Central to the comic vision of life manifest in the lesser comedies of Evelyn Waugh is the comic absurdity of a world which has chosen to better its state of existence through secular change. The repetitive nature of secular human endeavours promises no material change in the lot of man. Caught in the vortex of secular change, man returns to his original state of existence again and again. Out of it grows a sense of comic futility of all secular human efforts. Waugh suggests that if man has to progress then he must transcend the cycle of repetitive events and touch the hub of the wheel of life where alone life is salvaged from the delusion of secular change. Ignorance of the absurdity of seeking progress through secular change prevents one from seeing this point. Consequently, the person who is taken in by the delusion of bettering his lot through secular change not only renders himself comic but also deprives himself of the opportunity of living life meaningfully. Waugh's comic vision of absurdity, therefore, contrasts sharply with that of Albert Camus, an existentialist. In his An Essay on Sisiphus, he maintains that the pleasure with which Sisiphus accepts his absurd fate epitomises man's attempt to live fully even in the face of the stark reality of the absurdity greeting all his efforts. Camus' Sisiphus has no other
choice save that of accepting his absurd fate as he
denies the possibility of religious salvation. But Waugh's
comic characters have an alternative choice in selecting
religious change as the means to progress. So there is no
attempt in Waugh's lesser comedies to celebrate an absurd
secular life. Rather, the emphasis is on its rejection.
Therefore, even when Waugh explores the absurdity of a
secular world seeking progress by effecting a string of
secular changes, his comic vision of life continues to
remain poised in the Roman Catholic hub of the wheel of
life. This lends the comic vision revealed in the lesser
comedies an air of absurdity that is different in tone and
texture from what is encountered either in the Theatre of
the Absurd or the existentialist works of art.

Waugh wrote eleven major novels, the three novels
included in the war trilogy being treated as one. Out of
them, eight novels contain a vision that is distinctly
absurd. Accordingly, an attempt has been made to study
them as lesser comedies. Each novel has been considered
separately in order that the comic vision of absurdity in
each becomes vivid.
DECLINE AND FALL (1928):

Decline and Fall (1928), Waugh's first major novel, is set against the backdrop of modern Britain. The reason is not far to seek. Quite evidently, Waugh wishes to hold up to ridicule the progressive notion of secular change as epitomised in the secular advancement of modern British society. It is pertinent to note here that modern Britain is the child of 'enlightenment' belief in the progressive character of secular change. In the words of R.G. Collingwood:

The historiographers of the Enlightenment thought the central point of history... (to be) the sunrise of the modern scientific spirit. Before that, everything was superstition and darkness, error and imposture. And of these things there can be no history... because there is in them no rational or necessary development; the story of them is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.¹

It is precisely by showing the omnipresence of these very anti-cultural values in modern Britain that Waugh ruthlessly renders ridiculous the progressive claims of the 'enlightenment' historiographers. His irony is, therefore, directed at the self-deceptive illusions of the progressive historiographers. Lest this should be mistaken for his sympathy with the antiquated and obsolete code of chivalry, he makes the comic censure through the point of view of a static character, Paul Pennyfeather. He is an academic
who is conditioned by his association with the values of the past. It is difficult for him to outgrow it. He may, therefore, be likened to a person who is merely capable of watching the action of life from the spectators' gallery, but not of participating in it. By rendering Paul ridiculous again and again, Waugh draws attention to the inadequacy of the value system of the past. Thus, Waugh conveys forcefully the idea of absurdity implicit in the quest for progress through secular change. This is the vision that is characteristically common to all lesser comedies of Waugh.

With the intention of exposing the luxuriant and unchecked growth of barbarity in modern Britain, Evelyn Waugh focusses his artistic attention on three important segments of British social life: education, high social life and judiciary. Each forms the subject-matter of a separate section in the novel. Commenting on this scheme, Cyril Connolly observes perceptively:

School life, high life and prison are the three stages, and each is exquisitely comic and plausible. 2

It is by making Paul undertake a picaresque journey through these three phases of British social life that Waugh exposes the depravity rife in the secular institutions of modern British society.
Waugh’s choice of the artistic form suitable for this purpose is highly ingenious. The picaresque fiction, right from Lazarello de Tormes (1554), had been employed to ‘point out the follies of ordinary life’. Introduced into England by Alaine Rene Le Sage’s The Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane, the tradition underwent a major change in the hands of Smollet whose Roderick Random replaced the picaro of loose morals with one of good breeding. Waugh’s use of the tradition here is more in the line of Smollet than in that of Le Sage. Before him, Dickens had already used it, after the manner of Smollet. But the Dickens who used it, was the immature Dickens. The mature Dickens shunned it, preferring, instead, the more compact plot of temporal-cum-logical progression. In Dickens, its use, therefore, signifies immaturity and inability to select and order events significant for furthering the novel’s thematic line of intention. In contrast, it signifies, in Waugh, artistic maturity. The lack of logical progression in the development of events helps Waugh in reinforcing the idea of the lack of logical development in the process of secular change. Consequently, his vision of absurdity concerning the secular quest for progress becomes all the more graphic.

Paul Pennyfeather, like the Spanish picaro, is an orphan. The resemblance ends here. Unlike his prototype,
he is a student of theology at Oxford. The world of scholarship entails an assessment of social reality but not participation in its changing facade. It is, therefore, 'static' and Paul, by virtue of inhabiting it, can be considered a 'static' character. As the movements of Paul are restricted within the bounds of the 'static' world of scholarship, his acquaintance with the 'dynamic' world of change, is minimal.

However, by an irony of fate, he is transplanted from his native 'static' world into the alien 'dynamic' world of British society. One night, when all sensible people quit Oxford for the irrational and savage festivities of the Bollingerites, he, returning from one of the meetings of the League of Nations, unwillingly encounters this 'dynamic' lot. Though they come from high society, their celebrations are tinged with barbarism and savagery:

At the last dinner, three years ago, a fox had been brought in a cage and stoned to death with champagne bottles, what an evening that had been.\(^3\)

Individuality, in so far as they are concerned, verges on the abnormal. One expects that those in authority, at least, would have shown normalcy by restoring order on the campus. But the two Dons who are expected to do so, revel in it and even pray 'sacrilegiously that they might attack.
the Chapel so that their income from the penalties
imposed on them would shoot up. Thus, beneath the thin
t veneer of civility can be discerned the menacing propor-
tions of barbarity. Waugh's own assertion at another
place illustrates this point well.

Barbarism is never finally defeated, given
prophetic circumstances, men and women who
seem quite orderly will commit every conceiver-
atable atrocity. The danger does not come
from habitual hooligans; we are all potential
recruits for anarchy.... Once the prisons of
the mind have been opened, the orgy is on.\^ 4

It is by such an orgiastic group of barbaric students
that Paul is debagged. The custodians of moral order on
the campus, the two Dons, instead of coming to his help,
are instrumental in the framing of the charge of indecency
against him. Paul is, as a result, sent down unjustly.
The incident is significant in the story-line of the
novel as it serves two purposes. One, it helps in
revealing the inversion of values that is peculiar to the
dynamic world of decadent humanity. Two, it thrusts Paul
out of the safe environs of the static world of scholar-
ship into the perilous surroundings of the dynamic world
of modern Britain. Paul's sojourn in the dynamic world
is essential for the exposure of the decadent nature of
modern Britain. Paul's successive reverses at the hands
of the dynamic world of British society play up successfully
its rampant valuelessness and ruthless barbarity, on the one hand, and the inadequacy of static ideals in combating these regressive features in British society, on the other.

There is no mistake in understanding right in the first novel that Waugh has made certain essential choices. He has decided to give the story a firm historical location and draw on our sense of historical verisimilitude by highlighting the contrary values signified by the 'static' and the 'dynamic' world. While the static world is comparable to the gallery sheltering spectators of the play of life, the dynamic world is comparable to the ever-changing region of the wheel of life. In the world-view of Evelyn Waugh, the dynamic world is the secular world making a vain bid to achieve progress through an essentially circular secular change.

Paul suffers his first reverse at the hands of his 'dynamic' solicitor-guardian who apart from withholding his allowance on the pretext of his shameful conduct, advises him to see life 'in the raw'. Waugh writes suggestively:

That spring Paul's guardian's daughter had two new evening frocks and, thus glorified, became engaged to a well conducted young man in the office of Works.
The very choice of profession in the case of his guardian is suggestive of the degree of dynamism in him. Paul's cloistered life does not equip him to deal with such a person. He is, therefore, left with no choice save that of struggling for survival in the tempting environs of the dynamic world. Try however much he might, he can never retrieve his original state the one prior to the Bollinger night. Something quintessential has gone out of him. It is the loss of his real identity. Though a 'static' character, he becomes of necessity a 'dynamic' person in the changed situation. As that runs counter to his true nature, he ceases to be a 'real' person. He becomes, so to say, a shadow of his previous self. In his analytical study, Dyson pays less than adequate attention to this underlying change when he writes:

As the leading character, and minor character, disappear, one feels not only that society doesn't care, but that the author doesn't care himself. The causes of Paul Pennyfeather's mysterious disappearance are neither explored nor regretted.

Eagleton, in contrast, has shown acute perceptiveness of the functional nature of this change. He opines:

The significance of Paul's blankness is two fold. It allows the novel's real concern - the life of upper class society - to emerge 'objectively', as a neutrally descriptive record rather than as part of a more personal, inward, evaluative history; and it deftly prevents their experience from being unduly criticised by the man who is its sacrificial victim.
It is partly on account of this objectivity in the narrative that Dyson is unable to comprehend the change in Paul. The disappearance of Paul as a real character, far from being an artistic weakness, is a sign of artistic strength. No writer of picaresque fiction had till then effected such a change in the protagonist's identity, and for such a purpose. In this respect, Waugh has made an innovative use of the tradition of 'picaro'.

The first aspect of modern British society exposed by Paul's picaresque journey is its educational system. Paul's 'picaresque' struggle for survival leads him to the doorsteps of Church and Gargoyle scholastic agents. The experiences described here and at Llannaba castle, Dr. Logan's model school of vice and disobedience, reflect Waugh's own when he was in a somewhat similar predicament.

As asked to apply for a job that demands knowledge of subjects that Paul does not know, he replies:

'But I don't know a word of German, I've had no experience, I've got no testimonials, and I can't play cricket'. 'It doesn't do to be too modest,' said Mr. Levy. 'Why, only last term we sent a man who had never been in a laboratory in his life as senior Science Master to one of our leading public schools...'"8

Paul's experience resembles that of his creator who once found himself in a precisely similar situation. Waugh writes about his own predicament thus:
But, as the scholastic agent remarked, few headmasters were able to find men with all the qualities they demanded and with desperate levity I offered to teach anything which anyone might require.9

Despite these resemblances, it would be a gross exaggeration to interpret the entire novel merely as a pastiche of autobiographical material. As Waugh himself once wrote:

Nothing is more insulting to a novelist than to assume that he is incapable of anything except the mere transcription of what he observes.10

In the offices of the Church and Gargoyle, scholastic agents, Paul learns about the elaborate gradations of public schools. Though he offers no comment on it, the reader reacts by laughing at its ridiculousness. His interview with Dr. Fagan, Llanaba Castle's owner, is also instructive similarly. Asked about the reason of his abrupt discontinuance of studies at Oxford, he responds, due to his training in honesty, by confessing the truth. Paul's conduct, contrasted with Dr. Fagan's who uses this confession to lower the sum offered for the job, is not only like that of an uninitiated picaro but also like that of a static character who feels uncomfortable in the attire of an assumed 'dynamic' role.

'I understand, too, that you left your University rather suddenly. Now... Why was that?' This was the question that Paul had been dreading, and true to his training, he had resolved upon honesty. 'I was sent down, sir, for indecent behaviour.'11
A Basil Seal would have held his ground and given nothing away. In contrast, Paul Pennyfeather, like Gilbert Pinfold, is no match for the dynamic characters of the world of secular change. Dr. Fagan's small victory in the interview with Paul shows him up as a 'dynamic' character capable of clinging to the wheel of life in its incessant circuitous motion. It is from such a person that Paul receives his first lesson in the ways of the 'dynamic' world: 'temper discretion with deceit'. This prepares us for the picture of lawlessness to be seen at Llannaba Castle, Dr Fagan's model school of vice and anarchy. Stephen Jay Greenblatt's remarks about this nursery of vice are worthy of note:

Paul's experience at Llannaba is a marvellous initiation into the savagery of society, for all greed, corruption, doubt, ugliness, hysteria, and callous indifference to suffering are found there in microcosm. The butler, Solomon Philbrick, is a criminal; the school master, Captain Grimes is a bigamist and a scoundrel; the Chaplain, Prendergast, is tormented by "doubts" and has no faith; the owner, Doctor Fagan, is a swindler. Of all these characters, Captain Grimes brings out best the public school code as he is himself the product of that system. Deciphering it, he says thus:

'They may kick you out, but they never let you down.'

Even though he has been, as a student, expelled from his school, yet he is provided with a letter of
recommendation that whitewashes his innate indecency, to help him find a job. It is in this way that British educational system has made the unsuspecting society a dumping ground for all potential anarchists.

Completely unheroic, Grimes prefers to save his life by electing to undergo the undignified course of court-martial rather than killing himself, in all honour. He also has the singular distinction of never sticking to any job for long which he attributes to his 'temperament and sex'. Instability is the basic characteristic of not only individuals like Grimes, but also of the world they inhabit. This grows because of clinging to the wheel of life at its most peripheral orbit. It is here that the giddiness of motion is felt the most. The inference is quite obvious: the degree of 'dynamism' in a person depends on the distance of his position from the hub.

"You see, the nearer you can get to the hub of the wheel the slower it is moving and the easier it is to stay on". 14

When Grimes says that he is 'singularly in harmony with the primitive promptings of humanity', he highlights a basic truth about the character of a dynamic person: that despite the high rate of change sweeping over their lives, there is a conspicuous absence of any remarkable progress
in their selves. Like the world to which they belong, they do not progress from a state of primitivism to that of culture and civilisation. Grimes, thus, offers a good example of the stagnation of human society at the temporal level and Waugh uses him to his great advantage as a tool and also as a potent artistic device to mock at the progressives' claims of inevitable progress. John Willet expresses similar views when he opines:

There are not many very durable characters in the modern English novel let alone immortals, like Don Juan or Jeeves, but Grimes is now part of our heritage; his language and values, his reflections on the public schools and the honour of the regiment, are marvellous glimpses of a supressed rich underworld of English life.15

The other teacher at Llannaba, Prendergast, is an ex-clergyman of the Church of England, who gave up his benefice after spiritual doubts began to plague his mind. The Bishop to whom Prendergast refers his problem is unable to provide a neat solution to them. His evasion is a sign of the spiritual bankruptcy within the Church of England.

'I asked my bishop, he didn't know. He said that he didn't think the point really arose as far as my practical duties as a parish priest were concerned.'16
Waugh is building up the world in language slowly and steadily and in this persistently developing world, consisting of a devised succession of events, he succeeds in projecting views of disruption found in civilisation, almost the kind of 'inoperancy of the world of spirit' that we find in Eliot's *The Hollow Men*. No longer a priest, he still nurses hopes of becoming one by seeing, one day, the light that will dispel his doubts.

"Perhaps one day I shall see Light', he said, 'and then I shall go back to the ministry'. Meanwhile Clutterbuck ran past the door, whistling hideously. 'That's a nasty little boy,' said Mr. Prendergast, 'if ever there was one'.

The atrocious degree of indiscipline in Prendergast's personality instinctively renders the world around him, hostile to him. The students delight the most in teasing him. One student even calls him 'Prendy' at the breakfast table while he is saying the grace. Prendergast thus embodies the spiritual instability that is eating into the vitals of British society.

In a letter to Paul, Potts, his Oxford friend and a fellow static character, writes with insight and understanding:

'... the great problem of education is to train the moral perceptions, not merely to discipline the appetites.... it is in greater fastidiousness.
rather than in greater self control that the future progress of the race lies. I shall be interested to hear what your experience has been over the matter.'

Paul's experience is disappointing, for both his colleagues represent values contrary to the ones emphasised by Potts. While Prendergast is a victim of 'moral perplexity', Grimes is given to 'self indulgence'. A society whose educational system is manned by such 'a criminal class' and 'potential recruits for anarchy' can scarcely claim to be a civilised society for instead of overcoming the anarchic bent of informed and raw minds in their care, they shall themselves encourage a free and unrestrained expression of these forces. It is by drawing attention to such examples of disorder and anarchy that Waugh mocks at the infantile belief of the secular progressive historiographers.

No wonder then that the students reading in such a farcical system of education are audacious and 'flippant even in front of their mentors. Several anecdotes in the novel show students asserting themselves at the expense of their teachers. Paul's first encounter with these students brings out in sharp focus the comic disorder prevailing in the school. A never-ending chorus of 'Good morning, sir', greets him as he enters the class for the first time. Waugh writes:
'Oh, shut up', said Paul. At this the boy took out a handkerchief and began to cry quietly. 'Oh, sir', came a chorus of reproach, 'you've hurt his feelings. He's very sensitive; it's his Welsh blood, you know; it makes people very emotional. Say "Good morning" to him, sir, or he won't be happy all day. After all, it's a good morning, isn't it sir?'

The quoted conversation illustrates not only the spirit of light-weight comic fun but it is also charged with significance: the dynamic way of life has found its way even into the attitudes of the students too. In order that Paul may wrest initiative from them, he must employ against the dynamic world its own weapons. He does so by asking his students to write an essay on 'self-indulgence', promising to reward the one that is longest. Such a kind of education, doled out in the public schools, makes a mockery of all objectives of education, especially that of equipping children for the tough task of being responsible members of a civilised society.

Paul's willingness to learn the depraved ways of a 'dynamic' life show the growing influence of his dynamic colleagues. He even compromises his dignity for the sake of getting the money that Alastair Digby Vane Trumpington offers to him by way of damages for the injury caused to him on the Bollinger night. Potts' displeasure with such a suggestion is reminiscent of the attitude of the vanished static Paul.
'I fairly let him have it, I can tell you, and told him just what I thought of him for making such an insulting suggestion. I asked him how he dared treat a gentleman like that just because he wasn't in his awful set. He seemed rather taken aback and said: 'Well all my friends spend all their time trying to get money out of me,' and went off. 20

Paul's conduct in the episode under discussion contrasts with that of Potts and parallels Alastair's. The emergence of a new set of relationships indicates that the direction in which Paul is drifting, leads to the dynamic world. These successes delude Paul into considering himself as dynamic as Grimes. However, his encounter with Margot Beste-Chetwynde shatters this belief.

The Annual School Sports further highlights the callous indifference to indiscipline and decorum prevailing among the custodians of discipline themselves. Though they begin on a frivolous note, they culminate in a savage finale. Dr. Fagan's penchant for pomp and splendour makes him introduce a revolver for starting the races. By a strange working of fate, it falls into the hands of the drunk Prendergast, who has been made the starter. Instead of shooting it in the air, he fires it in Tangent's direction and consequently shoots him in the foot. The barbarity of the action is enhanced by Prendergast's complete indifference to what he has done; he waxes
eloquent on ecclesiastical matters with the vicar who cannot help pronouncing him deranged. While his comic capers regale the readers, Tangent's injury strikes a note of concern. Prendergast has shown himself to be capable of releasing anarchic and disorderly forces. It is for this tragic potential concealed in comic situations that Waugh's humour is preeminently famous.

With the finishing of Annual School Sports, the public school system appears in all its comic disorderliness and vulnerability to barbaric forces. Besides, it is also presented as the breeding ground of values that are antithetical to the idea of progress. By revealing the lack of progress through secular change, Waugh slowly builds up his comic vision of absurdity.

Waugh now proceeds to show how a diseased educational system has affected the health of the British society, and with this purpose in mind, he introduces Paul to the very heart of high social life, the Mayfair upper class circle of Margot Beste-Chetwynde. But before Paul meets Margot, he rendezvous with his old 'static' friend, Potts. The meeting is significant as it sheds light on the nature of Paul's consequent disappearance a second time. In Pott's company Paul enters a familiar world, the static world of scholarship and thereby retrieves his lost 'static' personality momentarily, though he is not consciously aware of it. Waugh writes:
For an evening at least the shadow that has flitted about this narrative under the name of Paul Pennyfeather materialised into the solid figure of an intelligent, well educated, well-conducted young man, a man who could be trusted to use his vote... with discretion and proper detachment...\textsuperscript{21}

Paul's later separation from Potts refocuses attention on the loss of his real identity in view of the shift from his native 'static' world.

... but next day, he woke up leaving himself disembodied somewhere between Sloane Square and Onslow Square.... From the point of view of this story Paul's second disappearance is necessary, because ... Paul would never have made a hero, and the only interest about him arises from the unusual series of events of which his shadow was witness.\textsuperscript{22}

Waugh intrudes into his narrative in order to hint at the significance underlying Paul's mysterious disappearance and its obvious use for the novel's thematic line of intention: the comic inadequacy of static ideals in a comically futile and absurd world of secular change.

At King's Thursday, Paul meets Otto Silenus, a young architect whose intellectualism is self-defeating. Yet, it is through him that most of Waugh's significant comments on the history of human society are made. These comments in some way order the importance of the other parts of the novel; they work on the beliefs of the reader. Admittedly, Waugh finds that some of the beliefs
on which a full appreciation of the work depends come to him ready-made and somehow these beliefs must be accepted fully by the postulated reader as he comes to read the book; he reinforces these ideas concerning change and progress by weaving them into the texture of the novel. Thus, Silenus regards the process of 'becoming' vile as it has rendered man unfit both for the static life of a machine and the free life of a monkey. None of the possibilities are in themselves attractive. Waugh is castigating here, 'in an oblique manner, the evolutionary concept of change.

By now, Paul has started regarding himself a 'dynamic' person. His success with Margot has assured him of his ability to move about in the dynamic world with some measure of success. It is in this false self-estimation and in his gullibility about the purity of Margot's shady business that he shows himself a comic fool. Even after being alerted by Philbrick, the man who knows the underworld very well, and by Potts who sniffs white slave traffic at Margot's place, he chooses to turn a blind eye to what goes on under his nose. Paul's illusions about Margot's philanthropy not only render him comic but also have the potential to make his plight grim and tragic. An interesting characteristic of Waugh's comic style is that the incongruity from which the comic element springs
has very great possibility of turning tragic at any moment. A small hitch during marriage preparations hastens that. The women recruited by Margot for her shady Latin American Entertainment Co. are held up at Buenos Aires. Due to her insistence, Paul goes to procure their release. As the time at his disposal is too short, he goes by plane all the way to that place, with the tickets booked for the return journey. Paul feels himself already the lord of dynamic life and pities Potts' inability to understand his whirl-wind tours across the Atlantic. Paul's ignorance of Potts' real intentions in tracking his movements render him comic. Potts, who is working for the League of Nations, is after Paul to dig out vital clues to the shady business carried out at Margot's house. Comedy here is blended with the tragic as the fate that awaits Paul is grim and unjustified. His sympathy with Margot's women for having been trapped in a notorious street, irritation with Govt. officials who are non-cooperative to him and vexation with the League of Nations which hinders his apparently pious work make him look as comic as Don Quixote who sees in all his miscalculations the hand of some sorcerer. It is only after his arrest that Paul begins to understand the reality of his situation. By then it is too late. When Margot learns about her fiance's arrest, she takes flight, leaving him to suffer for her crimes.
'Paul's blankness' may prevent 'this experience from being unduly criticised'. But it does not in any way mitigate the reprehensibility of Margot's conduct. Eagleton's inference that it shows Waugh's dual approach to upper classes: that of acceptance and rejection, is somewhat lopsided as 'Paul's blankness' merely guarantees the objectivity of condemnation. The second section of the novel, therefore, exposes the sterility and pointlessness of Britain's high social life through the point of view of the rebuffed acquiescent picaro, Paul Pennyfeather. Once again the comic vision of absurdity is concretised in the moral valuelessness of high social life.

Ignoring this function of the second section, John Willot complains that

... there are sizable bald patches, particularly in the second section of the book. To some extent, this comes from the novel's pattern. The school staff have to be brought together in prison so as to stress the similarity of the two regimes.

True, this section includes the chapter, 'Interlude', that breaks off the narrative for a while. Still, instead of deterring attention from the novel, it helps in a better explication of the subtextual meanings of the novel. Also, this section performs a function much greater than that of allowing the school-staff to reassemble in Sir Lucas
Dockery's prison. As already discussed, it shows Britain to have progressed little from its hated barbaric past in so far as its society lacks all civilised values. Indeed, the imbalance and abnormality in human relations projected here seem more than what one can find even in a primitive society. The claims of British superiority thus look comic against the foreground of its vulnerable reality.

Every society has had to face threats to its existent order from the irrational forces of barbarity and savagery. Modern societies have devised the ingenious system of containing these forces in prisons with the help of an efficient judicial system. As Waugh maintains:

There are criminal ideas and a criminal class in every nation and the first action of every revolution, figuratively and literally, is to open the prisons.²⁵

In a society which is only reputed to be a civilisation, this system becomes ridiculous by its malfunctioning. The third section of the novel is indicative of this imbalance and maladjustment. Paul's trial reduces the system of segregating the criminals from the healthy body of society, to the level of a farce. While the real culprit goes scot free, the Judge and Potts are foolishly content with their success in saving the society from the malicious influence of a white slave trafficker. Like Falder, in
Galsworthy's *Justice*. Paul is here a victim of the miscarriage of justice meted out in courts of law. Consequently, the fabric of modern British society has been torn into shreds by criminals cunning enough to outwit the law. It would be delusive to consider such a society progressive and civilised. Once again, Waugh exposes the ridiculous faith of the progressive historiographers in the idea of attaining progress through secular change.

Paul's picaresque journey leads him violently to the prison of Sir Lucas Dockery. He meets his old friend, Prendergast, here. Prendergast has by now seen the 'Light' that he had been waiting for. He has discovered that in order to be a priest one need not, of necessity, adhere to any particular Christian theological doctrine. Accordingly, he is now a Modern Churchman in the prison of Sir Lucas Dockery. Prendergast's discovery epitomises the perversion of religion that is so often encountered in the dynamic world. While the Governor, Sir Lucas Dockery, is supposed to be the custodian of physical and mental discipline among the criminals, who are a variation on the barbarians of yesteryears, Prendergast is supposed to be the custodian of their spiritual discipline. Both, however, are misfits in their respective roles as they themselves are the epitomes of indiscipline. Sir Lucas Dockery can be always seen musing over his future
renown for having invented and introduced novel theories of penal reforms. He belongs to that class of people about whom Waugh writes that in the bid to be enlightened and progressive, they have tolerated all shades of opinion and in the process have lost more than gained by the loss of all principles and considered opinions. Upon being told about Paul's preference for solitary confinement, he sees signs of introversion in him. So the next thing Paul is made to do is to socialise with a homicidal carpenter who bears a deep-seated ill-will against Prendergast for being a false priest and an infidel. As the carpenter considers himself God's elect and the Sword of Israel against the infidel, Prendergast's life cannot be safe in his hands. In his visions, he keeps on hearing the command, 'Kill and spare not'. So when he is equipped with the tools of a carpenter, on the recommendation of the prison Governor who wishes to provide the aesthetic satisfaction of carpentry to him, he becomes a potential source of danger. The Prison Governor, however, realises it only after he has sawn off, in his cell, the head of Prendergast. The comic obsession of the homicidal lunatic with the visions of blood and murder take on a tragic dimension in Prendergast's cold blooded murder. This is the grotesque element that so often permeates Waugh's fiction.
The death of Prendergast and the defeat of Sir Lucas Dockery's new fangled ideas show Waugh's antipathy to an individualistic attitude to religion, as is manifest in Protestantism. Waugh's views are analogous to those of the Roman Catholic Church in Shaw's *Saint Joan*. Joan is burnt at the stake not for being an atheist but for encouraging a heretical propensity, whose later image may be found in Waugh's homicidal lunatic. Were every individual free to interpret the scriptures the way he wants, the world would be flooded with a bewildering variety of spiritual values. Waugh's later conversion to Roman Catholicism is anticipated here.

Sometime after Prendergast's death, Paul is shifted to Egdon Heath where he is supposed to pass the rest of his seven years' penal sentence. Captain Grimes is already there. But he does not intend to stay there for long. One day, he makes good his escape despite the entire prison guard force being at his back. To shroud their incompetence, they declare him dead. From his newly acquired familiarity with the dynamic world, Paul knows that it is not the truth. Once again Waugh exposes the inability and inefficiency of the judicial system in isolating criminals from the society and the modern British society is likened to a jungle infested with savages and barbarians. Thus the myth of progress,
epitomised in Britain's advancement is exploded.

The judicial system is again made to look completely absurd in the fake death of Paul. One day Paul is asked to get ready for an operation of appendicitis, even though he is perfectly alright. He is unable to make out the intention of the prison officials. He is taken to the seaside nursing home of the protean Dr. Fagan, who has by now left the teaching profession because of the meagre living it afforded. Alastair-Digby-Vane Trumpington is there to arrange the false declaration of Paul's death by a drunk Doctor who is amply rewarded. Paul's fake death is significant from the point of view of his search for identity. Underlying it is the fact of his death as a 'shadow' or a pseudo dynamic person. The chapter entitled 'Resurrection' suggests his phoenix-like rebirth as a 'real' 'static' character from the ashes of his imposed 'dynamic' self. Paul's steps are guided towards this self realization by Otto Silenus, who with a blend of wisdom and insight, tells him:

Now you're a person who was clearly meant to stay in the seats and sit still and if you get bored watch the others. Somehow, you got on to the wheel, and you got thrown off again at once with a hard bump. It's all right for Margot, who can cling on, and for me, at the centre, but you're static.... There's a real distinction there, though I can't tell you how it comes. I think we're probably two quite different species spiritually.27
Stephen Spender appears to have overlooked the significance of this experience in Paul's life when he accuses Waugh of not developing his characters properly:

There is no expansion of understanding, not only within the minor figures who are all mindless caricatures, but within the major characters as well. 28

Richard Johnstone also falls into the same error when he writes:

These picaresque journeys... are quests for knowledge and personal fulfilment; they lead, however, to increasing incomprehension and isolation.29

In fact Waugh needs to be commended for having made the picaro, a developing character when all through the history of picaresque fiction he had been a stagnant one.

The epilogue re-enacts the action witnessed in the prologue. Paul is back at Oxford, though disguised as a distant cousin of the previous Paul. The Bollingerites are again on rampage. But Paul is wise enough this time to keep clear of them and avoid being thrust on the wheel of 'dynamic' life once again. The only person aware of his true identity is Peter Beste Chetwynde to whom Paul confesses the incompatibility of his static nature with the dynamic nature of Peter's class of people. With the dawning of this realisation, he ceases to be the butt of comic ridicule. In view of Paul's development from a
ridiculous 'shadow' character to a thoughtful 'real' person, it is difficult to reconcile with the views expressed by Stephen Spender:

Perhaps one of the things which makes Evelyn Waugh primarily a comic writer is that, with all his observation of manners and behaviour, he is unable successfully to project his own struggle into a character.30

True, Paul does not touch the peak of self-realisation that Guy Crouchback does. But he does plumb, at least, the reality of his self, however handicapped it may be. This movement from incomprehension to comprehension lies at the base of most comedies.

The action of the novel describes a full circle with the re-admission of Paul at Oxford. Besides, the very situation with which the novel ends is a repetition of that with which the prologue of the novel opened. The circuitous picaresque journey of Paul is analogous to that of a person poised on a wheel whose circular motion robs his efforts of all significance. Stephen J. Greenblatt has rightly pointed out:

The plot of Evelyn Waugh's first novel is not a linear progression, a series of events which conclude in a true shift from the original condition but a great circle 'like the big wheel at Luna Park'.31
The image of wheel, pointed out by Otto Silenus, brings out, in sharp focus, the anti-progressive attitude of the author. The circularity of secular change underlines the comic futility of human endeavour in a world rendered absurd by the exclusion of the true religious impulse from it. This is the vision that is common to all lesser comedies of Waugh. We, therefore, find the thematic assertion of the novel, underlined and accentuated in the circular plot of the novel.

While evaluating the novel, we should guard against being carried away by the flavour of its 'particular' quality: the sheer temporal progression of events in Paul's life, dealing with his comic misadventures. An underlying logical connection between these seemingly unrelated incidents lends the novel its universal quality which is that change at the temporal level of reality yields no significant results. Terry Eagleton's assertion that Waugh's fiction is 'unable to pass beyond its own specialised social experience to discern and evaluate the total structure of which it is a part' is therefore partial and prejudiced in many ways.32

If Terry Eagleton fails to see the universal quality in Waugh's novels, Stephen Spender reads the novel, inverted:
But the title has also a subtler irony; for *Decline and Fall* like the novels of Ronald Firbank, deals with a world where there is in reality no Fall, nor Sin, nor Redemption.

True, the dynamic characters score over the unsuspecting static character, Paul Pennyfeather, and roam with complete impunity, giving the impression of a Before-the-Fall world. But they also do not escape the point of Waugh's irony, which reveals the futility of their delusive faith in temporal progress on the wheel of life. Moreover, in Waugh's comic vision of life the Garden of Eden lies at the hub of the wheel of life which is symbolic of permanence and order.

The novel shatters the illusions not only of Paul Pennyfeather but also of the progressives who believe in Britain's cultural superiority and in doing so, renders not only Paul but also the progressives, comic. It is this non-progressive character of secular change that lends the world of Evelyn Waugh an air of absurdity which is comic in so far as it mocks at man's delusive faith in progress through secular change and grim, in so far as it holds out no hope of salvation from the pointlessness of an incessant circular motion. Thus the view of life presented here is at once tragic and comic. In a perceptive piece of critical remark Horace Walpole once said, "The world is a comedy to those who think and tragedy to those who feel". There is much truth in understanding life as a curious blend of tragedy and comedy. Waugh in holding the mirror up to a
tragi-comic view of life was merely exploring the old theme in a new way and his perception of reality from the point of view of the genre of literature is as old as that of Shakespeare.

VILE BODIES (1930):

In *Vile Bodies* (1930), Waugh's second major novel, the focus of artistic attention continues to be the absurdity of seeking progress through secular change. Waugh mocks at the idea of secular progress by showing how an individual who allows himself to be deluded by it returns to his original state of existence despite all his best efforts to improve his lot. The symbolic image of the wheel of life comes through graphically in the various circular images employed by the author for the purpose. Yet Waugh at no stage precludes sympathy from the object of our ridicule. His delusion demands sympathy rather than outright condemnation. This is what makes Waugh's second major novel to remain a lesser comedy rather than becoming a satire. The comedy is, however, tinged with tragedy in so far as it points to the outbreak of disorder and chaos in the shape of the Second Great War, at the end of the novel. In Waugh's comic view of life, while a movement along the wheel of life generates a sense of
ennui and absurdity, the movement away from the hub releases forces of disintegration and instability. A quickening of the pace of secular change thrusts human society to such a state. The comic vision of life revealed in this novel makes both these aspects of secular change explicit.

Culled from Lewis Carrol's *Through The Looking Glass*, the two epigraphs that preface *Vile Bodies* (1930), Waugh's second major fictional work, proclaim ideas that form the very foundation of the apparently ramshackle superstructure of its story. The first epigraph, a dialogue between Alice and the Queen, concerns itself with how rapidly a person need run in order that he may get away from his original position. In this regard, the Queen tells Alice:

'Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that.'

Waugh wishes us to understand that notwithstanding the massiveness of human efforts for change, there can be no real progress as long as the change desired is secular. The circuitous course of secular change deprives human effort of all its significance. The only possibility, whose hope the Queen holds out, is delusively as no person can work twice as hard as his abilities allow. Quite appropriately, there is the exclamation mark at the end
of the second sentence. An accelerated rate of secular change has, however, been mistaken in the industrialised world of today for a spring board for progress. By pointing out the folly of nursing such illusions, Waugh drives home the idea of the non-progressive character of the modern secular world.

The second epigraph, again a dialogue, concerns itself exclusively with the distinction between reality and illusion. When Alice asserts the reality of her self by pointing to the fact of her weeping, Tweedledum questions her complacent belief and doubts the honesty and genuineness of the tears shed:

'I hope you don't suppose those are real tears?' Tweedledum interrupted in a tone of great contempt.

The inclusion of the second epigraph is justified in so far as it underlines the theme of appearance and reality suggested right in the first epigraph. The interweaving of these epigraphs directs the attention of the readers to the theme of change and progress running through the sub-text of this novel. S.M. Pandeya, however, overlooks the thematic significance of the second epigraph when he restricts its interpretation to the technical aspect of the novel only. He opines:
The first epigraph has a thematic bearing on the book, and the second a technical one ... This (the second epigraph) raises the question as to the nature of reality presented in *Vile Bodies* ... There is no wonder that the contemporary socio-cultural reality presented in Evelyn Waugh's novels gives the impression of being a fantasy.36

The central character of *Vile Bodies*, unlike that of *Decline and Fall*, has a certain goal to achieve: marriage with Nina Blount. However, like Paul Pennyfeather, he belongs to the static world of scholarship and learning; Adam is a creative writer. When the novel begins, he is on board the ship bound for Dover. Waugh creates a picture of microcosmic British society on this ship by having the passengers on it drawn from the various segments of British society. There are the Bright Young Things, representing the youth of Britain; a politician, representing the British political leadership of the times; and two religious leaders, representing the religious leadership of the times. The ship thus acquires the symbolic significance of human society and the rough sea (that of) the difficulties in the progress of human society.

The roughness of the sea lends a circular motion to the ship which suggests the circular nature of secular change. Waugh highlights the impact of the delusion of secular progress, by showing the sickening effect that the circular motion of the ship has on its passengers. He writes:
Sometimes the ship pitched and sometimes she rolled and sometimes she stood quite still and shivered all over, poised above an abyss of dark water; then she would go swooping down like a scenic railway train into a windless hollow and up again with a rush into the gale; sometimes she would burrow her path, with convulsive nosings and scramblings like a terrier in a rabbit hole; and sometimes she would drop dead like a lift, it was this last movement that caused the most havoc among the passengers. 37

The pains Waugh takes in comparing the motion of the ship to a 'scenic railway train', a terrier, a lift, are not without significance. He is establishing in this passage the similarity between the circuitous motion of the wheel of life and that of the ship of human society. The importance of the last sentence cannot also be reduced. It shows the impact that the lifting of the veil of ignorance has when one is brought back to one's original position. The circular motion of the ship thus becomes the central and all pervasive image of the novel.

Modern society provides two kinds of leaders to its members: the politicians and the religious preachers. One expects them to steer the members of their society to a state of well-being and progress. The politician in the micro-cosmic British society on board the ship is Walter Outrage. He has drugged himself with worldly temptations and is, therefore, incapable of leading others. Besides, 'he is (only) last week's Prime Minister'. Among the religious preachers present are: Father Rothschild
and Mrs. Melrose Ape. As her name also suggests, Mrs. Melrose Ape's religion is a sham. She holds the unchristian opinion that the real religious journey begins only after death.

'Rough? 'Course it's rough. But let me ask you this. If you're put out this way over just an hour's sea sickness ..., what are you going to be like when you make the mighty big journey that's waiting for us all? Are you right with God?' said Mrs. Ape. 'Are you prepared for death?' 38

Contrasted with it is the truly religious attitude of Father Rothschild.

To Father Rothschild no passage was worse than any other. He thought of the sufferings of the saints, the mutability of human nature, the Four last Things, and between whiles repeated snatches of the penitential psalms. 39

Unlike Mrs. Melrose Ape, Father Rothschild makes no distinction between the life before and the life after death. He does not consider the former, secular by nature and only the latter, religious. Mrs. Ape thus belongs to the set of pseudo-religious people, about whom Harry Blamires says

... the christian has relegated the significance of the eternal to the life that succeeds this one. In doing so, it has enabled itself to come to terms with the secular mind on a false basis. The basis is that here and now christians and secularists can
share the same conceptions, attitudes, and modes of action within the temporal sphere, since the essential difference between them ... is one which begins to be applicable only when this life is ended. 40

Thus Father Rothschild's Roman Catholicism in contrast with Mrs. Ape's perverse religion, provides the hub to the wheel of secular life depicted in the novel. Still, Mrs. Ape has her way with the desperate humanity, represented by the seasick Bright Young People as her secular approach to religion is easier for the secular minded humanity to understand. Father Rothschild cannot help deploring this tendency. So when he hears the people on board the ship singing with her, he does not join them. Waugh says, "Father Rothschild heard it and turned his face to the wall." 41

The first episode of the novel is thus indicative of the extent of helplessness of British society by virtue of its pathetic belief in the illusion of secular progress.

After the ship docks in at Dover, the ship of Adam's life starts on its voyage, its destination being marriage with Nina Blount. It would not be out of place to point out here the religious importance of marriage. In Roman Catholicism, it has a unique sacramental value and therefore, Adam's desire for marriage may be mistaken for his quest for the permanence of the Roman Catholic hub of life. That it is not so is clear from the monetary considerations that play
a vital role in the possibility of his marriage. Thus Adam's desire for marriage is, in no way, different from any other secular effort of man. This exposes his endeavours to the absurdity implicit in the circuitous course of secular change. Accordingly, his first attempt at marriage with Nina turns into a fiasco when the manuscript of his autobiography is impounded by the customs officer at Dover. Adam has come to England with an autobiographical typescript. He hopes to enable himself to marry his fiance, Nina, with its proceeds. Being 'static', he little anticipates the reaction of the offensively inquisitive customs officer who considers his brain-child 'down right dirt' and accordingly, consigns it to flames.

It was sometime before Adam could get attended to. 'I've nothing but some very old clothes and some books', he said. But here he showed himself deficient in tact, for the man's casual air disappeared in a flash.

'Yes', said the customs officer menacingly, as though his worst suspicions had been confirmed, 'I should just about say you had got some books.'

If Adam's lack of understanding of the real nature of the dynamic world renders him comic, the irrational assessment of Adam's scholarly possessions renders the dynamic customs officer comic also, for he fails to see the real merit of Adam's book. With the loss of the book, Adam's hopes nose-dive like the ship which bore him back to England. The circuitous course of Adam's attempt manifests in his return to his original state of penury. The ship of Adam's hopes
describes a circle, in its rise at the prospect of marriage and fall because of its impossibility after the incident at the customs. Waugh, thus, draws our attention successfully to the futility of secular progress. A distinction needs to be drawn here between Waugh and the cyclical historiographers like Ibn Khaldun and Oswald Spengler. Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth century Muslim thinker, makes an allowance for secular progress, at least in the short run, when he compares the growth and decay of "dynasties" to that of living organisms. Oswald Spengler too makes such an allowance when he traces the course of human history from blatant barbarism through a classical period into a new type of barbarism where everything is commercialised and vulgarised. In contrast, Waugh denies the possibility of secular progress even for a short while. Even the hope of such a progress proves to be illusory, as it happens in the case of Adam. Notwithstanding external change, the human society never progresses to a state of civilisation, so long as the change effected is merely secular.

Henceforth, the impoverished Adam leads the life of a picaro shuttling through the different local circles of British high society with a view to improving his fortunes and consequently, marrying Nina.
Adam's picaresque journey takes him first to Shepheards' hotel which is owned by Lottie Crump. Among the people assembled in the hotel is the ex-King of Ruritania. A victim of instability in his own lost kingdom, he is of the opinion that England too is in the grip of political instability.

'And now when I come to England always there is a different Prime Minister and no one knows which is which'.

The instability manifest in the political order of British society, has deeper roots. It stems out of a perversion of moral values. Waugh conveys it in the conduct of Outrage who, right at that moment, is closeted intimately with Princess Yoshiwara in contravention of all principles of morality. Waugh is here expressing a view that has long been popular and is still very common among lay readers of fiction. Waugh's representation of reality can be justified, for it communicates philosophical or moral truths in a lively and pleasing manner, and if it meant telling things which were not literally true, the untruths or for that matter the aberrations of the moral truth can be interpreted metaphorically as ways of representing an underlying general truth. In fact, Waugh's projection of reality may be viewed as a plausible reconstruction of what might well have occurred.
It is at Lottie Crumps' hotel that Adam's hopes describe a second circle. A young man who visits the hotel at this time, challenges any one to perform the trick he can. Adam accepts his challenge for a sum of five hundred pounds. Adam performs it not once but twice and wins, in the process, one thousand pounds. The sight of so large a sum fills Adam's mind with the hopes of marrying Nina. The ship of his hopes rises once again on the waves of life. Dizzy with excitement, he gives it away to a drunk Major who promises to multiply it for him by betting it on a race-horse, Indian Runner. Adam rings up his fiance to apprise her of his ability to marry her by virtue of the sudden wind fall he has had and the thousands he would have, after winning the bet on Indian Runner. Nina sees through the illusion of Adam's hope of marriage as she is well aware of the poor quality of that horse. So she advises Adam to get his money back from that drunk Major. But before Adam may catch him, he has already made off with his money. Once again, the ship of Adam's desire dips down to the place from where it had risen and once again, Waugh underlines the comic futility of secular change. Though the reader cannot help laughing at Adam's excessive faith in the illusion of secular progress, yet the reader's ridicule is untainted by malice as he sympathises with the ignorance of the comic character. It is this quality that precludes a Waugh novel from being called a satire.
Waugh's attitude to change shows signs of resemblance with that of Roman Catholic Church, even though he got converted sometime after the composition of this novel. The attitude of Roman Catholic Church to secular change has been summed up for us by Harry Blamires who writes thus:

For the Christian mind earthly well being is not the *summum bonum*, as pain and death are not the worst evil. Eternal well-being is the final aim and end of things here. This means that success and prosperity within the earthly set up can not be regarded as a final criterion. Nor indeed can happiness within time be regarded as a final criterion. 46

The Catholic antipathy to 'earthly well-being' should be understood in the perspective of Man's Fall from the Garden of Eden state. As one sociologist says:

While Christianity laid a basis for the idea of progress in the teachings of redemption, it also put forth the idea of the "fall of man" and the total depravity of the human race and thus left hardly any scope for the notion of possible improvement of Man's condition on earth. 47

The perspective provides an incontrovertible evidence of Waugh's irony being centred in the morality of Roman Catholic Church.

The theme of disorder and consequent decay of human society regains Waugh's attention when he describes the events that lead to the fall of Sir Brown's government.
Archie Schwert has invited the Bright Young People to a Savage Party. As the name suggests, the invitees are expected to come dressed as savages; a fact that points to the increasing irrationality and barbarity among youth. Order and civilisation have lost their lustre for them. Barbarity fascinates them, as they see novelty in it. The seeds of disorder and decay are, therefore, germinating even in the psyche of British Youth. It is to such a lot of young anarchists that Sir Brown falls a victim. The press takes him unawares when it reports the savage festivities of the Bright Young People at his residence and the parliament dismisses his government on the charges of immorality in private and public affairs, the latter being substantiated with Agatha's shameless treatment at the customs upon reaching Dover from France. Sir Brown becomes an easy scapegoat of an irrational social system for neither the odium of the press nor that of the parliament is just or founded on any cause that may be attributed to him. The frequent change of political leadership and that for unreasonable charges shows not only the extent of the impermanence that has crept into the British Society but also of the irrationality that has gained sway over all human assessments.

It has rightly been pointed out by J.B. Bury in *The Idea of Progress* that man's faculty of improving himself is the source of his other faculties, including his
sociability and it has been fatal to his happiness too. Man's capacities, stimulated by fortuitous circumstances, urged him onward, but he thus set out on the fatal road which led to the calamities of civilisation. Waugh's concept of change and progress is a vicious circle and man comes back over and over again to the point from which he started. There is no doubt that the ferment of ideas that the author creates in this and subsequent novels concerning change and progress provides the staple with which he builds up the framework of his novels; for these reasons *Vile Bodies* may be regarded in the words of D.H. Lawrence, as one bright book of life. Indeed it is a tremulation on the ether.

Adam's third attempt to find the means which shall make him acceptable to Nina, takes him to her father, Colonel Blount's house. *Doubting All at Aylebury*. Adam's meeting with the colonel is one of the most hilarious episodes in the novel. Before Adam departs for Aylebury, Nina informs her father of his arrival. But when Adam introduces himself to the colonel, he shuts the door upon him, denying that he had ever invited him to the luncheon. When Adam rings again, wishing only to use the telephone, the Colonel, in a sudden spurt of affability, asks him in, though still mistaking him for a vendor of vacuum cleaners.
'... Why don't you come in? Have you come about the vacuum cleaner?'
'No'
'Funny, I've been expecting a man all the morning to show me a vacuum cleaner. Come in, do. Won't you stay to luncheon?'
'I should love to'.
'Splendid....'

... Colonel Blount picked up a telegram and read it
'I'd quite forgotten,' he said in some confusion.
'I'm afraid you'll think me very discourteous, but it is, after all, impossible for me to ask you to luncheon. I have a guest coming on very intimate family business.... To tell you the truth, it's some young rascal who wants to marry my daughter....'

The colonel in his ignorance abuses Adam in his face. The latter, however, bears with it, keeping in mind his own need. It is only after the colonel discovers his identity that the comic fun explodes and the novel resumes its serious overtone. The comic episode of Adam's meeting with Colonel Blount illustrates the moral perplexity frequently found in Waugh's novels. The sub-plots help to enlarge the meaning of the main plot and hence they have a functional role in the framework of his novels. In playing up the moral bewilderment of his created world, Waugh betrays an inclination for form and feeling, for colour and richness, and he did not make the mistake of supposing that one was inconsistent with the other.

Adam's comic meeting with Colonel Blount, encourages false hopes of marriage in Adam's mind as he receives a cheque for one thousand pounds from his future father-in-law. Adam's ship of desires rides high once again. Waugh writes:
It does not befall many young men to be given a thousand pounds by a complete stranger twice on successive evenings. Adam laughed aloud in the Rector's car as they drove to the station. Adam, however, keeps it to himself. The two spend that night together. Thus, Nina deliberately allows herself to be seduced. In the morning, she shatters Adam's illusion by letting him know the real worth of the cheque. Adam's ship now dives once again into the hollow on which it stood earlier. Adam's inability to progress is comparable to Vladimir and Estragon's predicament in Beckett's Waiting for Godot. Like Adam waiting for his never-to-materialise marriage with Nina, Vladimir and Estragon wait ceaselessly for the Godot who never turns up. Both Waugh and Beckett thus deny any notable change in man's lot. Yet, while Beckett is a pessimist who considers even the hope offered by religious revelations and teachings false, Waugh does not think so. A movement towards the sub-specie aeternitatis reality of Roman Catholicism, symbolised by the hub of the wheel of life, constitutes in Waugh's comic vision of life a step towards progress and freedom from the sterility of modern secular life.
Opportunity knocks once again in the shape of the job of Chatterbox on the Daily Excess. Adam gets it as the previous Chatterbox, Lord Balcairn has singed his head in the gas-oven after being caught reporting a party from which he was purposely excluded. It is a gruesome end of the fallen gentry. Adam's quick successes as a Chatterbox fill him again with the hope of marriage. With the intention of materialising it, he calls on Colonel Blount once again. His second visit to Doubting All forms the backdrop to another comic misadventure. Doubting All is buzzing with the activity of the Wonder-Film company who are shooting a film on Wesley. The Director of the film mistook Adam for a reporter who has come to report the shooting. The Colonel too fails to recognise him and Adam's efforts in trying to identify himself look absurd in the face of the Colonel's rigid inability to understand. Adam has to return without being able to seek the Colonel's consent for the marriage. Upon returning to London, he discovers that Nina and her childhood friend, Ginger, in performing his job by proxy have unwittingly violated the prohibitory orders of Lord Monomark against mentioning three names: Espinosa, Count Cincinnatti and green bowler hats. As a result of this mistake, Adam loses his job of 'chatterbox' and Adam's ship of desire once again returns to its original place. Marriage has eluded him the fourth time. All his efforts for changing his condition have
yielded no result for the circular path of secular change brings the labouring man back to his original position.

We seem to hear the echo of Tennyson's famous lines: 'The old order changeth and God fulfils himself in many ways'.

Change is the condition of life and with it man moves from lesser progress to greater progress. The situation in Waugh's novels is similar, in so far as he acknowledges the reality of change and different, because it proves illusory in improving the lot of human society. Nevertheless, there is a renewal of faith and the development of events, as we shall see in our subsequent study of other novels, sheds light on the supreme importance of faith signified by belief in Catholicism.

While the non-progressive character of Adam's life describes a circuitous course round the hub of the wheel of life, the decadence of Britain describes a different kind of course. It is discernible in the increasing disorder, political instability and moral perplexity in British society. Commenting on the disregard for order among the Bright Young People, Father Rothschild remarks:

'Don't you think', said Father Rothschild gently, 'that perhaps it is all in some way historical? I don't think people ever want to lose their faith in religion or anything else.... they are all possessed with an almost fatal hunger for permanence. I think all these divorces show that. People aren't content just to muddle along now-a-days.... They say, "If a thing's not worth doing well, it's not worth doing at all." It makes everything very difficult for them'.

50
The 'fatal hunger for permanence' among the youth shows how chaos and anarchy have struck roots in the social structure of England. Father Rothschild sees only a catastrophe such as a war, a fit finale to this divisive trend. Walter Outrage, who lacks the penetrating insight of Father Rothschild, a spiritual elite, is alarmed upon hearing war mentioned. He mistakes it for an actual one and remonstrates comically against the withholding of this information from him.

'What war?' said the Prime Minister sharply. 'No one has said anything to me about a war. I really think I should have been told. I'll be damned,' he said defiantly, 'if they shall have a war without consulting me. What's a cabinet for if there's not more mutual confidence than that? What do they want a war for, anyway?' 51

Condemned to the Sisyphean task of meaningless labour on the wheel of life, the dynamic Walter Outrage cannot have the insight which a spiritual elite at the hub of the wheel of life can have. Before the astounding insight of the latter, the former's reliance on worldly knowledge looks comically myopic. Father Rothschild, the only spiritual elite in the novel can thus analyse the outbreak of wars, in a profound manner. Father Rothschild asserts:

'Wars don't start nowadays because people want them. We long for peace, and fill our newspapers with conferences about disarmament and arbitration, but there is a radical instability in our world order, and soon we shall all be walking into the jaws of destruction again, protesting our pacific intentions.' 52
The course of destruction chalked out by Father Rothschild is such that it leads one away from the hub of the wheel of life to the farthest orbit on the wheel. The degree of impermanence, because of the high rate of speed at the outermost orbit, is so high that it is difficult to keep oneself in place there. Obviously, impermanence in world order manifests itself in a catastrophe like war. Progress and decline in Waugh, therefore, need to be understood in the perspective of the direction of change, to or away from the hub. In this respect, Waugh differs from the cyclical historiographers who see progress and decline occurring on the circuitous course of life only. His view parallels the Christian view of progress and decline as a movement towards or away from the permanent values of Christianity. To be Christian must be understood here as having faith in redemption and revulsion against the original sin which continues to haunt the mind of man.

The circular car race provides another image to Waugh in conveying the idea of circular secular change. A statue of Fame embraced by Speed has been kept for the car which stands first in this race. Waugh appears to suggest that human efforts are rewarded similarly in the 'dynamic' world. The man who travels fastest on the wheel of life and reaches the starting point first is, ludicrously enough, adjudged the best in the competition. Though by returning
to his original position, he negates the significance of all his efforts, yet he earns fame in the secular world. The incongruity between fact and fiction renders the entire enterprise ridiculously comic. Agatha Runcible's motor car accident, during this race, and her later nightmare of moving round and round at a faster and still faster pace ceaselessly, brings out the absurdity of engaging oneself in secular change. Commenting on the pathetic plight of Agatha Runcible, Rose Macaulay writes:

Agatha Runcible, whirling to her fatal crash in a fantastic motor race... is a figure perhaps more menacing and exemplary than the Bright Young Person she seems; Mr. Waugh might, with a little less of artistic control, have emphasised this aspect of her, given her in her last moments a spiritual malaise more explicit and profound than her delirium of racing cars. 53

Though Rose Macaulay reads the obvious meaning, the 'menacing and exemplary' fate of Agatha; she is unable to see the 'spiritual malaise' it implies. Apparently, it stems out of her inability to understand the symbolic significance of the circular car race. In contrast, Stephen Jay Greenblatt does not miss the profound implication of Agatha's nightmarish end as he considers her 'delirium dream' to be of prime importance to the novel.

The central image of Vile Bodies is the delirious dream of Agatha Runcible, who had drunkenly stepped into an idling racing car and cracked up after a few wild spins around the track....'54
Greenblatt, however, reduces the symbolic significance of the image of circle when he restricts it to the process of change taking place in modern times only while, according to Waugh, the image of circle or wheel stands for the entire continuum of time or life. This error of judgement impels him to see the moral centre of Waugh's irony within the temporal perspective of life, in the "value structures of the past".  

It is during this race that Adam discovers the drunk Major who again lends false hope to Adam by wishing to return the multiplied sum of thirty five thousand pounds to him. As he does not have the sum upon him then and as he has lost even his money-purse, he wonders if Adam would help him. Adam obliges him by borrowing from Archie Schwert. The next day Adam goes to the drunk Major's hotel to get the huge sum of thirty five thousand pounds from him. When he learns that the drunk Major has already left the place, all his hopes fizzle out and he feels that he has come back to the starting point of all his futile endeavours.

Though Adam has been unable to get married to Nina, he buys her with a bad cheque off Ginger to whom she has been married, by now. The episode is suggestive not only of moral disorder but also of Adam's growing conformity to
the ways of this disorderly and irrational 'dynamic' world. In his third visit to Doubting All, along with Nina, it is he and not the Colonel who wins. The forgetful Colonel, unable to recognise Adam, mistakes him for Ginger, Nina's real husband. The colonel's confidence, in knowing him as a child, is, therefore, rendered amusing and incongruous:

'.... I used to know your father very well indeed at one time. Used to be a neighbour of mine over at where-was-it. I expect you've forgotten those days. You used to come over here to ride with Nina. You can't have been more than ten or eleven....' 56

The servants, however, recognise him. So does the Rector. What perplexes them is Adam's impersonation as Ginger Littlejohn. The Rector presumes mistakenly that the colonel's son-in-law also might be suffering from a fickle memory. In this respect, Adam succeeds in throwing dust into the eyes of all those present at Colonel Blount's Doubting All. A ludicrous situation emerges when the Rector sympathises with Adam's supposed handicap. Ignorance of the reality of the situation renders the Rector comic and the reader has a hearty laugh at his expense.

'Quite off his head, poor boy. He didn't even remember coming here before. One expects that sort of thing in a man of the Colonel's age, but for a young man like that .... a very bad look out for the next generation....' 57
If intuition does not provide us with the decisive data to support the existence of the self, some other way should be found to confirm or deny the intuitive idea. Our past experiences are present in some way in our memory. Yet, Hume remarks, quite rightly, that our experiences or perceptions are different from each other and may exist quite separately, having no need of anything else to support their existence. In fact, we need some kind of permanence and continuity to make the process of understanding possible and when the conditions of permanence are lacking, we experience the tastes of comedy. This is precisely the kind of mistake which develops when Adam presents himself as Ginger to the Colonel and the Rector.

The absurdity of 'dynamic' life is perhaps best brought out by the film that Colonel Blount shows to his supposed son-in-law and Nina. Wherever the action of the movie holds dramatic potential, the movie rushes through the episodes there. By not allowing any dramatic situation to develop, the movie stifles its dramatic element. However, the action of the movie slackens, wherever it is drab and uninteresting. Waugh's view of life thus compares favourably with Eliot's view of the fallen humanity or with that of the absurd dramatists who too saw no dramatic element in life.
While Adam and Nina are enjoying their Christmas at Doubting All, the war breaks out. The actualisation of the war lends authenticity to Father Rothschild’s penetrating analysis of this world. The news of the war is juxtaposed with the tidings of comfort and joy brought by Christmas. The virtuosity in the act of juxtaposition is significant for only after the destruction of an unstable and irrational secular world can there be a possibility for the establishment of a stable Christian social order worthy of being called civilisation. Waugh’s point is illustrated by his views in one of his essays, “I see Nothing But Boredom... Everywhere”.

... I can see nothing objectionable in the total destruction of the earth, provided it is done, as seems most likely, inadvertently. If it is done in malice someone will have behaved culpably.58

It is Waugh’s deep discontent with the dynamic secular world that prompts him to acquiesce with the total destruction of the world.

At the end of the novel, we find Adam reading a letter from Nina, on the biggest battlefield in the history of the world. By now, Nina is with Adam’s child who Ginger thinks mistakenly to be his own. Thus, even Ginger is not spared from comic ridicule. It is during this war that Adam discovers his drunk Major who by now has shot up to
the rank of a General. He offers Adam his money which by now has lost much of its value. So the receipt of that money makes little difference to Adam's struggle for winning the hand of Nina Blount. Waugh here conveys an abstruse fact: not only are the secular actions of man foredoomed to failure but the very standards of measuring secular progress are impermanent and unreliable. There is no hope, therefore, for the modern man in the secular dynamic world. Rebecca West has traced this note of disillusionment from Eliot through Huxley to Waugh most perceptively.

Vile Bodies has, indeed, apart from its success in being really funny, a very considerable value as a further stage in the contemporary literature of disillusionment. That may be said to have started with T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land. Although that work had a supreme emotional effect it was not easy to guess what Mr. Eliot was disillusioned with, and why.... Then came Mr. Aldous Huxley whose contribution ... left no doubt whatsoever as to what he was disillusioned with, and why .... Now Mr. Evelyn Waugh comes along to define this distaste... Young people, he tells us, are disgusted with the world because it is full of those who drink too much and think too little. 59

Her analysis, however, fails to bring out the real causes underlying the disillusionment of the youth in Evelyn Waugh's fictive world. She offers a simplistic explanation that ignores the significance of the profound metaphysical concealed in Waugh's comic view of the world. A saner analysis comes from L.P. Hartley who attributes the note of disillusionment to the impermanence of the world
in which the Bright Young People, ironically called so, live.

If we read this high-spirited book between the lines, and look its gift-horse, humour, in the mouth, we may find that the ground is not really solid beneath our feet, we are dancing on a volcano, carousing on the edge of a precipice...

Waugh's artistry needs to be commended for making a seemingly broken plot and apparently descriptive images to subserve the thematic line of intention in the novel. The course of Adam's efforts, directed towards marrying Nina, conforms to that of a circle which helps in establishing the analogy between Adam's attempts and those of a person on the wheel of life. The analogy is reinforced by the various circular images suggested in the narrative. The relationship of the 'formal circle' to that of the 'thematic circle' thus helps in strengthening the feeling of comic helplessness and absurdity of secular change usually found in the lesser comedies of Waugh.

Terry Eagleton, however, deprives Waugh's novels of their legitimate 'universal' quality by including them in the category of 'upper-class novel' and foisting on them the quality of its restrictive vision.

Both the upper-class and lower middle-class novels confront panic and emptiness, as an 'objective' quality of contemporary experience; yet that sense of uncontrolled collapse is, equally, the quality of a constricted social vision in the novel itself, unable to pass beyond its own specialised social experience to discern and evaluate the total structure of which it is a part.
True, Waugh's novels take their protagonists to the heart of high social life. But that should not be used as a stick to beat the artist with, for

His knowledge (the author's) of the world is limited by his own experience. It is practically impossible for those who live among poor people to write about the rich, a writer who has never been seriously in love can not make his characters seem so; upbringing, education, experience of travel, of the war, etc., all circumscribe and determine the incidents of a book.63

Moreover, the Waugh novels do pass beyond the social experiences they describe. This is evident from the comic vision of life that emerges from them. The circuitous path that Adam's fortunes describe, the perpetual nightmare reality of a circuitous motion evident in Agatha's fate and the decline of British social system are ideas that point to the all-pervasive idea of the futility of secular change; a vision, which is at once original and profound. *Vile Bodies* thus provides an important step forward in the canon of Waugh literature.
BLACK MISCHIEF (1932):

The first two novels of Waugh preponderated with exposing the comic fallacy of mistaking secular change for progress. By the time Waugh came to write *Black Mischief* (1932) at Madresfield, Lord Beauchamp's moated house near Malvern, he had got converted to Roman Catholicism. The change had an impact not only on his personal life but also on his artistry. It is evident from the explicit expression of the theme of non-synonymity of secular change with progress in this novel which lies at the base of all lesser comedies of Waugh. Though the moral centre of Waugh's irony, the hub of the wheel of life, mentioned first in *Decline and Fall* (1928), already displayed Catholic characteristics, it now took on an overtly Catholic significance. With the clarity of thought provided by Roman Catholicism, Waugh felt himself well-equipped for the strenuous task of expressing the theme common to his first two novels, in a historical framework. Consequently, he chose to narrate the history of a fictive barbaric nation whose ruler is desirous of translating the delusive Enlightenment philosophy of secular progress into a reality.

The change in the physical setting of this novel has, however, elicited a mixed response from critics. While Gilbert Highet is of the opinion that it is prompted by the novelist's desire to satirise 'the current idealistic
doctrine that all races are brothers under the skin', Lionel Stevenson thinks that it 'gives Waugh equal opportunities for ridiculing Western sophistication and primitive savagery'. Stephen Greenblott rejects these opinions and asserts that it is 'a condemnation far more of the cultivated Westerner than of the African'. David Lodge too denies any traces of 'racial snobbery' in the novels, dealing with the African situation, 'where if any group survives the author's impartial irony, it is the non-Europeans'. Despite this, Greenblatt and Lodge comprehend the thematic significance of the change in setting inadequately. While the former considers it no more than a means of heightening the ironic force of Waugh's biting scrutiny of his homeland, the latter thinks that it merely shows 'the primitivism of Africa... as both a foil to and a portent for a civilization that was itself declining into a new, and less appealing, kind of barbarism'. Both these analyses ignore the centrality of Waugh's desire to show, through the changed setting, the comic futility of a nation's journey towards secular progress on the circular path of secular change.

Seth, the central protagonist of this novel, is the descendant of Amurath, the Great who was responsible for founding the Azanian Empire, with its capital at Debra Dowa.
Inhabited mostly by the savage tribes of Sakuyu and Wanda, Azania was under Arab rule until it passed into the hands of Amurath, a three-fourth Negro. Inflamed by the desire of developing his empire, secularly of course, he took steps to modernise it. Amurath, thus, falls into the seductive delusion of mistaking secular change for real progress just as the Enlightenment historiographers did.

His successes and failures are indicative of the victory and defeat respectively of Enlightenment historiography. One of the first steps taken by him, in this direction, is the introduction of 'a railway' between Matodi and Debra Dowa. Waugh remarks ironically enough:

Reluctantly, step by step, barbarism retreated; the seeds of progress took root and, after years of growth, burst finally into flower in the single, narrow-gauge track of the Grand Chemin de Fer Impérial d'Azanie.\(^1\)

The mock epic style employed here leaves no room for doubt regarding where the author's sympathies lie. Waugh had no illusions about the extirpation of barbarism by secular change. Barbarism can scarcely be overcome with a change that is incomprehensible to people.

The first few trains caused numerous deaths among the inhabitants, who for some time did not appreciate the speed or strength of this new thing that had come to their country. Presently they became more cautious and the service less frequent.\(^2\)
Among other changes that he introduced were the abolition of slavery and the declaration of Christianity as the official religion. The former had little impact on the prevalent practice as it was never made known to the real offenders.

He proclaimed the abolition of slavery and was warmly applauded in the European Press; the law was posted up prominently in the capital in English, French and Italian where every foreigner might read it; it was never promulgated in the provinces nor translated into any of the native languages; the ancient system continued unhampered but European intervention had been anticipated. 73

The response of the European Press, against the backdrop of this eyewash, is not only ludicrous but is also condemnable of their progressive stance.

Again, the declaration of Christianity as the official religion by itself does not lend significance to the progressive designs of Amurath as the basis on which they are pursued, is unchristian and secular. Seth wishes it to further his efforts for secular progress and also to ward off European intervention.

As a result of these secular changes, Debra Dowa comes up as a modern city with a gesellschaft social structure. This is evident from the picture Waugh paints of it. A haphazard jumble of shops, missions, barracks,
Legations, bungalows and native huts sprang up in Debra Dowa. The character of the inhabitants also changed:

...the main population, however, was always cosmopolitan, and as the country's reputation as a land of opportunity spread through the less successful classes of the outside world Debra Dowa gradually lost all evidence of national character.  

The disorder that afflicts a gesellschaft social structure, also plagues Debra Dowa. Waugh writes:

The ground between and about the buildings was uneven and untidy; stacks of fuel, kitchen refuse, derelict carriages, cannon and ammunition lay in permanent places; sometimes there would be a fly-blown carcasse of a donkey or camel, and after the rains pools of stagnant water; gangs of prisoners, chained neck to neck, could often be seen shovelling as though some project were on hand of levelling or draining.  

Disarray is a sign not of civilisation but of barbarity. Thus despite the changes effected in the Azanian society, it continues to be as it was before. The circular path of secular change deprives human efforts of any significant achievement, a view that is diametrically opposed to that of the Enlightenment and Humanist historiographers.

When the action of the novel begins, Amurath and his daughter are already dead, his grandson, Seth, is fighting with Seyid, the husband of the late Empress, for political control over the island-state. Oxford-educated,
his imagination is fired by the Enlightenment zeal of human progress on the circuitous path of secular change. He is, in this respect, far more dynamic than his grandfather, Amurath. Moreover, Seth has been exposed in his youth to the 'dynamic' life of the Western society which has made him conscious of 'modernity'. He, therefore, sees the battle between him and his father as one between progress and barbarity.

'Fools, what do they know? What can they understand? I am Seth, grandson of Amurath. Defeat is impossible. I have been to Europe. I know. We have the Tank. This is not a war of Seth against Seyid but of progress against Barbarism. And Progress must prevail. I have seen the great tattoo of Aldershot, the Paris Exhibition, the Oxford Union. I have read modern books... The whole might of Evolution rides behind him; at my stirrups run woman's suffrage, vaccination and vivisection. I am the New Age. I am the Future'.

Seth's excessive reliance on the tank exhibits his unshakable faith in the superiority of whatever is modern. In this regard, he is completely hoodwinked by the Western ideas of progress. David Lodge has rightly commented that 'Seth personifies a misplaced faith in Western ideas of progress'[^77]. His 'misplaced faith' is comic in so far as it persists in the face of reality. The tank on which he pins all his hopes, proves to be of no more use in the battle than of serving as a punishment cell. The battle is won, instead, by 'two very ancient weapons - lies and the long spear'[^78]. A fitting reply to Seth's notion of
modernity comes, though he fails to see the point of the irony, in the manner of Seyid's death.

'They should not have eaten him - after all, he was my father...
It is so... so barbarous'. 79

In the theme of cannibalism, that emerges from Seyid's death, Waugh shows that the comic adventures into modernity by a deluded ruler, can have grave consequences as well. The comic and the tragic get blended quite often in Waugh when the dynamic world is allowed to have its way unhampere­red. The forces of barbarity unleashed in this battle mock at the progressive claims of Seth, and by inference, the Enlightenment and Humanist historiography also. Thus, Seth, as the deity of secular change, becomes the butt of ridicule in this novel.

Instead of reading in his victory, the fallacy of modernisation as a means to progress, Seth reads in it an urgent need for the modernisation of his people.

'I am afraid that as yet the Wanda are totally out of touch with modern thought. They need education. We must start some schools and a university for them when we get things straight'. 80

It may be argued that if education, which is a culture of mind, is not a sure way to civilisation, then what else is. True, education has the noble aim of civilising human society. But the kind of education that Seth chooses for
his subjects is the secular education of the West, about which T.S. Eliot has brilliantly written:

All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.

Moreover, Seth himself, as a product of that system of education, is a figure of fun. The need for modernisation that is accelerated social change in a secular perspective, keeps pressing upon his mind. Waiting for the delinquent engine to return, he ponders over the urgency of the need.

'My people are a worthless people. I give orders; there is none to obey me. I am like a great musician without an instrument. A wrecked car broadside across the line of my procession... a royal train without an engine... goats on the platform... I can do nothing with these people. The Metropolitan is drunk. Those land-owners giggled when the engine broke away; I must find a man of culture, a modern man... a representative of Progress and the New Age.'

Modernity, Seth's obsession, has however already made an incursion into Azania, in the shape of the Embassies and legations of the so-called civilised West. The co-existence of the decadent West and the barbaric East marks 'a unique stage of the interpenetration of two cultures'. The description of the three Embassies, representatives of the West, shows that the civilisation for which Seth aspires, is no civilisation for its imposed order is unable to contain the forces of impermanence and instability. While
the American Ambassador suffers from a false sense of superiority,

... he had chosen that post and had not regretted it, enjoying during the last eight years a popularity and prestige which he would hardly have attained among his own people.84

the French Ambassador's excessive suspiciousness verges on the comic. When M. Ballon, the French Ambassador, learns of Bishop Goodchild's visit to the British Legation, he attaches an uncalled for importance to it. He thinks that the British Ambassador keeps himself informed about the town through the Bishop. In other words, he is obsessed with the idea of espionage. The elaborate ritual of his retiring to bed is highly comic as it shows the extent to which he has been taken in by his own imagined fears.

M. Ballon ascended the stairs to bed. In his room he first tested the steel shutters, then the lock of the door. Then he went across the bed and examined the mosquito curtains... examined the magazine of his revolver and laid it on the chair at his bedside... He slipped another revolver under his pillow. He tiptoed to the window and called down softly:
'Sergeant'
There was a click of heels in the darkness. 'Excellence'. 'Is all well?'
'All well, Excellence'.85

M. Ballon's excessively cautious nature, despite its comicality, is not unexpected. A lifetime's association
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with a disordered and savage world has made him be on
his guard against dynamic characters like Margot Chetwynde
and Basil Seal and thereby, escape the fate of a Paul
Penn feather. In this respect, he is a part of the secular
'dynamic' world. Despite all the Enlightenment claims of
the rational superiority of modern man, he is as super­
sticious as a savage. Before sinking into the stupor
of sleep,

his hand found and grasped a small-curved
nut which he kept under his bolster in the
belief that it would bring him good luck.86

If the French Ambassador represents one pole of
the dynamic world, the Ambassador, Sir Samson Courteney,
represents another. Oblivious of the world around him, he
is happy in the calm of his domestic life. If his French
counterpart renders himself comic by grossly exaggerating
his false fears, he becomes comic by flagrantly belittling
the gravity of reality. This has earned him the name of
Envoy Extraordinary. Bishop Goddchild's visit, which had
made M. Ballon fret so much, reveals on the other hand,
Sir Courteny's comic disregard for reality.

'E everyone is in a great state of alarm in the
town,' said the Bishop. 'There are so many
rumours. Tell me, Sir Samson, you do not
think really, seriously, there is any danger
of massacre?'

Contd...
The Envoy Extraordinary said: 'We seem to have tinned asparagus for luncheon every day... I can't think why... I'm so sorry - you were talking about the massacre. Well, I hardly know. I haven't really thought about it... Yes, I suppose there might be one... Don't do to get worried... I should have thought we could have grown it ourselves.'

The Envoy Extraordinary's attitude is that of a man who unconsciously feels himself incapable of changing the disordered and predatory 'dynamic' world and therefore, lets the matters drift without burdening his own mind with the task of changing the direction of its course. As it is a response fathered by a highly unstable world order, there is no distortion of truth in the depiction of Sir Courteney's personality. By being a product of the 'dynamic' world, he is Waugh's indirect and objective indictment of its progressive claims.

The Envoy's thirteen year old 'silly' daughter, Prudence, is in love with William, the first secretary to the British Legation. Their constant attempts to invent new ways of loving show the superficiality, and consequent insincerity, of their feelings. The impermanence of their love is a sign of decadence in the quality of human relations.

Given the opportunity, it can easily transfer to another person. Such an occasion arises on Basil's arrival.
Prudence forgets William and takes to the highly unstable Basil. The theme of cannibalism again rears its head in their idle love talk. Basil tells Prudence, "You're a grand girl, Prudence, and I'll like to eat you". To this she replies; "So you shall, my sweet, anything you want". It is gruesomely realised in the denouement when Basil unwittingly consumes his mistress at a cannibal feast. The cannibal instincts portrayed here make mockery of the progressive claims of the Enlightenment and Humanist historiographers as they show a lack of Western cultural superiority over African barbarism. T.E. Eliot, in *Sweeney Agonistes*, points to a similar lack of progress in the secular efforts of human society. Aldous Huxley too, in his fiction, has drawn attention towards the barbaric potential of modern man.

In a perceptive piece of critical writing, Stephen Jay Greenblatt remarks:

"The abortive attempt to modernize Azania is not a statement of the African nation's inability to share in the glories of civilization but a shy and satiric examination of modernity itself. The struggle which Seth envisages as a mortal combat between barbarism and progress is a miserable sham, for Western culture itself is no longer meaningful.\*

By having founded itself on the false basis of secularised Christianity, the Western culture, as was seen in the first two novels, has drifted away from the rock of the Roman Catholic hub of the wheel of life and has, thus, exposed itself to the impermanence that keeps on growing as one moves away from the hub. Greenblatt, however, does not
interpret the meaninglessness of Western culture in these terms, he does so within the false framework of temporal reality. He writes:

Those Western ideas which might have given Seth's project real significance have been abandoned. Basil informs Seth: "We have got a much easier job now... If we'd had to modernize a country then it would have meant..." 'What is all that?' asked the Emperor. 'Just a few ideas that have ceased to be modern'... 89

The passage on which Greenblatt bases his argument, instead of playing up the meaningful stability of the ideas which would have given Seth's project real significance, exposes the vulnerability of those secular ideas to the change that the modern secular man has been effecting, under the delusion of secular progress. Permanence, according to Waugh, lies only in Roman Catholic values of life. So only they could have given meaning to his project of progress.

Seth, however, lives in blissful ignorance of the reality of the modernised West. He waits for the man who would use the magic wand of accelerated secular change to modernise his nation and thereby, bring it at par with the putative civilisation of the secular West. His choice falls interestingly enough, on Basil Seal, a person who is the very epitome of change and instability. Upon reading about the trouble in Azania, Basil, who has a natural penchant for rackets, becomes eager to go there. He not only deceives his mother who is planning a stable career at the Bar for him, but also robs her of her emerald bracelet when she does not
give him any money. Only a dynamic character like him can be so unfeeling as to do this and also to beg money of a mistress, unabashedly. The 'exceptional energy and initiative for an Evelyn Waugh hero' that Spender discovers in him owes to this dynamism of his.

Basil's encounter with Seth is a meeting of two dynamic characters. Seth, by virtue of being placed on the outermost orbit of the wheel of life, is far more dynamic than Basil. Yet, when Seth sees Basil, he feels inferior.

Seth recognized him in his first grave survey of the restaurant and suddenly, on his triumphal night in his own capital, he was overcome by shyness. Seth's shyness springs out of the delusion of Western superiority which Basil represents by his flashy and dashing personality. As Waugh writes:

... Basil still stood for him as the personification of all that glittering, intangible Western culture to which he aspired.

Their close association cures Basil of any illusions of scoring over Seth for the latter proves to be intractable by virtue of the greater instability he epitomises in his personality. Seth, however, never learns the truth of Basil's personality. He continues to mistake Basil's disorderliness, a barbaric trait, for his progressiveness. The facade of sophistication hides the barbaric potential of Basil which is, indeed, a counterfoil of the blatant
barbarism of the Earl of Ngumo. Seth is reminded only of the barbaric Earl of Ngomo 'pacifically winking at the ladies as they danced past him'.

'Insupportable barbarians', he thought. 'I am sure that the English lords do not behave in that way before their king. Even my loyalest officers are ruffians and buffoons. If I had one man by me whom I could trust... a man of progress and culture'.

With the induction of Basil into Seth's service, his modernisation plans breathe with life. The 'Ministry of Modernization' is opened and it is located at the site occupied previously by the old Empress' oratory. Commenting on the secular nature of the changes contemplated by this ministry, Greenblatt rightly remarks:

The attempt to replace the worship of God with the worship of Progress is even more obvious in the site of the Ministry of Modernization, which occupies what had formerly been the old Empress' oratory.

As the course of secular change is circular and not linear, Seth's modernisation plans are an exercise in futility. Mr. Youkoumian, the Armenian counterpart of Basil, is made his Financial Secretary. In his lust for money, he compares favourably with Judas Iscariot.

It is evident from the avid interest he takes in one of the first tasks undertaken by the ministry, the issue of boots to the bare-footed Azanian army. Before the order is out, he buys boots to be sold later to the army.
He stands to lose when Connolly refuses to buy boots for his army, knowing fully well their uselessness for the soldiers who are used to going barefoot. Upon his deputy's requests, Basil argues with Seth about the modernity of having booted Guards and cleverly insinuates against Connolly being 'not quite modern' in opposing it. Convinced, Seth issues a royal decree, overruling Connolly's sagacious objections and indirectly furthering Mr. Youkoumian's financial interests. The boots have an ironic end when the soldiers who are issued these mistake them for extra rations and therefore, eat them. Hearing their jubilant cries, Basil mistakes them for their extreme satisfaction with being booted. The highly dynamic world of Azanian society is beyond the comprehension of even as dynamic a Western man as Basil Seal. He realises his first defeat when he learns the truth from his own adversary in the venture. Waugh writes:

'That's one in the eye for Connolly', he said, and next day, meeting the General in the Palace yard, he could not forbear to mention it. 'So the boots went down all right with your men after all, Connolly.' 'They went down.' 'No cases of lameness yet, I hope?' The General... smiled pleasantly. 'No cases of lameness' he replied. 'One or two of belly ache, though... You see my adjutant made rather a silly mistake. He hadn't had much truck with boots before and the silly fellow thought they were extra rations. My men ate the whole bag of tricks last night'.

Basil is rendered comic in failing to comprehend the greater degree of 'dynamism' of the barbaric society of Azania.
The other excursion into modernity, popularisation of birth control measures among the natives, has an equally ironic end. An artist, engaged for the purpose, draws up two posters which distinguish the relative fortunes of a small and a large family. The posters, captioned, 'WHICH HOME DO YOU CHOOSE?', are supposed to encourage the natives to have small and contented families. Their effect is, however, vice versa.

Nowhere was there any doubt about the meaning of the beautiful new pictures. See: on right hand; there is rich man; smoke pipe like big chief; but his wife she no good; sit eating meat; and rich man no good; he only one son. See: on left hand; poor man; not much to eat, but his wife she very good, work hard in field; man he good too; eleven children; one very mad, very holy. And in the middle; Emperor's juju. Make you like that good man with eleven children.

The Emperor's juju is mistaken for the promotion of fecundity and the large family concept. Just as the changes effected by his grandfather, had little impact on the transformation of Azanian society. Similarly, his secular endeavours also fail in civilising his subjects. According to the Graeco-Roman Humanists, 'whatever happens in history happens as a direct result of human will; that someone is directly responsible for it, to be praised or blamed according as it is a good thing or bad'. They tend to eliminate the role of God and supplant him with 'mere personifications of human agency like the genius of the Emperor'. By showing the miscarriage of all Seth's modernisation plans, Waugh shows the Humanist claims to be exaggerated and false.
in the realm of secular reality. He thus appears to be in agreement with R.G. Collingwood who opines:

The extent to which people act with a clear idea of their ends, knowing what effects they are aiming at, is easily exaggerated. Most human action is tentative, experimental, directed not by a knowledge of what it will lead to but rather by a desire to know what will come of it. 99

The indictment of Humanist thought, further robs the secular human endeavours of any meaning they may have had. The dynamic secular world is reduced to the status of a jungle, no matter what its outward form may be.

But Seth refuses to see the limitations of human endeavours, unaided by any divine agency. He pursues his modernisation plans with greater vigour and ardour. The accelerated pace of change introduced by industrialisation is matched fully by his ebullient mind. No sooner does his mind ponder over one change in the Azanian social structure than it flits to another. The pace of change that he introduced is even greater than that in the western world. As change has an unsettling effect, the ideas that Seth borrows from the West are not even given time to settle and to be understood in their proper context. They are thus reduced to the level of half-baked concepts. In the less dynamic society of the West, these ideas, though they have little influence on development, have at least been understood whole because of the comparatively lesser unsettling effect of the slower pace of change. The working
of Seth's 'dynamic' mind, thus, tells upon Basil's abilities,

"'E's been reading books again, Mr. Seal, that's what it is. You won't get no peace from 'im not till you fix 'im with a woman..." 100

whose dynamism is no match for Seth's. The defeat of Basil shows neither him nor Seth in a better light as it is indicative of the victory of one savage over the other. It would not be fair, therefore, to say with Spender that 'Evelyn Waugh's sympathy (lies) with characters like Basil Seal who are not merely sinners but devils.' 101

Waugh here draws a comparative analysis of the two cultures. By being subject to a lesser pace of change, the West is nearer the hub of the wheel of life compared to Azania which by being subject to a greater pace of change is farther from the hub. Nearness to the hub in Waugh means superiority while distance implies decadence. The Western society is, therefore, less decadent than the Azanian society. The linear comparison made here is justifiable as it springs from Waugh's linear concept of real change, one that leads to progress or barbarity. This is a point of distinction between him and other cyclical historiographers, Waugh's concept of decadence is, thus, unlike Spenglar's.

The rapid unsettling change introduced by Seth's modernisation plans looms up from the shadows in the form of anarchy and insurrection at the end of the novel. The Church, the army and the crafty French Ambassador, with the aid of the Earl of Ngumo, set up a rival candidate for
the throne. On the occasion of the Birth Control Gala Day, there is a rebellion. In the struggle that ensues, Seth loses and has to flee along with Viscount Boaz to the jungles. Debra Dowa's imposed order rips open and the forces of irrationality and barbarity have their way in creating chaos and anarchy. Azania returns, after a long circuitous journey of secular change to its original state of barbarity. Seth, the champion of Enlightenment historiography, himself meets with an ironic and grim end in the jungles.

The circular path of Azanian history brings out the absurdity of man's belief in progress through secular change. Seth's position is rendered comic, in so far as he mistakes secular change for progress, and grim, in so far as he has to lose his life for this mistake. The error of judgement that the tragic hero in Shakespeare falls a victim to, takes a tragi-comic shape here in the fate of Seth, the deity of change in the novel. Besides, the comparative juxtaposition of the Western and the Azanian society brings out the linear concept of progress and decline that Waugh espoused. Thus, the novel shows two directions of change, circular and linear; each of them, however, being critical of the secular approach to life. Eric Linklater shows blatant ignorance of Waugh's attitude to change and progress, when he belittles his achievement in the novel by bringing it down to the plane of Restoration comedy.
Mr. Waugh is so abominably subversive as to mock the idea of progress, especially in such manifestations as might be expected to promote, by a One Year Plan, the adoption of modern organization and habits of life in the negroid Empire of Azania; but Mr Waugh, by living rather on the plane of Restoration Comedy, permits his readers, if they prefer it, to take his criticism simply as a good joke.102

Waugh once said that there 'is no more agreeable position than that of a dissident from a stable society'103 which, in his philosophy, implies a Roman Catholic society for civilisation, which 'has no force of its own beyond what is given it from within',104 'came into being through Christianity, and without it has no significance or power to command allegiance'.105 The events in the novelistic history of Azania testify to Waugh's belief and also reveal the vantage point from which he assesses the secular efforts of human society. Ernest Oldmeadow's accusation,

There may be books in which sordidness of detail does not overwhelm the spirituality of the pervading idea, but Mr Waugh's is not one of them. On his dunghill no lily blooms,106

is, therefore, a reflection not on the book he surveys maliciously but on his own inability to detect the pervading Christian idea in the objectively narrated history of Azania.

The circular course of Azanian history reinforced by a plot which ends where it began concretises Waugh's comic vision of absurdity against the backdrop of a world that has allowed itself to be deluded by the enlightenment and humanist historiographers' claim of achieving progress through secular change. In this respect, Black Mischief, forms an integral and essential part of the lesser comedies of Evelyn Waugh.
Inspired by his travel in the barbaric region of British Guiana, A Handful of Dust, Waugh's fourth major novel, had a unique genesis in that its final part had already appeared in the shape of the short story, The Man Who Liked Dickens. The novel reveals Waugh's continued preoccupation with the inverse relationship between secular change and progress and the tragic:–comic consequences of attempts that treat them synonymous. The novel bears closer resemblance to Black Mischief where the novelist shows the claims of the Enlightenment and Humanist historiographers, concerning the inevitability of human progress through greater modernisation and greater role of human reason, absurd in the serio–comic fate of Seth, who is an embodiment of such beliefs. Having rejected the superiority of the present and the future over the past, Waugh now proceeds to show how the Romantic tendency of the idealisation of the past values of life as embedded in the chivalric code of the Gothic Age is equally misleading and absurd, in its consequences. The comic vision of absurdity that develops here is not unlike that in other lesser comedies of Waugh.

In selecting Tony Last, an out and out feudal character, as his protagonist, Waugh's underlying intention is to show the vulnerability of the secular values of the past to change and the comic fallacy of mistaking them for the eternal values manifest in the Roman Catholic hub of life.
Commenting on this attempt in Waugh, David Lodge writes perceptively:

The modern is ridiculed by contrast with the traditional, but attempts to maintain or restore the traditional in the face of change are also seen as ridiculous; and in any case the traditional usually turns out to be in some way false or compromised. 109

As Tony 'attempts to maintain' the traditional values enshrined in his chivalric code of morality, 'in the face of change', he exposes to ridicule his own self and by implication, the Romanticists. His refusal to participate in the world of change shows him as a static character wishing to shun the dynamic world; a fact that places him in the line of the static heroes of the previous novels.

Though Tony's excessive reliance on the past has been explained by many critics 110 in terms of his obsession with his neo-gothic house, Hetton, an architectural image of the past values of life, yet its significance in shedding light on his static character has been glaringly overlooked. David Lodge comes closest to it when he highlights his two static qualities of 'innocence' and 'immaturity'.

Tony Last's devotion to it (Hetton), though touching, is misdirected, a symptom and a symbol of his innocence and immaturity. 111

While 'innocence' brings out, at a mental level, his refusal to outgrow the dated values of the past, 'immaturity' brings out, on an emotional plane, his inability to overcome the
nightmares of his childhood. Tony Last, in other words, suffers from past-fixation. His entire personality is conditioned by an outlook which prevents him from participating in the process of secular change. His plight is akin to that of a person who takes a seat in the spectators' gallery instead of jumping on the constantly revolving wheel of life. It is this attitude which marks a static character out. David Lodge, however, stops short of calling him so.

In order that Tony's 'static' faith in the secular values of the past may be shown false and inadequate, Waugh employs the familiar 'bed-room farce' as an artistic device. All great artists have shown the tendency to select a familiar plot for the sake of conveying their abstruse themes. While Shakespeare uses in King Lear, the story of the betrayal of a father by her power-hungry daughters, T.S. Eliot takes up in The Cocktail Party, the seemingly simple story of the break-up of a marriage. The need for familiar plots has been felt not because of any artistic weakness but because of the author's desire of interesting the readers or the audience in the complex themes of his work. By employing the plot of a 'bed-room farce', therefore, Waugh does not show any artistic weakness; as Ernest Oldmeadow makes out:

The author has not made a clear choice between tragi-comedy and farce.112

Instead, he reveals his ability to transform an intellectually inert artistic form into a forceful examination not
only of 'humanism and modern society' but also of the culpably inadequate values of the past.

The fortuitous contriving of the plot mocks at the Humanist tendency of attributing all that happens in history to human agency rather than God or any other unknown factor. It is a matter of chance that Tony should have chosen the dynamic Brenda, "'nereid' from another domain", for his mate. Her choice of a bed is quite suggestive.

She had insisted on a modern bed. In the 'static' atmosphere of Hetton, her influence is, however, contained. This makes their friends and acquaintances, mistake their shoddy marriage for a successful one. Only Mrs. Beaver, the presiding deity of the dynamic world of London, does not think so. Giving a piece of her mind to her son, she remarks:

I should say it was time she began to get bored. They've been married five or six years.

What is needed to hasten the breaking up of this marriage is an agent from her dynamic world. Tony Last, by chance, himself becomes the instrument of inviting him into his world to shatter not only his world but also to jolt his illusions. On one of his trips to London, he, very casually, asks John Beaver, the uninteresting son of Mrs Beaver, to his place. Insipite of being aware of the casualness of the invitation,

'... Tony asked me in Bratt's the other night. He may have forgotten'.
Beaver resolves upon visiting Tony's place. Acting on his mother's advice, he takes all precautions against his visit being stalled. With the arrival of Beaver at Hetton, Tony Last's world gets exposed to the buffetings of the dynamic world. Brenda's initial response to him is as cold as that of her husband. But with greater familiarity, she discovers a fellow-dynamic character in him. Distanced for a long time from the hectic circle of parties in the high society of London, she takes avid interest in Beaver's stories of secular London life. Tony Last, who could never have fully won Brenda's affection, gets supplanted gradually by John Beaver. Commenting on the estrangement of Brenda with Tony, Greenblatt says:

The lack of communication between Brenda and Tony becomes a clear rift when Brenda tells Beaver that she really detests Hetton. "I shouldn't feel so badly about it if it were really a lively house - like my home for instance... but of course Tony's been brought up here and sees it all differently" (p. 34). When on a periodic trip to London, Brenda becomes Beaver's mistress, there is no surprise and practically no explanation.

He attributes the lack of deep psychological examination of the motives behind the break up of marriage to the satirist's concern with characters 'not as individuals with private lives' but as symbols of societal forces. To my mind, the unburdening of Brenda's heart to Beaver and the similarity in their approach to life is a sufficient psychological explanation for the break up of the marriage. Furthermore, Greenblatt's contention, that Waugh is dealing
here with types rather than individuals, is rejected by the novelist himself when he writes, in one of his letters to Katherine Asquith:

Very difficult to write because for the first time I am trying to deal with normal people instead of eccentrics. Comic English character parts too easy when one gets to be thirty.120

The preoccupation with 'normal people', instead of eccentrics, is a clear indication of Waugh's attempts to portray individual or round characters rather than stylised or highly idiosyncratic typical characters. At yet another place, "Fan Fare", Waugh makes an assertive statement about a novelist's business with individual characters only.

A lady in Hampstead, N.Y. asks me whether I consider my characters "typical". No, Mrs. Schultz, I do not. It is horrible of you to ask. A novelist has no business with types; they are the property of economists and politicians and advertisers and the other professional bores of our period. The artist is interested only in individuals.121

While Brenda and Beaver continue to draw nearer and the ramshackle structure of Tony's static world begins to crumble, Tony shows himself foolish in mistaking Brenda's genuine interest in Beaver for the gentlemanly code of courtesy towards a guest. Unaware of the fact that he is surrounded by dynamic people, he renders himself comic by applying the values of his static world to their conduct. A similarly comic situation accrues in Wycherley's The Country Wife where Sir Jasper allows Lady Fidget to be
intimate with Horner, whose false report of impotence has deceived him. Yet, a basic disagreement exists between the two situations. Sir Jasper, unlike Tony Last, is very much aware of the moral corruption in London's high society. Besides, his comic deception is a direct result of his ungentlemanly and ribald pleasure in poking fun at the feigned impotence of Horner. His comicality lies, therefore, more in being outwitted than in being a pitiable victim of the designs of the world. Tony Last, in contrast, is a pitiable victim of the ruthless designs of a dynamic world, out to exploit his illusions. The difference sheds light on the genres to which the two works belong. As satire withholds pity from the person satirised, The Country Wife, in its unsympathetic attitude towards the characters that people it, is a satire on the follies of the Restoration Age, but A Handful of Dust, with its sympathetic attitude towards the deceived hero, is a comedy. By virtue of its tragi-comic character, the novel, however, compares favourably with Shakespeare's Othello, whose central character, Othello elicits our sympathy, like Tony Last, in the act of falling a victim to his illusions. Within the broad parameters of this commonality, there is, yet a contradiction between their attitudes to the situation of marital infidelity. While Othello, under the artful tutelage of Iago, suspects the virtuous Desdemona and the faithful Michael Cassio of treachery towards him, Tony Last, under the delusive impact of his 'static' beliefs, ignores the infidelity of his wife. Othello, however, is as static as Tony is, in his ignorance.
of the clever ploys of dynamic Venetians, like Iago.

Mistaking Brenda's frequent trips to and long periods of stay in London for her desire to help him with his speeches, when he would stand for elections, Tony applies his 'static' values to an essentially 'dynamic' situation. Brenda is no gentlewoman for she makes discreet enquiries about the 'sex-life' of Beaver from her sister, Marjorie, in London.

'What do you suppose is Mr. Beaver's sex-life?'
'I shouldn't know. Pretty dim, I imagine...'
You do fancy him?' 'Oh well', said Brenda,
'I don't see such a lot of young men...'

Brenda is interested in Beaver not because he fascinates her for he is 'pathetic' to her, but because he is the one man she knows from her native dynamic world. Her affection for him lacks sincerity as does Prudence's in Black Mischief. It is purely physical and ephemeral. Modernity has reduced human relationships to the level of ever changing fashions in dresses or thoughts. She makes her gullible husband pay for the flat she hires from Mrs. Beaver, and indulges in her sexual escapades with Beaver without fear of exposure. Even when Tony is close to discovering her, she turns the tables on him. In a highly ironic situation she makes Tony regret the ungentlemanly act of drinking and visiting night clubs upon being refused a meeting by her.
Tony went and sat alone in front of the library fire. 'Two men of thirty', he said to himself, 'behaving as if they were up for the night from Sandhurst - getting drunk and ringing people up and dancing with tarts at the Old Hundredth... And it makes it all the worse that Brenda was so nice about it.123

Tony's persistent ignorance owing to his static beliefs renders him comic. It is Brenda and not Tony who need repent for faithlessness. Instead, she relishes her unprincipled victory over her husband.

"If I know Tony, he'll be tortured with guilt for weeks to come. It was maddening last night but it was worth it. He's put himself so much in the wrong now that he won't dare to feel resentful, let alone say anything, whatever I do. ... He had to learn not to make surprise visits'.124

If Tony is the opposite of Seth, Brenda is the opposite of Desdemona. Blinded by his 'static' chivalric code to the dynamism of Brenda, he willingly allows himself to be deceived and thus rendered comic.

Tony's commitment to his static ideals is so total that he cannot be made to feel interested in the futile cycle of dynamic life. His wife's attempts to get him interested in some other woman fall flat as Tony does not feel impressed by Princess Jenny Abdul Akbar, an absurd product of modern secular life. Burdened with her company, he tries to get rid of her company. When she refuses to comply with his desire, he lets her do what she wants without taking the least interest in her silly gibber.
'I expect you'd like to see your room', said Tony. 'They'll bring tea soon'.
'No, I'll stay here. I like just to curl up like a cat in front of the fire, and if you're nice to me, I'll purr, and if you're cruel I shall pretend not to notice - just like a cat - Shall I purr, Teddy?'
'Er... yes... do, please, if that's what you like doing'.

Yet, he cannot avoid feeling discomfited by her presumptuous familiarity.

Not content with duping Tony, Brenda contrives with Mrs. Beaver's help to tamper with the very symbol of his faith in the past, Hetton. Mrs. Beaver arrives with her workmen to renovate a part of the house, in the modern style. Tony is unable to prevent the desecration of his ideal, as it is insisted upon by his wife. Even when the very symbol of his static faith bows down to change, he does not realise the inadequacy and oddity of his 'static' faith in a rapidly changing world. The incursion of the dynamic world into his static world has the effect of orphaning him.

It is the chance death of John Andrews, their only son, which suddenly brings Tony face to face with the bleak reality of his situation. Viewing the effect of his death on Brenda with the help of his obsolete chivalric code of morality, he anticipates that it would 'hurt' her very much. Jock Grant - Menzies who is aware of Brenda's dynamic nature, strikes a realistic note by telling Tony that 'You can't ever tell what's going to hurt people'. The events that follow shatter Tony's faith in his wife.
'But, you see, I know Brenda so well!' 126

Unknown to him, Brenda is, in his wife's guise, a **femme fatale** from the dynamic world.

Informed about the death of her son, she mistakes it for Beaver's and thus, despite herself, gives out to Jock, the bearer of the news, how much she loves John Beaver. It is only after Jock mentions Hetton that she realises her mistake. Still, her concern for John Beaver's safety makes her declare impulsively her love for Beaver.

She sat down on a hard little Empire chair against the wall, perfectly still with her hand folded in her lap...
She said, 'Tell me what happened. Why do you know about it first?'
I've been down at Hetton since the weekend....
She frowned not at once taking in what he was saying.
'John... John Andrew... I... oh, thank God...'
Then she burst into tears. 127

Despite the ambiguity of her tears, similar to that of the Prioress' 'Amor Vincet Omnia' in *The Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*, the scene brings out, on a psychological plane, Brenda's complete estrangement with the static world of Tony. Graham Martin seems to have ignored the significance of this scene while accusing Waugh of 'never... (going) beyond the external accuracy of observation'. 128 The disappearance of John Andrew, the bond that held them together, precipitates their physical and legal separation.

Upon hearing of Brenda's desire to move out, Tony shows comic obtuseness in mistaking initially that for
their temporary departure from Hetton as a means of mitigating the impact of John Andrew's death.

'Are you really going?'
'Yes. I can't stay here. You understand that, don't you?'
'Yes, of course. I was thinking we might both go away, abroad somewhere'.
Brenda did not answer him but continued in her own line,
'I couldn't stay here. It's all over, don't you see, our life down here'.
'Darling, what do you mean?' 129

Only after she makes the meaning of her words quite explicit does Tony hear the rumbling of the imminent collapse of his static world. The painful process of Tony's confrontation with his illusion begins with it. The first illusion to be shattered is the compatibility of their two natures. Tony's talk with Jock is quite revelatory, in this regard.

Tony said to Jock, as they sat alone after dinner,
'I've been trying to understand, and I think I do now. It's not how I feel myself, but Brenda and I are quite different in lots of ways. 130

Notwithstanding this realisation, he is far from comprehending the culpable inadequacy of his static faith in the secular values of the past. It is in the remarkably comic divorce proceedings, where Waugh inverts the usual pattern of justice, that 'Tony's habits and illusions are systematically destroyed'. 131 In Decline and Fall, though Margot had made Paul suffer for her misdeed, she had not become a plaintiff pitted against him. Brenda, far more dynamic than Margot, not only grafts her guilt on Tony by making him the accused in the divorce proceedings but also
swops places with him in seeking justice from the court. She succeeds in doing so because of Tony's chivalric generosity towards the weaker sex. Tony is a development over Paul Pennyfeather in that the latter's chivalry does not confront the dynamism of Margot's lot all the time; Paul accepts money from Trumpington, against all the norms of gentlemanly honour, pointed out by Potts.

As a result of his chivalry towards women, Tony undergoes the grilling ordeal of providing evidence against himself by being seen in the company of another woman, who is a woman of the town, by detectives paid from his own pocket. Upon taking out the child of that woman, he exposes himself to the unjustified censure of the people on the shore, when the child insists on bathing despite the beach attendant prohibiting it.

'But I want to bathe', said Winnie. You said I could bathe if you had two breakfasts'. The people who had clustered round to witness Tony's discomfort, looked at one another askance. 'Two breakfasts? Wanting to let the child bathe? The man's balmy'.

The world into which Tony has stepped is one where action is subject to any interpretation for the dynamic world's circular journey lacks logical development; it is a mere temporal progression. Johnstone rightly observes:

The mechanistic modern society cannot be defined by rational means, because it is fundamentally irrational. In Waugh's comic universe, nothing is what it seems.
By drawing attention to the lack of rationality in the
dynamic world of modern times, Waugh castigates the Humanist
belief in reasoning and that of the Enlightenment historiogra-
phers in the progress of the secular world.

Once Tony supplies evidence against himself, the
dynamic world plays yet another unholy trick upon him.
Brenda raises the settlement of five hundred pounds a year,
agreed to earlier verbally and not put in writing as insis-
ted by his solicitors, to the staggering sum of two thousand
pounds. Tony had rejected earlier the sound counsel of his
solicitors, saying, 'Lady Brenda's word is quite good enough'
He now realises his mistake. The static values with which
he has been judging Brenda's conduct, prove threateningly
misapplied in her case as she is no 'Lady'.

His mind had suddenly become clearer on many points
that had puzzled him. A whole Gothic world had come
to grief... there was now no armour glittering
through the forest glades, no embroidered feet on
the green sward; the cream and dappled unicorns
had fled.134

It has led him into a trap out of which there is only way:
Winnie, the daughter of that lowly woman. He, therefore,
tells Reggie, Brenda's brother, that if they sue him with
the help of the evidence supplied to them willingly, he
would tear their evidence to shreds with the help of his
trumpcard, Winnie.

'... If you care to bring the case I shall defend
it and win, but I think when you have seen my
evidence you will drop it. I am going away for
six months or so. When I come back, if she wishes
it, I shall divorce Brenda without settlements of
any kind. Is that clear?'135
Tony's firmness with Brenda stems not out of the knowledge of the inadequacy of his static faith in the past but out of his complete disappointment with her utter disregard for the chivalric code. His disillusionment with Brenda is similar to that of Shaw's King Magnus with his prime minister, Proteus' squabbling cabinet who are interested more in wresting veto power from him than in protecting British interests against the hegemonistic designs of America. Just as Magnus feels himself an outsider among the members of Proteus' Cabinet, Tony feels himself an exile in the dynamic world of London. He, therefore, thinks of leaving England in search of his native world.

Tony's quest for the lost city shows up his culpable mistake of substituting the city of God with a gothic one. The elaborate picture he has in his mind about the city is that of another Hetton.

His mind was occupied with the City, the Shining, the Many Watered, the Bright Feathered, the Aromatic Jam. He had a clear picture of it in his mind. It was Gothic in character, all vanes and pinnacles, gargoyles, battlements, groining and tracery, pavilions and terraces, a transfigured Hetton, pennons and banners floating on the sweet breeze, everything luminous and translucent...137

He fails to see the true significance of his search as, in the words of David Lodge, his 'real religion is a feudal myth'. The chivalric values that he believes in were never true, not even in their own age. The reference to the story of King Arthur is implicit in the naming of the rooms, from Malory's Morte de Arthur, at Hetton. Despite
the chivalric ideals professed by his characters, Guinevere betrays Arthur and Lancelot instead of seeking the Holy Grail as a reward for his chivalry, prefers to seek the hand of Guinevere. The chivalric ideal was as good a sign of staticity then as now and Tony, the last of his kind as his name suggests, falls a prey to the same dynamic world that his forbear did. His and Arthur's mistake lies in investing secular ideals, that are susceptible to change, with the significance of *sub specie aeternitatis* reality of the hub which is beyond the reach of change and hence true for all times. Helena, on the other hand, guards against such a lapse. Her initial romantic association with the past yields place, as she matures, to the supremacy of the Roman Catholic values of life. When she embarks on a similar journey, she knows that the city she searches has to be a Catholic one. Commenting on Tony's inability to supplant Hetton by the Catholic City, Frank Kermode writes:

The great houses of England become by an easy transition types of the Catholic City, and in this book the threatened City is Hetton; it will not prove to be a continuing city. 139

Led by the Virgil-figure of Dr. Massinger straight into the inferno of the dynamic world of the Amazonian jungles, Tony's childhood nightmares return to him, as a consequence of his blunder of looking for the lost static world in a highly dynamic world. Replying to Henry Yorke's complaint that
...you spent far too much time on the trip. You have 348 pages, roughly 100 of these are concerned with Tony running away...my whole mind is clouded by the Amazon. Waugh asserts that 'the Amazon stuff had to be there. The scheme was a Gothic man in the hands of savages - first Mrs. Beaver etc. then the real ones...'. It is quite ironic that in flying from the dynamism of British society, Tony should have chosen, in his ignorance, the gasping mouth of demonic dynamism for his static cave of refuge. The nightmarish end of Tony is anticipated, as Stephen Greenblatt suggests, in the symbolic meaning of the comic sermons of Rev. Tendril who because of his inability to distinguish between the British laity and the troopers serving in India, often refers to 'homes and dear ones far away'.

Like Lear's madness, Tony's nightmarish state does not lack method. His mind flits from one situation in Britain to that in Brazil. With the help of this collage technique, Waugh brings out the similarity of Amazonian life with the British. Tony's nightmarish state, thus, becomes a good objective correlative for Waugh's notion of the futility of secular change. The repeated juxtaposition of a scene in Brazil with a similar one in London suggests in the words of Greenblatt:

The repeated juxtaposition of a scene in Brazil and a similar scene in London makes devastatingly clear Waugh's point that the foul inhuman jungle in which Tony wanders feverishly is London transfigured.
The claims of the Enlightenment and Humanist historiographers regarding the progressiveness of modernised secular societies look hollow in the face of this assertion.

It is in his nightmarish state only that Tony perceives the futility of his mistaken search.

'I will tell you that I have learned in the forest, where the time is different. There is no city, Mrs Beaver has covered it with chromium plating and converted it into flats ... Very suitable for base love.'

He realises that the dynamic world has made inroads into the static world of his beliefs and destroyed it. Despite this realisation he still nurses hopes of finding at least someone who conforms to the chivalric code of morality. He finds this man in Mr. Todd, an embodiment of all that is the worst in both the cultures. There is a glint of lunacy in him, in that he imprisons Tony merely for the sake of hearing the gothic stories of Dickens, and a gleam of guile, in that he is artful enough in putting Tony's searches of the scent. Both qualities are signs of an individualism that offends the order of nature. Thereby he is a combination of Captain Grimes and the homicidal carpenter in Decline and Fall. Mr. Todd combines with these dynamic traits, the ruthlessness of a savage. In pursuing his objective of holding Tony back, he shows little compassion on his death-in-life existence. It is, therefore, ironic that Tony should have read chivalrous motives in Mr Todd's attempts to restore him to normalcy. By miscalculating Mr Todd's intentions, Tony seals his fate for ever.
In order to reciprocate the false chivalry of Mr. Todd, he reads the gothic novels of Dickens to him. It is ironic that the first novel he reads to him should be *Bleak House*, the most gothic of all. Commenting on the contradiction between the values upheld in them and the values rejected in Tony's perpetual imprisonment in the bleak house of Mr. Todd, Greenblatt writes perceptively:

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Day after day, the readings testify to the ultimate victory of goodness and the sanctity of the personal dream - precisely those values which the hero's life-in-death refutes.\textsuperscript{146}
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The grotesque end of Tony plays up the tragi-comic consequences of the culpable mistake of investing essentially impermanent secular ideals with the significance of permanent religious values. In this respect, as Bernard Bergonzi rightly maintains, *A Handful of Dust*, looks forward to the Catholic novels of the later period.

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It is the first of his essays in 'serious' fiction, and in its treatment of the doomed Gothic hero - not yet a Catholic hero - it points forward to such ambitious later novels as *Brideshead Revisited* and, in particular, the *Sword of Honour* trilogy where Guy Crouchback, a more complex and developed version of Tony Last in the early novels (both have appropriately suggestive surnames), realizes the insufficiency of the gentlemanly ideal and is stripped of his romantic illusions.\textsuperscript{147}
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The novel, in the serialised form, was also issued with a specially written ending, in *Harper's Bazaar*. It deleted the South American adventure and ended on the happy note of reconciliation. The alternative ending lacks the
terrifying force of the culpability of trying to substitute
the City of God with the Gothic City. This reduces the
novel to the level of a mere bed-room farce from which the
South American episode salvages the novel with its original
ending. Bernard Bergonzi has therefore rightly argued that
any interest the novel in its alternative version may have,
is more bibliographical than critical.148

Notwithstanding the aristocratic lineage of the
central character, much played up by Terry Eagleton, the
novel achieves a unified universal tragi-comic vision in its
rejection of both the Romantic and the Humanist tendency of
endowing life with the significance of false secular ideals.
The quest for the city, in particular, strikes a Christian
anti-Humanist and anti-Romantic note. Brigid Brophy, an
authority on Ronald Firbank - an object of Waugh's admi-
ration - has very rightly drawn attention to the pre-
occupation of the novel with 'the romantic and eschatologi-
gical' which Waugh, on his own, associated only with the
Catholic novels, beginning with Brideshead Revisited.150

In condemning Tony to the perpetual fate of reading
Dickens' gothic novels one after another in a continuous
cyclical motion, Waugh tears down the mask that shields
from view the grotesque reality of a dynamic mode of
existence. Waugh appears to be saying that all efforts
directed towards secular change suck man into the grinding
and absurd cyclical motion of the whirl pool of dynamic life.
Thus, the comic vision of absurdity revealed in the tragi-comic end of Tony jolts the readers out of their complacent attitude to secular change.

**SCOOP (1938)**

Evelyn Waugh's fifth major novel, *Scoop* (1938), marks a shift in the exploration of the theme of non-synonymity of secular change with progress. In the novels prior to this, Waugh's comic vision of life emerges out of the circular course of secular change. The central characters in these novels invariably return to their original state of existence despite their best efforts to get away from it. In *Scoop*, Waugh digs deeper and uncovers the lack of logic in secular change. This is in sharp contrast with the general belief, fostered by progressive historiographers, that secular change follows a logically consistent upward course. It is this incongruity between reality and illusion that generates much of the comic fun in this novel and it is, almost always, directed at those who allow themselves to be deluded by the role of reason in secular change. By pointing out the irrationality of the process of secular change, Waugh hammers at the idea of absurdity, that is central to the comic vision contained in all lesser comedies of Evelyn Waugh.
With a view to crystallising this idea, Waugh adopts a gratuitous plot for narrating the incidents in this novel. Unlike the nineteenth century novels, it has a narrative that appears to have no connecting links other than that of time. This compels a comparison with the eighteenth century novels which too followed a temporal scheme in their narratives. Yet a vital point of distinction exists between them and this novel. While there it is a sign of artistic immaturity, here it is an indication of artistic maturity. A gratuitous plot helps the novelist's concern with showing the lack of logic in secular change to come through more forcefully. Attention may be invited here to the similarity between Hardy and Waugh. Like Waugh, Thomas Hardy also employed an episodic plot for the purposes of focussing attention on the irrationality of change in universal order. Notwithstanding this similarity, there is a basic difference in approach to life between them. While Hardy considers both secular and religious changes fortuitous, Waugh does not. The latter does not share Hardy's pessimism with the loss of religion in life. Waugh places religion at the hub of the wheel of life and not at its orbits. Only secular change constitutes in Waugh's comic view of life a sure means to absurdity and disenchantment.

In keeping with the episodic and gratuitous nature of the narrative, Waugh employs the common comic device of mistaken identity to attract attention towards the basic irrationality of secular life. Waugh's use of this literary
device contrasts sharply with its use by other comic writers like Fielding and Congreve. In none of them is there a suggestion of this kind. It is used only to heighten the comic flavour of their works. Waugh's use of this technique is, therefore, not only appropriate but also innovative.

The comic device of mistaken identity impinges on the life of two characters in the novel. They are John Boot, a popular novelist, and William Boot, an obscure columnist on the daily, The Beast. Waugh adds that both are distant cousins. John Boot wishes to be recruited by Lord Copper, the owner of The Beast, for reporting the incidents in the Ishmaelite civil war. Made conscious of Boot's strength as a writer by Mrs. Stitch, Lord Copper directs his Foreign News Editor, Mr. Salter, to call up Boot and recruit him for the assignment in Ishmaelia. By a strange quirk of fate, Mr. Salter calls up William Boot instead of John Boot. Thus, the way is paved for the consequent comedy of mistaken identity.

The sense of improbability implicit in the irrational working of secular life has led critics to the point of bestowing the quality of fantasia to the comic world of this novel. As Rose Macaulay remarks:

With it Mr. Waugh re-entered his peculiar world; it was a relief to those of us who had begun to fear that we were losing him...
Waugh's own admission in the diary for 6 September 1924 should suffice to set off this impression. He writes:

Rather an amusing incident has happened about the Queen's Dolls' House. One, John Pennell... was allowed ... the honour of inserting some small contribution by himself .... This innocent work would have gone quite unnoticed had not Her Majesty decided ... to thank all who had contributed to her toy. When it came to Mr. Pennell's turn it was not unnaturally assumed that J. Pennell must be Joseph Pennell and a letter was accordingly sent to him in America.132

It is the recurrent pattern of such real incidents that lends an aura of fantasy to Waugh's novels. Otherwise, Evelyn Waugh has attracted criticism for being very matter-of-fact in reporting incidents. As Graham Martin remarks:

He seems admirably careful to submit to the discipline of a faithful report. But the report itself is really serving the rigidities of fixed emotion ... a state of affairs which can obstruct 'meaning' quite as effectively as an over-zealous pursuit of it.153

The comic device of mistaken identity has also the consequence of dragging a static character from his native static world into an alien dynamic world. William's static character is suggested by his attachment with an unchanging country life. William cherishes the insignificant job of contributing a half-column, 'Lush Places', to The Beast as it provides him the opportunity of maintaining his link with the country-side. Waugh writes:

The work was of utmost importance to him: he was paid a guinea a time and it gave him the best possible excuse for remaining uninterruptedly in the country.154
The symbolic suggestivity of countryside needs to be understood in the context of Waugh's concept of change. The brunt of industrialisation has been felt the most in the urban centres of Western civilisation. The rural areas have remained relatively free from it. As a result, the countryside, in sharp contrast with cities, has presented an unchanging face. Change, in Evelyn Waugh, can be felt only on the revolving wheel of dynamic life. The static world of the spectator's gallery remains beyond its pale. Country life thus compares favourably to a static mode of existence and urban life, to dynamic mode of existence. William's predilection for country life is from this angle a sure sign of his staticity. William's static character invites comparison with the other static characters we have met till now: Paul Pennyfeather, Adam Penwick-Symes and Tony Last. Paul Pennyfeather's ignorance of his innate static character, till the end of the novel, renders him comic when he steps into a hostile dynamic world. Similarly, Adam renders himself comic on account of his ignorance of his true nature and that of the dynamic mode of existence. Tony Last meets with an absurd end for being unable to distinguish between the static and the dynamic worlds. Unlike them, William Boot is an enlightened static character. He is very much aware of his static nature and the incompatibility of his nature with the dynamic world of London. William's aversion for urban life and preference for country life flow out of this consciousness. William,
therefore, escapes the fate of his predecessor — static characters even though he is caught in the dynamic world for some time.

David Lodge appears to have overlooked the distinction between the city and the countryside when he remarks:

As Europe is to Africa, so the metropolitan world of The Beast is to Boot Magna: in both pairings a sophisticated modern barbarism is discomfited by a more intransigent and deeply rooted primitivism. 155

Though Europe and Africa represent the same side of the coin, Africa and Boot Magna, do not. Both Europe and Africa are dynamic worlds. The lack of progress in secular change removes all distinctions between a supposedly superior secular civilisation and a supposedly inferior one. The Beast is an essential organ of the dynamic world as it is a product of its quest for secular progress. Boot Magna, William's residence in the countryside, in contrast, is suggestive of the static world's aloofness to change.

The comedy of mistaken identity sets into motion once William receives the summons from The Beast. In one of his previous contributions, Priscilla had substituted 'the crested grebe' for his 'badger'. This had outraged the veracity of his statement. William suspects that he has, perhaps, been called to give explanation for this lapse. He does not know that the Foreign News Editor, Mr. Salter is waiting to recruit him as The Beast's special correspondent in war-torn Ishmaelia. Set against the background of this reality, William's attempts to discover some
means of defence against Lord Copper's admonition look ridiculous and comic. Waugh writes:

By the time he reached Westbury he had sketched out a little scene for himself, in which he stood resolutely in the board-room defying the doctrinaire zoology of Fleet Street... 'Lord Copper', he was saying, 'no man shall call me a liar unchastised. The great crested grebe does hibernate'.

If Waugh renders William comic for his ignorance of the irrational working of the dynamic world, he comes down equally upon Mr. Salter for epitomising in himself the irrationality of the dynamic world. Describing his irrational attitude to life, Waugh writes:

If a psychoanalyst testing his associations, had suddenly said to Mr. Salter the word 'farm', the surprising response would have been 'Bang', for he had once been blown up and buried while sheltering in a farm in Flanders. It was his single intimate association with the soil. It had left him with the obstinate though admittedly irrational belief that agriculture was something highly alien and highly dangerous.

Salter's comic behaviour growing out of the mistaken tendency of imposing logic on things connected by no other thread than that of time shows up the lack of causal sequence in secular life.

Each confronts his own illusion in the course of the meeting between them. Salter has been planning for it since long. He has even collected information about things that may possibly interest a countryman. Each of these things is distasteful to Salter. But as he has to win over
William for the assignment in Ishmaelia, he submits to the ordeal. Nervousness is writ large on Salter’s face when he opens his conversation with him. Waugh writes:

Mr. Salter planned a frank and disarming opening. 'How are your roots, Boot?' It came out wrong. 'How are your boots, root?' he asked. William glumly awaiting some fulminating rebuke, started and said, 'I beg your pardon?' 'I mean brute', said Mr. Salter. William gave it up. Mr. Salter gave it up. They sat staring at one another, fascinated helpless. 158

Waugh renders Salter comic for his irrational and imagined fear of meeting a countryman. It is only after he learns that William has no outlandish tastes and that he is a normal person like him that he feels at ease in his company. Once he feels composed, he proceeds to shatter William’s illusion. Salter broaches the matter of reporting the incidents in Ishmaelia for The Beast. William sees in it the punishment of ‘transportation’ for his small mistake. He, therefore, tries to explain his defence. It is only after Salter tells him that he would have to work there only for sometime and that too for a substantial salary that William feels easy. In spite of that, William refuses to leave the static world of Boot Magna and go to the dynamic world of Ishmaelia. His stubborn resistance makes Salter desperate. It is at this moment that William discloses unwittingly his vulnerable point.

'Is there nothing you want?' 'D’you know, I don’t believe there is. Except to keep my job in 'Lush Places' and go on living at home'. 159
Salter is quick enough to exploit this weakness to his advantage. Accordingly, he uses this information as a weapon against William.

'Oh, but Lord Copper expects his staff to work wherever the best interests of the paper call them. I don't think he would employ anyone of whose loyalties he was doubtful, in any capacity.'
'You mean if I don't go to Ishmaelia I get the sack?'
'Yes', said Mr. Salter. William surrenders to Mr. Salter in the extreme fear of losing his job. Should he defy Lord Copper's wishes then he would be deprived of writing for The Beast. Without it, William would lose the opportunity of staying uninterruptedly in his static world of Boot Magna. Ironically enough, William's job not only helps William to stay on in his native world, it also exposes him to the irrationality of the dynamic world. Were William willing to give it up, he would have been spared the ordeal of participating in the irrational process of secular change sweeping over the dynamic world. Thus despite his awareness of his true identity, William is drawn into the vortex of dynamic life.

William's elevation to the rank of a special correspondent is a superb act of comedy. The honour that should have gone to John Boot goes to William Boot. More than that, the comedy is enhanced by their contrasting attitudes also. While John Boot is much too eager to have it, William wants somehow, to get rid of it. The cardinal principle of logic stands outraged here. So when the reader laughs at this
comic situation, he also ridicules the enlightenment and humanist historiographers who see reason and logic as the guiding forces of change in the secular world. Waugh, however, does not allow our ridicule to fade into condemnation as he constantly engages our sympathy for William and Salter.

Having seen for ourselves the irrational working of the dynamic world, we may now turn our attention to the extent of absurdity implicit in the illogical nature of the Ishmaelite strife. Ishmaelia presents a picture of decadence in that successive missionary groups have failed in civilising its barbaric inhabitants. Even the advanced 'European powers' have, out of their inability to control it, written it off their maps. Such is the degree of instability inherent in it. In Waugh’s view of life, such a society occupies a place farthest from the hub of the wheel of life and is, as a consequence, most 'dynamic'. It is pertinent to recall here that the degree of instability is felt the most on the outermost orbit of the revolving wheel of life. Ishmaelia presents an unabashed portrait of dynamism compared to the dynamic societies of the West which hide it beneath the veneer of civilisation.

Left to itself, Ishmaelia has formed into a republic. The lack of any 'tie of language, history, habit, or belief' have left it with no other alternative. The republic of Ishmaelia has been ruled by the Jacksons who have enacted
every year the farce of elections to weather any resist-
tance to their rule from the people. The people of this
African state continue to remain as savage as they were
before. The disorder within the social fabric of this state
assumes international dimensions when one of the Jacksons,
Mr. Smiles Soumes, rebels against the family. Only one
quarter, Jackson and three quarters, pure Ishmaelite, he
presents himself as a champion of the Ishmaelite cause. In
order to obtain the support of the Western powers, he con-
cocts a ridiculous racial theory in favour of his claim for
the control of the Ishmaelite government. He declares that
the savage Ishmaelites were originally white. Owing to
constant exposure to the sun, they have grown red. In
comparison, the Jacksons are negroes. Accordingly, he
starts a White Shirt Movement against their so-called negro-
government. Traces of Jonathan Swift in Gulliver's Travels
are discernible here. Like Swift, Waugh is ridiculing here
the idea of democratic politics. However, more than that,
he is exposing the inadequacy of logic itself. Waugh is
drawing attention here to the idea that logic is a double
edged sword which may be used to cut its own self. The
excessive faith of enlightenment and humanist historiogra-
phers in it is, therefore, ridiculous. This is in keeping
with Waugh's Roman Catholic view of things. According to
the Roman Catholic Church, reason is not an adequate means
of verifying the veracity of a fact. Unaided by divine
grace, it leads one astray. Thus, the rejection of the role
of reason is not at all a sign of valuelessness in Waugh. As secular change rests on the edifice of human reason, Waugh draws attention towards the absurdity of achieving progress through secular change.

Aboard the ship bound for Ishmaelia, William acquires his first tips about the dynamic art of journalism from his fellow-journalist Corker. The latter tells him how Wenlock Jakes demonstrated the power of the press, though unconsciously, by starting a war that had not yet broken out by sending concocted reports about it, from a different country. Despite the lack of any real basis for Jake's stories, the faith of the governments of the world and that of the people in the validity of press reports was so great that Government stocks dropped, financial panic, state of emergency declared, army mobilized, famine, mutiny and in less than a week there was an honest to God revolution under way, just as Jakes said 'There's the power of the press for you'.

The chain of these irrational incidents does not end here. It continues and concludes most illogically in the award of Nobel Peace Prize to Jakes for his role in starting the war. Once again, Waugh ridicules the Humanist and Enlightenment historiographers for reposing faith in the supremacy of reason. Waugh's persistent preoccupation with the narration of logically inconsistent events resembles, to some extent, that of Kafka. In *The Trial*, Joseph K., in spite of having committed no offence, is arrested one morning. Upon his persistence with trying to know the cause thereof,
he is warned that it shall make his case more complicated and stern. He must, therefore, concern himself only with defending himself. The difference between Waugh and Kafka is, however, apparent. In Kafka, it is difficult even to divine the cause hidden behind the irrational pattern of the narrative, but not in Waugh.

The story of William's success as a journalist is another irrational chain of events. William's chance meetings with Bannister, Vice-Consul at the British Legation, and Katchen, a woman of uncertain nationality, putting up at Frau Dressier's Pension, provide him with clues that initiate his success story. Most of the professional journalists with him have been making frantic efforts to reach Laku where they believe Smiles Saum, the leader of the rebellion, to be. When the Jackson government allows them to go there, they dash for it with comic enthusiasm. Only William does not for he is aware of the non-existence of the place through Bannister who tells him that the word means in Ishmaelite, 'I don't know'. But having been marked once on the maps, it has stayed there unaltered. The professional journalists fall a prey to this distortion of facts and, thereby, look comic in their absurd enthusiasm. By having stumbled on this piece of information, William manages to stay on in Jacksonburg, the locale of future anarchy and reaps profit out of it as a journalist.
That chance not personal merit secures William the fame of a good investigative journalist becomes clear from his inability to follow the hints supplied by Bannister who asks him to watch out for a Russian agent and to keep an eye on Dr. Benito, the man who insists on William's departure for Laku. William does neither. Instead, he whiles away his time in the company of Katchen. He even fails to look up his mail which has been growing insistent. When Bannister tells him that his paper is worried about his safety and silence, he replies most irresponsibly:

PLEASE DONT WORRY QUITE SAFE AND WELL IN FACT RATHER ENJOYING THINGS WEATHER IMPROVING WILL CABLE AGAIN IF THERE IS ANY NEWS YOURS BOOT.162

Its impact on Salter who feels vexed by the bantering tone of this expensively long telegram is, in the fitness of things, quite expected.

"Weather improving," said Mr. Salter. "Weather improving. He's been in Jacksonburg ten days, and all he can tell us is that the weather is improving."163

Salter's impatience arises out of his knowledge that William was as unsuited to the job as the trick cyclist to that of a Sports Editor. The irrational course of events reduces his plight to that of comic helplessness. Waugh shows here that the dynamic character himself at times becomes a victim of the irrationality of his world. In Black Mischief, he has already shown how Seth is victimised ruthlessly by the instability he himself creates.
Lest Salter should derive satisfaction out of having been wise enough to gauge William's true abilities, Waugh introduces a chance breakthrough in the latter's journalistic career. Katchen, the woman to whom William has become attracted, brings news of the President's house-arrest by 'Doctor Benito and the Russian and the black secretaries who came from America'. William's incompetence as a journalist is accentuated by his inability to understand its significance. He despatches the information to his paper only to assuage their demand for some news. Waugh says that

No one observing that sluggish and hesitant composition could have guessed that this was a moment of history ... held up as a model to aspiring pupils of Correspondence Schools of Profitable Writing, perennially fresh in the jaded memories of a hundred editors; the moment when Boot began to make good.164

Far from being a model worthy of citing, William's first scoop is the saga of incompetence and indifference to duty. He realises little the value of the news he is despatching to his paper. Besides, he has made no effort to obtain it. He has merely stumbled upon it. William's accidental success is an indication of the illogicity of the process of secular change for those who really deserve it are deprived of it. Waugh, therefore, conveys unequivocally the absurdity of secular change as the right logical means to progress.
William's second scoop is again indicative of his incompetence as a professional journalist. As the political unrest in Ishmaelia grows, Katchen is arrested and some men approach William for taking possession of the stones he had bought from her. He refuses to part with them and the men have to go back empty-handed despite their best efforts to gain their possession. For the sake of keeping them in safe custody, he takes them to Bannister's place where William accidentally knows what they actually are. He learns that what he had been mistaking for stones is, in fact, gold. Believing William to have been sacked by The Beast, Bannister acquaints him freely with its role in the political turmoil of Ishmaelia. Bannister tells William:

"It's been between Smiles and Benito now and it looks to me as if Benito had won hands down .... We stand to lose quite a lot if they start a Soviet state here ... Now you've stopped being a journalist I can tell you these things."165

William's response to this discovery characteristically is static. While a dynamic character would have thought of exploiting it to his own personal advantage, he does not. He thinks of his country and his lady-love, Katchen. Loyalty to one's nation and rendering help to a woman in distress constitute two essential features of the outdated and ideal chivalric attitude to life. Waugh writes:

Love, patriotism, zeal for justice, and personal spite flamed within him as he sat at his typewriter and began his message. One finger was not enough; he used both hands.166
Even the money that he gives to the clerk at the wireless station is not an act of dynamism but one of static nature as it is rooted in William's chivalrous concerns. His action, therefore, is not unlike that of Tony, who unaware of his static nature, is fired by similar emotions when he deprives his wife of the satisfaction of having everything in her own way, even after he accedes to the request for divorce.

When William's despatch reaches Salter's office, his confidence in his ability of judging receives a setback; he no longer regards himself wiser than Lord Copper.

"He's all right. Lord Copper knew best."

"You know", he said meditatively, "it's a great experience to work for a man like Lord Copper. Again and again I've thought he was losing grip. But always it turns out he knew best. What made him spot Boot? It's a sixth sense... real genius". 167

Salter's newfound confidence in Lord Copper's genius is equally ridiculous for it ignores the reality behind William's second scoop. He thus looks comic in the Platonic sense of the word. Yet, it would be too much to say that he has been satirised for satire evokes moral indignation; Salter in his comic plight evokes our sympathy over his ridiculous ignorance of truth. So, the irrational nature of secular change lends a comic glow to the novel. We do not find this in Hardy where the increased role of chance only gives a gloomy and melancholy air to the situations described.
While the professional journalists going 'Lakuward' warm their pates in the African sun for nothing, William, the novice journalist, is an accidental witness to yet another series of cataclysmic incidents, which provide material for his third scoop. The brief spell of super-imposed order in the state of Ishmaelia is over. The barbaric forces within, with the help of the dynamic world of the economically developed nations, assert themselves in the shape of a revolution against the Jacksons. The thin veneer of civilization that the Jacksons had given to this African state is torn down. Ishmaelia returns to its original state of barbarity and anarchy. Waugh conveys the futility of secular change as a means to progress in the circular history of Ishmaelia. Seeing the shape of things to come, William instinctively sings Uncle Theodore's pet refrain in the manner of a character in the chorus of a Greek drama.

'Change and decay in all around I see', he sang softly, almost unctuously. It was the favourite tune of his uncle Theodore.  

The revolution is short-lived for Baldwin, the man who arrives on the chaotic scene of Ishmaelia like a *deus ex machina* engineers a counter-revolution in a way that mocks at the ideological considerations often attributed to such movements. Eric Olafsen in a drunken state, contrived by Baldwin, goes to the stage from where Dr. Benito is issuing his revolutionary orders. When he lifts the chair
against Benito, the latter jumps down from the balcony to his death on the ground for the traditional ineradicable awe of the white man frightens him too much. With the dethroning of Dr. Benito, the crowd begins chanting the counter-revolutionary slogan of 'Jackson, Jackson, Jackson'.

William profits from his accidental proximity with Baldwin, in composing his third despatch. Baldwin is no other than the man who William had helped by granting permission to board the plane which was to carry him on his journalistic mission.

No, said a gentleman behind him. If you would not resent my cooperation, I think I can compose a despatch more likely to please my good friend Copper.

Mr. Baldwin sat at William's table and drew the typewriter towards himself. He inserted a new sheet of paper and began to write with immense speed:

MYSTERY FINANCIER RECALLED EXPLOITS RHODES LAWRENCE TODAY SECURING VAST EAST AFRICAN CONCESSION...169

Not only does Baldwin offer him news but he also does his work by proxy. Lord Copper is, however, blissfully unaware of it. When the news of Boot's success in Ishmaelia reaches him, he thinks himself fortunate for having listened to Mrs. Stitch's advice. Poor Lord Copper does not know that the Boot reporting from Ishmaelia is different from the Boot recommended by Mrs. Stitch. Accordingly, he plans to host a banquet in Boot's honour. Besides, he requests the Prime Minister to recommend Boot for knighthood by the Queen of England. Lord Copper's enthusiastic response to
Boot's accidental success makes him look ludicrous. Ignorance of the irrationality hidden in this apparently logical process of Boot's success reduces him to the rank of a comic character and the reader cannot help laughing at his obtuseness to reality.

So while William is on his way back to England, the dynamic world of The Beast is busily preparing for a banquet in honour of its invented hero. The celebration of William's accidental success is comparable to that of Trimmer's invented successes in The Sword of Honour Trilogy.

The novel once again employs the comic device of mistaken identity for showing how the irrational course of events deprives Lord Copper of the satisfaction of doing even that. Lord Copper's request for honouring Boot with knighthood is mistaken in the Prime Minister's office as an indication of John Boot's elevation in status and accordingly, his name, instead of William's, appears in the list of persons to be honoured by Her Majesty, the Queen of England. The mistake is discovered too late to be rectified. Consequently, John Boot steals the place which William had unknowingly stolen earlier from John. The illogical course of secular change revealed here drives home the comic absurdity of seeking the improvement of one's lot through secular change. William is, however, immune to this conspiracy of fate as he has already taken a decision against any more truck with the dynamic world of journalism and London. It is evident from his merciless response
to the handsome offers of employment in his newspaper establishments.

William released them, one by one as he read them, at the open window. The rush of air whirled them across the charred embankment to the fields of stubble and stacked corn beyond.170

It is also evident from his clever ploy in getting away from the infatuated novice newspaper man sent to receive him by The Beast.

William's refusal to be seduced not only by the blandishments of "wealth and elegance" but also by that of the 'power' of press does not, however, imply a step towards real progress as they do in the case of Charles Ryder and Guy Crouchback for he re-enters the sheltered cocoon of his static world at Boot Magna after his disenchantment with the dynamic world. The Evelyn Waugh hero has not, till now, realised the significance of the cloister in getting away from the dynamic world and forging ahead on the path of progress.171 It is left for his successors to comprehend that vision and carry it out. A.A. De Vitis has rightly pointed out this inadequacy in William Boot thus:

William is incapable of coping with the forces he has come to understand. To invade the world he would need a banner, and the banner that flies over Boot Magna is in tatters. It is left to Guy Crouchback to invade the world under a banner still whole enough to demand the allegiance of the many.172
The comic vision of life that grows out of this novel is shaped and structured by the absurdity implicit in the logical inconsistency of secular change. The successive scoops of William indicate that a person need not deserve what he gets. Chance and accident rule the roost in the anarchic dynamic world. Waugh shows that the immense faith reposed in the role of reason in effecting a transformation of human society is comically unjustified. Without divine grace, reason is an inadequate guide to reality, and hence, an ineffective means of achieving real progress. But the enlightenment and humanist historiographers refuse to see this. Accordingly, their point of view is ridiculed.

Brigid Brophy, whose other remarks on Waugh have been quite illuminating, gives evidence of less than adequate comprehension of the comic vision of absurdity implicit in the illogical process of secular change when she argues:

Scoop has always struck me as a mere, though entertaining, after-flutter of the fine imaginative flight which had produced Black Mischief; it is a Black Mischief without the great Seal set on it, and starting from a spring-board of mistaken identity which is not quite bouncy enough to get the invention into the air. 173

Like her, Christopher Hollis also shows incomprehension of the abstruse comic vision in this novel. He argues:

Scoop is concerned with how Europeans, who know nothing of their culture except its superficial patter, make use of Africans for their absurd purposes. 174
In contrast, Martin Stannard shows an appreciable grasp of the novel's thematic line of intention. He observes:

The underlying notion of the absurdity of the rationalist viewpoint ... is another rendering of a continuous theme in Waugh's fiction. The world is not, he suggests, as Lucas Dockery or Seth would suppose, a composite of discernible facts; without the dimension of 'spiritual' experience, human behaviour is seen to be unreasonable. 175

The examination of the incidents in the novel reveals an underlying circular pattern in the plot of the novel. A mistake had thrust William, in the beginning of the novel, into the inimical world of dynamic London and Ishmaelia. A similar mistake, at the end of the novel, redeems him from its absurdity. The circular nature of the plot of the novel calls up the central image of the wheel of life. The relentless circular motion of the wheel of life brings one to the original point despite all efforts. That is to say, the circular nature of secular change leaves no room for progress as it brings one back to one's original place. Thus Waugh conveys that life lived at the secular plane does not hold out the promise of progress. There is a sheer temporal movement. Logical movement is conspicuous by its absence for the circular nature of secular change is scarcely amenable to logical evaluation. Thus, the comic vision of life rooted in the logically inconsistent movement of secular change is underlined by the circular plot of the novel. The unique combination of 'form' and 'content'
in the novel speaks of Waugh's artistic brilliance even when he was only in the prime of his career.

PUT OUT MORE FLAGS (1942):

Waugh's sixth major novel, Put Out More Flags (1942), also remains preoccupied with revealing the comic claims of Humanist and 'enlightenment' historiography that progress inevitably accrues from secular change. Set against the background of the Second Great War; the particular comic vision conveyed in this novel, however, grows out of the unequal conflict between the dynamic and static characters. Unaware of the extent of the craft and guile in the dynamic characters, the static characters are rendered comic in the act of trusting them. Thus, Waugh exposes the ridiculous insufficiency of the 'static' mode of life in the face of the valuelessness of the 'dynamic' world. Appreciation for the dynamic world is, however, withheld as its triumphs are a sign not of progress but of valuelessness and barbarity. The turbulent time of war serves as an appropriate temporal setting to the expression of this idea. The outbreak of war symbolises, in Waugh, a return to the state of barbarity. In the imagery of the wheel of life, it is comparable to the extreme degree of instability, felt on the outermost orbit. Attention may here be invited to the points of
similarity and distinction between Nietzsche and Evelyn Waugh. Nietzsche too sees history as a story of decadence, a falling away from the great into the trivial and finally, into nihilism. But he differs from Waugh in so far as he believes that Christianity has played a leading role in this process of decadence and debility. Waugh's decadent world is the dynamic world which has snapped its ties with religion and has increasingly engaged itself in the pursuit of the mirage of secular progress.

As the comic element in this novel grows largely out of the deception played on the ignorant static characters by the knowing dynamic characters, it is not unexpected that Waugh should have chosen Basil the most 'dynamic' of all the characters he has created till now, as the central protagonist of this novel. Christopher Hollis ignores the significance of this aspect when he complains against his suitability to the world of this novel.

The trouble with Basil Seal is that, if we consider him as a real character, he is too odious to be funny. Had he been content to remain a character in one of Mr. Waugh's earlier novels ... we could have laughed at him as a mere formula of villainy without any attempt to pass a moral judgement on a person. We can tolerate him even in Azania. But in a real world, alongside real and suffering people at a great crisis of our history, he is too horrible.176

Even when he refers to the novel's predominant concern with Basil's war-time adventures, he makes no effort to uncover their underlying significance. He writes:
The bulk of the novel is concerned with Basil Seal's attempt to extract profit and amusement out of the war.177

An attempt has been made, in this direction, by Alan Pryce-Jones and Lionel Stevenson. In the opinion of Alan Pryce-Jones:

The English world is neatly, and to some extent justly divided into those who get away with it and those who don't by a judge who has a weakness for the former.178

Thus, he finds, in Basil's victories, the division of the English world into two segments: those who act with impunity and those who do not do so. In drawing this classification, he comes very near the division of the world into dynamic and static. But when he attributes the victory of the former over the latter to Waugh's sympathy for the former, he appears to disregard the facts recorded in this work. Lionel Stevenson improves upon it in his analysis of this subject. He maintains that Waugh's attitude towards the former group is by no means that of connivance. Rather, the group is indicted for its lack of sincerity towards friends and mercilessness towards the harmless rural residents.

¼. While in charge of prisoners of war on a troopship, Waugh was able to write Put Out More Flags, an angry expose of civilians who were profiting by the war. Appropriately, the central character is the ineffable Basil Seal, now insidiously reporting innocent friends to the authorities as Nazi plotters and blackmailing rural residents by threatening to billet a detestable family of slum evacuees in their houses.179
Lionel Stevenson's analysis, however, is confined to a period-interest in the novel and Waugh has been accused of it by Martin Stannard also.

Few would now agree with those who considered it Waugh's finest achievement of the period 1928-42. Although still entertaining, the specific contemporary relevance perhaps leaves it with the flavour of a 'periodic piece' relying for its maximum effect upon a detailed knowledge of events beyond the text. 180

Both the critics adopt an attitude similar to what we can find in Christopher Hollis as they deny the significance of the incidents concerning Basil Seal in projecting the conflict between the dynamic and static characters which in its turn brings about the inconsequence of secular life, whether dynamic or static: an attitude that stems out of Waugh's Christian anti-humanism.

It is Sonia, who anticipates Basil's comic adventures during the period of war: 'I expect Basil will have the most tremendous adventures. He always did in peace time. Goodness knows what he'll do in war'. 181 Basil wages his first war against the peace-loving static people of Malfrey when he visits his sister Barbara in order to avoid his mother who is bent upon seeing him recruited as a subaltern. Barbara who has been made the billeting officer for her district is unable to rid herself of the problematic Connolly children. No family in the village is ready to accept them for their destructive potential is notorious throughout the district. Indeed, they are the very epitome of the forces of anarchy,
disorder and irrationality which have been let loose by the outbreak of war in the dynamic world. In the war between the unscrupulous and unpredictable dynamic characters, on the one hand, and the unsuspecting static characters, on the other, the former's victory over the latter springs from the inability of the latter to gauge the extent of their destructiveness. Plato remarks that ignorance is one of the qualities that renders a person comic, and these static people are presented in a comic light for the want of knowledge concerning the real nature of Connolly-children. While we laugh at their ignorance, we also sympathise with them. This prevents them from becoming the objects of our satiric scorn.

One of the first families to fall a prey to these agents of the destructive dynamic world is Mr. Mudge's who returns with them to Barbara not long after they have been sent to him. Seeing Mr. Mudge kill a goose one day, Michy, the second Connolly child, kills all six of them and also, the old cat. Besides while Marlene, the third child, goes about soiling every place in the house, Doris, the eldest, tries to seduce not only young Willie but even Mr Mudge.

'If you ask me, mum, she's (Doris) the worst of the lot ....... Soft about the men she is, mum. Why she even comes making up to me and I'm getting on to be her grandfer. She won't leave our Willie alone not for a minute, and he's a bashful boy our Willie and he can't get on with the work, her always coming after him'.

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Mr Mudge's old woman shuts herself up and refuses to come down until they are despatched from their home. Such is the terror struck in her mind. Mr. Mudge's horrified response to the Connolly children renders him and his 'old woman' comic, not satiric, for when we laugh at their discomfiture, we do not condemn them; there is an overtone of sympathy for their ignorance of the barbarity of the dynamic world all the time.

Only a person as dynamic as they themselves are, can control them effectively, and such a person arrives at Malfrey in the person of Basil Seal. Instead of feeling perturbed with their persistent presence, he sees in their destructive capability, an opportunity of beginning his warlike work and translating his 'Nazi diplomacy' into a self-satisfying palpable reality.

Like Nazi diplomacy it (Basil's 'system of push, appeasement, agitation and blackmail') postulated 'for success a peace-loving, orderly and honourable world in which to operate.'

The world that his diplomacy needs for success is the static world which is already there before him in Malfrey's remoteness from the change that is sweeping across the dynamic world of London or, for that matter, any urban centre of human society. In his first war-effort, Basil employs the Connolly children as grenades against unwary static characters such as Mr. Harkness. The episode deepens the comic contrast existing between a dynamic character like Basil
and a static character like Mr. Harkness. The latter's static predisposition is presented in the following words:

... his years of waiting had been haunted by only one fear; that he would return to find the place "developed" .... But modernity spared Noth Grappling; he returned to find the place just as he had first come upon it, on a walking tour, late in the evening .... 185

Mr. Harkness's response to change is indicative of the outlook shared by all static characters. Unfortunately, he is unaware of the inroad made into the static world by the dynamic world in the persons of Basil and the Connolly children. He is, therefore, unable to understand the real import of the word, 'evacuees', uttered by Basil and mistakes it to mean simply townsfolk in search of sanctuary. He is, therefore, ready to accept the rent, quoted by him, in the local paper.

'May I ask what are your friends?'
'Well, I suppose you might call them evacuees.'
Mr. and Mrs. Harkness laughed pleasantly at the little joke.
'Townsfolk in search of sanctuary, eh?;'
'Exactly'.
'Well, they will find it here, eh, Agnes?,' 186

The reader cannot help laughing at the couple's ignorant mirth over the seemingly 'little joke' and yet there is an element of sympathy for the painful ordeal they are to undergo for this error of judgement. It does not take them long to understand that their 'little joke' is in fact a trap out of which there is no easy escape.
'Eight shillings and six pence?' said Mr. Harkness. 'I'm afraid there's been some misunderstanding.' Five, six, seven. Here it comes. Bang! 'Perhaps I should have told you at once. I am the billeting officer. I've three children for you in the car outside.' It was magnificent. It was war.187

The authorial comment sheds light on the nature of war being fought by Basil and his 'dynamic' accomplices. Basil is enacting here, on a small scale, the war waged by Nazi forces against the other unsuspecting European powers. While Hitler is annexing countries, Basil is busy in fleecing the unwary static characters. The Harknesses rid themselves of the children by paying thirty pounds to him. More victims follow and his earnings from the war keep on swelling. The problem—children become means of profit in his hands. The repeated victories of Basil show how in war it is the dynamic character who triumphs odiously over the static character. To be static, therefore, is a particular disadvantage in such a chaotic world. Waugh does not, however, appreciate Basil’s triumphs for they lack mercy and humanism, qualities that Christianity wishes to foster. Thus, the success of the dynamic character, by no means, implies upholding of the lack of principles and values that dynamism stands for. As Waugh himself once said, it is better to be static than dynamic.

It is better to be narrow-minded than to have no mind, to hold limited and rigid principles than none at all. ... to put up with what is wasteful and harmful with the excuse that there is "good in everything" ... means an inability to distinguish between good and bad.188
The incidents concerning the Connolly children also substantiate it as Waugh makes us sympathise with the victimised static characters repeatedly rather than the dynamic ones, who despite their success are presented in a lurid light. Christopher Hollis appears to have underestimated the importance of these episodes concerning Connolly children in furthering the novel's thematic intention when he expresses doubt about their validity and use.

But Basil's antics—his dodge of selling the Connollies though ingenious, is not, to tell the truth, especially amusing. It is a little bit the kind of thing that curates do in novels by George A. Birmingham.  

The second string of Basil's comic adventures begins in London with his success in befooling Colonel Plum who is made to believe his story of the lunatic carrying bombs. The Colonel does not know that it is Basil himself who has brought the lunatic inside despite the heavy security at the gate. Made a second Lieutenant for this war-effort, the Colonel promises to fulfil his aspirations for a higher post provided he catches a fascist for him: 'Not for watching communities. Catch a fascist for me and I'll think about making you a Captain of Marines'. The incident brings out the lack of rationality in the concatenation of events in secular life. Reward does not necessarily follow after one's personal merit: a view that Waugh has explored deeply in *Scoop*. Waugh's antipathy to 'humanist' and 'enlightenment' emphasis on a rational
interpretation of secular progress does not remain concealed here. In drawing our attention to his aversion to progress through reason, Waugh, in fact, probes the second level of reality which does not in any way invalidate the first. What we need in fiction is a devoted fidelity to an acceptable technique which will help us to discover and evaluate our subject matter. It is understanding to realise that the author's concept of change and progress, leaning more towards faith and disavowing reason, provides this much needed fidelity: a measure of judgement more satisfying than what we come across in contemporary critical writings concerning his novels.

The man Basil chooses to be his 'fascist' prey is his own old acquaintance, Ambrose Silk. He occurs in the long line of static academic characters like Paul, Adam and William Boot. That Waugh associates the scholarly profession with staticity is clear from Basil's habit of taking to writing when he feels exhausted and tired of keeping pace the world of change; though such periods of hibernation are very short-lived, owing to his resilient 'dynamism'. As Waugh writes:

For years now, whenever things were very bad with Basil, he had begun writing a book. It was as near surrender as he ever came and the fact that these books - two novels, a book of travel, ... - never got beyond the first ten thousand words was testimony to the resilience of his character. 191

Apart from his scholarly profession, Ambrose, like Tony Last, is attached to the past. In his own words:
But Ambrose, thought Ambrose, what of him?
Born after his time, in an age which made a

type, of him, a figure of farce ...  192

He is a man born after his time and thus a fit object of ridicule for his staticity. Unlike Boot, Ambrose himself plunges into the dynamic world by joining the Ministry of Information as a writer committed to the cause of Britain and communism. Ambrose deliberately gives up the privileged position of an objective spectator and willingly takes part in the action of the changing world. He, thus, exposes himself to the predatory dynamic characters stalking around fearlessly in the war-torn dynamic world. Besides, he has imposed upon himself the role of a dynamic character, which runs counter to his real static personality. This imposition, just as in the case of Paul Pennyfeather, has robbed him of his reality; he has become a 'shadow' character. It is on account of this contradiction within himself that he suffers from persecution-mania, both from the fascists and the public. Waugh writes:

... there were only a few restaurants, now, which he could frequent without fear of ridicule and there he was surrounded, as though by distorting mirrors, with gross reflections and caricatures of himself. 193

Even his voice has lost its seriousness, because of the diminution of his real personality to the state of a shadow.

Mine is the brazen voice of Apuleius' ass, turning its own words to ridicule. 194
Basil makes Ambrose undergo precisely what he thinks of here. He proves the latter a fascist to Colonel Plum. Basil gets started on this trail by Poppet Green's casual reference to Ambrose as a fascist.

'Did you say "fascist?"
'Didn't you know? He's gone to the Ministry of Information and he's bringing out a fascist paper next month.' 'This is very interesting', said Basil. 'Tell me some more'.

The paper that Ambrose is planning to publish is actually a literary journal entitled 'Ivory Tower', a name that also suggests Ambrose's state of mind. As Ambrose's attitude to art rejects the idea of art for art's sake, so the paper begins with stating its aims. In doing so, he sows seeds of controversy in it which does not even escape the notice of his publisher, Mr. Bentley.

'It's all very controversial', said Mr. Bentley sadly. 'When you first told me about it, I thought you meant it to be a purely artistic paper'. 'We must show people where we stand,' said Ambrose. 'Art will follow - anyway there's 'Monument to a Spartan'. 'Yes', said Mr. Bentley. 'There's that'. 'It covers fifty pages, my dear. All pure Art'.

The essay that Ambrose considers an example of pure art is everything but that. It centres around his old friend Hans who in the first flush of youth was taken in by Nazi ideals but later on discovered their fatuity. It thus purports to show the hollowness of Nazism. Ambrose's assessment of his own committed writing as pure art is an error of judgement, arising out of his inability to sift truth from fiction.
Basil pounces on this vulnerable trait. The essay, "Monument to a Spartan", needs only a slight modification which Basil with his superior talent can turn into a really fascist article. Chance helps him in doing so. When Ambrose absents himself from his room where he has kept the essay, Basil happens to drop in. Upon discovering the galley-proofs, he steals one with him. After reading it thoroughly, he chooses his points of alteration. He makes Ambrose believe that the second part which deals with Hans' awakening, robs the story of its value as pure art and lends it instead an air of propaganda. He suggests to him that the essay should end 'with Hans still full of his illusions, marching into Poland'. What Ambrose fails to see is that an ending like this would make the readers mistake Hans' illusions for reality and thereby inculpate him as a fascist. His inability to see the point renders him comic. Because of this ignorance on his part we sympathise with him even when we laugh at his foolishness. This comic episode is, therefore, precluded from the scope of satire.

If Ambrose by his association with the past is the opposite of Basil; Angela Lyne, by her true contemporaneity with him, parallels him in more ways than one. Her dynamism is reflected not only in her American appearance and general deportment but also in her descent: she is the daughter of a Glasgow millionaire who rose to heights from the 'life in a street gang'. 'Angela', Waugh says, 'is a decadent modern woman'. In other words, she is thoroughly steeped in the
decadent spirit of the constantly changing modern secular world. The impact of mechanisation, the means of secular change, is writ large on her face.

But the face was mute. It might have been carved in jade, it was so smooth and cool and conventionally removed from the human.

The narcissistic tendencies, manifest in Basil and Barbara, can be detected in her too.

Narcissus greeted Narcissus from the watery depth as Basil kissed her (Barbara),

For seven years she had been on a desert island; her appearance had become a hobby and distraction, a pursuit entirely self-regarding and self-rewarding...

She owes her proximity with Basil not to any sensual reason but to the 'other bonds' of dynamic qualities. In Basil's absence, when she shuts herself in, she falls sick and suffers from insomnia. Her sickness results from her decision to impose a static self upon her essentially dynamic self. It is only after Basil's arrival and in his company that she gradually recovers. It is, therefore, quite likely that she should get married to him after the death of Cedric, her previous husband. Marriage, however, does not represent stability and permanence in their case. It only means a short-lived arrangement.

'What's the sense of marrying with things as they are? I don't know what there is to marriage, if it isn't looking forward to a comfortable old age.'

'The only thing in war-time is not to think ahead. It's like walking in the blackout with a shaded torch. You can just see as far as the step you're taking.'
In the flux which followed World War II, it was futile to expect permanence even in the bond of marriage. The instability suggested here is felt on the outer orbits of the wheel of life, where it is difficult for a person to maintain his balance.

Basil's decision to join the war near the end of the novel has been interpreted by critics as a sign of hope, a sort of regeneration of the decadent aristocracy. As Lionel Stevenson opines:

> In the dark early months of the war, Waugh apparently almost succumbed to a delusive hope that it might bring regeneration to the effete aristocracy. 202

Our preceding discussion has revealed that the outbreak of war in the dynamic world implies the unleashing of the forces of destabilisation which push human society to an extreme form of dynamism like what we can find in the barbaric circles of humanity. In the terminology of *Decline & Fall*, it implies a rapid movement away from the hub of the wheel of life. The war cannot, therefore, offer the hope that Lionel Stevenson speaks of concerning the effete aristocracy: *The Sword of Honour* trilogy, written much later, further explains the evils of war and its inability to provide any such hope. Guy Gouchback sees in the war an expression of the unchristian desire of killing each other and thereby satisfying one's manhood. Basil Seal too joins the war not with any holy intention or for that
matter for the sake of any ideal; he joins it only to satisfy his irrepressible desire of putting to sword hordes of Germans. The importance of holy intention or the desire to highlight some ideal is very closely connected with the concept of change and progress in Waugh's novels.

Christopher Hollis too appears to have ignored the sadistic motives which work in Basil's mind before he joins the war when he writes of his reformation in the war-torn world.

We are indeed left at the end of Put Out More Flags with a vague impression that in the new atmosphere of the Churchillian Renaissance even Basil Seal is going to behave decently. 203

The character who really reforms himself in this novel is Alastair Digby-Vane-Trumpington. He does so, however, by joining the war in order to express his penance for his unruly and wasteful past. A.A. De Vitis has rightly perceived the future artistic potential of Waugh on the basis of this change in Alastair.

Here is Waugh tenuously moving into the penance prescribed by the Catholic Church, although his outlook in Put Out More Flags is specifically secular. But the introduction of the religious note indicates more strongly than ever before the direction he will take in Brideshead Revisited. 204

Inspite of it, A.A. De Vitis is right in saying that war is no solution to the ills of the dynamic world.

Yet war is no solution, and Waugh is conscious of the fact. 205
In the words of Lionel Trilling we may therefore assert that Waugh was making 'a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as an indication of the direction of man's soul'. The holy intention, suggested by the panorama of change and progress, is thus very nearly what we mean by Catholicism in his novels. Catholicism in his novels, it will be seen, stands for the principle of unquestioned spiritual authority outside the individual and that is also the principle of Classicism in literature.

Apart from these episodes which indicate a general trend away from the hub and towards greater chaos and consequent instability on the periphery of the wheel of life, the novel also brings out the circular nature of life in the fate of the people who stalk the corridors of the Ministry of Information, and fail to meet the right person who will listen to them. They keep moving from one office to another until they end up in the same office from where they had begun their circular journey. They have the feeling that a person on the wheel of life has when he reaches nowhere despite all his efforts.

The 'new spirit' that Sir Joseph sees 'on every side' has no foundation in the grim prospect that dynamic life holds out. Whatever comic fun we find in the novel owes not to the regeneration of life or the epiphany that
occurs after resurrection, (he presents this view of life in a clearer manner in the so-called Catholic novels) but to absurdity, in the way Ionesco defines this term:

"Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose.... Cut off from his religion, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."

The absurd attitude, by its very nature, frightens while it regales. Basil's comic adventures may please but they also reveal the vacuity of his purpose in life. The aim that he discovers at the end is nothing more than a satisfaction of irrational and senseless desire of killing, a wish that brings him closer to his barbaric forbears.

Conceived on board a troopship carrying prisoners of war, the novel, in the words of Waugh, is 'a minor work dashed off to occupy a tedious voyage'. Critics appear to have taken a cue from it to appraise it unsympathetically. Alan Pryce-Jones, Waugh's friend and reviewer, considers the plot of the novel too fragile to act as a controlling agent of the incidents described in it.

The plot does not matter; it imposes a vague pattern on selected instances of incompetence, lying, theft, graft, fornication, unkindness, ineptitude, snobbery, cowardice, drink and unnatural vice during the first year of the war. Even David Lodge sees signs of structural and thematic disunity in the novel.
Though *Put Out More Flags* (1942) certainly has its moments ... the novel has neither structural nor thematic unity .... But one should not judge *Put Out More Flags* too harshly for it was written on a troopship, partly to relieve the author's own boredom.209

The criticism is, however, tempered with an extenuating reference to its peculiar mode of composition.

Notwithstanding Waugh's own unsympathetic assessment of his sixth major novel, the theme of inverse relationship between secular change and progress does recur in it as a unifying bond of apparently disparate episodes which lends the novel an aesthetic wholeness.

Just like his previous novels, *Put Out More Flags* follows the basic structural pattern of a circle and it is suggestive of the wheel of life. The action of the novel unfolds in 'Autumn' with three rich women thinking of Basil in terms of his suitability for the war. Barbara Sothill, Basil's sister, thinks that '... Basil needed a war. He's not meant for peace'.210 Angela Lyne, his mistress, and Lady Cynthia, his mother, too picture him as a subaltern leading an action. Basil, however, eludes attempts to get him recruited. It does not, by any means, falsify the assessments of these three rich women for the reasons that make him do so, are in no way pacific. It is the discipline that the armed forces demand which repels him. As he is a true dynamic character, he wishes to have a taste of irrational and impartial killing from the war. At this stage
of the war, he feels, these are precisely what he would be unable to realise.

'Conscription has rather taken the gilt off that particular gingerbread', said Basil. 'Besides, this ain't going to be a soldier's war'.

The desires of the three women, close to him, materialise only towards the end of the novel. Basil's reasons for joining the war, however, remain true to the ideals of dynamic life.

'There's only one serious occupation for a chap now, that's killing Germans. I have an idea I shall rather enjoy it'.

His anticipation of the relish in killing the Germans is comparable to the homicidal carpenter's relish in exterminating heathens like Prendergast in *Decline and Fall* (1928). In depicting the situation in both the novels there is a fear that the unrestrained irrational impulses must be tamed by imposing religious order or otherwise our civilisation will perish. In this respect, Basil stands in sharp contrast with Guy Crouchback who returns to England at the beginning of the Second Great War in order that he may defend the honour of his country. While the resemblance with the homicidal carpenter emphasises the common bond of dynamism, the contrast with Guy Crouchback reveals the dynamism of Basil against the backdrop of Guy Crouchback's static life. Basil's entry into the war thus completes the framework of the novel and lends it a circular nature by bringing the action to
the point from where it began. Even the movement of time in the novel reinforces this impression, for the operation of seasons, within which the action is contained, is itself cyclical.

By manifesting a concern with the absurdity of secular change, the novel falls in line with Waugh's previous other fiction in which he upholds a similar view of life. To the discriminating readers of his novel the inference is palpable that the events are carefully patterned and deliberately organised: over and over again Waugh dwells on the theme of change and progress in life and time and again he is disillusioned by the ridiculous nature of dynamic life that he finds around him. In our analytical study of the next novel, we shall see the same trend depicted with a firmer grasp of manners and material.

THE LOVED ONE (1948):

In Decline and Fall, the critique of civilisation unfolded itself against the backdrop of modern Britain and the idea of attaining progress through secular change was there held up to ridicule. In The Loved One (1948), notwithstanding the change in setting from Britain to America, the same theme finds a vigorous expression once again. The change in setting is, however, significant for America compared to Britain is a far more 'dynamic' society. In the words of Waugh himself:
She is the child of late eighteenth-century 'enlightenment' and the liberalism of her founders has persisted through all the changes of her history and penetrated into every part of her life.214

The 'enlightenment' and liberalism that have guided American society have introduced a stupendous rate of change into it so that from the status of a mere colony of Britain it has come to be regarded now as a society far more developed and civilised than even Britain. Waugh's anti-'enlightenment' attitude does not allow him to subscribe to the progressive view of American society. He believes that the high rate of secular change noticeable in it is the cause of its undoing and for this reason American society is placed on the outermost orbit of the wheel of life. Britain with its slower pace of secular change finds a berth on a comparatively inner orbit. It is significant that Waugh measures progress not in terms of the cyclical motion of a society on the wheel of life but in terms of its distance from the Roman Catholic hub of life. The idiom of expression is clear and categorical in *Decline and Fall*:

>'You see, the nearer you can get to the hub of the wheel the slower it is moving and the easier it is to stay on.'215

Britain, by virtue of its nearness to the hub has a far more stable society than America which is farther from it. In consequence, an interaction between the two exposes America, in all its vulnerability, to the buffetings of Britain. Waugh has voiced this view quite clearly in the "Commentry for *The Private Man*". He remarks:
The more uprooted they are from their essential loyalties, the more the control of their own lives and families and the pride in their possessions are taken from them so much the more readily will they fall victim to attack from nations which have not been so enervated.216

The defeat of America at the hands of a British intruder also helps to highlight the American illusion of progress as comically false and delusive. The novel stops short of being a satirical attack on American society as the shattering of this illusion elicits our sympathy and admittedly, it is one of the cathartic emotions created by comedy. The Times Literary Supplement appears to have overlooked this basic distinction by labelling the novel as a satire:

It is as an Old Testament prophet exposing our festering sores, as a flayer of society that he excels. The Loved One perhaps indicates that he has finally accepted his métier. At any rate, he has given us a satire, witty and macabre, ominous and polished, which strikes straight at the heart of the contemporary problem.217

Waugh's choice of Hollywood as the backdrop to the action of this novel is not without reason. The home of cinema in English, Hollywood is, to Waugh, the very epitome of futile secular change. In "Why Hollywood is a Term of Disparagement", he remarks,

As far as the home of a living art is concerned, Hollywood has no importance. It may be a useful laboratory for technical experiment.218

By distinguishing between 'living art' and 'technical experiment', Waugh tries to draw a line between quintessential
and superficial change. While the first is of a religious kind, the second is of a secular kind. Hollywood represents a secular world in flux. Accordingly, it is a very appropriate background for showing the absurdity of secular change. In Waugh's philosophical terminology, we may, therefore, call it the dynamic centre of a dynamic society. Two categories of artists are shown converging on this dynamic heart of America. The first is comprised of those who have allowed art to give up its quest for the aesthetic expression of permanent values. The second is comprised of those who have been true to their artistic calling.

Waugh's anguish and pain for the first type of artists is neatly formulated in these words:

The great danger is that the European climate is becoming inclement for artists; they are notoriously comfort-loving people. The allurements of the modest luxury of Hollywood are strong. Will they be seduced there to their own extinction?

The answer to this question is implied in the downward sloping curve of Sir Francis Hinsley's artistic career. He has joined initially as a chief script-writer in Megalopolitan Pictures, after his arrival in Hollywood. By the fag-end of his career there, he has come down to the Publicity Department, where his job is to endow actors and actresses with saleable identities. Change in the dynamic world is so rampant that even the tastes of the people keep on changing. Sir Hinsley's job is to fashion and re-fashion
the identities of the actors and actresses with a view to catering to these changing tastes. Waugh's art thus imitates life in this respect as in so many others. Assuredly, his novelistic writing is not marred by the impression that he has created in the character of Sir Hinsley on dishonest scales. The final impression depends not on whether the novelist explicitly passes judgement but on whether the judgement he passes seems defensible in the light of the dramatised facts associated with the fashioning and refashioning of the identities of the actors and actresses with a view to catering to these changing tastes.

By making art serve the ends of the dynamic world, Sir Hinsley has not only reduced himself to the rank of an apostate artist but also exposed himself to the possibility of 'extinction' of which Waugh is never tired of writing. The Megalopolitan Pictures retrench him as they find his approach outdated. The fact of his retrenchment, however, escapes his notice as the company does not even inform him. When it does come to his notice, he refuses to accept the reality, for he cannot believe that he has finally fallen a victim to the denigration and debasement of his trade. The illusion concerning the supremacy of impure and corrupt art in a way renders his position comic, though he does not fail to draw the sympathy of the sensitive readers.
'I've just found a Mr. Medici in my office,'
'Why, yes, Frank. Only he says it "Medissy",
like that; how you said sounds kinda like a wop
and Mr. Medici is a very fine young man with a
very, very fine and wonderful record, Frank, who
I'd be proud to have you meet.'
'Then where do I work?'
'Well, now see here, Frank, that's a thing I want
very much to talk about but I haven't the time
right now. I haven't the time, have I dear?'
'No, Mr. Baumbein,' said one of the secretaries.
'You certainly haven't the time.'

It is only after Sir Erikson tells Sir Hinsley in blunt
Nordic terms about his retrenchment that he realises that
he has been added to the long list of 'has-beens' in the
ever changing world of Megalopolitan Pictures.

He had seen the rooms filled and refilled, the
name-plates change on the doors. He had seen
arrivals and departures, Mr. Erikson and Mr.
Baumbein coming, others whose names now escaped
him, going.

Significantly, when he leaves the building of Megalopolitan
Pictures, he leaves the question of the girl at the desk —
'Did you find who you were looking for? ' unanswered;
Sir Hinsley has found out his own real self and the fact of
its discovery stares him in the face now.

Waugh presents a just and lively image of human
nature by playing up the passions and humours of the charac-
ters depicted, and also by representing the changes of for-
tune to which men are subject. If Hamlet's father had not
been murdered by his uncle and his mother had not married
the same uncle, Hamlet would never have been driven to
exhibit the true image of human being and thus hold the mirror up to nature. The wisdom with which Sir Hinsley recognises the reality of the situation following his retrenchment provides the acid test that illuminates his character. A grim note is added to the comic situation that obtains in Sir Hinsley's retrenchment by his death which imparts particularity to one of his own comments on life in America:

'Did you see the photograph ... of a dog's head severed from its body which the Russians are keeping alive ... by pumping blood into it from a bottle? It dribbles at the tongue when it smells a cat. That's what all of us are, you know, out here. The studios keep us going with a pump. We are still just capable of a few crude reactions - nothing more. If we ever get disconnected from our bottle, we should simply crumble.'

Despite his awareness of the nature of life found in America, Sir Francis Hinsley meets with the same fate, he speaks here of. His death illustrates the tragic potential of a comic situation that Northrop Frye refers to in his essay on comedy.

The other kind of artists who have flocked at Hollywood are represented in Dennis Borlow who despite going 'native' always maintains an intellectual detachment from the dynamic world. In fact, we get flashes of it in his alert artistic sense which refuses to stoop the way Sir Hinsley's did. Having won fame with his book of poems published during the last war, he comes to Hollywood to
write the life of Shelley for the Megalopolitan Pictures. Three months of his stay there convince him of the decadent nature of secular art encouraged there. He, therefore, prefers the job of an assistant at the Happier Hunting Ground after the expiry of his period of contract. This introduces him to the ultimate stage of decadence, death, that the dynamic world is prone to. Besides it saves him from the ordeal of subserving his artistic perception to the ends of a decadent dynamic world. Barlow's work as an assistant at the Happier Hunting Ground decides Sir Ambrose's choice for the person who can look to the funeral preparation of Sir Hinsley at Whispering Glades: an opportunity that brings him into contact with the most vulnerable area of the dynamic world of America. Being a person nearer to the hub, by virtue of his inner stability reflected in his artistic rectitude, he becomes a good medium for exposing the American notion of progress as comic and false.

Waugh's art of novelistic writing may rightly be regarded as our storehouse of recorded values in so far as they spring from and perpetuate hours in the lives of exceptional people. In depicting the character of Dennis Barlow, the author underlines the varying possibilities of existence and the discriminating reader can easily understand that the habitual narrowness of interests in his acts and activities are replaced by an intricately wrought composure because he is endowed with an artistic rectitude. In the "Conservative Manifesto" to Robbery Under Law, Waugh has clarified this
point beyond doubt. He opines:

There is no more agreeable position than that of a dissident from a stable society. Theirs are all the solid advantages of other people's creation and preservation, and all the fun of detecting hypocrisies and inconsistencies. There are times when dissidents are not only enviable but valuable.225

Barlow fulfils the needs of a 'dissident' far better than Paul Pennyfeather or for that matter Adam Penwick Symes or William Boot does. He neither suffers from the bewilderment of a static character nor from the pointless dynamism of a dynamic character like Basil Seal whose deep sense of participation in the world of change prevents him from viewing his world with a detached wisdom that Barlow brings to bear on the follies of the dynamic world. Barlow may, therefore, be said to occupy a place near the hub of the wheel of life.

The notion of progress that the 'enlightenment' and humanist historiographers have fostered judges, as a matter of general rule, the development of man and his world through the acceleration of the pace of secular change. Men upholding such a view show a culpable disregard for the mortality of man and the transience of his achievements. The insignificance of man's achievements in the face of death compelled Marlowe's Doctor Faustus to abandon the study of subjects that would not alter his condition of 'but Faustus and a man'. While he evaded a suitable answer to this problem by succumbing to the
delusive super-human pleasures of evil necromancy, the
dynamic society of America has gone a step further. With
a view to preventing death from undoing its quest for
secular progress, it has launched a frontal attack on the
very significance of death as an eye-opener of the insigni-
ficance of secular human efforts through the ages. Refe-
ring to this tendency, Waugh records his conviction in
"Death in Hollywood" in these words:

They are gently spinning the cocoon which will
cover their final transition. Death is the only
event which can disturb them, and priests of
countless preposterous cults have gathered round
to shade off that change until it becomes
imperceptible.226

Thus, the American society has burrowed itself deeper into
the comic delusion of investing mortal life with the perma-
nent values of spirituality. This contradiction manifests
itself in the comic unreality of Whispering Glades, a
cemetery of great repute for the Americans. Nothing here
is what it seems to be. Like Iago's, here there is a tacit
proclamation, 'I am not what I am'. The unreality of the
place is accentuated in its being the product of a dream.
The dream-like quality can be found around most of the
objects of art installed here. Here are the Kaiser's
stoneless peaches, the buzzing sound of non-existent honey-
bees, three-dimensional houses that look artificial and
two-dimensional facades that look natural. Besides, most
objects of classical art and architecture here are debased
replicas of their originals found elsewhere. Waugh did not have to strain his imagination much for creating the fantastic environs of Whispering Glades. Waugh makes use of the events associated with the Whispering Glades usually as references which are involved as conditions for, or stages in the ensuing development of attitudes. It matters not at all in such cases whether the references are false or true; their sole function is to bring about and support Waugh's dominant attitude towards change and progress: ideas which provide an acceptable and irrefutable measure of judgement for reading his novels in a rewarding manner. Still, it would be rewarding to know that the material was readily available in the cemetery of Forest Lawn which he visited while he was on a tour of California for discussing the filming of Brideshead Revisited. In his diary for this period, he says, 'I found a deep mine of literary gold in the cemetery of Forest Lawn'. Again, we find few changes between its description in the novel and the one given in "Half in Love with Easeful Death" which serves to show the richness of this particular experience of his. The letter to Cyril Connolly, written on 2 January 1948, also leaves no room for doubt about the impact of this experience on his fecund imagination.

"The ideas I had in mind in writing were:
1st & quite predominantly overexcitement with the scene of Forest Lawn ...."
The contradiction that renders the physical facade of Whispering Glades comic does not stop here; it extends even to the practices adopted. The dead bodies brought for burial here are called the loved ones. Large scale operations are undertaken, in case of injury, to bring them back to their original beauty and appearance. Only after that are the corpses sent to their respective burial spots. Even then, no effort is spared to avoid the body getting mixed up with earth and decaying. The burial place of Whispering Glade thus tries to arrogate to itself the spirit of blissful eternity that is the foundation of Heaven according to Christian conception of life. Commenting on a similar inversion of values in Forest Lawn, Waugh writes perceptively in "Half in love with Easeful Death" thus:

We are very far here from the traditional conception of an adult soul naked at the judgement seat and a body turning to corruption ... In those realistic times Hell waited for the wicked and a long purgation for all but the saints, but Heaven, if at last attained, was a place of perfect knowledge. In Forest Lawn, as the builder claims these values are reversed. The body does not decay; it lives on, more chic in death than ever before ... the soul goes straight from Slumber Room to Paradise, where it enjoys an endless infancy... 230

The travesty of Christian truth in Whispering Glades is well illustrated by Evelyn Waugh in these words about its apotheosis:
Forest Lawn has consciously turned its back on the 'old customs of death', the grim traditional alternatives of Heaven and Hell, and promises eternal happiness for all its inmates. Dr. Eaton (the founder) is the first man to offer eternal salvation at an inclusive charge as part of his undertaking service.231

The eternal salvation sold at Whispering Glades contravene the Catholic stand that Waugh takes in "The American Epoch in the Catholic Church":

The Christian believes that he was created to know, love and serve God in this world and to be happy with Him in the next. That is the sole reason for his existence.232

Thus, in the words of Lionel Stevenson, this novel 'conveys an abhorrence for the blasphemous parody of religion practiced in the modern materialistic world'.233 Edmund Wilson, who had reacted to the overt expression of Catholicism in Brideshead Revisited, finds fault with the emphasis on the Catholic viewpoint in Waugh's ironic presentation of American attitude to death:

To the non-religious reader ... the patrons and proprietors of Whispering Glades (the cemetery in the book) seem more sensible and less absurd than the priest-guided Evelyn Waugh. What the former are trying to do is, after all, merely to gloss over physical death with smooth lawns and soothing rites; but, for the Catholic, the fact of death is not to be faced at all: he is solaced with the fantasy of another world.234

John Farrelly of Scrutiny, however, finds Wilson's approach rather 'depressing'.
If Mr. Wilson finds the attitude to life implicit in Whispering Glades more congenial than that explicit in the traditional 'Christian myth, that should prove' disturbing, as I said above ... Rather, 'depressing', would be the more sympathetic term.  

What Edmund Wilson failed to notice while criticising the Catholic slant of the book may be summed up best in the words of Desmond Mac Carthy who points out:

The book is a ruthless exposure of a silly optimistic trend in modern civilisation which takes for granted that the consolations of religion can be enjoyed without belief in them... 

The comic fun that Waugh arouses here emerges from the incongruity between the real value of death, as defined by Roman Catholicism, and the false one, superimposed on it by the American notion of progress. The latter is held up to ridicule for its delusive attempt to assert the supremacy of man by trying to conquer even death. In his book Evelyn Waugh, A.A. De Vitis has, therefore, rightly pointed out:

Waugh lamented the fact that the traditional concepts of the soul standing naked at the judgement seat, of the mystery and enormity of death ... were minimized and replaced by an infantile and imbecile idea of the permanence and beauty of life. 

Yet, the imbecility of the American attitude to life and death also makes us sympathise with them. So when De Vitis calls the novel a 'caustic condemnation of the American way of life', and when Cyril Connolly calls it a 'Swiftian satire on the burial customs of Southern California', 239
they ignore the importance of sympathy in the creation of the comic world.

Observing the self-delusion evident in the American attitude to death with his 'literary sense' alert all the while, Barlow feels an urge within him to translate this into a work of art.

In that zone of insecurity in the mind where none but the artist dare trespass, the tribes were mustering, Dennis the frontiersman, could read the signs.\(^{240}\)

But as his experience of the depravity and illusions of American life is not yet complete and as he has still a duty concerning the burial of his deceased host to perform, he lets the impulse lie low. He engages himself, instead, in writing an elegy on Sir Hinsley. The poem suggests Barlow's disenchantment with the so-called progressive American society, despite his active participation in its circular and pointless 'dynamic' life.

They told me, Francis Hinsley, they told me you were hung
With red protruding eye-balls and black-protruding tongue;
I wept as I remembered how often you and I
Had laughed about Los Angeles and now 'tis here you'll lie;
Here pickled in formaldehyde and painted like a whore,
Shrimp-pink incorruptible, not lost nor gone before.\(^{241}\)

The two kinds of women that Barlow meets at Whispering Glades are indicative of the degradation that
human life has undergone in the highly dynamic atmosphere of America. Those who belong to the first kind are no more than the 'standard product' of an industry.

A man could leave such a girl in a delicatessen shop in New York, fly three thousand miles and find her again in the cigar stall at San Francisco, just as he would find his favourite comic strip in the local paper; and she would croon the same words to him in moments of endearment and express the same views and preferences in moments of social discourse.242

The sameness that permeates them is a sign of their servility to the mechanical order of things that they themselves have given precedence over all else under the false impression that it would lead them ahead on the path of secular progress. In the "Commentary" for The Private Man, Waugh says: 'Men are not naturally equal and can only be so when enslaved'.243 The servility to a mechanical order of things is here conveyed through the act of denaturing life. While depicting Thomas Gradgrind, Charles Dickens gave a similar example of life. In his novel, as in this, it grows as a sequel to the mechanistic approach to life.

We recall here that Waugh made oblique criticism concerning individuality in Decline and Fall, and considered it the root cause of the disorder prevalent in the dynamic world, and hence the critical account of sameness in human life presented here may be construed as a departure from views originally held. In his book The Picturesque Prison, Jeffrey Heath244 has analysed this problem at length.
He argues that Waugh believes, with St. Augustine, that every individual nature is God-given and good so long as it keeps man 'in the place assigned by the order of nature'. It is only when man relinquishes his ordained place that his nature assumes barbaric potential and threatens the stability of human society. The presentation of events in which the essential humanity of man is denied is, therefore, only an apparent contradiction in Waugh. The comic laughter that Waugh elicits over this self-contrived situation is saved from being satiric by the element of sympathy which pervades all along, for the folly committed by the dynamic characters is an unconscious one and is rooted in the delusive faith in secular progress cherished by them.

The second category of women that one comes across in America, is of those whose individuality has a streak of barbarity. They fall in the long line of dynamic characters beginning with Captain Grimes and Prendergast in Decline and Fall. Dennis Barlow discovers such a kind of woman in Aimee Thenatogenos.

But the girl who now entered was unique. Not indefinably; the appropriate distinguishing epithet leapt to Dennis' mind the moment he saw her: sole Eve in a bustling hygienic Eden, this girl was a decadent.245

Her uniqueness, as Dennis detects, lies in her decadent nature and is, therefore, not a sign of her superiority. The parallel drawn with Eve underlines this fact. The
'rich glint of lunacy', that he finds in her plays up the wildness of her individuality that is ever ready to upset the established order of things. Her heathen parental lineage also reinforces the idea of this dangerous quality in her. As a student she had wished to take up art as her first major subject. But because her father had lost money in religion, another sign of perversity in American life, she was forced to give that up and learn beauty-craft instead. The choice is guided by monetary considerations than any high ideals and the alternative chosen is accordingly one which lacks the permanent values of the fine arts. Aimee's choice therefore sheds light on her growing conformity to the dynamic world where the quest for secular progress robs all things of a permanent value. She suffers another fall when she willingly opts for working on dead corpses as a cosmetician than on living faces. This makes her subserve her false art to the furtherance of the pseudo-religion of Whispering Glades, and this is clearly indicative of the travesty of truth found in the dynamic world.

Dennis wins her admiration not by reciting his own poems which she does not like but by reading out the poems of Keats. This is illustrative of the fact that Aimee who prefers the heathen values celebrated in the poems of Keats rather than the Christian ones in Dennis' poems is an out-and-out dynamic creature. Wishing to gain greater insight into this decadent world, Dennis keeps up her interest in
him by making her believe that he is the author of those heathen poems. Besides, unlike the apostate artists, Aimee and Sir Hinsley, he cannot make his art stoop to the level of self-deception practised in the dynamic world.

That was not what the Muse wanted. There was a very long, complicated, and important message she was trying to convey to him. It was about Whispering Glades, but it was not, except quite indirectly, about Aimee. Sooner or later the Muse would have to be placated. She came first. Meanwhile Aimee must draw from the bran-tub of the anthologies.

Aimee contrasts the transience of her work (the paint she applies on the dead face flakes off after some time) with the permanence of the Hellenic poetry supposedly written by Dennis and thereby, begins to feel for him in a way she has never felt for Mr. Joyboy, the Chief Mortician at Whispering Glades. His arrival minimises the impressiveness of Mr. Joyboy who till now has reigned in her mind as an epitome of artistic excellence.

The courtship of Mr. Joyboy in the sombre setting of the mortuary is not only an inversion but also a perversion of all sacred values of life. Death which is a grim reminder of the transience of human joys and life is itself used as a love-broker to further and celebrate the impermanent pleasures of life implicit in human love. Mr. Joyboy expresses his admiration and love for Aimee through the smiles that he imparts to the dead faces under his care. The contradiction between what should be and what is makes the entire process of courtship look repulsive and ridiculous.
'It's true, Miss Thenatogenos. It seems I am just powerless to prevent it. When I am working for you there's something inside me says "He's on his way to Miss Thenatogenos" and my fingers just seem to take control. Haven't you noticed it?'

'Well, Mr. Joyboy, I did remark it only last week. "All the Loved Ones that come from Mr. Joyboy lately", I said, "have the most beautiful smiles".

'All for you, Miss Thenatogenos.'

Aimee confides the vicissitudes of her love-life to a fake spiritual guide, Guru Brahmin, who is not one person but two. In the dynamic world of America where religion has been robbed of its eternal significance and made to come to terms with secularism on a dubious note, there is no dearth of 'preposterous cults' and commercialised religiosity. Similar events and trends occur in other novels; we have already mentioned them in Decline and Fall where Mr. Prendergast sets up as a Modern Churchman and in Vile Bodies where Mrs Melrose Ape uses religion for personal aggrandisement. Wishing to take up a respectable job, Dennis asks Mr. Bartholomew how he can become a non-sectarian clergyman. He expects that some bishop may be responsible for ordaining such priests. Mr. Bartholomew, however, disagrees with him. He discounts the need of a bishop as anyone 'who has received the Call has no need for human intervention'. The dangers of such an attitude to religion have already been referred to in Decline and Fall where the homicidal carpenter becomes a potential source of menace to the social order by virtue of the 'call he supposedly receives from the angels of God. Waugh re-emphasises here the dangers of an individualistic approach to religion and suggests his preference for the
collective approach manifest in the concept of Church as a body of believers in Christ. By pointing out the absurdity of an individualistic approach to religion, Waugh ridicules the impermanence associated with its essentially humanistic and thereby, temporal outlook. Waugh's religious attitude is appreciable in the light of Freud's discoveries. Sigmund Freud clearly demonstrated in his theory of mind that the so-called rational decisions of man were basically cast in the mould of his hidden emotional desires. The power of the unconscious revealed by him put a big question mark on the objective validity of man's rational decisions. The kind of religious change advocated by Evelyn Waugh steers clear from this dubiousness as Roman Catholic Church hinges on the decisions taken by the collective group of the college of bishops. Waugh's emphasis on Roman Catholic Church is, therefore, not a simplistic one.

The spiritual life of America is dominated not only by the pseudo-Christian cults but also by non-Christian faiths. The Guru Brahmin and the Hindu Love-Song are cases in point. As the dynamic world is founded on a secular approach to life, the exponents of progressive ideology here take pride in their atheism. They do not realise that by depriving the wheel of life of its religious hub, they are exposing themselves to the Sisyphean absurdity of an endless and meaningless circular motion. Aimee admittedly is a representative figure of this type. Upon having been informed by Dennis of his desire of being a priest, she
writes to Guru Brahmin, her confidante.

He says he is going to be a pastor. "Well as I told you I am progressive and therefore have no religion but I do not think religion is a thing to be cynical about because it makes some people very happy and all cannot be progressive at this stage of Evolution...."

Waugh is ostensibly referring to this erosion of religious stability in the dynamic world in his essay 'Tolerance' where he prefers narrow-mindedness to mindlessness, rigidity to senseless elasticity of opinion.

Dennis exploits this false progressiveness in Aimee. When she learns the truth about the real authorship of the poems he has addressed to her till now, she tries to get away from him and get married, instead, to Mr. Joyboy. Dennis who knows the extent of her foolish faith in the inverted secular ideals of Whispering Glades, wins her back by reminding her of the oath of living together they had taken in the Lovers' Nook at Whispering Glades.

"It may be that by the Dreamer's standards there are defects in my character... So what? You loved me and swore to love me eternally with the most sacred oath in the religion of Whispering Glades.... Sanctity is indivisible. If it isn't sacred to kiss me through the heart of Burns or Bruce, it isn't sacred to go to bed with old Joyboy'.

The false religion of Whispering Glades has so overpowering a hold on her mind that she can hardly ignore its demand for obedience. She, therefore, comes down to requesting Dennis to release her from that oath. As Dennis has discovered
its effectiveness, he is unwilling to do so for fear of losing her to his rival, Mr. Joyboy. The episode heightens the comic contrast between Dennis and Aimee. The former with his awareness of the fallacy of secular ideals renders the secular ideals followed by Aimee ridiculous and preposterous. Aimee's ignorance of the retrogressive character of Whispering Glades' secular ideals, however, deserves our sympathy, as well. Thus the Anglo-American encounter in this novel is essentially of a comic character rather than being satiric.

In her bewildered condition Aimee turns for guidance to none but the fake Guru Brahmin. The situation that develops out of this decision may be best explicated in Waugh's own words:

A people who have forfeited their privacy will easily succumb to rogues and charlatans who promise a change of condition. 251

Indevitably, the advice that Aimee receives seals her fate for ever. The man who has till now been replying to her letters is in a drunken condition as he himself is in a quandry after his retrenchment from the paper for which he wrote as Guru Brahmin. Irritated by Aimee's phone call, he thoughtlessly asks her to jump off a building. Soon after this Aimee repairs to the mortuary at Whispering Glades where she takes her life in Mr. Joyboy's room. The wild spontaneity that Dennis had noticed in her 'rich glint of
lunacy' suddenly gains complete control over her and consumes her in her own destructive passion. The heathen gods she has abandoned get her at the end. Waugh writes appropriately:

Her mind was quite free from anxiety. Somehow, somewhere in the blank black hours she had found counsel; she had communed perhaps with the spirits of her ancestors, the impious and haunted race who had deserted the altars of the old Gods, had taken ship and wandered, driven by what pursuing furies through what mean streets and among what barbarous tongues!'252

Apart from highlighting the tragic end of the dynamic world's false sense of progress in abjuring fixity of opinion, the incident sheds light on the incompatibility of British and American cultures. At this point, it is worthwhile to remember that Waugh's novel under discussion is not seriously flawed by careless intrusions. In fact, he strikes a happy balance between artful showing and inartistic telling. Indeed, his fruitful ideas associated with the false sense of progress in the dynamic world grow effortlessly out of this happy balance and provide a valuable yardstick in interpreting his novels. Waugh referred to this incompatibility in his letter to Cyril Connolly:

The tale should not be read as a satire on morticians but as a study of the Anglo-American cultural impasse with the mortuary as a jolly setting.253

This statement of Waugh and the tragedy of Aimee connote that a culture which lacks stability because of having pushed itself to the fringes of the wheel of life cannot
withstand the incursion of a more stable culture which is found nearer the hub of the wheel of life. In other words, secular change introduced through greater industrialisation may increase the acquisitions of man but so far as achieving real progress is concerned, it has a marginal impact. A really progressive culture should be able to withstand and resist all attempts aimed at its destruction. The victory of a more stable culture indicates that progress can be achieved not through liberalism and 'enlightenment' theories of life but through greater acceptance of a religious attitude to life. A.A. De Vitis has rightly stressed the significance of this point of view for a proper understanding of the novel.

The Loved One is interesting, too, because it shows clearly the position from which Waugh criticizes the world .... In The Loved One the Christian context from out of which Waugh creates his people and devises his situations is so completely conveyed by the indignant tone that his fundamental humanity is apparent. The beliefs of Christianity so pervade the novel that unless they are appreciated the novel cannot be understood.254

Though John Bayley does not like the Christian predisposition of Evelyn Waugh, he does not overlook the Christian standpoint either. In his own words:

Both Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene are writers who use their Catholicism as a weapon and a probe; they explore vice and anarchy from a definite standpoint.255

The assertion of the Christian standpoint in this novel owes not only to the travesty of truth Waugh saw in
the construction of Forest Lawn but also in the conscious artistry Waugh adopted for the first time in composition. The record of his diary entry of 2 June 1947 illustrates this method well.

I have decided to try a new method of work. When I began writing I worked straight on into the void, curious to see what would happen to my characters, with no preconceived plan for them, and few technical corrections. Now I waste hours going back and over my work. I intend trying in The Loved One to push straight ahead with a rough draft, have it typed and then work over it once, with the conclusion firmly in my mind when I come to give definite form to the beginning.256

The 'conclusion' that Waugh evidently had in mind while ridiculing the achievements of the American society, is quite clear: true progress can be achieved only by striving for the permanence implicit in the Roman Catholic hub of an otherwise absurd wheel-like life. Mrs. R.D. Smith appears to have overlooked this thrust in the thematic pattern of events narrated in the novel when she condemns it for its seemingly hackneyed themes.

Hollywood, funeral hypocrisy and the adman's domain of nutbergers, Jungle Venom perfume, and peaches without stones are themes that have been well worked over before, more effectively indeed, by Mr. Aldous Huxley, Mr. Sinclair Lewis, and by various hands in the 'New Yorker', notably Mr. S.J. Perelman.257

and for the 'contradiction between what Mr. Waugh intends us to understand are his values, and what the feel and texture of his writing reveal'.258 The inability of most reviewers in perceiving the underlying 'thematic line of
intention' in the novel owes partly to Waugh's own sense of pleasure in keeping his critics always guessing. His letter to Nancy Mitford is quite revelatory in this regard. He writes there:

Loved One is being well received in intellectual circles. They think my heart is in the right place after all. I'll show them. 259

The comic vision of life in Waugh thus develops out of the mistakes in accepting the apparently progressive secular change in place of the truly progressive religious change. Concepts concerning change and progress are thus the recurrent themes in a Waugh novel; admittedly the author achieves his effects by the kind of silence he maintains and also by the manner in which he leaves his characters to work out their own destinies or tell their own stories. We realise it also for certain that Waugh could not have brought out his preoccupation with ideas of alteration and advance in life and living if he tried to become a reliable spokesman, speaking directly and authoritatively to us. When at the end of the novel, Dennis leaves with his artist's load of experiences for England, Waugh seems to be dramatising the concept of comedy signified in regeneration which he has portrayed brilliantly in the character of Charles Ryder in Brideshead Revisited. Still, the absurd vision implicit in the inverted ideals of the dynamic American society retains a dominant impression.
THE ORDEAL OF GILBERT PINFOLD (1957):

In *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957), Waugh's persona, Pinfold, is of the opinion that 'most men harbour the germs of one or two books only; all else is professional trickery of which the most daemonic of the masters - Dickens and Balzac even - were flagrantly guilty.' True to it, this novel, eighth in the series of lesser comedies, refocusses attention on the theme that has been seen to shape and structure his other novels falling in this category. While revealing there his disagreement with the humanist and enlightenment view of history as a rising curve of secular change, he neither accepts the 'dynamic' way of life which he considers ridiculously absurd nor the static way which he ridicules for its inadequacy in coming to terms with an ever changing secular world. In *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957) Waugh again comes down upon both ways of life while psychoanalysing its central character, Gilbert Pinfold.

But before any analysis of the comic vision manifest in this novel may be undertaken, attention must surely be invited to its 'confessedly autobiographical' quality. In his diary for this period, Waugh remarks at its personal quality thus:

I have worked hard and easily, seldom writing less than a thousand words a day. The book is too personal for me to be able to judge it.
Again the letter dated October 2, 1956 to Daphne Fielding does not conceal the relation of the novel's action to his own personal experiences.

I say, talking of mad, I am fully in the middle of writing an account of my going off my rocker.\textsuperscript{263}

However, it is the letter of 15 August 1957, addressed to Robert Henriques, that elaborates the similarity.

Mr. Pinfold's experiences were almost exactly my own. In turning them into a novel I had to summarize them. I heard 'voices' such as I describe almost continuously night and day for three weeks. They were tediously repetitive and sometimes obscene and blasphemous. I have given the gist of them.\textsuperscript{264}

In order to see how far Pinfold's experiences 'almost exactly' resemble Waugh's own, we have to rely on the letters as the diary for this period is completely silent. Michael Davie, who has collected and edited the diaries, says:

\begin{quote}
In the second half of January 1954 Waugh left England on the voyage to Ceylon that produced the hallucinations described in The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold .... The existing MS has no entry between January 1954 and June 1955.\textsuperscript{265}
\end{quote}

One of the instances that finds an echo in the letters concerns the copper tap. In the novel, Mr. Pinfold is highly agitated over the conspicuous absence of 'a prominent, highly ornamental, copper tap in the centre' of 'a wash-hand stand of the greatest elaboration' which has been sent to him by a friend in London who shares his 'tastes in furniture' (p.24). Only after his friend,
James Lance informs him of the truth, does Mr. Pinfold realise that his memory has played a trick with him. There had never been 'any tap such as Mr. Pinfold described'. Waugh was a victim of a similar capricious working of memory. This is clear from one of his letters to John Betjeman, dated 29 Dec. (1953).

As I remember the G.B. there was an ornamental bronze pipe which led from the dragon's mouth to the bowl below .... Did I dream this or did it exist? 266

Another similarity concerns the B.B.C. radio programmes. Aboard the ship S.S. Caliban, Pinfold thinks mistakenly that he is listening to a B.B.C. radio programme on his artistic merit and also some noise which he attributes to faulty wiring. Placed in a similar situation, Waugh responded similarly. In the letter dated 3 Feb. (1954), Waugh writes to Laura Waugh:

The chief trouble is the noise of my cabin. All the pipes and air shafts in the ship seem to run through them. To add to my balminess there are intermittent bits of 3rd Programme talks played in private cabin and two mentioned me very faintly and my p.m. (persecution mania) took it for other passengers whispering about me. 267

Pinfold's imputation of his hallucinations to telepathy and the Box at Upper Mewling figures in another letter of Waugh, dated 8 Feb. 1954, to Laura.
I must have been more poisoned than I knew. Then when I was beginning to rally I found myself the 'victim' of an experiment in telepathy which made me think I really was going crazy. I will tell you when I got home. It has made me more credulous about Tanker's box. 268

The voices that haunt Pinfold even after his disembarking abruptly at Port Said and reaching Colombo by air, persecuted Waugh too. The letter of 12 Feb. 1954, addressed to his wife, Laura, reveals it. He writes there:

It is rather difficult to write to you because everything I say or think or read is read aloud by the group of psychologists whom I met in the ship. I hoped that they would lose their art after I went ashore but the artful creatures can communicate from many hundreds of miles away. Please don't think this is balmy, I should certainly have thought so three weeks ago, but it is a fact & therefore doesn't worry me particularly .... But it is a huge relief to realize that I am merely the victim of the malice of others, not mad myself as I really feared for a few days. 269

Pinfold also thinks in a similar vein and accordingly counsels his wife not to be perturbed by his madness.

The parallels indicated above create an impression that the novel holds no more than an autobiographical interest. But that is not so. Such an impression is misleading as it detracts attention from the artistic significance of the novel. Gustave Flaubert, the noted nineteenth century French novelist, says in a letter to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie:
It is one of my principles that a writer should not be his own theme. An artist must be in his work like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful; he should be everywhere felt, but nowhere seen.270

Waugh's persona, Gilbert Pinfold also holds similar views:

He regarded his books as objects which he had made, things quite external to himself to be used and judged by others.271

Waugh himself once said, 'I am not interested in myself, it is these works I make that interest me',272 thereby falling in line with those artists who have upheld the impersonality of art. Though materials with which Waugh has composed this novel were such as had occurred in his own life, yet they contained within them elements that were amenable to an artistic rendering of the attitude to change and progress. I contend that Waugh saw in his madness; after his recovery, the conflict between a natural and inherent static character, on the one hand and a superimposed dynamic facade of personality, on the other. By grafting his madness on his artistic creation, Pinfold, Waugh sought to expose the ridiculous inadequacy of both attitudes to life in comparison with the religious one. The artist within him, therefore, seized the opportunity of transmuting his personal experiences into an impersonal work of art and thereby also achieve an artistic transcendence of his own limitations.

We have seen that in Waugh's comic vision of life, a static attitude to life implies withdrawal from the absurd
motion of the world of change, and a dynamic attitude, participation in the world of change under the delusive impression that secular change fathers progress. Very early in his life, Waugh showed a 'static' tendency in himself. Waugh’s preference, as a child, for the things of the past clearly demonstrates it. In his own words:

This cellar and this wilderness I took as my special province, thus early falling victim to the common English confusion of the antiquated with the sublime, which has remained with me; all my life I have sought dark and musty seclusions, like an animal preparing to whelp.273

The confusion of the antiquated with the sublime is a typical static trait that Waugh himself explored in the tragi-comic end of Tony Last. The confusion, therefore, sheds light on Waugh’s dual attitude to life. Though, at the emotional level, he chose to withdraw from the high action of a world in flux, yet, at the intellectual level, he realised his folly in mistaking the placidity of a withdrawn static life for the stability of the transcendental hub-reality of Roman Catholicism. It is the latter that shapes his artistic works and in consequence, he is able to transcend his personal limitations, as well. In work after work, Waugh rejects both the static and the dynamic ways of existence, while keeping himself firmly anchored in the sub-specie aeternitatis vision of the hub of life. Interestingly enough, while he is able to transcend his staticity in the creative process of art, it is precisely because of
his artistic calling that he is also able to suckle his 
staticity. What is being attempted here is a differentia-
tion between the artist and his art, one that Pinfold and 
Waugh themselves admit. The trade of an artist, being more 
of an observant and retirining nature than an active one, the 
artist can easily slip into the life of a recluse. Not 
unexpectedly, therefore, Waugh took to a sort of semi-
feudal life towards his middle age when he shifted to the 
country side. Jeffrey Heath has rightly said that "Essen-
tially, Waugh's love of the artistic life was a love of 
solitude...". Unfortunately, critics who mistake the 
artist for his art have criticised him for being a conser-
vative reactionary in trying to glorify and play up redund-
ant values of the past. They overlook that in Waugh's 
fiction it is these very values which are shown obsolete 
and culpably inadequate. When Waugh ridicules his static 
characters who are invariably men of letters, he is in a way 
condemning his own personal prejudices. Dennis Barlow is the 
one exception who like Carl Van Vichten is the 'one man of 
letters who is also a man of the world'.

While writing The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold (1957), 
Waugh grafted his staticity on Pinfold, a middle-aged nove-
list, passing his 'long, lonely, tranquil days at Lychpole, 
a secluded village some hundred miles from London'. In 
this respect, Pinfold is a precise replica of his creator. 
A little ahead, Waugh elaborates the reasons for his staying 
away from London at a remote place and he attributes them
to his concern for privacy: "Since the end of the war his life had been strictly private." In his static concern for privacy, Pinfold fully resembles his creator who too shunned public life on account of his static character. Lest Mr. Pinfold's seclusion should be mistaken for mere friendlessness, Waugh says: "But Mr. Pinfold was far from friendless and he set great store by his friends". Pinfold thus occurs in the long line of static-artistic characters and is a sign of Waugh's growing artistic genius which could now turn inwards.

Paradoxically enough, the trade of an artist not only helped Waugh's static personality to flourish but also exposed it to the dangers of the dynamic world of his audience. In the words of Waugh,

There is no art or profession, except possibly higher mathematics, which one can practise without exposing oneself to amateur criticism and interference.

In the essay, 'People Who Want to Sue Me', he goes on to elaborate how his readers have many a time tried to drag him into public controversies by imputing motives of caricaturing real-life persons in the depiction of his characters. Some would go to the extent of suggesting to him about the people he could put into his books. To one such proposer Waugh retorted that he did not put real-life people into books; instead they 'take themselves out'. To keep the incursion of the dynamic world at bay, he put off
such sneakers into his privacy by not only disallowing people to meet him but also by a snobbish and ogreish front specially assumed for the purpose. Martin Stannard has rightly said that

The real Mr. Waugh, however, would never stand up before the microphone or camera. There was always a melodramatic disguise, a parodied prejudice, to defend his privacy. 281

By behaving thus Waugh was in effect employing the dynamic world's own weapons against it. Jeffrey Heath who has analysed this split between the static and the dynamic in Waugh's self says:

At Heath Mount School Waugh was both aggressive and artistic. The same divided temperament is apparent in Waugh at Lancing College, which he attended on 17 May 1917. Waugh's diaries for the period (they do not begin until 1919) are the product of a public self concerned with advancement and prestige, but there is at the same time a persistent preoccupation with art and the need for privacy. 282

In fact from an early age, as Heath's analysis also shows, Waugh's preoccupation with the furtherance of his public self was a means to protecting his own insecure and retiring self from the unjust censure of a dynamic world.

Just as Waugh transferred his static character to Pinfold, so did he his dynamic facade. Pinfold too has imposed on his static self, a dynamic front which has lent him a dual personality, thereby. Outlining the nature of this superimposition in his personality, Waugh writes:
He was neither a scholar nor a regular soldier; the part for which he cast himself was a combination of eccentric don and testy colonel and he acted it strenuously, before his children at Lychpole and his cronies in London, until it came to dominate his whole outward personality.

What, therefore, started as a protective guise came to dominate his entire personality, after sometime. The 'adult shell' of dynamism that he has raised round himself protects his 'modesty' from intrusive interviewers and the young men and women who were employed to write (his) 'profiles' on account of his being a reasonably famous novelist. Just as the trade of a novelist exposed Waugh to the dangers of the dynamic world, so does it in Pinfold's case. Both concoct a similar remedy or should it be said that Pinfold borrows his creator's way of escape.

The co-existence of the two irreconcilable attitudes of static and dynamic human natures has led to the creation of a schizophrenic divide in the personality of Pinfold as it has in Waugh's own. Thus the novelist succeeds in translating his madness into one of his protagonists in a way that prunes the experience of all extra-literary associations. Waugh illustrates the division within Pinfold's personality in these words:

When he ceased to be alone, when he swung into his club or stumped up the nursery stairs, he left half of himself behind, and the other half swelled to fill its place.

In Put Out More Flags, Angela Lyne's insomnia, an anticipatory symptom of madness, had resulted from the superimposition
of a static facade on an essentially dynamic self. In Pinfold, Waugh has reversed the process. Pinfold's insomnia and later madness arise from the superimposition of a dynamic front on a quint-essentially static personality. The hallucinations that Pinfold has, are not mere nothings but an outward projection of his own superimposed dynamic self. In being pitted against them, he, who is essentially a static person, is fighting his own superimposed dynamic self. His madness thus becomes an allegorical device that creditably externalises the psychological conflict between the static and the dynamic halves of his personality.

Lionel Stevenson has, therefore, rightly pointed out the uniqueness of this 'excursion into psycho-analysis' in Waugh's work. Even when Priestley accepts the psychological nature of the conflict in the novel, he fails to apprehend the true nature of the divide in Pinfold's personality. He maintains wrongly enough:

He is not a Catholic landed gentleman pretending to be an author. He is an author pretending to be a Catholic landed gentleman. But why, you may ask, should he not be both? Because they are not compatible. And this is not merely my opinion. It is really Pinfold's opinion too.

Priestley appears to have overlooked the fact that the roles of an author and of a Catholic country gentleman, far from differing with one another, aid one another as both roles are symptomatic of a static attitude to life. Waugh was therefore quick to retaliate to this interpretation, in his famous essay 'Anything Wrong with Priestley?'
in which he imputed Priestley's harsh criticism to his socialist aversion for the aristocracy. Waugh opines:  

No, what gets Mr. Priestley's goat (supposing he allows such a deleterious animal in his lush pastures) is my attempt to behave like a gentleman.  

David Lodge is nearer the truth when he maintains that Pinfold's hallucinations are the displaced and distorted projections of Mr. Pinfold-Waugh's public and private life.

What is fascinating about the hallucinations is that they are "displaced" and distorted projections of Mr. Pinfold-Waugh's public and private life. The "ordeal" is therefore a kind of identity crisis and the writing up of the experience a therapeutic exercise in self-analysis.  

Having seen how elements within Waugh's own harrowing experience of madness were amenable to an artistically objective treatment, we may now safely consider the novel, in its own right. A dual narrative scheme helps Waugh to unfold his unique comic vision of life. Within the circular narrative framework of Gilbert Pinfold, the split-personality, falling sick, voyaging to Ceylon to recuperate his failing health and recovering only after his return from Colombo, is inset the allegorical narrative framework of Gilbert Pinfold, the static man, confronting his superimposed dynamic self, being ridiculed and tormented initially but triumphing in the long run, over his 'dynamic' adversary.
As has already been emphasised, the countryside represents the static world in Waugh. As the chief protagonist of this novel, Gilbert Pinfold, is a static character, so, he prefers the calm placid and unchanging life of the village of Lychpole. Accordingly, towards the end of his career, he has set up his house here in the manner of feudal lords. His preference for this obsolete style of life, like Tony Last’s, is a sign again of his ‘static’ character. Pinfold endangers the unchanging placidity of his life when he resolves to quit Lychpole and make for Ceylon. The life on board the ship, bound for Ceylon, is unlike that of Lychpole. While the life there is completely public, the one at Lychpole is private. Pinfold’s decision, thus, exposes him to the dangers that beset a static character in the dynamic world. His mistake is not unlike that of other static characters in Waugh. Paul Pennyfeather, Adam Fenwick-Symes, Tony Last, William Boot and Ambrose Silk all suffer in their own ways for taking such a rash step. Waugh suggests the dynamism of the public world aboard the ship, by naming it after one of Shakespeare’s most queer and repulsive characters, Caliban. He is neither complete man nor a complete monster. He, therefore, combines in himself the guile of man and the barbarity of beasts. By naming the ship after him, Waugh gives us an idea of the deep-rooted dynamism in modern secular society in a most artistic and non-committal way. Pinfold shall have to battle, like Tony Last, against such a barbaric world. The first narrative
ends with Pinfold embarking the ship S.S. Caliban.

The narrative framework set within the first, begins with Pinfold's going off his mind on board the ship. Pinfold's madness externalises his superimposed dynamic self in the shape of hallucinations and thus begins the hilarious comedy of static Pinfold's conflict with his superimposed dynamic self. Pinfold's hallucinations people the world of the ship, S.S. Caliban, with the most unabashed and brutal persons and the atmosphere of the ship soon acquires the nature of its apotheosis in Shakespeare's The Tempest. Pinfold, however, does not realize that the supposed monstrous characters stalking on board the ship, are a manifestation of his own ogreish front. Ignorance of the true character of this battle and his own personality, renders him ridiculous and Waugh draws much fun at his expense. The allegorical conflict between the real self which is static and the false self, which is dynamic, becomes, therefore, a perfect objective correlative for Waugh's idea of the rejection of both the static and the dynamic worlds as both tend to ignore the significance of the Roman Catholic hub of life in the progress of mankind. The rejection is cast in a comic mould for while the static man is ridiculed for his helplessness in combating the dynamic world, the latter itself does not escape comic censure for its caddishness. The two narratives, however, are not disjoint. While the second narrative unfolds itself, the first narrative does not cease altogether. It continues to hang about
like the halo of a saint, manifesting itself in the split-
personality - Pinfold's comically abortive attempts at
knowing the truth about his hallucinations.

The allegorical conflict begins with the introduction
of the static Pinfold to the dynamic world of his halluci-
nations. In the state of hallucination, the static Pinfold
over-hears some bright young people playing jazz and causing
nuisance by its uproarious noise. Later, he overhears about
a Lascar crew member getting hurt in work and the Captain's
cold and merciless attitude towards him. Still later, he
overhears a conversation full of recriminations against a
man who appears to have seduced the woman who Pinfold names
Goneril. The Captain of the ship beats him so much so that
he dies and is consequently thrown overboard. The static
Pinfold is horrified by this frightening barbarity of the
dynamic world. The first narrative intrudes here in Pinfold's
attempt to know the nature of his hallucinations. When Pin-
fold tries to gauge the reaction of the other passengers
to these disconcerting events, he discovers, to his dismay,
that none of them is aware of them. Not ready yet to realise
the reality of his madness and the identification of the
dynamic self, he circumvents the truth by attributing these
bizarre happenings to defective wiring in the ship. Persis-
ting with illusions renders Pinfold comic in the Platonic
sense of the term.
The microcosmic conflict between the static Pinfold and the dynamic world acquires a threatening note when the supposed hooligans, acting out plays near his cabin, warn him of a physical assault. When Pinfold tries to confront them by coming out, he finds no one outside. So he returns disappointed to his cabin. Immediately afterwards, the girls in this group rob Pinfold of his peace of mind with a loud bawdy song. The central protagonist in Kafka's *Trial* is confronted with a similar problem in the court room where he has been summoned unexpectedly. The hero finds the table of the jury covered with obscene photographs and one man in the court-room trying to seduce a woman. The world that baffles Kafka's hero also perplexes Waugh's protagonist. In both cases, however, this world is in actuality that part of the hero's own self which is being denied. Waugh makes Pinfold look comic as does Kafka, for his inability to tear down the veil of ignorance and see the reality clearly. While this illusion lasts, the microcosmic struggle of the static Pinfold continues.

The static Pinfold now finds himself in a world deprived of order, a trait that likens it to the highly dynamic world of savagery and barbarity. He can neither rid himself of these hooligans nor seek remedy against them as the Captain of the ship is, himself, no more upright than those hooligans. The Captain, however, gets exonerated soon after Pinfold overhears a supposed B.B.C. programme. By
chance the programme happens to be discussing him only. Its unjustified censure and personal vendetta infuriates him and he comes round to the inference that the episode involving the Captain, Goneril and the murdered man must have been a B.B.C. play.

Now it was apparent that many of the sounds in his cabin emanated from the Broadcasting House, he became certain that what he had over-heard was part of a play. The similarity of June's voice and Goneril's seemed to confirm it.289

Pinfold's cocksureness in having lighted upon the reality of the conversation involving the Captain renders him comic for it is no nearer the reality than his previous conclusion. Fortified thus, he sees an ally in him in his war against the dynamic world of the hooligans.

The next episode that brings out the conflict between the static Pinfold and the dynamic world is entitled the International incident. He overhears a conspiratorial plot that involves the forcible substitution of the dark little old man, on 'H.M.G.'s secret service', by him so that the former may be protected from the Spanish officials hunting for him. Pinfold, like most static characters, is patriotic, an ideal that has become obsolete in the age of mercenaries. He would, therefore, have gladly agreed to perform this arduous task, if consulted and taken into confidence. What infuriates Pinfold is that the Captain wishes to force him into doing it without trying to seek his cooperation even once. The concern for his country,
however, prevails upon his rage and Pinfold resolves that he would perform this substitute role but that only after making his adversaries aware of his willingness in doing so. When the time arrives, Pinfold saunters out to carry out his resolve. At this point, the first narrative blends with the second. That is to say, the macrocosmic action coalesces with the microcosmic conflict here. The split-personality Pinfold is thoroughly disappointed to find the deck deserted and no Spanish officials holding the ship captive. For the first time, he fears that he may be going mad. His piteous outburst makes him a person deserving of our sympathy despite being the butt of ridicule for his ignorance about the real nature of his adversaries.

He had been dauntless a minute before in the face of his enemies. Now he was struck with real fear, something totally different from the superficial alarms he had once or twice known in moments of danger, something he had quite often read about and dismissed as over-writing. He was possessed from outside himself with atavistic pain; 'O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven', he cried.290

The pearls of laughter that he overhears from Goneril convince him wrongly that it must have been a trick played by the hooligans to persecute him. However unpalatable this idea may be, Pinfold finds it still soothing as it means that he has not gone mad.

He might be unpopular; he might be ridiculous; but he was not mad.291
Once again Pinfold fails in comprehending the real nature of his hallucinations which alone can redeem him from the ordeal of persecution.

Upon approaching the captain with the complaint against the young men and women, supposedly belonging to one family, that have continuously been harassing him, he learns that no family travelling by the ship matches his specifications. Instead, there is a quiet family of Angels. Upon hearing the name, Angel, Pinfold is reminded of the Angel who had once come to interview him for the B.B.C. and soon concludes that this family must include that man from the B.B.C. Having made himself believe that, the static self of Pinfold finds itself facing an inquisition, which is staffed by Angel, Goneril and the other hooligans. His cross-examination resembles that of Joseph K. in Kafka's The Trial where the jury that accuses the hero is itself culpable.

With a view to escaping from his persecutors, Pinfold leaves the ship, makes for Cairo from where he flies to Colombo. But he gets no respite from persecution. It is only when Pinfold is on his way back home that these persecutors soften and even adopt a plaintive note in their speech. They plead that he should not divulge their identity to anyone in England. The static Pinfold refuses to oblige them for he neither trusts their word nor wishes to shield them from censure and just punishment. Angel's threat,
"All right, Gilbert. You'll pay for this", lacks strength as the static personality in Pinfold has at last asserted its supremacy over the dynamic self whose projections these persecuting hallucinations are.

With the successful resolution of this microcosmic conflict between the static and the dynamic selves of Pinfold, the path becomes clear for him to tread back to normalcy. Upon learning from his wife that Angel had all along been in England only, he begins to understand the true nature of the hallucinations. When therefore Doctor Drake, his medical attendant, considers his hallucinations as a 'simple case of poisoning', Mr. Pinfold's reaction is different from his wife's.

'That's a relief', said Mrs. Pinfold, but Mr. Pinfold accepted this diagnosis less eagerly. He knew, and the others did not know - not even his wife, least of all his medical adviser - that he had endured a great ordeal, and unaided, had emerged the victor.

Priestley appears to have overlooked the significance of this passage, apart from distorting the nature of the psychological conflict in the novel, when he says:

Let Pinfold take warning. He will break down again, and next time may never find a way back to his study. The central self he is trying to deny ... will crack if it is walled up again within a false style of life.

In fact, Pinfold is very much aware that the pills were not to blame so much as the false self he had superimposed
on himself. Fortified with this knowledge, Pinfold cogitates to transmute his harrowing experience into a work of art; an action that echoes Waugh's own. The novel therefore ends on a note of self-discovery. John Raymond appears to have overlooked the neat culmination of Pinfold's identity crisis in self-discovery at the end, while coming down unjustly upon it for lacking a proper denouement.

My only criticism is that the book lacks a satisfactory denouement. This, however, is the fault of all case-histories.

But what Northrop Frye in his 'The Argument of Comedy' (1949) calls epiphany is not effected here for the simple reason that though the protagonist discovers his true self and thereby gets reborn, his rebirth lacks significance as it does not lead him ahead towards the nerve-centre of the wheel of life which alone can guarantee real progress. Pinfold's journey of self-discovery ends up in his burrowing into a static world that is far from the hub of life. Jeffrey Heath appears to have ignored the thematic thrust of this novel while considering all novels after *Brideshead Revisited* to be displaying the acceptance of the correct refuge from the dynamic world.

In the novels before *Brideshead Revisited* Waugh's protagonists typically find solitary refuges which are false... while in the fiction of later date they discover the correct refuge which has been adumbrated by the false ones: the Household of the Faith.
What Heath enunciates here applies more aptly to the Sword of Honour Trilogy, and Helena, the only two books that carry out this thematic pattern after Brideshead Revisited. The thematic pattern of this novel is well reinforced by its unique structure. Waugh conveys the absurdity of the world into which Pinfold thrusts himself by the circular pattern of the narrative concerning his voyage. Pinfold begins his voyage from England and like a man struggling on a wheel, returns to it, at the end of his voyage. Pinfold's return to Lychpole, after his circular trip, is suggestive of the return of a spectator to the spectator's gallery after jumping off a circular wheel. The step is regressive rather than progressive for Pinfold does not pierce through the absurd circular motion of the wheel to its transcendental hub.

Waugh's comic vision of life this unfolds itself with the subtle and implied use of the symbolic imagery of the wheel of life both at the thematic and structural level.

The artistic coherence that Waugh has lent to his own experiences while transmuting them into an artistic work speaks of Waugh's mature artistry in handling a theme so intractable by reason of its personal character. What Waugh said of Firbank may very rightly be applied to him as well.

His introduction of his own name in The Flower Beneath the Foot and Prancing Nigger is intolerable vieuxjeu; perhaps Firbank's sense of humour had reached a degree of sophistication when it could
turn on itself and find the best fun of all in the
doubly banal; if so it was a development where few
will be able to follow him.²⁹⁶

Even Philip Toynbee concedes that Waugh showed maturity in
handling a theme that turned upon his own self. He says that
Waugh has begun to explore depths of experience which were
previously beyond his reach - or at least beyond his desire.²⁹⁷

However, both the Times Literary Supplement

He is a light weight who has suffered from being
bracketed with completely different writers like
Mr. Graham Greene,²⁹⁸

and Donat O' Donnell

... he has chosen to make 'a light novel' out of
material fundamentally unsuited to such treatment.
It may be said that the comic treatment of the
grimmest themes ... is precisely where Mr. Waugh
excels. That is true when as a satirist he allows
himself a free hand ... but not when he is treating
sacred subjects such as himself²⁹⁹

would seem to betray an insensitivity to the thematic pattern
underlying the novel while mistaking the comic element in it
for a sign of its lightness. In fact, the comic mould of
Waugh's novel is a measure of his superior artistic ability
in rendering a profound vision of life in an artistically
agreeable manner.

Thus, an analysis of Waugh's comic vision of life
in the lesser comedies reveals the absurdity of seeking
progress through secular change.