Chapter IV

Tony Last’s Journey in Search for Selflessness and Caring Soul in A Handful of Dust

“It would be a dull world if we all thought alike” (90).

This chapter presents Tony Last’s journey in search for selflessness and caring soul in A Handful of Dust. A Handful of Dust is link of the different segments of the society. Evelyn Waugh has taken the title A Handful of Dust from T.S.Eliot’s The Waste Land, “I will show you something different from either / Your shadow at morning striding behind you / Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you; / I will show you fear in A Handful of Dust” (27-30). At the age of thirty, Evelyn Waugh published A Handful of Dust (1934). During this period of his career, every book, Waugh wrote was more successful, and is one of the most penetrating of Waugh’s novels. He is from a social realist his work shows the awareness of political and economic developments. He himself observed that it dealt entirely with human behavior. Garnett points out that, “Personal grievances and frustrations gnawed
him.... With *A Handful of Dust* he decided to go on the attack: to expose the savagery of contemporary life” (99). During this period he filled the years with reading, writing, and traveling. Also during this time Waugh hosted parties, attended lectures, visited art and sculpture exhibitions, often accompanied friends to the theater, and enjoyed sundry cocktail parties and social gatherings.

To some extent, the notion found expression in *A Handful of Dust*. In July of 1929, Waugh learned his wife, Evelyn Gardner, had fallen in love with John Heygate. Heygate makes the underestimate incidence of adultery in Waugh’s circle. Waugh was deeply hurt and it came as a shock to him. The novel *A Handful of Dust* is an attempt to bring out the evil effects of a marriage break off due to infidelity of women. Nicholas Joost connects the line, “I will show you fear in *A Handful of Dust*” to “the handful of dust symbolically sprinkled upon the coffin in the traditional Christian rite of burial” (181). After a brief attempt to reconcile, he filed for divorce in September of 1929.

On a cruise in 1933, Waugh met Gabriel Herbert, who later invited Waugh and others from the cruise to the
Italian Villa Altachiara, one of the homes of the Herbert family, and while there he met Laura Herbert, his future wife. Despite proving disloyal to Tony, Brenda Last did not find satisfaction with John Beaver and ultimately she had to get married to Jock Grant-Menzies. In the end, she got only a handful of dust. Eliot, according to Clement, believed that his present civilisation, “was doomed because it repudiated all versions of the doctrine of original sin and refused to acknowledge the insane and irrational springs of wickedness in human nature” (92). In the same way, Tony Last also could not get the things he cherished. He also remained a tortured soul throughout his life. The four lines Waugh quotes from The Waste Land allude to London, which is the “waste land” of Eliot’s poem. Joost says, Tony’s search for the lost city is “echos the quest of the Grail in ‘What the Thunder Said,’ the last section of Eliot’s poem” (181). He was mentally suffered by his surrounding characters, like mainly on his wife Brenda and her liaison beaver.

In A Handful of Dust, Waugh tries to narrow the focus of his message, as he accentuates the value of tradition and the necessity to respect the past and through this aspect how the character suffered. Firchow
says, “shadow striding at morning behind you” and the “shadow at evening rising to meet you” symbolises the past and the future (409). In this novel, Waugh explores the effects twentieth-century progress has on English families living on country estates like Hetton. Waugh converted to Catholicism several years before publishing *A Handful of Dust*, and his conversion stands as one of the most important events in his life, for it affected his choice for a wife, the parts of himself he changed or gave up, and the way he raised and educated his children. Robert Murray Davis compares the novel to the poem and says:

The novel is in some ways a deeper indictment of contemporary civilisation because it chronicles social and moral disintegration so pervasive that the characters are unaware of it and the omniscient authorial voice reveals it primarily through implication. (Introduction ix)

The novel deals with the futility, aimlessness, and the boredom of the so-called modern life. Brenda Last got fed up with the humdrum life as a wife of Tony Last and wanted to escape from this monotonous life. She wished for a place in the social circles. With this purpose she
got inclined towards John Beaver. She got so involved headlong into this love-cum-obsession that she gave more importance to him than to her own son John. The fates of Waugh's characters are inextricably tied to place; throughout the story, Waugh uses the contexts of Tony's suffering experiences to portray the devolution of British society.

The protagonist, Tony has suffered at three places in this novel. The first one is from - Hetton Abbey, his ancestral house, the second one is from - London, through his wife Brenda and her love affair with Andrew and a third one is from - Amazonian jungle, by Mr. Todd, and both he reflect the development of affect character.

Waugh’s inquiry is to discover how Tony Last achieves his ultimate fate from his sufferings and creates some interesting commentary on the novel’s protagonist. This novel is neither the first nor the only novel in which Waugh uses a piece of architecture to inform one of his characters’ personalities. In fact, many of his novels define characters through an architectural construct like in Decline and Fall and Brideshead Revisited. Waugh’s use of architecture is to explain facets of personality. Architecture is, after
all, the most visually pervasive and socially determined of the visual arts:

But the general aspect and atmosphere of the place; the line of its battlements against the sky; the central clock tower...ecclesiastical gloom of the great hall,...painted in diapers of red and gold...shafts of polished granited with vine-wreathed capitals,...lancet windows of armorial stained glass...and fitted with twenty electric bulbs;...the cavernous chill of the more remote corridors...dining hall with its hammer-beam roof...bedrooms with their brass bedsteads, each with a frieze of Gothic text, each named from Malory, Yseult, Elaine, Mordred and Merlin, Gawaine and Bedivere, Lancelot, Perceval, Tristram, Galahad....(17-18)

An architectural medium is exactly what Waugh attempts to do with Tony Last, and first few pages of A Handful of Dust that Hetton is meant to be that architectural medium.

Tony Last's, absorption in his country squire existence at Hetton. The architecture of Hetton Abbey reflects Tony's character. Johnston says that Hetton symbolises an “insulated world,” and she maintains the Lasts are in “a position that isolates and protects them”
Like Tony, Hetton evokes a bygone age and is therefore hopelessly out of style, misunderstood by all who see it. His obsessive love for Hetton is abrasive of modern society. Devotion and compassion toward one another, a core reason is why many relationships these days work out and last in a lifetime. Trusting someone is essential and basically the backbone of all relationships. Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* is a satirical novel that involves the story of Tony Last and his wife, Lady Brenda. Tony is more in love with his house, Hetton Abbey, than with his wife.

Hetton's defiant existence in the face of general disdain is a manifestation of Tony's perseverance even though his peers consider him outdated. The description of Hetton from the country-house guidebook at the novel's outset reads like an epitaph, encouraging sightseers to pass by and move on to better things. Tony's company is similarly foregone by British society—second-rate John Beaver is Tony's only visitor in weeks. Tony's reverence for tradition alienates his wife, Brenda, who abandons him just as day-trippers have forsaken Hetton. Tony is misunderstood not only because he represents the past, but also because he seems irrevocably stuck there and
Tony remains contentedly static in the modern world. His days are unvaried manifestations of the values and Hetton represents dignity, hierarchy, and community. In Hetton the space is a crowded museum of his life and the place is filled with photos, eggs, butterflies, fossils, and shelves upon shelves of books.

Hetton is Tony's self-constructed idyll. Crabbe states, “The initial loss of Tony’s family symbolises the estrangement of modern man from society” (62). Hetton represents a golden age of chivalry British tradition; it also imposes its outdated worldview on Tony Last. The abbey constantly reinforces his “mad feudalism” and facilitates stasis. Tony has no need to move beyond the confines of his own world. Extraneous desires do, however, entice Brenda, who is repulsed by the stagnancy that her husband and his home perpetuate.

Tony seems to be empty of any passion except for Hetton Abbey, which is listed in the guidebook. Nevertheless Hetton's grounds are open to the public and tours are available upon request. The intricate, but a gloomy description of Hetton exemplifies the lack of interest to the public. Although from Tony's perspective, Hetton is magnificent. The contrary description of
Hetton's guidebook and that of Tony's is obvious. Hetton's guidebook and the public basically mock the house while Tony praises it. Tony's name indicates that he will be the "Last" of his ancestral line. Critics suggest several other intentions of the name. Bergonzi contends that his name symbolises:

He is the ultimate survivor of a former age and scheme of values, whom nobody understands....He is too good for the world he is born into, and a predestined victim, a scapegoat who must be cast out to a living death in the wilderness. (106)

Despite everyone's opposition Tony shows little or no care in what others think and justifies his neglect towards others including his wife Brenda.

Hence, Tony derives great pleasure from Hetton Abbey—the ancestral home, in which he takes even greater pride—the physical manifestation of the protagonist’s Victorian constitution through the Neo-Gothic medium of Hetton. Tony Last's love of Hetton is farcical in the novel; his only identity is tied up in the garishly remodeled country house. He still has a light touch, but those things he is touching are more real, less arbitrary, and less patently solely a product of the
narrator’s inventive imagination than before. He is more interested in people, and so he is telling the story, his rhetoric, what he chooses to say and how he tells it’s different, because he is now more interested in people, little of the pithy.

Tony is so immersed in his Victorian aesthetic that he fails to connect with Brenda’s position. Tony Last can only conceptualize his mansion as a retreat, not a focal point for entertainment. For Brenda, on the other hand, Hetton’s sole purpose is to serve as a forum for merriment. The tension of this scene, like so many others between Brenda and Tony, arises from the couple’s failure to understand others viewpoint. Tony cannot abandon his fixation for the Gothic aesthetic, and Brenda cannot adopt it. Stephan Jay Greenblatt aptly says:

In *A Handful of Dust* Waugh returns to England to tell a seemingly simple story of the failure of a marriage.... What might have been a rather dull “bedroom farce”, however, is transformed by Waugh into a terrifying and bitter examination of humanism and modern society, which is the culmination of his art. (21-22)

The couple’s failure to understand one another in the novel is also conspicuous in their views of Hetton
itself. For Tony, Hetton is the idealized environment, and Brenda could be more repugnant.

Tony’s main motto of life was to provide glory by renovating his outdated ancestral house Hetton. This is symbolic of their retreat to past glories and traditionalism. However, by describing the house as devoid of any interest in the country Guide Book, the narrator establishes the futility of his pursuits. He loves the house, but Brenda only tolerates it. Tony and Brenda were two separate poles standing wide apart.

Tony was a hardcore believer of traditional values and rituals, and he accepted them without questioning them and started finding pleasures in them, but in reality he was living in a world which was not there, he was living in the past which was nowhere and while living in that world, he neglected the present. However, in their very nature his desire to provide Hetton its lost glory was an attempt to remain in the past; his vague belief that by defending outdated Hetton, he can regain the glorious past, brings out his distance from the present, as he never wanted to come out of it.

Occasionally they entertain, and one weekend, John Beaver comes to visit. On a business trip to London, Tony met
Beaver at his club and extended a half-hearted invitation. The unmarried Beaver is unemployed and has no direction in life:

Brenda’s stay at Hetton lasted only for three nights. Then she returned to London, saying that she had to see about the flat. It did not, however, require very great attention. There was only the color of the paint to choose and some few articles of furniture. Mrs Beaver had them ready for the inspection, a bed, a carpet, a dressing-table and chair – there was not room for more.... (57)

Brenda goes to London weekly to shop and to visit her sister. She enjoys Beaver when he visits Hetton, and thus she asks him to escort her to a party the next time she goes to London. He agrees and they begin an affair. Brenda tells Tony she is bored at Hetton and wants to attend economics classes in the city. He hesitates, but eventually rents Brenda a flat in London, where she carries on her affair with Beaver. Beaver was characterized by his dialogue with his mother, so Tony is characterized by a dialogue scene with Brenda.

The mock-grandeur of Hetton is offset by the parceling of living space in London and gaining fashion. The modern convenience of having a small flat in town for
shopping trips, in no small way connected to the rank materialism Waugh condemns throughout the narrative, appeals to Brenda last as an escape from the gloomy solitude of country living:

John Beaver lived with his mother at the house in Sussex Gardens where they had moved after his father’s death. There was little in it to suggest the austerely elegant interiors which Mrs Beaver planned for her customers. It was crowded with the unsalable furniture of two larger houses, without pretension to any period, least of all to the present.... (7)

She meets Mrs. Beaver to view of possible locations—Mrs. Beaver comes to symbolize all that is shallow, immoral, and materialistic in modernity. Firchow more aggressively concludes that Mrs. Beaver symbolises, “gnawing greed incarnate,” in that she “makes a profession of hollowing out the past and chrome-plating it” (409). John Beaver too is in constant pursuit of a more material existence, although he, like a woman who is husband hunting, waits to secure it through means other than employment. The Beavers' social aspirations are calculated in material terms, and they effortlessly fit the unspoken “tyrannous element” of modernity. Mrs. Beaver is remarkably in tune
with the type of accommodations required by the modern set with which Brenda becomes quickly caught up.

Brenda is bored and she thinks as her life is shallow. Brenda is shallow, "'Anyway, this lets you out. You’ve done far more than most wives would do to cheer the old boy up.' 'Yes that’s certainly true,’ said Brenda” (95). The immediate reply from Brenda evidently illustrates the relationships she is encountered in or will be encountered in the future which are most crucial in her life. The amount of trust Tony had in Brenda played a huge role in their relationship. Implying that Tony's trust for Brenda is immense, he thinks that she is dedicated besides the fact that she is miles away from him for weeks at a time. Brenda, bored with Tony and his apparent desire to live in the past, being the lord of the manor type of person, turns her attention to John Beaver, a twenty-five year old socialite. The personalities and character traits of Tony and Brenda contributed to the end of their relationship:

On Monday morning Tony found this letter on his breakfast tray.

_Darling Tony,_
I am not coming back to Hetton. Grimshawe can pack everything and bring it to the flat. Then I shan’t want her any more.

You must have realised for some time that things were going wrong.

I am in love with John Beaver and I want to have a divorce and marry him. If John Andrew had not died things might not have happened like this. I can’t tell. As it is, I simply can’t begin over again. Please do not mind too much. I suppose we shan’t be allowed to meet while the case is on but I hope afterwards we shall be great friends. Anyway I shall always look on you as one whatever you think of me.

Best love from
Brenda. (125-126)

Pompousness, conceit and the actions motivated by these traits affected their lives in and outside of their marriage. Between, Tony and Brenda, Brenda is beautiful, and tony is innocent. Since they’ve been married five or six years, Brenda should be about ready to be bored. Their wealth goes into keeping up the house.

London acts as an emotional leech, depleting its inhabitants of emotion and humanity while cultivating vanity. All this makes Tony incompatible with Brenda because she was a young woman desperate to be a part of modern society and finds her satisfaction in London’s
glamorous shallow social life. She detests the house and its conventionality and finds satisfaction in a small one room flat in London. Deep in her heart, she always felt that Tony’s conventional ways are keeping her away from the modern world. Her affair with John Beaver was an effort to enter the world she always cherished. Beaver substituted Tony by accompanying her to the social parties in London and thus succeeded in finding a place in her heart. Though in himself, John Beaver was a worthless young socialite, most famous as the only spare man of London, who used to spend most of his time sitting next to his telephone expecting a last minute call inviting him for lunch or dinner. But due to his affair with Brenda, he suddenly became an attraction for everyone. The attitude of the whole society got changed towards him, which brought out the superficial and hypocritical nature of the aristocratic people, whose loyalties keep changing according to the power and position one holds.

On the other hand, through Brenda, Beaver wanted to enjoy the high social life, name, fame and attention and so he was in love with Brenda till he was getting it and therefore later on Brenda’s inability to help him in
getting the membership of the prestigious Brown’s club he took it against her. Moreover, later when Beaver realized that Brenda was not that ladder through which he can attain social success, he decided to leave her and went to America with his mother leaving Brenda helpless, which brought an end to their illegitimate relationship.

Tony's trouble was that he trusted Brenda too much. A marriage that lasts, however, has an abundant amount of trust. The trust Tony had for Brenda was the wrong kind of trust. Since the amount of trust was great, Brenda took advantage of it, by leaving the house for weeks at a time she found another man without Tony noticing any of it. Though confiding with a partner can be excellent for a relationship, if the amount exceeds over the top, it can be detrimental for a relationship. His friends try to console him and say she will be back, quoting examples of silly affairs that were really nothing more than a diversion for the people who were involved in the affair and fodder for gossip for the rest of the circle. Tony well known as beaver invades Hetton through Brenda.

Early in the novel Tony reflects that the hollowed battlements of Hetton were not in the current fashion. Tony in fact believes it his duty to preserve Hetton in
its fading splendor for his son without introducing the outside world. Tony hopes to raise his son as he himself was raised; the tradition of the house, and the Lasts' symbolic duty to their parish, is one Tony hopes to pass on.

Also the selfish and egotistical characteristics of Brenda are visible, by ignoring her "sympathetic and affectionate" qualities and focusing more on herself and her relations with others. Her disregards for the ones that are close to her soon become clear. The "imaginative, sympathetic" Brenda waits until her fortune-telling session ends before she receives a message that John is dead. Brenda is stunned and shocked. Clues in the message reveal that it was her son John Andrew who was dead, not John Beaver, "John...John Andrew... I... oh thank God" (119). Then she burst into tears. Brenda is relieved that it is her only child who is dead and not her lover, John Beaver. In this moment of shock and grief, she does not guard her words: "Oh thank God," she says. Waugh has captured the essence of Brenda's selfishness which is core-deep. The depth of her self-centeredness in this scene is so great that the one can feel the bite of Waugh's savage satire in this
portrayal of an immensely shallow woman, a woman who is not capable of love. Otherwise, she would never have even though “thank God” that it was her son, and not her effete and lazy lover who was dead. Brenda not only thought it, she spoke the word. Therefore, it is equivocal; Brenda is in fact living life for her own sake and no one else's.

The death of John Andrew marks a turning point in the novel. John Andrew’s unexpected death, then, is a critical hit to Tony’s notions of security. It is this first incident that begins to change his relationship with nostalgia and its objects and reveals the importance of the child in relationship to nostalgia within A Handful of Dust. The setting of the boy’s death is especially crucial to the beginning of the estate’s disintegration as a nostalgic fortress: the accident that ends John Andrew’s life takes place during a fox hunt on Hetton’s estate. Joost supposes the images of the fox hunt foreshadow the idea that, “life is a struggle in the jungle” (194). This fox hunt highlights the clear division of child and adult: John Andrew, a young boy, is allowed to go fox hunting, an adult event that is inappropriate for a child that requires constant
supervision from a nanny. According to Heath, the tradition of English horsemanship, "has degenerated into the spectacle of the fox hunt," which symbolises the "disorder and dislocation of upper-class England" (111).

The end result of the hunt is an accident in which John Andrew is struck and killed by another rider’s horses—a sort of punishment for his transgression from the age appropriate activity. McDonnell states that John Andrew represents, "the secular attitude toward death" (73). Since John Andrew is Tony and Brenda’s only child, the future of Last nostalgia is jeopardized by his abrupt death; if Tony dies before the estate is returned to its rightful place in British opinion, there will be no one left in the Last line to preserve Hetton. This is a threat to Tony’s physical and mental constructions of lasting nostalgia—but not an immediate death knell, since Tony is still relatively youthful and can still hole himself up within Hetton’s comforting space.

In the accident, the little boy falls from his horse and dies. Although the remark on this meanness is presented in free indirect speech, as the voice of local gossip, it represents the overall viewpoint of the novel. Hidden in such comments is the implied author’s judgment
of the society depicted. However, it is part of the novel’s psychological realism and dulling of explicit moral judgment that the child who is this society’s victim, suffering first loneliness and misery as his mother destroys his parents’ marriage, and then death on the expedition he has so looked forward to, is thoroughly unlikeable. He is spoilt and aware of his social status even at a very young age, openly expressing the snobbery of his class, where the adults are hypocritically more discreet.

John Andrew’s death provides Brenda with the realization, with the loss of Brenda and John Andrew, Tony can have no more illusions about the state of his emotional relationships. But he still has Hetton. The problem of the divorce is the entry point of the second critical child. Tony still clings to the last vestiges of his emotional nostalgia, allowing Brenda to appear as plaintiff in the divorce case despite her infidelity. In order to provide the court with evidence for a divorce, Tony and his lawyers stage a simulation of infidelity, renting a suite at a seaside hotel for Tony to carry on the performance of an affair. But the woman with whom Tony chooses to engage in this deception, Milly, brings
her eight-year-old daughter, Winnie, with them to the seaside resort—much to the surprise of Tony, the hotel reception clerk, and the detectives that have been hired to find proof of Tony’s unfaithfulness. Winnie’s presence complicates the simulation of infidelity, as one of the main reasons.

Though during her divorce proceedings, Brenda also realized the superficiality of her extramarital affair, but after losing Tony, she had no other choice then to stick with Beaver, and for this she continued to provide Beaver the privilege of high life despite running short of money:

‘I didn’t expect you’d take this line, Tony. I think it’s extremely unreasonable of you. After all, it’s absurd to pretend in these days that a single man can’t be perfectly comfortable on four thousand a year. It’s as much as I’ve ever had.’

‘It would mean giving up Hetton.’ (151)

She wants more money. In fact, she wants so much money that Tony will be forced to sell his beloved Hetton. Therefore, in order to feed Beaver, Brenda demanded alimony of two thousand pounds per year. Though earlier, she demanded only five hundred pounds per year for which
Tony also agreed without any written agreement and himself gave false proof of his infidelity so that Brenda can get divorced easily as he was in the habit of ‘loving and trusting Brenda’.

The inadequacy of Tony and his tradition to deal with the arbitrary blows of fate, becomes even more apparent in his reaction to Brenda's infidelity. The trouble is, of course, as Waugh says so succinctly and movingly, that he had fallen into the habit of loving and trusting her. Standing in his hotel in Brighton, accompanied by a slightly insane, but motherly whore and her obnoxious daughter and in the midst of the farcical adultery legally necessary for a British divorce, Tony maintains the facade of calm courtesy. But, as he discovers soon to his own cost, such outrageous circumstances still await him.

Tony refuses to give up Hetton for Brenda. Brenda is not at all nostalgic about the house—she cannot appreciate why Tony spends the majority of his income on its upkeep. She is modern and sees the country house way of life as antiquated and stale; thus, she abandons the house, the land, and the people who make up the fabric of the Last family heritage. However, this new development
for Tony meant giving up Hetton. Tony recognizes this would be in order to “buy Beaver for Brenda” and he refuses. Brenda’s supporters think Tony has behaved very badly. Tony becomes angry and, since the adultery is not real, decides he will give Brenda her divorce, but he will provide no settlement or alimony to her. He plans a six month trip abroad while Brenda ponders her situation.

The largest betrayal is John Andrew’s death itself; Hetton, which Tony has cultivated as a safe and comfortable space, is not truly safe for his son, who represented a future of continued nostalgia. And without Brenda, he has little chance of producing another heir that will continue the Lasts’ constructive project after Tony’s death. She attends classes during the week and goes to Hetton on weekends. Friends and relatives know about the affair, yet Tony learns of it only after his son, John Andrew, dies in a horseback-riding accident.

Brenda is sociable; Tony is content to admire Hetton and has no need of company. From the Brenda’s point of view, Tony deceived her into thinking he would be a good husband and betrayed her by being a dull and uninteresting man. Tony read the letter verbatim and took it literally. He interpreted it as the only reason for
Brenda leaving was her love for John. Obviously to Brenda, Tony was not showing enough affection and love towards her. Of course, there were a variety of other events like the death of their son, her constant treks to London and their altercations about the flat Brenda were suggesting to buy. Mainly the fact that Brenda didn't get enough attention and affection from her husband was the reason why they departed and went their separate ways. The trouble was that Tony didn't really know what Brenda wanted:

'*... My marriage was an ideally happy one,’ she read, ‘until shortly before Christmas last year when I began to suspect that my husband’s attitude had changed towards me. He always remained in the country when my studies took me to London. I realised that he no longer cared for me as he used to. He began to drink heavily and on one occasion made a disturbance at our flat in London, constantly ringing up when drunk and sending a drunken friend round to knock on the door. Is that necessary?’ *(146-147)*

This exemplifies the shyness of Tony. He obviously isn't very interested in a relationship and interacting to form one. He may be insecure about his feelings towards other
women other than his wife and interactions and that is the reason why Brenda is leaving him, because of his childlike actions in his relationships and easy aim to take advantage of him. This naivety, however, would have made him an easy target for a dedicated man-hunter like Brenda. She would have been able to manipulate him until he could no longer refuse to notice her.

Tony's sense of identity, social position, and purpose are tied up in the rambling old estate. Without Hetton he is lost, and he climbs to Hetton's symbolism and memories. Tony's nostalgia for the cloistered, vanishing lifestyle that Hetton represents is only retrospectively admirable; in refusing Brenda the divorce and alimony, he saves the hereditary estate for the impoverished Lasts on whom it is entailed. Tony discovers that he is surrounded by people with debased standards. There has been a reversal of vices and virtues. Marital infidel- it has become the most fashionable game of the period. Tony's revelation— his awareness of the disappearance of such traditional values and institutions as love, marriage, and family— comes to him during a phone conversation with his wife, Brenda.
Jock Grant-Menzies is a wealthy bachelor friend of Tony’s. They belong to the same aristocratic London club where they sometimes visit over drinks. Tony often entertains Jock at Hetton. Although Jock invites Tony to stay with him after Brenda asks for a divorce, his concern comes a little late. Jock knows about Brenda's affair with Beaver all along, but he never informs Tony. While Tony dedicates his income to the upkeep of Hetton, Jock, not yet owning such a place, enjoys socializing in the city.

His search for another place during his expedition was in fact the search for the same Hetton he left behind. Tony refuses to divorce Brenda – based on monetary reason rather than a desire to keep her bound to him. Instead, he leaves his beloved Hetton and goes to Brazil. Reserved and stodgy, Tony is far from an energetic extrovert. However, the mysterious Amazon can be understood as a kind of dark Eden for Tony to pursue, a chance to start anew far from his beloved but tainted England. Despite its exotic, natural state, the Amazonian jungle reveals more about London than London does about itself. The association that Waugh establishes is underscored by seamless cuts back and forth between the
jungle and London as the book draws to a close. Joost says, London symbolises, “the rootedness of the achieved, civilised life,” and the jungle symbolises, “the primitive savagery lurking everywhere in wait to destroy that life” (191).

There is a “city” in the jungle which does possess a measure of ordered life, though this is only too obviously not the city Tony had hoped to find, but the order is autocratically imposed by an illiterate madman. There are some peculiar similarities between Hetton Abbey and Mr. Todd's community. Both are dependent on Victorian culture; Hetton Abbey was built during the Victorian period and Dickens is the only source of culture in Todd's society.

Life at Hetton Abbey is an artificially ordered life surrounded by the wild, decadent life of Waugh's satiric London society; Todd's society is the ordered creation of a madman surrounded by the wild South American jungle. This society is an absurd one, yet when it is examined in terms of the other societies portrayed in the novel Waugh's purpose is revealed. Mr. Todd, “twists every good thing — the cross, healing, literature — to a bad end” (Crabbe 69). Todd acknowledges no authority other than
his own and expects that everything done in his community should be carried out under his control and for his good. This is not too far removed from the self-centred way of life Tony led at Hetton Abbey.

The madman has cut himself off from the outside world and this is exactly what Tony was trying to do at Hetton. In the jungle there is no respect for the human person, for his emotions, or for his rights; once again the comparison with London society is clear. Far from finding the lost city of some past civilization Tony has been allowed to discover a society in which all present day decadent social trends have come to their logical conclusion and in which a madman can assume control of society.

He failed to identify himself without Hetton and kept searching that past throughout his life, but this futile search ended when a mad recluse Todd stranded him and he found himself imprisoned in the books of Dickens. The books of Dickens had the same value for Todd as Hetton for Tony. And so the traits of his personality match with Reggie and Mr. Todd, who were also incapable of living in the present and so prefers living in the past. Reggie lives in his own dream world and often goes
on excavations to find one. Mr. Todd’s name could symbolise death, for the German word “tod” means death (Garnett 117). Similarly, Mr. Todd finds pleasure in the work of Dickens and lives in that world, which brings out his incapability to deal with the present:

> Although Mr Todd had lived in Amazonas for nearly sixty years, no one except a few families of Pie-wie Indians was aware of his existence. His house stood in a small savannah, one of those little patches of sand and grass that crop up occasionally in that neighbourhood, three miles or so across, bounded on all sides by forest. (209)

Mr. Todd in the novel is a symbol of a true aristocrat who was using his powers selfishly. Clement argues:

> The insane repetitiveness of Todd’s life is a distortion of Tony’s own meaningless routine of earlier days when he lived the life of a country gentleman in Hetton . . . . What was torture to Brenda years ago is soon going to be even worse to Tony. (112)

But, like Tony he found satisfaction in the past and ‘past’ for him meant the ‘books of Dickens’. Waugh called him a ‘perfect reader,’ but his reading of the books never meant that he was gaining any moral lessons
whatsoever. A series of events bring Tony to Mr. Todd, who is a very strange man. Tony ends up being nothing more than a prisoner of Todd. Unable to muster passion, Tony remains unable to take action. He was a victim of Brenda in his naive and almost innocent ways. He ignored Brenda, he could not even manage to see that she needed more from him than she was getting. Faced with the affair, which he could have outlasted, he ran away. It was just an escape for him to an imaginary and more significant world, where he had never been and so through the books he tries to reside in those places that do not exist. However, Mr. Todd was a mad recluse, but the nature of his escapism was quite like Tony because, like Tony he also wanted to escape from the current world to an imaginary world that can provide him comfort and solitude. But when like all the aristocrats Todd used his powers to detain Tony in the forest it turned out to be disastrous for Tony and he got a life imprisonment in that forest. Meckier says:

No matter how frequently Dickens moves him [Mr. Todd] to laughter or tears, the isolated trader feels no compulsion to improve his behaviour. Waugh claims that Dickens’ humane ethics, unsupported by divine sanctions, make
an emotional appeal that generates a purely emotional response. Todd weeps over the injustices that Dickens describes while committing against Tony a crime of his own. ("Why the Man" 174)

Tony meets Dr. Messinger, the organizer of an expedition in search of a lost city in South America, and he decides to join Messinger's group. In the jungle, their guides desert them, they lose their supplies, and Tony suffers from a fever that makes him delirious. Messinger goes to help but drowns in a river. Tony finds himself alone in the jungle and eventually stumbles onto the settlement of Mr. Todd. Mr. Todd feeds Tony a potion that eventually cures the fever. An illiterate and crazy man, Mr. Todd holds Tony captive and forces him daily to read aloud the works of Charles Dickens:

They had finished Bleak House and were nearing the end of Dombey and Son, when the rain came.... Next day at noon a single plate was put before Mr. Todd but with it lay his gun, cocked, on his knee, as he ate. Tony resumed thy reading of Martin Chuzzlewit where it had been interrupted. Weeks passed hopelessly. They read Nicholas Nickleby and Little Dorrit and Oliver Twist. (216-218)
Eventually, a group of men come looking for Tony, but before they find him, Mr. Todd gives Tony a sleeping potion and he misses their visit. When he awakens, Mr. Todd tells Tony the men have left, thinking Tony is dead. Back in England, the courts declare Tony dead and Brenda marries Jock Grant-Menzies, a respectable Member of Parliament who has been a friend of Tony. The novel ends as Tony's cousins inherit Hetton, raise rabbits and foxes, and plan to restore the abbey to its splendor.

The novel thus, brings out the fact that how people run after those persons who can bring them name, fame, glory and money and how their attitude changes when they find they are not going to get it from the person they were earlier expecting from. As a result, due to this blind chase, the true relations are left far behind. While describing the cousins of Tony, the narrator efficiently conveys that they might have shown more grief on the death of John Andrews if they have realized that they can be the heir of Hetton, in case anything will happen to Tony in the near future. This brings out the yearning for wealth and the emotional emptiness even in the blood relations, who give utmost importance to material possession. Tony Last, an innocent who fails to
progress, is an explorer unsuccessfully pursuing a more reliable hearth and home. Brenda has done damage to herself by her faithlessness and disregard for her husband.

Tony's fatal flaw was his inability to face what was right in front of him. Even at Todd's he keeps thinking he will be rescued. Brenda's fatal flaw is similar but for different reasons. She cannot see what is right in front of her because she is too busy looking at herself and her own needs. While their contradictory traits drove them apart, the bigger question is what brought Tony and Brenda together in the first place. Brenda, it was likely, considered the right thing to do for her own future. There is a sense about Brenda that she would have considered Tony's obtuse ways a bonus for the future as she knew he would not ask too many questions about her unless she began to do something that upset the structure of Hetton Abbey. Here Tony is asking for Brenda to come home and she can't because of the lectures and meetings she has. Already it is clear that Tony doesn't keep Brenda on a short leash. Brenda, being gone for weeks at a time now, Tony isn't the least bit suspicious. Brenda must have known from the beginning that maneuvering Tony
to believe anything and not questioning Brenda at all would be very simple. Tony seems to be oblivious to female attention and even in the bedroom scene with Milly where he is trying to have himself set up as the adulterer to save Brenda the anguish of having to be sued for divorce by giving her grounds.

Both Tony and Brenda are affected by London society, but the society which Waugh described in this novel has a different tone to it than that in the earlier works. While it is true that Margot Metroland is still around, Waugh's society now contains “corrupters” such as Mrs. Beaver, who like to be considered very modern and who are totally without standards of either morality or taste. This woman is a fashionable interior decorator; in other words she either rips out the interiors of old houses and divides them up into flats or redecorates them in the latest gaudy fashion. This disconnect between perception and reality renders English society, the Amazon offers no more salvation to Tony than his own backyard; the jungle is Hetton, each space that supported tradition, family, and morality. While uncharted land has once offered the chance for new life.
Mrs. Beaver spends her time destroying different aspects of past traditions while at the same time playing the role of the gracious hostess. Though they variously reflect the characters in *A Handful of Dust*, the settings of Hetton Abbey, London, and the Amazonian jungle are all interwoven: they represent stages in Tony's understanding of British society and the devolution of characters around him. At the end of the novel Waugh creates the impression that Brenda is happy in her new life and would prefer to forget all about Tony and Hetton Abbey.

In this novel he considered the dead end of a humanism that supposes one may have a moral purpose and yet have no metaphysics in which that purpose is grounded. The novel speaks of a “loss of standards.” DeVitis notes:

Tony cannot cope with society’s loss of standards, and to that end, he focuses on his dreams of restoring Hetton to the position of baronial prestige it held in the nineteenth century. . . . The standards of Victorian architecture and those of Victorian morality are, however, out of date. This Gothic world falls to pieces, and he comes to understand fear in his handful of dust. (31)
DeVitis states that, *A Handful of Dust* gives evidence that Waugh depended on the traditions of the aristocracy to “bolster the individual’s courage against the inanities of the modern waste land” (35). His failure initiates in the protagonist a quest that leads him eventually upon a painful journey of renunciation through the wilderness to the sea to wait for the coming of the spring rains; so, too, Tony's failure with Brenda turns him into an “explorer,” a journey into the unknown darkness of the jungle. Lady Brenda is the other of Tony's chief illusions. Brenda’s willingness to sacrifice her roles as wife and mother signifies, “modern society’s unwillingness to take family responsibility seriously” (Doyle 21).

Tony’s travels in one of them bring him close to death. So the contrast, though humorous, has a cutting edge to it. While Tony, itching all over from the attacks of various unfamiliar insects, thinks during a bout of violent scratching in the night about what might be happening at the same time in London, and about his past life with Brenda, she is dancing with Jock and also thinking about Tony; but with typical self-absorption, she is convinced that he is the one who behaved
monstrously. Meanwhile, her interest in him is largely financial: she is in the solicitor’s discovering that absolutely no provision has been made for her and that in fact she has been cut out of her husband’s will. Tony, alone because Dr. Messinger has been drowned going to help, is in a state of acute physical and mental distress that reduces him to helpless crying in the darkness of the jungle night. Of course, Dr. Messinger could symbolise the messenger who is the angel of death. Clement rightly says, “The sudden death of Dr. Messinger, who is death’s own harbinger, symbolically foreshadows Tony’s incarceration in the jungle and his irretrievable spiritual alienation” (106). At the same time, in London, Brenda is also crying—but out of self-pity and chagrin at the failure of her attempts to manipulate. She, like her husband, though she does not know this, is “entirely alone”; but there is no comparison between being alone in London.

In this novel Waugh has perfected his use of repetition, contrast and parallelism give the impression of hopelessness, sufferings, terror and decadence. Edmund Wilson says:
They are utterly empty.... *A Handful of Dust* is a depiction of an earthly hell—a most Orthodox Catholic concept of it. Waugh’s hell is the supreme negation, where every vestige of beauty and nobility, love and truth must die, yet without its inhabitants ever quite losing the knowledge that actual beauty, nobility, truth, and love do somewhere exist. (qtd. in Kellogg 106)

He does not start by describing or analyzing the poor relationship between Brenda and Tony or the decadence of society. But from the beginning he is mentioned Tony, symbol of the romantic Hetton Abbey, and broken marriages and death.

Tony Last, in *A Handful of Dust*, is perhaps a Waugh's most realistic character among the early heroes, and his pathetic attempt to discover what has gone wrong in his marriage to Brenda is representative of the whole problem of personal identity and the past. But Tony's struggle to find a causal chain leading to and explaining his present situation is fruitless, for the causal relationships are not there. In denying Tony and the other early heroes’ logical connections with the past, Waugh objectifies his characters, makes them like so many well-made chessmen, to be examined curiously, but not
probed or humanized. Tony Last has a memory, it is true, but he cannot establish the necessary relationship between past and present and so the past no longer belongs to him; it too has become an object, without signification.

In fact, in Waugh’s early novels like *Decline and Fall*, *Vile Bodies* and *A Handful of Dust*, the emotional relationships are all based on financial ones. One of the central themes of *A Handful of Dust* is money and financial affairs. Indeed, the Wauvian women are mostly money-lovers. From the very beginning of *A Handful of Dust*, the reader becomes familiar with the Beaver family whose name regarding Waugh’s concern with the use of titles implies beavering and honest hard work. Waugh starts the novel with Mrs. Beaver’s conversation with her son, John Beaver. Here, Mrs. Beaver’s desire is the financial benefits she can make through a fire in one of her flats without any regard for its injured inhabitants. Brenda is one of the other central characters who are fond of money and expensive life in London. This love of money is even dominant in the little child, John Andrew, who talks of his nanny – the only woman who truly grieves after his unfortunate death – in financial terms.
However, Waugh has made Tony in this respect the opposite of the others. The novel is regarded to be a tragic-comedy of manners and a novel about adultery. The comedy of manners turns into a tragedy when John Andrew dies and after a while, Brenda asks for a divorce. Brenda asks Tony for a divorce so she can marry John Beaver, a divorce that symbolises, “the decay of traditional order spiritually and socially” (Cook 135).

*A Handful of Dust* is a gloomy view of a corrupted society. In Waugh’s view, it is a humanist work that contains all he wants to say about humanism. The moral decay of the modern era along with the meaninglessness of human life and affairs in the inter-war period beautifully speaks to the Eliotic theme in “The Waste Land.” The world Waugh describes is a wasteland, where the antiquated life of the gothic mansion, Hetton, is fading away under the shadow of modernity. One can hear Waugh’s voice in the character of the stationmaster who by his ironic reference to other women’s love for London predicts Brenda’s betrayal. Here, horror of modern life, especially whenever it overshadows the traditional roles of the women and makes them such rebels as Brenda. James Nichols charges that with Tony Last, Waugh comes to the
conclusion that, “a man armed only with a traditional code of values is helpless in the modern world” (56).

In this way, the novel concludes that A Handful of Dust brings out the hollowness of modern life in which pristine human values are sacrificed for getting momentary pleasure of mundane life. Waugh believes that, “Secular goodness unaided by spiritual belief dooms modern man to an essentially incomplete life” (Doyle 22). Waugh always tried to unfurl the flag of true husband, wife relations based on love, dedication, commitment and sacrifice. In case any partner deviates from this path of righteousness, he or she not only brings about destruction for himself or herself but creates social chaos. Brenda Last becomes an example of a person who does not get satisfaction at any place, and she becomes the butt of laughter in social circles. Cunningham proclaims one important symbol, “develops from Waugh’s allusions to the city” (119). She explains:

“All that quest for a city seems to me justifiable symbolism,” Waugh wrote to Henry Yorke. That figure introduces a complex matrix of references – to the Apocalypse of John, to the Epistle to the Hebrews, to Augustine, to Dante, and, of course, to Eliot. This figure
includes both the false icons of the city which must, like all illusions, be renounced and also the true icons of it by which the false ones are judged. (120)

With this novel, the methodology adopted by the novelist was to present the negative side to come to the positive side. At certain levels, the writer questions the very basis of making friends and maintaining friendly relations. The description did not remain confined to a few individuals – it becomes general with the description of Bratt’s club. But the sad spectacle is that despite their desire to fly high, they attain nothing in the long run and their hand only contains A Handful of Dust which justifies the title of the novel. Meckier reaches the harsh conclusion that A Handful of Dust “ends with one madman reading to another from the works of a third” (177).

Thus, the novel discusses Tony Last’s journey in search for selflessness and caring soul and closes on the moral note that if people do not change their mindset by leaving the superficial modernity, the present situation will eventually end in the same way as it ends in the sad condition faced by Brenda Last. Waugh wants to see that
faith is the obvious answer to their situation. Without a dedicated faith and a grasp of tradition, Tony finds himself stuck in one place with no way to move forward. Tony's lack of faith robs him of the possibility of finding hope, tragically shrouding him with an enveloping inertia of spirit.