CHARACTER AS A VEHICLE OF SATIRE

IN THE

EARLY NOVELS OF EVELYN WAUGH

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Critical work concerning Evelyn Waugh is conspicuously small in volume. Of the writing that has been done, most has been biographical, with very minor attention to criticism. Of the limited material at my disposal, all but one article presented the generally accepted view that Waugh is a major English satirist of the Twentieth Century. The dissenting article declared Waugh to be a mere entertainer, a comic writer and not a satirist. Directing my study toward Waugh as a satirist, I intend to demonstrate that his use of character is his most effective tool in achieving the brilliant satirical novels.

Waugh's early works of the late 1920's and the 1930's are novels of great fun, particularly when directed at English "high society." Waugh later entered a period of religious fervor and published novels and biographies dealing with Roman Catholicism in England, past and present. From the late 1940's to the present, Waugh's work has returned to the hilarious satire upon which he built his literary reputation. His contributions to the British press through the years in criticism and essay have also been outstanding.

My thesis is based upon four novels of the early period: Vile Bodies (1930), Black Mischief (1932), Scoop (1937), and

Put Out More Flags (1942). Although each satirizes many facets of English life, Waugh concentrates on one facet in each novel as the object of ridicule. In Vile Bodies, English high society is taken to task. Put Out More Flags pokes fun at pre-war England and governmental activity. Black Mischief deals primarily with foreign diplomacy. The press withers under Waugh's pen in Scoop. In each case the characters are the main vehicle of satire, no matter where it is directed.

The character in satire plays an important role. He can be completely impossible, entirely credible, or somewhere between. In Waugh's early novels, the major characters are quite credible; and their ideas, actions, and reactions form the main part of the satire. The minor characters are strange ones, most often exaggerated personifications of English institutions or caricatures of well-known personages. This is not to say that Waugh declines to attack any abstract qualities in his major characters. It has been noted by James Sutherland[1] that satire is brought out best in minor characters who come to the surface for a few brief, bright, noisy, and often embarrassing passages, and that the satirist is in danger when he produces a major satiric character because of the detachment with which a satiric character is usually conceived. To a certain extent, Waugh depends on minor characters, but the main characters in the

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[1]James Sutherland, English Satire (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 120-1.

four novels under consideration here--Basil Seal in Put Out More Flags and Black Mischief, William Boot in Scoop, and Adam Fenwick-Symes in Vile Bodies--are all instruments of Waugh's satire. While the main burden of the satire is carried by the minor characters and events, the roles these main characters play and the way in which they perform display them as keys to, or directors of, the satire. As the major characters do act in this important role, and as the minor characters are also strongly satiric, I will discuss each separately in order that the full importance of each group may be recognized.

Character as an effective vehicle of satire is widely recognized by critics. As David Worcester says:

> Satire is dedicated to the close observation of human nature, and the Character carried the conscious, or academic, analysis of human nature a long step forward.[2]

Waugh is, therefore, hardly unique in his use of character to build satire. It is his effective and masterful use of it that sets him apart from and at the head of contemporary satirists.

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[2]David Worcester, The Art of Satire (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1940), p. 156.

CHAPTER II

MAJOR CHARACTERS

It has been said that the author of the satiric novel must, and very effectively can, treat his minor characters satirically. Either the character can be satirized throughout the novel to attain rather important satiric status within the story, or the character may pop up unexpectedly from the background with noisy significance. But the warning has been set forth that in presenting a major character satirically, the effectiveness of the author's work is in jeopardy. The value of this standard is, in part, verified by Waugh's early novels. The minor characters of Vile Bodies, Black Mischief, Scoop and Put Out More Flags are indeed satiric figures and bear the brunt of Waugh's satire. The major figures, on the other hand, are not fully satirized themselves. Some small facet of their personalities may be satirized, an action ridiculed, or an idea exposed in its foolishness, but the characters themselves are rather plain and neutral. If they have definite ideas or thoughts, they are not important ones. If their life has some pattern, the reader may be assured that it will be upset. As soon as Waugh forces his major characters to arrive at a position of neutrality in their thinking or in their opinions, he begins to parade the government, society, or whatever is to be satirized, before their unbiased, watching eyes.

> They are gray, subdued observers in a world of startling events and startling people. Mild and passive, they are

> Carried along by life's current--sucked into whirlpools, dizzied in rapids, dropped in backwaters. Things happen to them, in so unequal a contest what is the use of making an effort? Through their wondering eyes we have a kaleidoscopic view of a violent, chaotic, purposeless civilization.
>
> They are ironical figures as they drift through life with disintegrated personalities and highly educated brains.[3]

Since Waugh's early novels came at precisely a time when the world was a violent, chaotic place to live (the threat of World War II throwing a menacing shadow over England and all of Europe), the novelist could throw his characters into out-of-the-ordinary situations without straining and could allow the objects of his satire to be more easily exposed. High society, for example, is hampered in periods of alarm, and prominent persons are often more easily proven frauds. Of the four early novels, only Vile Bodies presents high society, and all England, in a period free from stress and worry. The "upper crust" lead lives of carefree gaiety and complacency. Put Out More Flags, published in 1942, deals directly with the war and government service. Not only the major characters, but every minor one as well, is touched in some way by the threat. Scoop and Black Mischief both deal with revolution in tiny African countries. Three of the novels are, therefore, filled with the confusion brought on by war, but they are no more confused and entangled than the fantastic escapades taking place in the "peaceful" world of Vile Bodies.

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[3]David Worcester, The Art of Satire, p. 106.

Into these hopelessly confused conditions, Waugh unmercifully tosses his major characters. With the exception of the madcap adventurer Basil Seal of Black Mischief and Put Out More Flags, Waugh's major characters are innocents, plain and passive. They have given their lives pattern and know what they enjoy most, but they are helpless to defend themselves against the trends and events that lead them into the most extraordinary and bizarre surroundings and situations.

The major characters of the novels are Adam Fenwick-Symes in Vile Bodies, William Boot of Scoop and Basil Seal of Black Mischief and Put Out More Flags. Although each performs essentially the same purpose for Waugh, each is an entirely different personality. As each observes and acts in different circumstances, they must be discussed separately to determine how well they work for Waugh.

Adam Fenwick-Symes, the major character of Vile Bodies, is given no physical description. As a visible figure, he is virtually anonymous. In the early pages of the novel,

> . . . a young man came on board carrying his bag. There was nothing particularly remarkable about his appearance. He looked exactly as young men like him do look,[4]

Adam is, therefore, not highly individualized as a character. If one were to classify him into some particular group, it would have to

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[4]Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies, (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1930), p. 14.

be what Waugh calls the "Bright Young People." These are the young socialites of England whose life seems to consist of one gay party after another, broken only by wild, scandalous affairs which are lightly dismissed as inevitable. The Bright Young People are unemotional about everything: sex, love, hate, or anything else that usually arouses most people. They have no deep passions, and Adam is no exception. A typical example of their matter-of-fact way of thinking may be seen in the following bit of dialogue between Adam and his fiancee.

> "Darling, am I going to be seduced?"
>
> "I'm afraid you are. Do you mind terribly?"
>
> "Not as much as all that," said Nina and added in Cockney, "Charmed, I'm sure."[5]

About their impending marriage they are equally unmoved. In fact, the engagement is broken off and resumed several times throughout the novel, until finally Nina becomes engaged to another man, a mutual friend. As the book ends, Adam is at war and reading a letter from his former betrothed on the battlefield. An excerpt:

> . . . and my dear, I'm going to have a baby, isn't it too awful? But Ginger [her husband] has quite made up his mind it's his, and is as pleased as anything, so that's all right.[6]

Typical of the minor characters as well as the major characters in this way, the two preceding portions show that the morals of the Bright

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[5]Waugh, Vile Bodies, p. 70.

[6]Ibid., pp. 186-7.

Young People are as loose as their personal ties and loyalties.

Adam Symes is one of the Bright Young People. He goes to their parties, speaks the same kind of language, and thinks the same thoughts, but unlike the vast numbers of minor characters Waugh has incorporated in the group, Adam works as a tool. Through Adam's friends and through his job as Mr. Chatterbox, a gossip-columnist, the reader is allowed to inspect at close range all the odd personalities of the society and the lives they lead. The novelist wishes to have the reader recognize the follies and, to a certain extent, the evils of the Bright Young People, and Adam is the vehicle of this satire.

William Boot of Scoop performs the same duties for Waugh as Adam does in Vile Bodies. Boot is a newspaper man and must observe and report all that is going on about him. Unlike Adam, however, Boot is a victim of circumstance. He has been pulled out of his normal, quiet surroundings by accident and thrown into a confusion which he is quite unable to handle. Quite by chance, he fulfills his obligations honorably and well, but Boot shares with the reader the frustrations and ignorance of attempting a job with no background or knowledge of it. Waugh, however, always gives the reader the facts before poor Boot, thus adding greatly to the comic effect.

Waugh tells the reader a great deal about William Boot. In one of the early chapters, Boot's background, family, occupation, disposition, and complete personality are carefully set down. All

that is lacking is his personal appearance. Waugh has good reason for relating Boot's background so fully and in detail. The journalist is to be set in odd surroundings and his usual reactions to the unusual happenings will give added force to the satire.

William Boot, a wildlife columnist on a London newspaper, has a distant cousin, John Boot, a newly acclaimed writer who wishes to be assigned to cover a revolution in the African country of Ishmalia. In the confusion of engaging the foreign correspondent, the paper sends the ill-prepared country gentleman to Africa. William's idea of Africa runs along safari lines, so his preparations for the trip include costly and cumbersome equipment to effect comfort in the wilds.

> . . . William had acquired a well, perhaps rather over-furnished tent, three months' rations, a collapsible canoe, a jointed flagstaff and Union Jack, a handpump and sterilizing plant, an astrolabe, six suits of tropical linen and a sou'wester, a camp operating table and set of surgical instruments, a portable humidor, guaranteed to preserve cigars in condition in the Red Sea, and a Christmas hamper complete with Santa Claus costume and a tri-pod mistletoe stand, and a cane for whacking snakes.[7]

His knowledge of journalism is also painfully small, and he blunders his way to revolution-filled Ishmalia with scores of other foreign correspondents whose eager enthusiasm places them in a state of confusion equal to poor William's.

William Boot's reactions to the frantic correspondents, to

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[7]Evelyn Waugh, Scoop, (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1937), p. 46.

the factions on either side of the revolutionary forces, to the Ishmalian natives, and to the non-committed foreigners on the scene--all objects of Waugh's satire--are similar to what his reactions would be to his Great Aunt Anne, his sister Pricilla, his Uncle Roderick, and his butler, Bentinck. All this not only produces a comic effect but adds to the satire, since objects and persons of supposed importance are made to look rather ridiculous or insignificant by William's stock, unexcited reactions. William's newspaper, the Beast, cables for news--William has sent nothing and the London papers are full of stories from the other correspondents. William replies,

> PLEASE DON'T WORRY QUITE SAFE AND WELL IN FACT RATHER ENJOYING THINGS WEATHER IMPROVING WILL CABLE AGAIN IF THERE IS ANY NEWS YOURS BOOT.[8]

His ineptness at recognizing news makes the whole revolution look absurd. As the reader follows Boot's adventures in Ishmalia and sees the other correspondents blunder into false leads, William ultimately appears the most sensible, collected, and experienced of the lot. So by having a wholly incapable and inexperienced man perform the duties better than those trained for the job, Waugh is able to present his satiric subjects in as ridiculous a vein as he wishes. Boot's role is somewhat different from that of Adam in Vile Bodies, but this merely demonstrates that the satirist can put his major character in a wide variety of situations and can, by keeping him

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[8]Waugh, Scoop, p. 135.

basically neutral, achieve an intense satiric effect.

Basil Seal is the major character of both Black Mischief and Put Out More Flags. Of the major characters in the four novels, Basil has the strongest personality and most clearly described physical appearance. Basil has his own type of neutrality, however, in the fact that he is really not suited for anything. As a result he manages to find himself in the most fantastic situations, all of his own planning. He is regarded as the black sheep of a respectable English family who go to great lengths to find the right place for their prodigal in society. Lady Seal appeals to an old and influential friend,

> . . . I've begun to doubt whether we shall ever find the proper place for Basil. He's been a square peg in so many round holes. But this war seems to take the responsibility off our hands. There's always room for everyone in wartime, every man. It's always been Basil's individuality that's been wrong.[9]

But Basil doesn't care for his "proper place." The efforts of his family and their friends are in vain, for Basil seeks only the advice of his own friends--and even then does not follow it. If his mother does not give him money for his latest venture, he will steal it from her, or get it from his mistress, Angela Lyne. In Put Out More Flags Basil finds his way into the Civil Service, pictured by Waugh as the epitome of over-organization and confusion. In this atmosphere Basil's wild exploits and fantastic schemes seem normal.

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[9]Evelyn Waugh, Put Out More Flags (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1942), p. 234.

If Basil's adventures in the English military are strange, his role in the Azanian government in Black Mischief is absurd. The African island country is in the midst of revolution, an ideal situation for such a bizarre adventurer. Basil pawns his mother's jewels and goes. In true Basil Seal fashion, he befriends the Oxford-educated monarch and becomes the High Commissioner and Comptroller General of the Ministry of Modernisation. In this position, Basil deals not only with the Azanian government, the British, the French and the American legations, but also with the Azanian natives, whose loyalties lie where the food and the most noise is. As unlike as the English and Azanian governments are, the similarities found in the novels are striking. Both are over-organized and deluded. They attempt being "noble" or "progressive," or both, and invariably end up doing the right thing wrongly or the wrong thing wrongly. If anything comes out right, it is a complete accident and not to the credit of those in charge. This bizarre state of affairs is in evidence at a festival promoting birth-control.

> Then marching four abreast in brand new pinafores came the girls of the Amurath Memorial High School, an institution founded by the old Empress to care for the orphans of murdered officials. They bore, somewhat unsteadily, a banner whose construction had occupied the embroidery and dress-making class for several weeks. It was emblazoned in letters of appliqued silk with the motto: "WOMEN OF TOMORROW DEMAND AN EMPTY CRADLE."[10]

Basil, always in the middle, manages to survive every crisis to

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[10]Evelyn Waugh, Black Mischief (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1932), p. 341.

return to his family, who pretend to be happy to see him and who begin to think of another "place."

In Black Mischief Basil is twenty-eight and in Put Out More Flags he is in his thirty-sixth year. In both he has the dreams and ambitions of a child. The reader's realization that his childish, harebrained schemes fit so well with the plans of the governments and people with which he comes in contact, shows exactly how harebrained those governments and people really are. It is not fair to blame Basil, for he is an adventurer and takes advantage of any situation to add excitement to his life. If he is accepted and if he can take people in, it is their fault, not his. Like William Boot, he finds himself in odd surroundings. Like Adam, he is unreceptive to the more tender passions. But unlike either Boot or Adam, he will seize any situation, become familiar with it, and attack it with fervor and flair.

Basil does not fully fit the conventional picture of the unkempt, but brave and strong adventurer. Nor does the even more trite picture of the handsome, wily, vigorous adventurer fit Basil.

> He stood in the doorway, a glass of whiskey in one hand, looking insolently round the room, his head back, chin forward, shoulders rounded, dark hair over his forehead, contemptuous grey eyes over grey pouches, a proud, rather childish mouth, a scar on one cheek.[11]

This brief picture, and what we know of Basil's personality, allows us to understand his family's disapproving concern, but what we

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[11]Waugh, Black Mischief, p. 245.

know of Basil's family, allows us also to feel some sort of affection for the brazen young man. While we can scarcely feel sorry for him, we also find it hard to condemn. George Dangerfield's comment on the book is well-put.

> In "Put Out More Flags," . . . the apparently heartless jesting reveals a bitter attack upon the society which made Basil possible in the first place, upon false internationalism, official pomposity, selfishness, blindness, greed, betrayal.[12]

So if Basil is a victim of his society, if his society has produced him, what other character could better serve as a vehicle to satirize society? That which has condemned Basil is in turn condemned by him.

In his four early novels, Waugh has created three major characters that serve equally well as tools of his satire. Each one is different in appearance, in personality, in background, in beliefs (if he has any), and in situation. But Waugh takes these differences and skillfully molds each character to fit exactly his purpose--that of satirizing institutions, ideals, and individuals.

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[12]George Dangerfield, "Review of Put Out More Flags," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXV (May 30, 1942), p. 7.

CHAPTER III

MINOR CHARACTERS

Although what may be technically called major characters would include many more than the three discussed in the first chapter, they are so unique in their purpose and role that segregating them in the paper gives them the close inspection and importance they deserve. As all the other characters are now, by definition relegated to the status of minor characters, it is perhaps necessary to distinguish them from the major characters in the varying effects they exert on the novels' satiric tone. The minor characters have been defined as essentially the objects of satire rather than the vehicles of it. They are vehicles only in that they add to and give depth to the satire. Whereas the three major characters are, to a degree, satirized, their role is mainly that of observer and reactor. Also, the major characters are more complete as personalities than the minor.

> It may be argued that the satirist is unable to create complete characters who respond freely to events and circumstances, because he is too much committed to his own satirical interpretation. He does not see the man or the woman, it may be said, but the particular folly or moral imperfection which it has become his business to demonstrate every time those characters appear.[13]

As I have already tried to establish that the major characters are not primarily objects of satire, I feel safe in saying that the

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[13]James Sutherland, English Satire, pp. 19-20.

satirist can, as Waugh does, "create complete characters who respond freely to events and circumstances." The minor characters, on the other hand, do fit Sutherland's argument. They are not rounded characters, but figures who parade through the novel as personifications of traits of human nature and society.

Much of Waugh's humor evolves from the minor characters. Part of this effect is achieved by their most improbable names. Either the name fits the character and personality to perfection, or it produces hilarious incongruity. Waugh seems to have presented the multitudes of characters he so lightly terms the Bright Young People or the Smart Set primarily in Vile Bodies where name follows name and brief, but individual, personality sketches are piled one upon another. Some flit quickly by, offering only a glance. Some stand staute-like, ever-present monuments of the particular quality Waugh is satirizing. Still others perform a service while Waugh jabs at them.

A character who finds her way into several of the novels is Lady Margot Metroland. The reader learns little about her appearance or even her personality, but she gives "the most marvelous parties" where the reader may meet "the most fascinating people." A picture of complacency and frivolity, the busy socialite certainly acts as a vehicle of satire while she entertains her way through the Waugh novels. Many of the memorable minor characters are first introduced at one or another of her parties.

The Right Honorable Walter Outrage is "last week's Prime

Minister." Miles Malpractice is a young doctor for the Smart Set. Miss Mary Mouse sits still at a gala party "with her eyes popping out of her head."[14] These numerous and elaborate affairs are attended by such personalities as Lord Circumference, General Strapper, and Fanny Throbbing. To add to the fun, Waugh does not always have his characters stay in their "name" roles. Mary Mouse, later in the novel, is reported to be at Monte Carlo with the Maharajah of Pukkapore.

Waugh does not miss an opportunity for satire as in the characters of Mrs. Melrose Ape, a sturdy woman evangelist, and her troupe of traveling angels. The angels bear the usual religious names of Fortitude, Chastity, Faith, Charity, Humility, Prudence, Mercy and Justice, but Waugh pokes fun by adding Divine Discontent and Creative Endeavor. And naturally it is Chastity who wishes to have a love affair. Mrs. Ape, not nearly so benevolent in private as on the stage, admonishes her charges quite unreligiously and calls them "Sluts'" Waugh has shown the woman who is outwardly the most religious to be on the same rather contemptible level as the rest

The minor characters of Vile Bodies are sketchy and fleeting, not making a great impression, either in plot or theme, upon the novel, but the remaining three novels have minor characters of more importance to the plot. Waugh elaborates on their appearance and personality by means of dialogue and description.

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[14]Waugh, Vile Bodies, p. 46.

The minor characters of Scoop fall into three groups. First is William Boot's family and household. The home staff of the Beast, William's newspaper, makes up another, and the teeming population of Ishmalia, both natives and visitors, make up the third. Each displays a different aspect of society and a different type of people. By keeping each group within separate episodes and, at the same time, shuffling the episodes throughout the novel in random order, Waugh is able to satirize each separately, yet give the satire added impetus by contrast.

William Boot is the master of Boot Magna, a spacious country home, in which he enjoys the peaceful life of the country gentleman. His home is filled with every relative who had ever lived there or who could hobble from somewhere else to take advantage of the "good life." The numerous bedrooms are occupied not only by the relatives, but also by several generations of servants, no matter how aged or incompetent they may be.

> In other rooms about the house reposed Nannie Price, ten years the junior of Nannie Bloggs, and bedridden from about the same age (she gave her wages to Chinese Missions and had little influence in the house), Sister Watts, old Mrs. Boot's first nurse, and Sister Sampson, her second, Miss Scope, Aunt Anne's governess, veteran invalid, of some years seniority in bed to old Mrs. Boot herself . . .[15]

The Boot menage exists on an annual budget which somehow balances, partly through the benefits of communal living. The waste and decay of the family are made ridiculous as Waugh shows the family to be

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[15]Waugh, Scoop, p. 22.

a great organization or business which produces nothing. Waugh seems to take great pleasure in plucking William from an easy life and a job as author of "Lush Places", a nature column in the Beast, and carrying him off to London and subsequently to revolution in Ishmalia.

The London folk, represented by the staff of the Beast, are self-made sophisticates. They live their carefully planned and faultless lives and work at their carefully contrived jobs with an air of great importance.

> At last they came to massive double doors, encased in New Zealand rosewood--which, by their weight, polish, and depravity of design, proclaimed unmistakably, "Nothing but Us stands between you and Lord Copper." Mr. Salter paused, and pressed a little bell of synthetic ivory. "It lights a lamp on Lord Copper's own desk," he said reverently.[16]

The Beast is arranged like a monarchy. Lord Copper is the king, who graciously passes out titles to those who are good to him and who loudly pledge their allegiance. The newspaper is seen as a separate little world with its own ideals and language. More than once William is confused by the concise little telegrams that come to him from the staff at the Beast. He has no idea what Lord Copper or his assistant, Mr. Salter, would have him do. His rustic mind cannot comprehend the intricacies of worldly people who guide his existence through the Ishmalian crisis. Their apparent sophistication and great presence of mind fall apart while the untrained William becomes a success, leaving the Beast with an awkward situa-

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[16]Waugh, Scoop, p. 43.

tion as bad as the one they had given him.

Ishamalia is shaken first by revolution, then even more by several train-loads of frenzied news correspondents. When William asks Mr. Salter for identification of the combatants, he receives the following reply:

> You see they are all Negroes. And the Fascists won't be called Black because of their racial pride, so they are called White after the White Russians. And the Bolshevists want to be called Black because of their racial pride. So when you say Black you mean Red, and when you mean Red you say White, and when the party who call themselves Blacks say Traitors they mean what we call Blacks, but what we mean when we say Traitors I really couldn't tell you [17]

That confused bit of explanation is about as clear as the revolution ever seems to get. The many correspondents represent many newspapers in many countries. Their main purpose is to get a "scoop," which involves keeping up with all the others, even to the point of rather unscrupulous activity such as perennial lying and reading of other people's mail. The businessmen and natives watch the correspondents with amused detachment.

All these minor characters appear, at the beginning, to be doing everything carefully. It all seems part of a big plan in which the unprepared William must, but cannot, fit. But rather than having William conform to the big plan, Waugh makes the plan, if there was one, fall apart and work for William.

Black Mischief also deals with a troubled African country,

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[17]Waugh, Scoop, p. 45.

this time called Azania. There are few Englishmen in the novel, the most important are those living in the British legation. Basil's worried mother and a few of Basil's friends in London appear in the early pages of the story only briefly. Sonia and Alastair Trumpington do absolutely nothing except that which is out-of-the-ordinary. These two useless people have such odd friends that Basil seems almost mild by comparison.

> They Sonia and Alastair lay in a vast, low bed, with a backgammon board between them. Each had a separate telephone, on the tables at the side, and by the telephone a goblet of "black velvet." A bull terrier and a chow flirted on their feet. There were other people in the room, one playing the gramophone, one reading, one trying Sonia's face things at the dressing table.[18]

They are typical of the Bright Young People in Vile Bodies.

The English in Azania, on the other hand, have relatively important duties. But they are about as competent, or as interested, as Sonia and Alastair. Sir Sampson Courtney's interests lie more in the area of the tastiness of tinned asparagus than in the area of diplomacy. His wife is fascinated by her garden, his daughter toils over her literary masterpiece, "A Panorama of Life," and his assistant divides his time between the daughter and the bagatelle. They are the picture of complacency--the unperturbed British.

Waugh takes to task the ever-present do-gooders. Dame Mildred Porch and Miss Sarah Tin are traveling the world over with great success on the behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to

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[18]Waugh, Black Mischief, p. 251.

Animals. The staunch, tight-lipped ladies are hilariously misunderstood, however, by the ignorant natives of Azania, whose spokesman greets them:

> It is my privilege and delight this evening to welcome with open arms of brotherly love to our city Dame Mildred Porch and Miss Tin, two ladies renowned throughout the famous country of Europe for their great cruelty to animals.[19]

It is obvious that they are not needed in Azania, where the natives, let alone the animals, would be just as happy without their help. The evident pleasure that Waugh finds in presenting these do-gooders is an added outlet for his satiric intentions.

Put Out More Flags gives the reader a more complete picture of Basil's family than does Black Mischief. But they remain still the high-class family, shocked by Basil's wild escapades. England is awaiting the outbreak of World War II--Lady Seal confidently, the arty set fearfully, and Basil's brother-in-law, Freddy, patriotically. Since Basil looks upon anything new as an adventure, the war is not a reality until it actually touches him. Lady Seal refuses to be intimidated. The foolishness on the Continent will soon be crushed is the attitude that Lady Seal and thousands like her confidently assume.

Basil's friends, artists, poets and people like Basil who do absolutely nothing, are afraid and enjoy their fear. A typical example is a conversation between Poppet, a painter, and one of her

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[19]Waugh, Black Mischief, p. 326.

colleagues, after an air-raid alert,

"I was frightened," said Poppet.

"Dear Poppet, you always have the healthiest reactions."[20]

These useless people are not much good to England, just as they are not much good as poets and artists. But it is fashionable to be afraid, so they tremble.

Freddy Sothill, Basil's brother-in-law, takes the impending war in a manly way. Already he has plans for conserving petrol, taking in evacuees, and rejoining his old regiment. On the exterior, Freddy seems quite an admirable person, but he hardly grasps the import of the war. His patriotic plans are hypocritical.

> "I won't ask any of the regiment over for the early shoots," he said. "But I don't see why we shouldn't let some of them have a bang at the cocks round about Christmas."[21]

It is a game for Freddy to put on his old soldier suit, act nobly, and wait for the war. Freddy is willing to wave the flag, because he knows that he really won't be touched at all, and there are always the "early shoots" in the fall. Dangerfield's summation is apt:

> The world is at war in this novel, and--wiggle as they will--they can find no place for themselves in it. They are not persons anymore, but just unhappy examples of bad and silly society.[22]

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[20]Waugh, Put Out More Flags, p. 244.

[21]Ibid., p. 228.

[22]George Dangerfield, The Saturday Review of Literature, p. 7.

Lady Seal, Poppet, and Freddy greet the war in different ways, but they are all the same, they are part of a "bad and silly society."

CHAPTER IV

NON-ENGLISH CHARACTERS

Not all the characters who carry along Waugh's satiric jabs are English. True, each novel is about English people and English situations, but other nationalities come upon the scene, often faring the worse for the intrusion. Whereas the main characters of Waugh's early novels are more the vehicles of satire rather than the objects of satire, minor characters, both English and non-English, enjoy, or rather do not enjoy, a reverse situation

The French, in particular, are a target of Waugh's satire. In Black Mischief the French legation, under the direction of Monsieur Ballon, plays a significant part in the novel. Monsieur Ballon is depicted as a man over-organized to the point of disorganization, who is equally worried about national conditions and his own personal safety.

> In his room he first tested the steel shutters, then the lock of the door. Then he went across to the bed where his wife was already asleep, and examined the mosquito curtains. He squirted a little Flit round the windows and door, sprayed his throat with antiseptic and rapidly divested himself of all except his woolen cumberbund. He slipped on his pyjamas, examined the magazine of his revolver and laid it on the chair at his bedside,[23]

He is suspicious of everyone and anyone, and his suspicions are invariably pointed in the wrong direction. All in all, Monsieur

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[23]Waugh, Scoop, p. 236

Ballon may be considered the fool of the piece, whose great desire for fair treatment and plans for his personal well-being most often lead to havoc and anything but the desired outcome. If he blunders on the offensive, his defenses show even greater folly.

Seeming to mirror this picture of the French diplomat in Black Mischief are the French news correspondents in Scoop. The correspondents may be an eager, disagreeable lot, but the Frenchmen among them are exaggerations--caricatures of caricatures.

> In the next room were four furious Frenchmen. They were dressed as though for the cinema camera in breeches, open shirts, and brand new chocolate-coloured riding boots cross-laced from top to bottom, each carried a bandolier of cartridges round his waist and a revolver-holster on his hip.[24]

The tiny country, Ishmalia, is having a revolution and all the leading newspapers of the world have foreign correspondents on the scene to "scoop" the first newsworthy item But only to a degree are these Frenchmen fools. They are again suspicious of every move and word, half of which they are unable to understand, and waste great amounts of time trying to bring themselves to the fore. They constantly shout, "Translate," and "We must protest." And it gets them nowhere. They would decidedly be the prime fools of the piece were it not for the rest of the frenzied, foolish correspondents, especially the English and Americans, who blunder along with the French.

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[24]Waugh, Scoop, p. 80.

Waugh seems less savage with Americans other than correspondents, although he takes a healthy cut at Mr. Schonbaum, the United States diplomat to Azania. Mr. Schonbaum was originally English, but

> At the outbreak of the European war he had retired first to the United States, and then, on their entry into the war, to Mexico. Soon after the declaration of peace he became an American citizen and amused himself in politics. Having subscribed largely to a successful Presidential campaign, he was offered his choice of several public preferments . . .[25]

So Mr. Schonbaum is not exactly an admirable man. He has taken advantage of the opportunity of making a name and position for himself by a little political gambling. He got his reward for backing the right man Of course, country-hopping at the whisper of war does nothing to endear him to the reader.

Although Mr. Schonbaum is the only specifically-defined American character in the four novels, Waugh makes occasional reference, but only in the form of general description, to Americans. An introduction at a party, ". . . and that's an American . . ."[26] seems to say that no more need be mentioned. The person himself seems to be of little importance. This may be due, in part, to stereotyping the American abroad, just as authors in this country have tended, over the years, to stereotype the Englishman. Certainly one would be foolish to believe that Waugh thought Americans above reproach. It might be more accurate to note that the lack of atten-

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[25]Waugh, Black Mischief, p. 226.

[26]Waugh, Vile Bodies, p. 35.

tion to Americans probably means that he was too busy looking at and writing about his fellow Englishmen

Although Black Mischief and Scoop relate the adventures of Englishmen in Africa, and although the bulk of satire in the two novels is pointed at the British, the Azanian and Ishmalian natives do not escape all of Waugh's satiric jabs. The African governments are satirized greatly for their mismanagement and over-organization, but this indirectly points back to England and other European countries who served as the models when the principalities were created. Were the government officials and agents not native-born and Negro, they might easily appear to be English.

The actual natives--those that reside humbly in the filthy towns and in the dense jungle of the hills--are satirized most cleverly. Their ignorance of and indifference to English methods and institutions, or more generally the civilized methods and institutions, create havoc for the government, but the common sense of their thinking, or at least of their reactions, which provides a peaceful, easy existence proves that, although it works for them, it gives them only the barest of pleasure and substance of living. The natives are content and, one must suppose, happy. But judging by civilized standards, their lack of aspiration and education leaves them naturally wallowing in their own filth.

The natives are exaggerations. Those in the hills are cannibals whose costumes are described in vivid, but no doubt greatly

inaccurate, detail.

> The wise men of the surrounding villages danced in the mud in front of Basil's camel; wearing livery of the highest solemnity, leopards' feet and snakeskins, necklets of lions' teeth, shrivelled bodies of toads and bats, and towering masks of painted leather and wood. The women daubed their hair with ochre and clay in the fashion of the people.[27]

This tongue-in-cheek description of an inland tribe seems to combine all African witch doctors into one.

Waugh's satiric comments on characters not English are not extensive. If a non-English character is necessary to one of the novels, Waugh includes him and does not ignore him satirically. On the whole, he is quick to point out human imperfection and folly, whether it be English, American, French, or African. Wherever a non-English character appears, he is, to some degree, satirized. But in many cases Waugh is able to give such characters added effectiveness, for as they are being satirized, they may be indirectly turning some of the ridicule from themselves toward the English.

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[27]Waugh, Black Mischief, p. 372.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Evelyn Waugh has been called, by at least one critic, an entertainer and nothing more than that.[28] His works have been attacked by the same critic as a waste of time, both to read and to have been written.[29] He has been called by most a brilliant satirist. Judging from four of his early novels--Vile Bodies, Black Mischief, Scoop, and Put Out More Flags--Waugh does stand among the best satirists of our time. Waugh is, as a matter of course, entertaining, but his worth as a satirist is foremost in considering his literary reputation.

Waugh's early novels fit the accepted view of what satire is and what its purpose is.

> . . . the writer of satire is trying to persuade men to admire or despise, to examine their habitual assumptions, to face ugly facts, to look beneath the surface of things, to change sides in politics and religion, to return to the old and true, to abandon the old and outworn, to do this or to do the exact opposite--in short to think, or believe whatever seems good to the writer of satire.[30]

This is what Waugh's novels do. Each one successfully attempts to set the reader's mind on a certain point and to agree with Waugh on that

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[28]Steven Marcus, "Evelyn Waugh and the Art of Entertainment," Partisan Review, XXIII (Summer, 1956), p. 348.

[29]Ibid., p. 349.

[30]James Sutherland, English Satire, p. 5.

point. This success may be at least partly attributed to the satirist's skillful characterization. Not all of Waugh's characters seem real, living people, but when they do not it is for a purpose which adds, not detracts, from the effectiveness of the satire. Each character, major or minor, fits into the general scheme of the satiric novel, and each performs his duties, no matter how insignificant a quick glance may show the characters or his duties to be.

The major characters are the vehicles of Waugh's satire in that they act less often than they observe and react. Although each of the major characters is of a different type, Waugh has produced, without stereotyping, a neutral character who could observe and react to the objects of his satire, personal or impersonal. At times Waugh pauses to laugh at the major characters, but for the most part they are not the objects of the satire.

Instead, it is the minor character who suffers Waugh's satiric stabs. These characters are the personifications of some English institution or caricature of some leading Britisher or type of Britisher. They bear the brunt of the satire which the major characters direct.

The non-English characters have less significance to Waugh's satire, but they do show that Waugh did not confine himself to the English and things English in his satire. Where a foreigner was needed in the story, Waugh inserted him and took advantage of the opportunity to satirize.

Waugh's four early novels are novels of situation in which his

characters, both major and minor, work as vehicles of satire. The characters artfully move in all action and thought. Great amounts of skillful dialogue and description illustrate Waugh's preoccupation with people, and illustrate how this interest enabled him to create such memorable characters. But he does not restrict himself to people individually, since many of his characters stand for groups or even society as a whole. Sometimes just one human trait, such as infidelity, will make up the entire personality of one character. Sometimes, too, a character will stand for merely one aspect of the government or the military. Sometimes a character will be made up of multitudes of traits, and form such an incongruity that the effect is comic as well as satiric. But no matter how one of Waugh's character creations turn out, they work as a means to an end--they work as his most effective vehicle of satire.

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An Abstract of

CHARACTER AS A VEHICLE OF SATIRE

IN THE

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Character as a Vehicle of Satire in the Early Novels of Evelyn Waugh. (34 pp.) No.

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Considering Evelyn Waugh as a satirist and taking as an initial assumption the idea that character can be an effective vehicle of satire, the study attempted, primarily by evidence found in four novels of Waugh's early satiric period, to show how Waugh's characters, both major and minor, both English and non-English, work as effective vehicles of his satires.

Because of an absence of critical work on Waugh, and because the novels themselves are so rich in evidence, the thesis relies mainly on primary sources. The four novels dealt with are Vile Bodies (1929), Black Mischief (1932), Scoop (1937), and Put Out More Flags (1942). The role of the characters is investigated to illustrate how Waugh obtains such biting, and most often comic, satire upon his contemporary English society.

The study concluded that Waugh's major characters are less the objects of satire and more observers and reactors to situations and people. They direct, in their neutral and impersonal way, the progression of the satiric novel. The minor characters, on the other hand, suffer the brunt of Waugh's satire. They are personifications of some English institution or caricatures of some leading Britisher or type of Britisher. The non-English characters, always acting in minor roles, show that Waugh did not miss an

opportunity to satirize, regardless of nationality.

Through an investigation of character on every level of Waugh's early novels, the study contends that character is Waugh's most effective vehicle of satire.