
“WAR, SOCIETY AND HUMAN VALUES IN EVELYN WAUGH’S MAJOR NOVELS”

Dr. Nitu,

nitukharb0129@gmail.com

Abstract: Evelyn Waugh's main novels construct a critical portrait of a contemporised society wracked by war, social upheaval, moral 'flux' and the loss of traditional culture and mores. In this paper, the author will specifically explore the effect war has on the individual, social interactions, class relations and human behavior within Waugh's fiction. *Decline and Fall*, *Vile Bodies*, *A Handful of Dust*, *Brideshead Revisited* and *Sword of Honour* have all brought to light the difference between social status and individual tragedy. Waugh is ironic, satirical and tragic in investigating the values of an evolving society. In his works of fiction, he reveals that war is more political and military than a transformative power of personal relationships, and social identity and moral decisions. The author maintains that Waugh's novels continue to be important for the appreciation of the interplay between war, society and values in human life.

Keywords: Evelyn Waugh; War; Society; Human Values; Class; Morality; Social Change; Satire.

Introduction:

An important twentieth-century English novelist, Evelyn Waugh was renowned for his bracingly satirical, ironic and critical depiction of contemporary society. His novels delve into a world in which traditional social values are gradually undermined by modernity, war, materialism and changing human

relationships. While there exists a certain association of upper-class society and comic fiction with Waugh, his novels also include serious philosophical treatments of suffering, moral corruption, the social hierarchies, and the after pain of war.

War is a significant theme in Waugh's imaginary universe. Fiction and novels like *A Handful of Dust*, *Brideshead Revisited* and *Sword of Honour* encompass all the elements of war and all but individual identity, love, faith and friendship, as well as the family circle. Waugh's characters are caught between uncertainty and fast change in a society in which keeping personal values is a challenge. Meanwhile, his practice of class and privilege reveals the distance between those who have class and those who have to deal directly with hardship.

This paper, then, sheds the light on the correlation of war, society, and human values in Waugh's major novels. It is mostly about the reactions of his characters to the disruption of society, the moral ambiguity in human action, divisions of classes and shifting modes of living in this modern world. Both as a satire and as a serious consideration of reality, Waugh provides a detailed portrait of life in a war-strangled, changing world.

Review of Literature:

Catholic Identity in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (2015), Marston Bailey explores the connection between

architecture, memory, and Catholic identity. The study makes clear how Brideshead Castle has become more than a space; it is cultural memory, the history of the family, a religious tradition, the enduring of a larger aristocratic way of life. With respect to the character's memory and experience, as well as the steady degradation of social and cultural life of which they are a part, Bailey demonstrates how the house can preserve these. This study is especially valuable for analyzing the interrelationships of place, identity, tradition and social change in Waugh's work.

In Evelyn Waugh: Fictions, Faith and Family, Brennan (2013) examines Waugh's significant works as he weaves themes of religion, family, morality, and personal identity together. Brennan believes that while Waugh's novels provide social satire, they also provide an honest look at faith, responsibility, human frailty and the significance of family relationships and more. This book is particularly valuable in its elucidation of the increasing pre-eminence of Catholicism in Waugh's later fiction. It is a helpful background to an exploration of the religious dimension in individual moral decisions in *Brideshead Revisited* and *Sword of Honour*.

Through the ideology of charm, grace and the creation of fictional worlds Christie (2018) examines *Brideshead Revisited*. The study highlights the ways that Waugh develops a whimsical, lingering and appealing social atmosphere via the design of the building, the outdoor spaces, the family life, the culture and personal relationships. Yet this lovely world has its share of tragedy, tragedy of war, and even of changes in history. Christie shows that

the beauty and charm of Brideshead can not be seen as a mere reminder of the past, but as a result of Waugh's noticing an older social order's passing. The message is relevant in this regard to comprehend the ideas of Waugh about the relationship of social change and memory, class and human experience.

Fernandez Ruiz (2023) uses the metaphor of conversion in *Brideshead Revisited*, but specifically looking at Charles Ryder's memory. This study examines the connection between sacred and secular experiences, and how memory plays a role in Charles's spiritual and personal journey. The key finding of the research is that in the novel, conversion is not only a religious transformation, but is also a means of the protagonist's identity acquisition, responsibility and human relationships. This study adds meaning to ongoing research since it reveals how Waugh processes the moral transformation movement and the human values through the lens of religious creation.

Writing from a postcolonial perspective, MacLeod (2010) explores Waugh's *Sword of Honour* and the novel's "approach to war, empire, and political identity. The study indicates that Waugh challenges the conventional notion of British imperial strength and national sovereignty. Military events reveal hidden fissures in political and social structures; characters feel disoriented about the values and standards they were brought up with. This study values MacLeod's analysis not only because it serves as a reference point for the present work, but also because it offers insight into Waugh's understanding of the nature of war, in which he delves deeper than military combat into the realm of

power, identity, politics and the erosion of accepted beliefs.

Paul Pennyfeather of *Decline and Fall* is analyzed by O'Brien (2017), and the novel is Elco meted with respect to the nineteenth century's idealism. The study stresses Waugh's portrayal of universities and institutions of social action in a satirical vein and demonstrates the gap between what we see and what we get regarding respectability. Paul's experiences show a culture where institutions that are supposed to have moral and disciplinary disciplines operate irrationally and/or hypocritically. One of the aspects of O'Brien's study which might be considered useful in an exploration of Waugh's satiric use of comedy is her ability to show the serious deficiencies of social institutions and moral values.

In Okuma's (2019) analysis of Waugh's war literature, he reflects on Catholic identity and highlights the three themes of repentance, responsibility, and spiritual reflection. The course maintains that in Waugh's fiction, both the 'factual' and military aspects of war are accompanied by the 'moral' dimensions of war. Characters find themselves subjected to suffering, guilt, failure and the repercussions of their actions. The discussion is significant as it brings together the ideas about war and those concerning religious and ethical values consistent with Waugh's broader concern with these issues in Okuma. It justifies the idea that Waugh makes use of his war experiences for a discussion of man's need for meaning and moral responsibility.

Sánchez Fernández (2022) discusses *Brideshead Revisited* as a novel of forgetting and the sentimental link to the

past. The results indicate that, the areas, family history, religion and memory of the past contribute in maintaining the past. Meanwhile, these aspects showcase the contrast of old values and the evolving modern era. Memory thus becomes a significant tool whereby Waugh examines cultural loss and personal identity. Such research will help to clarify the nature of social change and its impact on Institutions but above all the way individuals understand their past and present which is the reason the usefulness of the research in the present study.

In Villar Flor (2016), argues about military life in Waugh's series of novels: *Put Out More Flags* and *Sword of Honour*. This research is based on the depiction of soldiers, military institutions, and wartime experiences. Villar Flor reveals that Waugh does not depict military life as being all heroic and all romantic. Instead, he highlights confusion and the resulting difficulty and inefficiency, along with institution-based problems and the struggles of individuals trying to preserve personal dignity in complex systems. The study relates directly to the topic of war and human values, for it shows the conflict that is present between traditional duty and the actual conditions of today's war.

This article asks the question: Where did Japanese interest in Evelyn Waugh come from between 1948 and 1963? (Wilson 2014). The study provides insights into reception of Waugh's novels at the international level and demonstrates that his novels generated interest beyond Britain. Among the aspects that effectively contributed to his international literary reputation was his satire, criticism of society and depiction of life in the 20th

century. Though this study is about most reception, and not war and morality, it illustrates that Waugh's issues with society and human behaviour have relevance beyond its initial British cultural context.

Woodward (2022) looks at the relationship between Waugh and wartime propaganda, as well as literature, politics and military communication. The findings of this study show that Waugh knew propaganda had the potential to shape people's perceptions of wars and political happenings. Propaganda is treated with a critical attitude towards an official narrative or political representation. It is particularly valuable to see the literary approaches to the war in relation to larger issues of truth, power, patriotism and public opinion, as Woodward's work does for Waugh's writing.

Zimbroianu (2019) looks at the reaction to *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies* in Franco's Spain and Communist Romania. The study shows that Waugh's satire was not solely political, cultural, and could be seen by others. His attack on hypocrisy, social privilege, artificial behaviour and institutional weakness always had a message of value in their application beyond Britain. The study is thus a step toward understanding the societal implications of this writer and, it can be said, of all Waugh's work; it demonstrates the broader relevance of Waugh's criticism of society.

Analysis of the Study:

1. War and Human Experience

This instability in modern life manifests itself in many ways, one of which is war. In his large novels, war isn't seen exclusively in terms of battles, soldiers,

weapons and political events. It is Waugh's intention to affect the everyday life of humanity. The war transforms relationships, disturbs aspects of life, introduces ambiguity, and undermines an urban fabric and ties which have been generally relied upon. Thus, his account of war transcends the historical description and becomes a study of human insecurity, disappointment, loss and moral confusion. In *Brideshead Revisited*, the war's influence is intertwined as Charles Ryder's personal recollections. The novel juxtaposes the pre-war world and the war created world, making room for Waugh to demonstrate the world's changes. Charles's recollections of *Brideshead* are of a privileged past, beautiful, traditional, familial, and religious. As the war unfolds, this somewhat older space gradually moves away from the modern reality in which it is situated. *Brideshead* becomes a social and cultural norm, slowly writhed out of favor, as a place.

There's the personal aspect to the war too. The passages in which Charles Ryder is a soldier and his relations with Sebastian and Julia and the Marchmain family illustrate the interaction of historical events with personal feelings. The characters have to split their own issues and larger crisis. Separation, uncertainty, duty and loss have formed their relationships. In this regard, Waugh depicts war as an event that becomes personal.

During times of crisis, religion also becomes a part of understanding human experience. The Marchmain family grapples with the dilemmas of faith, responsibility, guilt and redemption. Waugh does not hesitate to state that the modern world is unstable, whereas there is

a potential for spiritual continuity. His attitude towards religion is neither easy or simple, but the novel implies that no amount of material wealth and social privilege can guarantee one's security in the face of hardship and death.

This is even more evident in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy. Guy has a deep sense of duty, honour and old fashion ideals of service when he joins the military. But the reality of war gradually begins to erode his-held views. The military and political structures which are supposed to bring order seem confused, inefficient and political. So, Guy realizes the difference between honour and how war is conducted today.

Waugh's depiction of war is an idealism versus reality struggle. The characters may go to war with notions of courage, duty, loyalty, patriotism, but they rapidly discover its flaws when challenged by politics and the desire for self-interest, corruption, and the monetization of everything else. Waugh is not proposing the abdication of courage and honour as such entities are nothing new in literature but why it is so hard to sustain them within institutions that seem to have not entirely secured their moral footing.

2. Society and Social Change

Waugh's novels depict a changing society which is moving from traditional forms to an emerging modern and unstable world. His characters' social world is shaped by changing attitudes to marriage especially the idealization of the idea of an ideal spouse - and family, and religion, and education and politics and individual freedom. In *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies* Waugh lampoons fashionable society's superficial behaviours through

the use of comedy and satire. But there is a serious issue of loss of social responsibility and fruitful human relationships, behind the jokes.

Waugh looks more intensely at the younger cohort and the glamour of the social life of the interwar world in *Vile Bodies*. Parties, celebrities, journalists, social events, romance and all the time entertainment are offered inside the novel. A world that is characterized by speed, exhilaration, publicity and short-lived pleasure prevails. There is great depth of emptiness beneath the surface of their lives and their energy and glam would appear to be attractive.

The relationships and goals of the youth in *Vile Bodies* are uncertain. Where they live, they are constantly being taught to go from one thing to another and get involved in fun rather than being involved or responsible. Waugh uses this world to raise a question about the improvement of happiness in the free modern world. Although there are opportunities for pleasures, it is a fact that many characters are not emotionally secure nor have they a sense of purpose.

One further concept crucial to social change in Waugh's work is the concept of family and marriage. Personal characteristics, economic factors, social norms, and personal freedom are more and more shaping traditional relationships.

3. Class and Privilege

Class and privilege are in the middle of Evelyn Waugh's fiction. In his novels he brings back into focus families of the aristocracy, wealthy people, educated elites, professionals, and ambitious types. This is a world where family, education, wealth, property, behavior and social

connections are important determinants of opportunities for these characters. This is a world seen from within but one also that reveals the world's faults and flip-sides.

Tony Last offers also important examples of the relationship of class privilege and individual suffering in *A Handful of Dust*. Tony is rich, land rich, status achieving and attached to his ancestral cave, Hetton Abbey. Initially, these bring him a sense of safety and a sense of identity. He fully recognizes his home and the very traditional aura it embodies. But his spoilt life doesn't guarantee him an unhurt heart or a happy existence.

Tony has an experience with social privilege when he marries Brenda. Tony's encounter with social privilege is the marriage to Brenda. He comes from a middle-class family socially acceptable, but his relationship begins to fall apart. Brenda's actions show that money and status do not bring affection and loyalty. Tony's failure to access his environment's emotional field adds to his isolation. So there is personal and social aspect to his tragedy.

Important in this respect is Hetton Abbey. It reflects Tony's aspirations to an older class system and lifestyle. Although the world around Tony's changes, he identifies himself with maintenance of the house. The social order Tony maintains is the social order that he sees fading away in Hetton. His tragedy thus needs to be understood in the context of a larger historical trend of the precariousness of inherited privilege.

Waugh offers another accurate portrayal of privilege in *Brideshead Revisited* through the Marchmain family. Wealth, social status, education, cultural influence and a

powerful sense of tradition all belong to the family. Charles Ryder is fascinated by this world and slowly starts to become very involved with it. The family is not depicted as an archetype of aristocratic existence, however:

The family of Marchmain suffers strife, divorce, heartbreak and doubt. They benefit from the richness of their wealth in that it comforts and gives them the amenities of the culture; but it does not cure personal problems. All of these scenes make clear how privilege is constrained: Lord Marchmain's rejection of his family; Sebastian's problems; Julia's internal dilemmas; Charles' complicated relationships. Thus, Waugh establishes an opposition between social difference and human fragility.

4. Morality and Human Values

One of the most profound concerns in the fiction of Evelyn Waugh is moral and the values of human. His novels are sometimes cited for their humor and satire, but the satire is the social portrait so that under the comic surface is a serious consideration of moral decisions among people in a changing society. Waugh's characters tend to operate in the middle ground and in conflict with traditional notions of right and wrong and the demands of contemporary life. They can explain themes of loyalty, honour, family, love, religion, duty, and respectability but their behaviour is not always in line with their words. This is a significant difference between the moral "show" and what is actually done, which becomes a point for criticism on the part of the author, Waugh. Morality and religion, and one's personal responsibility and feelings of family and love are inextricably linked in *Brideshead*

Revisited. The Marchmain family is an intricate case of people having a faith problem. The Catholicism goes beyond being a merely religious backdrop to being an integral component of the characters' knowledge of sin and forgiveness, responsibility and redemption. The moral world of novel is complicated rather than simple, because of the conflict between personal desires and principles of religion that are experienced by the characters of the novel.

For instance, Charles Ryder becomes a part of the Marchmain entourage primarily through his friendship with the young person Sebastian. He falls for Brideshead and its culture via the senses of beauty, privilege, friendship and emotion. However, as the story unfolds, Charles finds himself facing questions which require not only material and social values but also values of personal and moral order. His love affair with Julia also puts him at odds with matters of marriage, morality, responsibility and religious belief.

The nature of the character Sebastian is significant as his own sufferings reveal the contrast of ideal and imperfect conduct. It's difficult for him to abide by the rules of his family and his religion. He could not keep his life in check, thereby proving that many moral principles aren't easily followed. He is not merely a weak moral character -- the emotional, psychological obstacles to living by a moral code that is not necessarily shared or adopted are presented.

Thus, Waugh presents a nuanced depiction of morality that is not just about "right" and "wrong. His characters are flawed. They have errors, are selfish, have regrets,

sometimes they do not behave according to their ideals. But because of their failures the moral questions in the novels are significant. Offering a different perspective on this, Waugh posits that men and women are never cease and desist moving back and forth between what they desire and what they are responsible for.

In the overall, in Waugh's novel, morality takes a dual shape of challenge of traditional morality and modern pressures. Easy moral answers for his fiction are absent. Rather, it explores the failings, inadequacies and possibilities of humankind trying to live purposeful lives within an unstable society.

5. Social Inequality

Social inequality is another important element of Waugh's portrayal of society. The differences between rich and poor, socially dominant and socially disadvantaged, educated and undereducated, powerful and powerless, those with and without influential connections are not uncommon in his novels. These differences will impact the opportunities that are available to individuals as well as what individuals are evaluated on socially.

The advantages that Waugh's work upper class characters often have are unavailable to ordinary people. They have greater opportunities for better education, housing, travel, social connections and connections to influential people because of their wealth. Sometimes the mistakes that people make are more likely to be covered by family background. Waugh shows how social status can shape an individual's perception of reality in these descriptions. In *Decline and Fall*, the lack of equality of people grows to be a major subject of

satire. The relatively mundane character of Paul Pennyfeather's role puts him in situations that give him just a little bit more to lose than most. He surrounds himself with institutions which should symbolize justice, education, and respectability, but function often by social utility and personal interest.

The novel thus makes one think that the value of social respectability is not related with moral action. Vulnerability to a loss of personal influence can result in serious consequences for people with less influence. Waugh's comparison sheds light on the hypocrisy of a society that prides itself in being fair and yet lets privilege determine the outcome.

Vile Bodies introduces social inequality to fashionable culture and access to high-ranking social spaces. Transfer of post via party, entertainment, journalism and celebrity culture make room for some enjoying opportunities just because of their connection, social status. But if a privileged environment is a happy one, it can also be a phantasmagoria void, as Waugh, who has explored such possibilities as barns and workshops, demonstrates.

Inequality and privilege assume a heightened importance when social and political change is occurring. The ties of the older compartments are loosened, and their privileges are not so assured. War and the process of modernisation speed up this process. Waugh personifies this history shift by saturating his characters with the agonies of contentious efforts to hold on to a place within a rapidly evolving society.

Therefore, social inequality in Waugh's fiction has a social and moral or ethical dimension. His novels reveal the inequities

of opportunity, and challenge the notion that both wealth and status are true human superiority.

6. Satire as a Literary Method

A welcome distinctive characteristic of Evelyn Waugh's style is his use of satire. He does not only entertain the reader with humour, he also exposes the person, institution and social harbour, which show weakness in it. Irony, exaggeration, absurd situations, comic characters, unexpected events, sharp contrasts between what people say they believe and their actions are among the common devices of his satirical writing.

Satire is used in *Decline and Fall* in order to challenge established structures and institutions like education, religion, professionalism and social acceptability. Their conduct is frequently against reason and they always appear to be respectable people. This paradox is much of the humour for the novel.

Waugh can criticize serious social issues without seeming to come across as moralizing because he is making a comic commentary. The reader responds with a mixture of comedic glee and ill will, but a laugh that slowly gives way to a sense of comedy tinged with a piercing critique of hypocrisy, privilege and institutional dysfunction.

Another sharp example of Waugh's satirical knack is that of *Vile Bodies*. The novel is the story of the fashionable young generation who are captivated by parties, celebrities, newspapers, love, and entertainment. The cavilling for excitement makes for the comic moments, but the comic moments also show their directionless nature.

Waugh's satire applies to one social group, but importantly, Waugh's satire does not. He often refers to upper-class and fashionable society, but also shows the weaknesses among institutions and individuals in various kinds of society. In his criticism, he targets hypocrisy, artificiality, selfishness, pretension, and abusing power.

Satire thus is a leash connecting laughter and criticism of society. Waugh is writing in a style that gets people to laugh but not always in an agreeable manner. The comic scenes carry an underlying question as to the direction that contemporary society has begun with; one that poses a significant and serious question. His mockery raises readers' awareness of the values underlying the manifestation of human actions.

7. Changing Human Relationships

Changing human relationships form another important aspect of Waugh's fiction. His novels portray relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, friends, lovers, and members of the same social group. These relationships are often affected by social expectations, class differences, personal ambition, war, religion, and changing ideas about individual freedom.

Marriage occupies a prime importance in *A Handful of Dust*. As Tony and Brenda Last find their feelings apart and expectations clashing, the relationship falls apart. Tony cherishes his house, his family and his traditional roles, Brenda's interests grow in a new and alternative social and emotional life. Thus, their marriage is representative of a larger battle between traditional ideals and personal preferences.

Communication is also illustrated with their marriage breakdown. Their marriage breakdown also shows the importance of communication. Tony can't read Brenda's emotions and Brenda is getting even further removed from Tony's attitudes. They fail to communicate openly and thus resent and get selfish. The ending of their relationship is portrayed as a personal tragedy, but it's also symbolizing the transformation of consumer values.

These challenges are exacerbated in times of war. In *Sword of Honour*, the war and politics disrupt relationships. That people are isolated from family and friends, and that circumstances are shifting making it hard to sustain previous levels of stability. During war, when characters will have to rethink and redefine loyalty and responsibility.

Waugh also shows the influence of social class on relationships. People may form friendships or romantic attachments across social boundaries, but class expectations continue to influence their behaviour. Wealth, family background, education, and reputation can affect whom individuals are allowed to marry or associate with. In this way, personal relationships are never completely separate from the social environment.

Through these relationships, Waugh demonstrates that social change has a deeply personal dimension. Changes in class structures, morality, religion, and social expectations ultimately affect how people love, trust, communicate, and remain loyal to one another. His novels suggest that genuine human connection requires more than social proximity; it depends on responsibility, understanding, loyalty, and emotional commitment.

Overall Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Waugh's fictionalized world depicts the evolving attitude of society, where traditional notions about morality, class, family, responsibility and social order come into conflict with modernity, materialism and war.

Waugh's novels do not have war as a historical background. It impacts upon lives, relationships, friendships, social structures and beliefs. It brings indecision and weakening in the already existing systems. Throughout, Waugh's depiction of class shows the powerlessness of riches and dignity. His characters may have class, schooling, wealth, and power, but all these things are not enough to keep them safe from solitude, heartbreak, moral shortcomings, or the course of world history.

The study also shows the significance of Waugh's morality and human values in his fiction. The themes of loyalty, responsibility, love, faith, dignity, and compassion against selfishness, materialism, hypocrisy and social ambition are echoed over and over. Waugh does not portray his characters as wholly good or evil, but reveals their moral struggles and weaknesses. This criticism is enhanced by his use of satire. Through humour and irony, he reveals the artificiality of fashionable society, weakness in institutions, and social privilege, as well as the gap between social activeness and real human action.

Waugh's enduring legacy is best summarized in his capacity to amuse and even to throw probing social and moral light, utilised by satire. There is an

underlying seriousness in his humor: about the state of mankind in times of social and historical change. His novels also conclude that external outward success, class privilege, and material comfort are not enough without the true human values. In this regard, Waugh's fiction is valuable literary analysis of war, society, moral chaos and the human quest for meaning and home.

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