

Essay on Travel Writing

Studies in Travel Writing, Vol. 8, No. 1, is devoted to Modernist Travels. The issue includes an essay by Peter Miles entitled "The Writer at the Takutu River: Nature, Art, and Modernist Discourse in the Travel Writing of Evelyn Waugh" (65-87). Several of Waugh's photographs and designs are reproduced, and his color illustration for *Labels* appears on the cover.

Studies in Travel Writing is published at Nottingham Trent University, and the web site is available at <http://human.ntu.ac.uk/research/stw/links.html>.

Waugh-Greene Exhibition

Readers are also reminded of the forthcoming exhibition, "Writing among the Ruins: Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh," at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, from 5 October 2004 through 20 March 2005. Selina Hastings, author of *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography*, and Shirley Hazzard, author of *Greene on Capri: A Memoir*, will be scheduled to speak. A film series devoted to the work of Waugh and Greene will also be arranged. For dates and times, please check the Ransom Center's web site, www.hrc.utexas.edu.

Waugh Room at Hertford College, Oxford

The Middle Common Room at Hertford College, Oxford, plans to dedicate one of their rooms to Evelyn Waugh. The postgraduate students in the MCR also intend to organize "Waugh Night" in late October 2004, "to pay tribute to one of our most eminent alumni." If you are interested in helping to furnish the room by donating copies of novels or other memorabilia, please contact the editor, jwilson3@lhup.edu.

Book Reviews

The World is Always Too Much

Evelyn Waugh and the Modernist Tradition, by George McCartney. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003. 211 pp. \$24.95. Reviewed by Jonathan Pitcher, Bennington College.

And so the sick mind continues to infinity, creating groups then dispersing them again, heaping up diverse similarities, destroying those that seem clearest, splitting up things that are identical, superimposing different criteria, becoming more and more disturbed, and teetering finally on the brink of anxiety.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*

The above is one of the more infamous passages of twentieth-century social science. It concludes a paragraph describing an aphasiac's ever-failed attempts to sort and re-sort clews of colored thread. The twist is that for Foucault the aphasiac should revel in this inability, and is only traumatized by the external imposition of a counterfeit desire for order. It is also the rationale for Foucault's radical negation of the meaning-making premises of his field, indeed of any field, and would ultimately become the impetus for his paradoxical creation of "spontaneous" resistance in practice.

The following, published over thirty years earlier, is a description of *A Handful of Dust*'s Mrs. Rattery, as cited by George McCartney:

Mrs. Rattery sat intent over her game, moving little groups of cards adroitly backward and forwards about the table like shuttles across a loom; under her fingers order grew out of chaos; she established sequence and precedence; the symbols before her became coherent, interrelated . . . then [she] drew them towards her into a heap, haphazard once more and without meaning. (87)

McCartney's book, titled *Confused Roaring* (Indiana University Press, 1987) in its former life, presents Waugh as an author both of and often before his time. This version of the last century is buoyant on the literary modernism of Conrad, Mann, Lawrence, Woolf and Joyce, all of whom "portray European man as a victim of his overly intellectual culture" (34), on the fluctuating, frivolously intricate architecture of Antonio Gaudi, the modern art of Francis Picabia and Max Ernst (the former's cubism paralleling the latter's "seething surrealism" [58]), the transience of film, and above all on Henri Bergson, "the philosopher of Becoming" (37). Denying all principles of intelligibility, of the symbiosis of the intellectual and physical worlds, such figures' replacement is the vague promise of an acultural *entame*, projected into the present and then intuitively apprehended--a mass aphasia. Mrs. Rattery, along with Waugh's other "willful gods" (23), the likes of Captain Grimes, Lord Copper, Rex Mottram, and Sir James Macrae, all "live completely in the present moment, unable to recall today what they said and did yesterday" (90). In mirroring their milieu, unimpeded by the past, they are successful because of this oblivion. In contrast, bereft of meaning, Paul Pennyfeather's apparently stable "Edwardian dream of an ordered, benevolently progressive world achieved by prudence and industry" (9), or Tony Last's nonchalant, neo-Gothic idealism, are belittled by these *übermenschen*, superstitions now condemned, along with the superstitious, to disappear.

Although there is no explanation for this edition's change in title (the only difference between the two is a new introduction), McCartney's twist, unlike Foucault's, was and is neither confused nor roaring. At first blush, the earlier title implied that Waugh was a paid-up member of the modernist tradition, or, more probably, that he was capricious and therefore modernist by default. McCartney's suggestion, however, is that while Waugh appropriated the techniques and indeed the content of modernism (abstract characters, the shifting perspective of film, "the flux of Becoming" [14]), he was an *agent provocateur*, simultaneously manifesting that content's shortcomings. Nina Blount's description of the industrialized countryside via her hallucinated flight in *Vile Bodies* is compared to "the geometries of a Picabia canvas" (60), and then to the similar, later experience of a sanguine Gertrude Stein: "'When I looked at the earth I saw all the lines of cubism made at a time when not any painter had ever gone up in an airplane'" (cit. 62). Just as the adroit Mrs. Rattery, despite a hankering for coherence, is incapable of organizing her cards, Nina's response, indicative of Waugh's deflation of his own process, is "'I think I'm going to be sick'" (cit. 60). McCartney's viable claim is that such pseudo-modernism is so proficient that some readers miss the retching, "that there are those who have assumed the fiction is as disorderly and slapdash as the world it portrays" (112), "a symptom of Waugh's moral confusion" (16). Here, however, aphasia is still a sickness, feigned by Waugh in order to redefine it as such in its own terms.

Within Waughian criticism, this book collapses the oft-touted dichotomy between anarchy and order, illustrating that the anarchy always implicitly eats itself and on occasion explicitly vomits itself up. Even if we choose not to accept the overt Catholicism of the later novels as an alternative to modernism, McCartney's Waugh "was as convinced at twenty-five as he was at sixty that his society had forfeited its claims to civility" (142), and the tactic of using that forfeiture against itself is therefore constant, regardless of the alternative. Such partial acceptance is rendered in the new introduction as "Whatever one thinks of his answers, he was raising the right questions" (xvii). More broadly, as McCartney intimates, it is a tactic that may be deployed against "the course of the modern novel since Flaubert" (110), and "since Flaubert" is surely an understatement. Most significantly, beyond Waugh, and indeed beyond literature, rather than perceiving modernism as unconventional, as revolutionary, it is repositioned as the superstructure, the norm. While Foucault assumed that society's mediation of reality was becoming more sophisticated over time, and that this gap should be closed by dispensing with

the mediation, both Waugh and McCartney assume the opposite. One of the chapters is titled “Chromium Plating and Natural Sheepskin” (136), which is both Mrs. Beaver’s recommendation for the revamping of Hetton and a synecdochic indication of the similarities between the modern and bestial worlds. Via this semblance, McCartney’s version of Brenda Last’s predicament “is that in seeking to escape one orthodoxy [Tony’s lackluster tradition], she has only succeeded in succumbing to another [modernity]” (152).

The continued prevalence of such orthodoxy, such “technological barbarism” (137), prompted the new edition, the hope that we may parody the tactics of the post-secular age in order to conquer our own cultural amnesia. For McCartney, “Waugh’s preoccupations are even more pertinent” (x), and the introduction is therefore more caustic, averring that the relativist arguments of 1984’s O’Brien, a man convinced that two and two are five, “are eerily similar to those being promoted by many intellectuals today” (xvi). If this prevalence is the point, it is also the problem, for modernity’s technique, its amnesia, is supersessively self-fulfilling, forgetful of even its own earlier forms, and is thus protected. In a way, however persuasive, McCartney has talked himself out of much of an audience. Over the last seventeen years, the book was checked out of my library three times.

Catholicism as Ethos

The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845-1961: Newman, Hopkins, Belloc, Chesterton, Greene, Waugh, by Ian Ker. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003. 231 pp. \$25.00. Reviewed by Patrick Query.

“In no case can [Catholics], strictly speaking, form an English Literature.” John Henry Newman

Ian Ker assures the reader at the outset of his latest book that Newman was “happily lacking in prescience” when he made this grim prognostication (2). And up to a point Ker shows that there is now a formidable English Literature by Catholics. Another question, though, drives this excellent study and has perhaps never been so alive as at present: What makes writing “Catholic”? Is it a matter of the author’s baptism? Of imagery? Of style? Recent centenary conferences on Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh, the success of the annual Conference on Catholicism in Literature (Little Rock, AR), and a number of book-length studies have kept the question in focus for scholars. Ker’s is a significant contribution to the discussion, and although it does not presume to answer the big question definitively, it does much more than simply pose it once again. Any future studies taking up the intersection of Catholicism (indeed, of religion) and literature will be indebted to this book.

Ker sets himself a narrow field in which to work, limiting his study to those major English writers who wrote “as they did *because* they were Catholics” (9). He excludes a number of interesting figures—David Jones, Siegfried Sassoon, Edith Sitwell, Ford Madox Ford—because they fall in one way or another outside his intended scope. A point about which Ker says little is that *all* English Catholic writers are on a kind of periphery, and including such writers as these might have shown the range of ways in which this is true. On the other hand, strict limitations enable Ker to do a thorough job with the six writers who did make the cut.

In the G. K. Chesterton chapter, Ker refers to Charles Dickens’s “unconsciously Catholic and medieval ethos and imagination,” thereby almost blithely confirming perhaps the most problematic—and potentially the most attractive—notion behind this book: that in Western civilization Catholicism *is* an ethos, a form of mind frequently unattached to institutional religion as such. In part because he deals so thoroughly with the Church’s institutional apparatus, Ker justifies his temerity in suggesting that there is more than the occurrence of same to literary Catholicism. If Catholicism is indeed an “imagination,” as a very few other critics have begun to argue, then its reach is much subtler and more pervasive than we may have