

Waugh Among the Modernists: Allusion and Theme in *A Handful of Dust*

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A Handful of Dust (1934), Evelyn Waugh's fourth novel, occupies a pivotal place in his work. Though it includes many of the comic and satiric elements that made his first novels so popular, *A Handful of Dust* is generally considered Waugh's first serious novel, a fact which the author acknowledged wryly in his 1963 "Preface": "This book found favour with the critics, who often date my decline from it."¹ One of the features of the book which made some critics uncomfortable was what they perceived as an uneasy mixture of realism and symbolism in the book.² I would like to suggest that many of these difficulties disappear when *A Handful of Dust* is read in terms of its cultural allusions and references to other writers, particularly Conrad and Eliot. The novel's allusiveness is apparent even before we begin reading it: the title and epigraph are from Eliot's *Waste Land*, and two of the chapter titles ("Du Côté de Chez Beaver" and "Du Côté de Chez Todd") invoke Proust. In different ways, both Eliot's poem and Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* give us pictures of entire societies, and Waugh's allusions to them suggest that he has similar ambitions.

Waugh's picture of society employs a simple story and focuses on one couple, Tony and Brenda Last. Tony is devoted to his country house, Hetton Abbey, and to traditional social values; Brenda longs for the excitement of London and begins an affair with a worthless young man named John Beaver. When the Lasts' young son, their only child, is killed in a hunting accident, Brenda demands a divorce. Tony at first agrees, but changes his mind when he realizes that the settlement would require him to sell Hetton. He joins an expedition to

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find a lost city in Brazil, and, when the expedition goes disastrously wrong, is rescued and captured by the illiterate Mr. Todd, who forces him to read aloud the novels of Dickens over and over. Tony is presumed dead, Brenda marries an old friend, and a cadet branch of the Last family inherits Hetton.

This summary gives no sense of the quality of Waugh's narrative or style, but it does suggest some of his characteristic themes, particularly the fate of traditional values in the twentieth century. Like *The Good Soldier* and *The Great Gatsby*, *A Handful of Dust* is about the cost of idealism and the futility of nostalgia; like Ford and Fitzgerald, Waugh gives us a central character who is in some ways admirable but seriously flawed and often oblivious to everyday reality. The reader initially sympathizes with Tony as the wronged husband, but comes to realize that Tony has an "adulterous" relationship of his own—his obsession with Hetton, which causes him to neglect his wife and son and thus contributes to Brenda's decision to have an affair.

The architecture of Hetton tells us a good deal about Tony's values. The description of it in the county guidebook is dismissive:

Between the villages of Hetton and Compton Last lies the extensive park of Hetton Abbey. This, formerly one of the notable houses of the county, was entirely rebuilt in 1864 in the Gothic style and is now devoid of interest. The grounds are open to the public daily until sunset and the house may be viewed on application by writing.
(17)

Since the original house was an abbey, it was built before Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and was therefore Gothic in style. It was this house which Tony's great-grandfather tore down to build a new house in Victorian Gothic, the synthetic revivalist style popularized by A. N. W. Pugin; the best-known example is the Parliament Buildings in London. No-one would mistake Victorian Gothic for the original: it is rather an affectionate imitation in which certain features of the original are exaggerated. The unauthentic style of Tony's house reflects his unreal way of life. Pugin's architecture was an expression of his revulsion from the realities of Victorian life, including industrialism, but it could never be more than escapism. Tony Last's rever-

ence for traditional country life is similarly reactionary; the estate barely supports itself financially and the Lasts are effectively poor, but Tony's romanticism is based on a refusal to face facts. His obtuseness regarding Brenda's affair is consistent with the rest of his life.

If Hetton exposes in architectural terms the falseness of Tony's life, his dislike of London evokes literary tropes of which Tony is similarly unaware. He subscribes, unconsciously, to one of the oldest dichotomies in European literature—the opposition of town and country, in which the town represents corruption and the country a simple virtuous life in harmony with nature. This opposition is subverted in the novel in several ways. If the country is isolated from the temptations of city life, it is also closer to the dangers of nature. Tony's son will be killed by a kicking horse, and Tony himself will come close to death twice in the wilds of Brazil. When Tony leaves on his expedition, Brenda asks Jock Grant-Menzies if he will be safe, and Jock answers, "Oh, I imagine so. The whole world is civilized now, isn't it—charabancs and Cook's offices everywhere" (198). Waugh's irony cuts both ways: the whole world is not civilized in the way Jock means, as Tony is about to discover, and "civilization" in the twentieth century is an increasingly problematic term.

This brings us to Joseph Conrad, whose dismantling of "civilization" in *Heart of Darkness* resonates through all of twentieth-century literature. Tony's adventures in Brazil and his capture by the grotesque Mr. Todd have long been recognized as an extended reference to *Heart of Darkness*.³ The surface parallels are obvious enough: a dangerous river journey, an encounter with a sinister, possibly mad European who tyrannizes over the natives, and a revelation. It is the differences between the two narratives, however, which reveal Waugh's themes and the reason for the allusions. In Conrad, the heart of darkness—Kurtz's "horror"—is the black hole at the centre of the universe, the recognition that all values are human constructions, that good and evil are mere words, that there is no standard by which to say that Kurtz's acts were atrocities. Waugh, the Catholic convert, could not endorse Conrad's vision of nothingness, but the two writers

share a belief in the bankruptcy of what Waugh called “humanism”—the system of social restraints and secular moral codes severed from the Judeo-Christian tradition which gave rise to them. In a famous passage in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow addresses the question of how we can avoid stepping into the abyss. Force of habit, fear of public opinion and the law, and mere obliviousness will keep most people in line;⁴ for those who see the artificiality and ultimate impotence of such restraints, however, there are only two possibilities: Kurtz’s murderous nihilism, or complicity in a conscious lie like the one Marlow tells to Kurtz’s “Intended.”

With this in mind, our interest in the final section of Waugh’s novel focuses on how Tony will react to his own encounter with the radical disorder of the jungle. He is neither religious nor very bright; he has been one of those who believe that moral values are self-evident. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow summarizes such people contemptuously, and perhaps enviously, in terms which suggest Waugh’s depiction of Tony: “Of course you may be too much of a fool to go wrong—too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness” (54). In the early part of the novel, Tony’s naive idea of the good is embodied in Hetton, where the bedrooms are named after characters in Malory—Lancelot, Percival, Yseult, Elaine, Galahad, and so on. If Tony were a reader, he might realize the implications of the fact that his wife’s bedroom is Guinevere, but even when his personal Camelot falls he learns nothing and attempts, unconsciously, to find another perfect City—the lost city of the Pie-Wie Indians, the Eldorado of Dr. Messinger’s expedition. Finally, feverish and out of his mind, Tony seems to realize that all human societies are corrupt; all are versions of the London house which Mrs. Beaver, John Beaver’s mother, split up into flats and decorated in the latest style for the use of casual adulterers like Brenda:

Listen to me. I know I am not clever but that is no reason why we should forget all courtesy. Let us kill in the gentlest manner. I will tell you what I have learned in the forest, where time is different. There is no City. Mrs. Beaver has covered it with chromium plating and converted it into flats.

Three guineas a week, each with a separate bathroom. Very suitable for base love. And Polly will be there. She and Mrs. Beaver under the fallen battlements ... (238)

In Conrad's terms, Tony has moved from obliviousness to insight; he has seen the heart of darkness ("There is no City") and the question is how he will respond to it. He realizes soon enough that he cannot find his own way out of the jungle and that Mr. Todd will not help him. He is trapped in a mini-society as vicious as the one he fled.

Even the first reviewers of the novel were uneasy about this surreal episode in what is generally a realistic novel, and critics since have been divided on its appropriateness and effectiveness. The most trenchant criticism was put by Waugh's friend Henry Yorke (the novelist Henry Green) in a letter to the author.

The book was entirely spoilt for me by the end—the end is so fantastic that it throws the rest out of proportion. Aren't you mixing two things together? The first part of the book is convincing, a real picture of people one has met and may at any moment meet again. [...] But then to let Tony be detained by some madman introduces an entirely fresh note & we are in phantasy with a ph at once.⁵

Waugh acknowledged the fantastic element but defended the ending:

You must remember that to me the savages come into the category of "people one has met and may at any moment meet again." I think they appear fake to you largely because you don't really believe they exist ... [...] All that quest for a city seems to me justifiable symbolism.⁶

The symbolism is justified, I would argue, largely by the way in which Waugh uses Dickens to contrast Tony's response to the abyss with Marlow's.

The obvious irony in Tony's reading-aloud is that Dickens is the great chronicler of the corruption of London, so that Tony will be forced to face the reality he has avoided or ignored throughout his life, but the irony goes deeper than that. During his travels in what was then called British Guiana, which inspired the story of Mr. Todd, Waugh had read Dickens with great pleasure. This pleasure did not

alter his belief that Dickens represented “the fatuous optimism of Victorian humanism”;⁷ he wrote later of Dickens’s “impermeable insular smugness” and the fact that “he celebrated Christmas—indeed appointed himself the special patron of the feast—while privately proclaiming disbelief in the event which it commemorates.”⁸

Dickens’s morality is, in Waugh’s view, a sentimental and hypocritical nonsense—an attempt to enjoy the certainties of Christian moral standards without belief in what gave rise to them. It is, quite simply, a lie, and as such exactly analogous to Marlow’s lie in *Heart of Darkness*. Jerome Meckier, in his detailed study of Waugh’s treatment of Dickens and Conrad,⁹ argues that Waugh saw the two earlier writers as essentially the same. Having discovered that “religious feelings survive religious beliefs,” Dickens “invested secular events with a sacred aura to which they were not logically entitled” (179); feasts become sacraments, good women become angels, and sentimental repentance becomes salvation. Despite Conrad’s pessimism, Meckier argues, he is engaged in a similar enterprise, at least as Waugh sees it:

Conrad and the Edwardians do not surpass Dickens and the Victorians because they are still looking for humanistic ways to feel religious about life, as if art, utilizing religious metaphors, might restore value to a purely secular existence. [...] Waugh loathes the surviving romantic belief that, despite the collapse of orthodoxy, the transcendent remains somehow accessible in the earthly, that going down far enough means eventually going upward. (183)

In this reading, Marlow’s reliance on what he calls “inborn strength” is “the stoical pessimist’s version of the secular virtues the humanists substituted for grace” (183), and his lie to Kurtz’s “Intended” is “an act of old-fashioned, humanistic benevolence” in the manner of Mr. Pickwick (186). In more general terms, of course, Marlow’s lie represents the West’s attempt to live *as if* its values were still solidly based in belief.

All of this is well-argued, and Meckier is persuasive on the parallels. But a crucial difference remains: while Dickens’s humanistic ethics—in Waugh’s view—obscure the loss of belief in a fog of pseudo-Christian sentiment, Conrad squarely faces the fact that any attempt

to evade the consequences of lost belief can only be based on a lie, and lies are fragile. The illusions of all Conrad's major protagonists sooner or later come to grief, with catastrophic results, and the prophetic aspect of *Heart of Darkness* in particular is its clear-eyed recognition that the twentieth century could not long maintain the fiction of moral values without a basis in belief. It is this aspect of Conrad that Waugh could respect and even admire despite the differences in their metaphysics, and it is this, I would argue, which makes the extended reference to *Heart of Darkness* in *A Handful of Dust* largely sympathetic.

In Waugh's view, the Conradian alternatives—nihilism or the lie—are responses to the loss of religious faith. Nihilism, conscious lying (such as Marlow's), and faith all prompt us to action of one sort or another, but the *unconscious* lie (Dickensian sentiment and/or the belief that moral values are self-evident) encourages passivity and drift. Throughout Waugh's novel, Tony is a patient rather than an agent; his one apparently decisive action—repudiating the divorce settlement—is only a reaction to the threat he perceives to Hetton, and his expedition with Dr. Messinger is merely an attempt to escape, at least temporarily, from the complications of his life. Emotionally and mentally incapable of nihilism or of real faith, Tony moves, in literary terms, backward in time: he ignores the Conradian meaning of his river journey, and his reading of Dickens is a reversion to Victorian sentimentality. His reading returns him, ironically, to Hetton, which was built during Dickens's lifetime and represents the same problem—appearance without reality, the sentiment of an earlier period without the ethos.¹⁰ Mr. Todd weeps at affecting scenes in Dickens, but has no intention of letting Tony go.

Waugh makes his point clear in the stages of Tony's delirium. At the height of his fever, he believes that he sees the Lost City of the Pie-Wie Indians:

[...] Tony saw beyond the trees the ramparts and battlements of the City; it was quite near him. From the turret of the gatehouse a heraldic banner floated in the tropic breeze. He struggled into an upright position and threw aside his blankets. He was stronger and steadier when the fever was on him

[...] [T]he sound of music rose from the glittering walls; some procession or pageant was passing along them. He lurched into tree trunks and became caught up in roots and hanging tendrils of bush-vine; but he pressed forward unconscious of pain and fatigue.

At last he came into the open. The gates were before him and trumpets were sounding along the walls, saluting his arrival; from bastion to bastion the message ran to the four points of the compass; petals of almond and apple blossom were in the air; they carpeted the way, as, after a summer storm, they lay in the orchards at Hetton. Gilded cupolas and spires of alabaster shone in the sunlight. (233-34)

This is a pretty, Pre-Raphaelite dream—Hetton without problems, Camelot without adultery, the City of God without doctrine, all imposed on an alien culture about which Tony knows nothing.¹¹ The sacred is mixed with the profane, the familiar with the exotic, and belief is irrelevant in this sentimental vision of the ideal. When he is rescued by Mr. Todd, Tony does have the revelation I have already cited (“There is no city”), but this Conradian moment occurs while he is still delirious and there is nothing to suggest that he remembers it later, when he has recovered. He relapses into the baseless post-Christian morality with which he grew up, and when Mr. Todd asks him if he believes in God, he says, “I suppose so. I’ve never really thought about it much” (240).¹² Tony comes close to an awareness of the bankruptcy of humanism, but unlike Marlow he cannot complete the journey; he retreats to the comfort of childhood, but without real faith, and his constant re-reading of Dickens is, in Waugh’s terms, wholly appropriate: they are kindred spirits. Like Kafka’s baffled protagonists, Tony undergoes his trials without any sense of their meaning.

Heart of Darkness and *A Handful of Dust* are both quest narratives, and the same can be said of Eliot’s *Waste Land*, the other Modernist work echoed in Waugh’s novel. As Meckier points out in a footnote, “One of Waugh’s subsidiary aims in *A Handful of Dust* is to separate Eliot, whom he accepts as a religious writer, from Conrad, whom he dislikes as a humanist” (180). In the Grail legends which Eliot employs, the King has been injured and the land, identified with him, has become infertile. The questing knight travels to the Chapel Perilous

and asks a series of questions; the King's wound is healed and the land is restored. In Eliot's poem, as in the original myth, the waste land is obviously spiritual—the result of loss of belief in the divine and the significance of human actions—and the solution is implied by allusions in the poem to Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu scriptures. When he wrote the poem, Eliot himself was in the spiritual wilderness (he joined the Anglican communion a few years later), but he had no doubt about the alternatives. There is no middle ground in *The Waste Land* between faith and despair, no sentimental Dickensian morality, no conscious or unconscious lie. In *A Handful of Dust*, Tony is in some ways like the knight of the Grail legends. He rightly avoids the waste land of London, affirms traditional values, and eventually goes on a quest for the "City"; but, as I have already suggested, Tony's obliviousness means that his quest can never be more than an ironic and abortive one. As Jeffrey Heath notes, "Unlike the pure knight of legend, who is guided by faith, Tony does not seek the right goal, and he does not know the right questions. Rather than freeing the maimed king, he becomes one of the denizens of the waste land, waiting for a release that never comes."¹³

Thematically, then, *A Handful of Dust* is sympathetic to Eliot's depiction of spiritual quest but blackly comic in its depiction of the protagonist and his fate. As Heath implies, Tony is ill-equipped to be the questing knight; he is in fact more like the impotent king in *The Waste Land*. This figure is implied in the title of Part II of Eliot's poem, "A Game of Chess." As virtually all commentaries on the poem note, the king in chess is an "impotent" piece, capable of little and in constant need of protection, while the queen is the most powerful piece on the board. The two scenes of married life in "A Game of Chess," one involving the affluent, the other the working class, deal with women manipulating their husbands in different ways, and it seems likely that the relationship of Brenda and Tony throughout *A Handful of Dust* is intended to refer thematically to the impotent-king motif and dramatically to the weak husband/strong wife scenes in *The Waste Land*. It is interesting, in this regard, that there is no bedroom named "Ar-

thur" at Hetton: Tony sleeps in "Morgan le Fay" (18-19), a reference to Arthur's sister, a powerful sorceress, and, in keeping with his passivity, he goes from one sort of thralldom to another.

In addition to his burlesque of the questing-knight theme, Waugh provides sardonic versions of some of the incidents and characters in *The Waste Land*. The fortune-teller Madame Sosostriis, in Part I of Eliot's poem, is a "famous clairvoyante, / [...] known to be the wisest woman in Europe, / With a wicked pack of cards."¹⁴ This figure of debased religion, herself borrowed from Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*, tells fortunes with a set of Tarot cards; she is transformed in *A Handful of Dust* into Mrs. Rattery, a house-guest at Hetton during the time John Andrew is killed, who passes the time playing elaborate games of solitaire:

Mrs. Rattery sat intent over her game, moving little groups of cards adroitly backwards 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. (127)¹⁵

The order she creates is of course meaningless, the result of an arbitrary set of rules for the game; this may well be Waugh's symbol of the modern secular order. Mrs. Rattery is nevertheless in some ways an impressive figure, one of the few truth-tellers in Tony's artificial world. Because she is at home in the modern world and has no illusions, she becomes at times, paradoxically, a figure analogous to the Sybil and Tiresias, the all-seeing figures in Eliot's poem.¹⁶ When Tony imagines Brenda's grief when she hears the news of John Andrew's death, Mrs. Rattery suggests tactfully that "You can't ever tell what's going to hurt people" (126); when Tony confesses that he finds it "hard to believe" that John Andrew has died—attempting again, it seems, to take refuge in illusion—Mrs. Rattery replies bluntly, "It happened all right" (125).¹⁷

Having presented his readers with the alternatives, Eliot ends *The Waste Land* inconclusively: images of desolation and fragments of the European past are mixed with signs of hope and benedictions.

I sat upon the shore
 Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
 Shall I at least set my lands in order?
 London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
 These fragments I have shored against my ruins
 Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
 Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
 Shantih shantih shantih (ll. 423-33)

The reason for this inconclusiveness (note the lack of a final period) is not simply the modern avoidance of closed or definite endings, but Eliot's awareness that each reader must decide for himself or herself how the knight's quest will end. Waugh ends *A Handful of Dust* in similarly equivocal fashion: Tony's poor cousins have inherited Hetton, and Teddy Last, the son of the family, goes out to feed the silver foxes the family raises to increase the estate income.

They ran up to the doors when they saw Teddy come with the rabbits. The vixen who had lost her brush seemed little the worse for her accident.

Teddy surveyed his charges with pride and affection. It was by means of them that he hoped one day to restore Hetton to the glory that it had enjoyed in the days of his cousin Tony. (254)

One of Brenda's friends referred to Tony throughout her visit as "Teddy," and there is a sense in which cousin Teddy is Tony reborn, complete with illusions and devotion to Hetton; the cycle is set to begin again. But the poor cousins are more enterprising than Tony, and Teddy has chosen the famously uncomfortable "Galahad" as his bedroom (253). Perhaps, like his namesake, he will be a faithful questing knight and find the Grail; perhaps Last will be a verb, not an adjective, and the family will endure. As in Eliot, the reader's decision about the ending says much about his or her spiritual outlook.

A Handful of Dust invokes *The Waste Land* in other ways which cannot be tied to particular passages. These are *hommages* rather than specific allusions, but they draw attention to profound similarities of

theme and mood between the two works. Both Eliot and Waugh, for example, depict the pervasive boredom of the characters' lives and their futile pursuit of momentary transcendence in meaningless sex, and both societies seem devoid of real emotion: Brenda describes John Beaver as "cold as a fish" (59), and neither Tony nor Brenda reacts appropriately to the death of their only child. The casual brutality of most of the characters, notably Mrs. Beaver and Jock Grant-Menzies, is matched only by their refusal to learn anything from their own or other people's experiences. The possibility of knowledge or self-awareness through the arts is foreclosed by the characters' absolute lack of interest in such pursuits, and here again Waugh seems to echo Eliot. In *The Waste Land*, history and the arts have become a "heap of broken images" (l. 22) or "withered stumps of time" (l. 104), and the past is continually re-lived, the old myths re-enacted, because people refuse to read and learn: "And I Tiresias have foresuffered all / Enacted on this same divan or bed" (ll. 243-44). The meagre bookshelves in Tony's bedroom contain mostly books he read as a boy (19), and his ignorance of the meaning of Hetton's Arthurian room-names leads him to re-enact the fall of Camelot unconsciously. Waugh provides a compelling image of cultural amnesia and incoherence in his description of the London flat rented by Brenda's friend Jenny Abdul Akbar, a princess by virtue of her marriage to an Arab sheikh:

The Princess's single room was furnished promiscuously and with truly Eastern disregard of the right properties of things; swords meant to adorn the state robes of a Moorish caid were swung from the picture rail; mats made for prayer were strewn on the divan; the carpet on the floor had been made in Bokhara as a wall covering; while over the dressing-table was draped a shawl made in Yokohama for sale to cruise-passengers; an octagonal table from Port Said held a Tibetan Buddha of pale soapstone; six ivory elephants from Bombay stood along the top of the radiator. Other cultures, too, were represented by a set of Lalique bottles and powder boxes, a phallic fetish from Senegal, a Dutch copper bowl, a waste-paper basket made of varnished aquatints, a golliwog presented at the gala dinner of a seaside hotel, a dozen or so framed photographs of the Princess, a garden scene ingeniously constructed in pieces of coloured wood, and a radio set in fumed oak, Tudor style. In so small a room the effect was distracting. (131)¹⁸

In its mixing of sacred and secular, this scene echoes Part II of *The Waste Land*, in which “sevenbranched candelabra” are used profanely to illuminate a woman’s dressing-table (ll. 77-85); in its embrace of high and low from various cultures, the deracinated jumble of “fragments [...] shored against my ruins” looks back to the macaronic concluding lines of *The Waste Land* and forward to Tony’s culturally and morally incoherent vision of the City. Waugh acknowledges, with Eliot, that most people’s visions of the City, of the good, are now necessarily subjective and in flux:

What is the city over the mountains
 Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
 Falling towers
 Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
 Vienna London
 Unreal

(*The Waste Land*, ll. 371-76)

Other *hommages* to Eliot occur in the fifth chapter of Waugh’s novel, “In Search of a City.” Where Eliot uses vegetation myth and ritual to show the primitive patterns that underlie civilization, Waugh alternates scenes in the jungle and in London to draw ironic parallels between different societies’ food, entertainment, and brutalities. Where the various characters of *The Waste Land* embody the same dilemma and are in many ways interchangeable, those of *A Handful of Dust* reflect each other in similarly uncanny and unsettling ways. John Andrew has a double in the equally childish (but less endearing) John Beaver, and another in Winnie, Milly’s daughter, who, like John Andrew, asks awkward questions. Tony’s role as squire finds its shadow-double in Mr. Todd’s tyranny over the natives, and Hetton itself is mirrored in Todd’s meagre estate; after Tony is reported dead, he is “reborn” as Teddy. Many of the female characters—Brenda and Marjorie, Polly and Mrs. Beaver—speak almost identically and share the same round of activities.

Twelve years after the publication of *A Handful of Dust*, Waugh wrote that the novel was “humanist, and contained all I had to say about humanism.”¹⁹ In its analysis of the bankruptcy of a humanism

cut off from its religious roots, Waugh's novel takes its place in the pessimistic modern tradition of cultural analysis of which Conrad and Eliot were the most brilliant representatives, and establishes its *bona fides* through cultural and literary allusion. Tony's fate in the jungles of Brazil is not, as Henry Yorke thought, an aberration in an otherwise realistic novel,²⁰ but a macabre and allusive image of humanism's dead end and a tribute to two of Waugh's literary fathers. Like its great predecessors, *A Handful of Dust* conflates past and present, myth and history, the primitive and the civilized, and uses the protagonist's quest to show us a heart of darkness.

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NOTES

¹Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1964) 7. All subsequent references are to this edition, the last Waugh saw through the press.

²See the early reviews collected in *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Martin Stannard (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) 333-45.

³See, e.g., Jeffrey Heath, *The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and His Writing* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1983) 119: "Tony's relationship with Todd resembles that of Marlow and Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*"; and Terry Eagleton, "Evelyn Waugh and the Upper-Class Novel," *Critical Essays on Evelyn Waugh*, ed. James F. Carens (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987) 112: "Tony stumbles on Mr. Todd at the heart of darkness."

⁴See, *The Complete Short Fiction of Joseph Conrad*, ed. Samuel Hynes, vol. 3 (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco P, 1992) 53-54. The passage, too long to quote here, occurs in section II of *Heart of Darkness*, and begins with Marlow's words, "You can't understand. How could you?" Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁵Selena Hastings, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994) 314.

⁶Hastings 314.

⁷Martin Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years, 1903-1939* (New York: Norton, 1987) 329. Stannard notes that Waugh's father Arthur edited the Nonesuch edition of Dickens.

⁸"Apotheosis of an Unhappy Hypocrite" (1953), *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Donat Gallagher (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983) 445, 446.

⁹“Why the Man Who Loved Dickens Reads Dickens Instead of Conrad: Waugh’s *A Handful of Dust*,” *Novel* 13.2 (Winter 1980): 171-87. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically.

¹⁰Hetton is associated with Dickens early in the novel; Tony’s Aunt Frances “remarked that the plans of the house must have been adapted by Mr. Pecksniff from one of his pupils’ designs for an orphanage” (17).

¹¹Waugh wrote a book on the Pre-Raphaelites (1926), and the resemblance of this imagined scene to the pseudo-medieval landscapes of the school is not accidental.

¹²Tony has already shown his indifference to religion: he plans improvements to the house during Sunday service, and remarks to an acquaintance after John Andrew’s death, “the last thing one wants to talk about at a time like this is religion” (133).

¹³Heath 120.

¹⁴T. S. Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber, 1969) 62; *The Waste Land*, Part I, ll. 43, 45-46. Subsequent line or page references are to this edition.

¹⁵There are two other fortune-tellers in the novel: John Beaver, who pretends to tell Brenda’s fortune with a conventional pack of cards (40), and Mrs. Northcote, who “told fortunes in a new way, by reading the soles of the feet” (133).

¹⁶Mrs. Rattery’s contrary roles as Madame Sosostriis and the Sybil, the fraudulent and the genuine seer, are not contradictory. As Eliot says in one of his notes to *The Waste Land*, “all the women [in the poem] are one woman” (78), and many of the figures in the poem therefore embody ambiguous or contrary meanings.

¹⁷In keeping with her modernity, Mrs. Rattery arrives by airplane—as does Lina Szczepanowska, the “new woman” in Shaw’s *Misalliance*.

¹⁸The larger pattern of misplaced values and cultural incoherence in the novel is traced in Ann Pasternak Slater, “Waugh’s *A Handful of Dust*: Right Things in Wrong Places,” *Essays in Criticism* 32.1 (1982): 48-68.

¹⁹“Fan-Fare” (1946), in Gallagher 304.

²⁰As the poet William Plomer noted in his review, “it would be a mistake to regard Mr. Waugh’s more surprising situations as farcical or far-fetched; they are on the whole extremely realistic, and charged with the irony that belongs to the commonplace but is not always perceived.” See Stannard, *Critical Heritage* 154.