

The Transfer of Cultural Values: From Walter Scott to Waugh and Jünger

I.

Most readers are convinced that Evelyn Waugh is a „period“ author, skillful at capturing the moods, idioms, and behaviors of a certain time and place, but less than interested in the forces of social action and unable to grasp the historical dimensions of narration and society. His novels are, many critics declare, confined to issues of personal psychology or to the relations inside small groups. A case in point might well be *A Handful of Dust*. It does indeed start from the personal and the autobiographical: a short frustrating marriage and a resentment-filled divorce. There are few characters in the novel and all of them are driven by personal, not to say selfish, motives. Nevertheless a closer look at this „intimate record“ reveals something else.

The most striking moment early in the narrative is the description of „Hetton Abbey“ and, inevitably, the relationship between this estate and its current owner, the aptly and pointedly named Tony Last. To the uninformed eye, the manor seems the very embodiment of lovingly and respectfully preserved century-old historical tradition. In fact, well in keeping with the pious clichés of the „invention of England“,¹ Hetton Abbey is a building that in all essential ways is no older than 70 years (at the time when the action is supposed to have taken place): a historical sham. Its neo-Gothic character is suggested with devastating wit by the narrator:

„But the general aspect and atmosphere of the place; the line of its battlement against the sky; the central clock tower where quarterly chimes disturbed all but the heaviest sleepers; the ecclesiastical gloom of the great hall, its ceiling groined and painted in diapers of red and gold, supported on shafts of polished granite with carved capitals, half-lit by day through lancet windows of armorial satined glass, at night by a vast gasolier of brass and wrought iron, wired now and fitted with twenty electric bulbs; the blasts of hot air that rose suddenly at one's feet, through grills of cast-iron trefoils from the antiquated heating apparatus below, the cavernous chill of the more remote corridors where, economizing in coke, he had the pipes shut off; the dining-hall with its hammer-beam roof and pitch-pine minstrels gallery; the bedrooms with their brass bedsteads, each with a frieze of Gothic

¹ Cf. *The Invention of Tradition*. Ed. by E. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Cambridge, New York, 1983; Eric Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge, New York 1992. Cf. also Mark Girouard: *The Return to Camelot. Chivalry and the English Gentleman*. New Haven, London 1981. The critical literature on this whole issue of „invention“ is, of course, by now enormous.

text, each named from Malory, Yseult, Elaine, Mordred and Merlin, Gawaine and Be-divere, Lancelot, Perceval, Tristram, Galahad, his own dressing room, Morgan le Fay, and Brenda's Guinevere, where the bed stood on a dais, its walls hung with tapestry, its fireplace like a tomb of the thirteenth century, from whose bay window one could count the spires of six churches – all these things with which he had grown up were a source of constant delight and exultation to Tony; things of tender memory and proud possession“²

Waugh makes it abundantly clear that we are dealing with a construct of the social imagination; the date of the invention is 1864, plumb in the middle of the Victorian Age; touching nostalgia and tacky tastelessness are inextricably interwoven. Even more significant is a historical fact barely alluded to by Waugh: that what had been „formerly one of the notable houses of the county“ was from its very beginning based on dispossession and displacement – as the name shows, Hetton Abbey was one of the ecclesiastical properties secularized by Henry VIII's arbitrary actions and bestowed upon one of his robber barons.³ Clearly Waugh inscribes himself in the tradition most eloquently articulated by Gilbert Keith Chesterton: demystifying the „age-old“ traditions and baring the realities of modernizing intentionality that the facades are hiding.

A Handful of Dust hinges upon Tony Last's desperate attempts to hold on to an illusion. The divorce negotiations with his adulterous wife which he had pursued apathetically are cut off with brutal decisiveness as soon as Tony feels that Hetton Abbey might find itself endangered. This, of course, is a key turning point in the novel: for Tony adultery, even the loss of a son, seem less important than his vital relationship to his (false) self. Later on, as he treks toward the Amazonian jungles, Tony continues his dreams:

„His thoughts were occupied with the City, the Shining, the Many Watered, the Bright Feathered, the Aromatic Jam. He had a clear picture of it in his mind. It was Gothic in character, all vanes and pinnacles, gargoyles, battlements, groining and tracery, pavilions and terraces, transfigured Hetton, pennons and banners floating on the sweet breeze, everything luminous and translucent; a coral citadel crowning a green hill top sewn with daisies among groves and streams; a tapestry landscape filled with heraldic and fabulous animals and symmetrical, disproportionate blossom.“ (p. 222)

Needless to say, instead of finding this utopian spot (Hetton in the absolute, as it were), Tony ends up (at least in one of the two variant conclusions of the novel) in the trap of tedious and repetitious Victorian reading: Dickens' dark comedy as a substitute for tragedy (this is also an analogy to Waugh's own writing strategies).

² Evelyn Waugh: *A Handful of Dust* (1934). Boston 1962, pp. 13-14.

³ A recent study of the matter is Eamon Duffy: *The Stripping of the Altars. Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580*. New Haven/CT 1992.

In this symbolic and ideological context Tony Last's grievous sin ought to be plain to the reader, according to Waugh's evolving philosophy of history. Tony has identified the continuity and stability of values with their incorporation in transitory physical objects. He has proved unable to *transfer values*. He has overlooked the absolute and spiritual quality of values and their power to migrate in different historical products and to find alternative embodiments, while preserving their own beneficial energies. History passes, it also returns. Circumstances vary, but values are constant, even when they are not glued to ephemeral physical objects or environments.

The point of my explanation is simply that in its „deep-structure“ even *A Handful of Dust* (and *a fortiori*, as we shall see, other novels by Waugh) attaches itself to the mode of the historical novel, which is only in a very qualified way the descendant of the epic, as Lukács would have us believe.⁴ Rather, as emerging from Walter Scott's pen, the early 19th century historical novel was a philosophical disquisition on how historical progress could be handled in a humane and painless manner. The Scottian historical novel was an anti-revolutionary instrument used to reconcile progress and stability.

Before offering a few examples of the way in which historical novelists proceed, a brief observation may be useful. There is, in any kind of narrative fiction, „always already“ a dimension of the historical. It is impossible to write without a certain distantiation from the events narrated. Every „contemporary“ narrative already belongs to the past by the time it is composed and read. Dos Passos' trilogy *U.S.A.*, as well as many of Steinbeck's novels can be read now only as historical novels, and for many an American reader the temporal distance between *Middlemarch* and *Romola* appears negligible. Therefore I have to agree with Paul Hamilton⁵ when he says that a chief difference between modernity and the post-modern is the attitude toward the historical past: an assumed fixity (which we are able to know) in the first case and a playful motility in the latter. Burckhardt's celebrated „the state as a work of art“ (the title of his first chapter in *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, 1860) might as well be read as „the historical past as a work of art“. In the 19th century many novelists (not least Flaubert in *Salammô*) tried to live up to this principle. Not so the historical novelists (fewer but more substantial) who chose to walk in the steps of Walter Scott.

⁴ Cf. George Lukács: *Der historische Roman*. Berlin 1955.

⁵ Cf. Paul Hamilton: *Historicism*. London 1996, p. 4.

II.

When Sir Walter moved from narrative poetry to prose fiction, his first and fundamental book, *Waverley*, tackled head on the issue of his home country, Scotland, caught in the dilemma of identity and imitation. Already in the 17th century, but then much more dramatically and stringently in the 18th century, Scotland was faced with the option of joining the advancing direction of its overwhelmingly stronger Southern neighbor, England, or (on the contrary) trying to preserve its independence and its specific, traditional characteristics and way of life.

In the *first* case there were many advantages: a higher standard of living, a more open and broader horizon in the nation's positioning toward the world, increased possibilities for individual accomplishment, much more freedom of action, choice, and thought for each human person. There were clear disadvantages also: the merging into a vaster, but less structured community, the loss of the warmth and security provided by the multiple bonds of soil, blood, local community, the breaking of ties to the past, the gradual (perhaps irretrievable) loss of „soul“ and „charm“.

The *second* option provided exactly the opposite. Scotland could maintain its pride and its identity, it could preserve continuity and an autonomous self, but it would by the same token doom itself to fixity and cut itself off from the multiple connections and possibilities of entering a network of world-wide values and growth. How does one negotiate progress? This was the question that preoccupied many Scottish intellectuals, and certainly Walter Scott while he was writing *Waverley* and the chain of novels connected with it.

Scott was not willing to accept entirely and in an unqualified way either the first or the second of these two main possibilities as commonly defined. Rather he was working hard to find some *intermediate* answer in which somehow the best offered in each of the two options could be made to collaborate or even merge. In the novel *Waverley* we are faced with nothing short of a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of educational development, in which (the year is 1745, when the second of the major anti-English revolts in Scotland occurs) a naive young man is faced with several offers for his future development. Significantly he has several „alternative“ parents or fathers; he will have to choose among these and thus partially decide his own future. Likewise he has several possibilities as to his marriage; again, his choice will determine not only his own future, but also (to some extent) the outcome of the military-political campaign engaged for the fate of Scotland. Young Waverley is thus constrained to make decisions about his past, as well as on his future. His genealogical and matrimonial choices are

ultimately value options and psychological orientations that will shape the historical course of the society to which the young man belongs.

After much hesitation, some suffering, and some genuine peril, Edward reaches a happy solution. He will marry Rose Bradwardine – i.e. the daughter of a nobleman who is contendedly integrated in the new (Hanoverian) socio-economic order while preserving at least the outward trappings of his traditional mode of life (not without some comic features) precisely by imitating what has now become an artificial „tradition“. He will reject the reactionary/revolutionary paradigm embodied by Fergus and Flora MacIvor (with their vassals) and the dark, archaic structures it implies. He will become the „general inheritor“ in as far as he will bring together both Everard and Richard Waverley’s ownership, Phillip Talbot and Cosmo Bradwardine, not rejecting either the „southern“ or the „northern“ branches of his ancestry.

Significantly, throughout the series of adventures that lead to these outcomes, Edward Waverley will remain one of the most passive characters in the book, honorable and courageous, but devoid of initiative and (often) of a complete grasp of the events that tend to overwhelm him.

This scenario is repeated tirelessly in other novels from different angles. In *Rob Roy* young Frank Osbaldistone, reared in an environment of commerce and rationality, finds himself cast into a world of archaic violence, instinctual cruelty, and reckless individualist illegality (not only the MacGregors, but also Frank’s Scottish family). „Intermediate“ figures such as Bailie Nicol Jarvie and his female cousin (and future wife) Die Vernon help Frank find his way and ultimately become the inheritor of both rationality and sensibility (he gains not only a Scottish manor, but also a Roman Catholic wife), much as had been the case of Edward Waverley. In *Old Mortality* the young moderate Presbyterian Henry Morton and his graceful and civilized rival Lord Evandale together with Edith Bellenden stand for the Scottian solution of „middlingness“ and civilized reconciliation, against the cruel extremism of Lord Claverhouse, the royalist commander, and the gloomy fanaticism of the Scottish Covenanters, both of which are doomed in the long run, according to Walter Scott. Likewise in a quasi-contemporary novel such as *The Antiquary* genealogy and the rediscovery of sunken treasure provide the thematic thread; the thoroughly modern Major Neville („Lovel“) turns out to be the true heir of the Gothic and mysterious House of Glenallan. In a slightly more indirect manner *Ivanhoe* deals with a similar matter: how to combine the incoming order of the Norman Conquest with the tenacious opposition of the Anglo-Saxon indigenous remnant. (Cooper was to investigate this dilemma on a wider canvass: Amerindian Native values and ethnicities versus European immigrants and their progressive modernity). Perhaps the best example is that of *Redgauntlet* where the victory of the new

rational and modernizing order is plain to see and widely accepted. There also we have to do with a highly passive hero, Darsie Latimer, who is the prize of this high-stakes game.

It is worth mentioning that in most of these and other novels by Walter Scott two features recur. One is the resourceful strength and intelligence of young women such as Rose Bradwardine in *Waverley*, Diana Vernon in *Rob Roy* or „Greenmantle“ (Lilias) in *Redgauntlet*. It is figures like these who are the movers and shakers, it is these feminine characters who fully understand what is going on behind the scenes, and it is they who will shape in decisive ways the future.

The second recurring feature is that (as Waugh was to notice shrewdly in his novels, and as scholars, limping behind as usual, were to theorize somewhat later) the past (with all its „genuinely organic“ pretensions) is being manipulated and willfully constructed. Thus in *Waverley* much as the reader no less than Edward Waverley (a splendid surface-observer) are convinced that they have stepped into a deeply libidinal subconscious world of chthonic antiquity (the Scottish Highlands), they have to admit after a while that cold, calculating reason directs and commands this world: Flora McIvor knows exactly what she is doing, she invents or reinvents tradition in order to achieve power purposes of her own. Likewise in *Rob Roy* the gross stupidity of the Osbaldistone cousins has an underpinning in the razor-sharp intellectual precision of their „unusual“ kin Rashleigh and the equally subtle and precise counter-thrusts of their other kin, Diana. In *Redgauntlet* the struggle is only apparently driven by anger and nostalgic hope. Herries of Birrenswork, as well as those that he would yoke to his cause have canny material motives of power and wealth backing up their sentiments. Meanwhile the battle is fought and lost in the mind and soul of the ageing „Bonnie Prince Charlie“: the fact that he decides to remain loyal to his unwed mistress shows that he has reached the point where sense gratification or quasi-familial aims prevail over political ambition. In an age of analytical and empirical mind-sets, he is doomed. The solution is once again a displacement of inheritance: Darsie „becomes“ Redgauntlet, the rational Alan Fairford marries „Greenmantle“, and together thereby indicate the way in which the values of the past can be truly saved and preserved.

III.

These novels were trying to explain a proposition in the philosophy of history: namely, that values can be preserved also in ways *different* from the most obvious and visible ones. Values can be *detached* from their physical supports: from buildings and tools, from habits and dress codes, from social structures

and norms; they can *migrate* into alternative forms and bodies of social production, even find other idioms, expressions, and contexts, while nevertheless preserving their own essence. Alienation can and ought to be turned around – thus becoming a beneficent force. Continuity does not have to confine itself to fixed or rigid stability; gradual reform, change of articulation are equally good as stabilizing factors.

The overwhelming success of this newly invented genre throughout Europe, North America and, later, even outside Europe, is well documented. It literally changed reading habits and the taste priorities for almost a century and a half. How do we explain this enormous attraction? The truth is that if we look at Scott's immediate followers – James Fenimore Cooper, the Balzac of *Les Chouans* (1829), some of the German Romantics (Achim von Arnim, Willibald Alexis and others), the Pushkin of *Kapitanskaya Dochka*, perhaps the Manzoni of *The Betrothed* – we find that they are intensely concentrated on the same set of options and propositions as Scott. The onslaught of modernization (a process that had gathered momentum for several centuries, since the ages of artistic Renaissance, religious Reform, and geographical Exploration) became suddenly tangible as a result of the coincidence of several otherwise separate events: the English industrial revolution, the perception of an inevitable spread of democracy through the French and other sociopolitical upheavals, an apprehension of military „world wars“, demographic mobility, the general speeding up of life. Such matters are the very substance of Goethe's life-long meditations (in *Wilhelm Meister*, in *Faust*, and elsewhere)⁶. His contemporary Germaine de Staël may be taken as one example among many of French intellectuals who were passionately and genuinely liberal, but who nevertheless were disgusted by the ugly violence of the French Revolution and by the dictatorial methods of its Bonapartist follow-up. Madame de Staël saw history as a process of unfolding and recuperation at the same time: the two activities were, for her, complementary, rather than opposite. (In this respect *De l'Allemagne* might be even more eloquent than her more immediately political writings or than her novels. Indeed, Madame de Staël tries to convince us there that the great attraction of German literature is the way in which its originalities point back to fundamental, age-old values of *any* literature, of literature in its essence.)

It ought to be said that although the early 19th century was a time when these matters were intensely scrutinized (in an almost obsessive manner!) the core of the issue (how does the human psyche deal with historical progress?)

⁶ Virgil Nemoianu: *Absorbing Modernization: the Dilemmas of Progress in the Novels of Walter Scott and in „Faust II“*. In: *Interpreting Goethe's „Faust“ Today*. Ed. by Jane K. Brown, Meredith Lee and Thomas Saine. Columbia/S.C. 1994, pp.1-16.

how do human structures respond to historical change?) is itself a *constant* of literary discourses, from the earliest written records to our own day. Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the epic of *Gilgamesh*, sundry Biblical books, – all hinge upon the issue of change, with its joys and its agonies. After what I would call the explosion of the early 19th century⁷ this concern is deepened and diversified. The matter of transfer (selective or comprehensive?) becomes rather obsessive for writers such as Proust, Musil, Jünger, Pasternak, Faulkner, Claudel, and many others. Significantly, most of the major authors of prose and poetry in the 19th and 20th centuries felt compelled to write something in the mode of „historical fiction“ even when this was not their main field of interest. George Eliot, Dickens and Thackeray fall into this category, Flaubert and Tolstoy also, Tennyson and Browning, Virginia Woolf and Willa Cather, Márquez, Fuentes and Vargas Llosa likewise, to mention just a very few.

Evelyn Waugh, to return to him, is not an exception. Despite his intense dislike of Walter Scott he can be considered one of his worthy followers.⁸

IV.

In one of Waugh's two masterpieces, the trilogy *Sword of Honour* (which ought to be considered a historical novel, even though it was written and published so close to the events – published 1952-1961, i.e. a mere 10-15 years from the events narrated – as to enjoy the reception of a piece of contemporary literature), a key theme is the contrast between the main character, Guy Crouchback, and his father. Guy displays the genuine and, indeed, highly honorable desire to live up to the character of the Christian knight which had been fully achieved by more than one of his ancestors. He stands in contrast to his father Gervase, who in a humble and unselfconscious way, with complete lack of ostentation, actually achieves with some „desinvolture“ what his son ploddingly fails to accomplish. For Gervase, his Catholic faith is part of his own lifeblood, it is organic and spontaneous, it is taken for granted and utterly natural. Upon his death (SW III, 71-91) the whole family, but particularly his son, are astonished to see how widely Gervase had been beloved in the most differ-

⁷ Paul Johnson: *The Birth of the Modern. World Society 1815-1830*. New York 1991. Perhaps it is pointless to enumerate here a spate of titles that generally follow the tradition of Max Weber and that make somewhat similar points in different variants.

⁸ *Sword of Honour* is formed out of three separate volumes: *Men at Arms* (1952). Boston, Toronto 1979; *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955). Boston, Toronto 1979; *The End of the Battle* (1961). Boston, Toronto 1979. These will be cited in the text as „SW“ with volume and page number. One good example of Waugh's barbs directed against a „Scottianized“ Scotland is in SW, II, pp. 57-125 where some passages are a direct and cruel parody of Scott's *The Antiquary*.

ent circles of society and how much serenity and contentedness he had been able to spread around him. On a smaller scale, the son is flabbergasted when his father, in a small seacoast town interacts without a trace of self-consciousness with the slightly lower-middle-class, but utterly decent and humane Major Tickeridge of the Halberdiers and solves in a few minutes evening entertainment, easily and without any deliberate effort, the matter of suitable military employment that Guy had pursued doggedly and without success for many weeks now. (SW I, 42-48)

Guy, to whom his father has managed to transmit his beliefs, comes through as a very honest and committed Catholic, except that for him the Church is but a rational set of propositions that he follows truly and loyally; he has not turned it into a spontaneous part of his own soul and body, rather it remains a matter of intense willing and of duty. This is not the place to complicate matters by bringing up the theological issue of divine grace, which of course *had* been much on Waugh's mind.⁹

From the point of view of „transfer of values“ the trilogy is relevant in two main ways (besides many smaller and, let us add, highly amusing, ironic ways). Thus most of the first volume is built upon the comic contrast between Guy Crouchback and his impishly satirized colleague Apthorpe, a would-be guardian of the „Halberdier“ traditions, childishly ambitious and ready to exaggerate reality in order to present himself as a kind of noble warrior: a grosser and more vulgar version of Crouchback's own efforts. The ultimate humiliation is the enormous distortion that the line of inheritance and descent will have to suffer. The Crouchback family (with all its proud and noble past and lineage) is extinct by the end of the trilogy. The inheritor is (in sharp contrast to Sir Walter Scott's inheritors or as a mockery thereof) the scion of Virginia's amorous fling

⁹ Thomas Prufer: *The Death of Charm and the Advent of Grace*. In: *Communio* 10 (Fall 1983), pp. 281-291; Rodney Delsanta, Mario D'Avanzo: *Truth and Beauty in „Brideshead Revisited“*. In: *Modern Fiction Studies* 11 (1965/66), p. 142ff.; Susan Auty: *Language and Charm in „Brideshead Revisited“*. In: *Dutch Quarterly Review* 6 (Autumn 1976), pp. 291-303; Jeffrey Heath: *The Picturesque Prison. Evelyn Waugh and His Writing*. Kingston, Montreal 1982, pp. 172-173, 179, 182; Jean-Louis Chevalier: *Arcadian Minutiae: Notes on „Brideshead Revisited“*. In: *Evelyn Waugh. New Directions*. Ed. by Alain Blayac. New York 1992, pp. 35-61; Giovanni Cecchia: *Waugh controcorrente. Avventure e problemi di un enfant terrible*. Torino 1970, pp. 226-229 is good on the issue of Waugh's historical consciousness: from Vico to Eliot and Spengler. In terms of the text itself see the all-important letter of Crouchback Senior (SW III, 8-9) and his son's subsequent repeated musings on it. The bogus figure of Clare Ivor in vol. II (who seems the perfect knightly dandy and proves to be nothing short of a coward) and, at the other extreme Apthorpe, the vulgarized caricature of the main character himself should also be mentioned here.

with the contemptible Trimmer (SW III, 45-51, 165-196, 247-265). In a gesture of supreme humiliation (one may wonder whether in terms of theological ethics this is not the *chief* vindication of Guy Crouchback, his reason for salvation) Guy accepts the child as his own: it will be the inheritor of Britain's aristocratic splendor.¹⁰

We can describe the episodes evoked above as constituting together transfer by constriction (much as Guy's father Gervase, had serenely renounced his properties and had confined himself to two dingy hotel rooms). There in another transfer however, more broadly historical (and, in a way, standing in symmetrical contrast to the previous one), a transfer by expansion. This has to do with the „motley society“¹¹. From being a phenomenon that was arguably limited in geographical space and in historical time, as in *Vile Bodies* for instance, this mode of randomized and chaotic human intercourse now takes on planetary proportions. The „motley society“ with its weak epistemology and breakdown of ethical values, hierarchies and human distinctions embraces now the *whole* of society, with its upper, middle and lower reaches. More ominously, it spreads over many continents: Western Asia, Northern Africa, North America, the Oceans, Europe in its entirety. What had been merely the seeds of chaos have grown and expanded over the whole world; they have created an environment in which destruction has now become normal human behavior. This is transfer by expansion. Walter Scott's sunny and hope-filled narrative closures have become, in the hands of Waugh, dark and hopeless.

To confirm this opinion we can quickly look at other works by Evelyn Waugh. His two „African“ novels, *Black Mischief* and *Scoop* are, at bottom, historical meditations on the analogy between forms of barbarity: the spontaneous-archaic one, and the contrived and sophisticated one of „advanced“ societies. When contemporary ultra-sensitivity shudders in the face of Waugh's blunt formulations and of his apparent „racist Eurocentrism“, it tends to lose sight of the author's real point: that any society in which the values of religious rationality and cultural humanism are lost cannot claim exemplary status or even survival. In this Waugh may well be deemed wrong, but he deserves to be judged and sentenced on the basis of his actual sayings, not of views attributed to him after the fact and that remained for him secondary at most.

¹⁰ See however the more optimistic comments of Jeffrey Heath: *The Picturesque Prison*, pp. 247, 254-256.

¹¹ See Virgil Nemoianu: *Theory of the Secondary*. Baltimore 1989, pp. 113-132, and, perhaps in more detail in Virgil Nemoianu: *Evelyn Waugh and the Motley Society*. In: *Clio* 12 (1984), pp. 233-243. Also Virgil Nemoianu: *Following the Classics: Layers of Stylistic Mimesis*. In: *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory*. Ed. by Mihai Sparioso. Amsterdam, Philadelphia 1984, pp. 201-216.

Similar arguments can be recognized in some of Waugh's non-fictional works. Thus *Edmund Campion* (1935) ostensibly describes the dreadful fate of a young Jesuit apologist and proselytizer during the reign of Elizabeth I. The distorted judicial process and the horrifying physical torture of which this brave Catholic militant was a victim correspond very closely to the contemporary Moscow Stalinist show-trials and thus suggest to the reader meaningful continuities in the tradition of inhumanity and of persecution always perpetrated in the name of progressive ideals. Even more obviously, *Robbery under Law* (1939) the subtitle of which speaks about „an object lesson“ uses the socialist measures of the 1930s Mexican governments (specifically the nationalization of the oil industry and agrarian reform) as cautionary lessons for measures taken by Keynes-inspired American and British administrations and indeed as a paradigm for the procedures of any socialist-type regime, anywhere in the world and at any time. This may be said to be Waugh's greatest „counter-revolutionary“ book: the model of how historical change must *not* happen, the counter-model to *Brideshead Revisited* or to *Sword of Honour*. *Helena* (1950), Waugh's only overtly historical novel, uses freely language and behavior borrowed from the social environment of the „bright young things“ and of the decadent upper classes of Western Europe as a clear parallel to a decaying Roman Empire in which (again, a clear identification from Waugh's point of view) Christianity remains the only substantial hope.

V.

Probably the most meticulous analysis (one bordering on the ruthless) is provided in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). There the century-old palace, with its Baroque splendor, the deeply-preserved faith of its masters, the high station of its inhabitants combine to provide an image of the earthly paradise. This image is fully emblemized in the superhuman beauty, charm and self-confidence of Sebastian Flyte, a portrait of Adamic innocence and perfection. Waugh, who states at one conspicuous point that „My theme is memory“¹², pursues meticulously the matter of how the passing of time *ruins* this „perfect“ construct: what temporality can do to it, how the different characters respond to the relentlessness of change, how much can be saved and other related issues.

Lady Marchmain (perhaps the most unrelentingly Catholic character of the novel), mother of four and sister of three brothers who perished in World War I: „that grim mask which, in *Brideshead*, overlaid the gracious features of his father's family; this was a man of the woods and caves, a hunter, a

¹² Evelyn Waugh: *Brideshead Revisited* (1944). Boston 1973, p. 225. Hereafter in the text as „BR“ with page reference to this edition.

judge of the tribal council, a repository of the harsh traditions of a people at war with their environment“. These „archaic lines“, Ryder muses, belong to men who „must die... they were the aborigines, vermin by right of law, to be shot off at leisure so that things might be safe for the travelling salesman...“ (BR, 138-139). She comes to stand in her dark, all-suffering and doubt-free way for the continuity and firmness of Faith. However, Lord Marchmain, her husband, is separated from her *precisely* because the unity of immanence and transcendence that she idealizes and aspires to has proved to be impossible. He represents the „other half“: beauty and sensual gratification, i.e. the half that somehow escapes his lawful wife. Lady Marchmain is, one might say, the feminine Jehovah, unyielding and demanding, with whom the average sensual human being is forever wrestling („when people wanted to hate God, they hated Mummy“ Cordelia says, BR, 221).

These incipient tensions are soon exponentially increased inside the younger generation, which centrifugally separates itself from the kind of physical/spiritual unity provided by the aesthetic middle-ground of the Brideshead estate with its abundant and victorious accomplishments (the paradisiacal condition inside history). Cordelia, the youngest sister takes religious vows and becomes a nun; in so doing she admits that the yearned-for synthesis of the older generation is impossible. Stiff and stolid, „Bridey“, the oldest brother, is absorbed or reabsorbed into a bourgeois ethos and way of life, through his marriage, no less than through his inherently philistine mentality. Both these siblings only apparently follow the „straight and narrow“ rearing principles of their mother. They do not rebel, but upon a closer look they follow quietly their own and different paths.

The two „adversarial“ middle siblings, Julia and Sebastian, are (in an almost geometrical order) opposed to the obedient ones. Julia marries a divorced man, outside her Faith and class (the ambitious Canadian adventurer Rex Mottram), shows a weak allegiance to her mother's religion, engages in adultery, seems ready to divorce and remarry in a care-free manner. Sebastian is a reluctant and mechanical observer of religious obligations, an alcoholic fundamentally (though not visibly) unhappy with himself, a patently unsocial and (almost deliberately) dysfunctional individual, an increasingly marginalized or self-marginalizing person who ends up in the lowest reaches of society: homeless, helpless, sick. (He is undoubtedly the most Dostoyevskian character ever penned by Waugh.) Nevertheless, we see both Sebastian and Julia returning with full commitment to the beliefs that their mother had tried to inculcate in them. Sebastian becomes the servant and hanger-on of a monastery, gaining a kind of saintliness almost, certainly a proximity to God. („I've seen others like him and I believe they are very near and dear to God,“ Cordelia says, explaining in

some detail the present and the likely future of Sebastian to Ryder, BR, 307-309) Julia decides that it is impossible for her to divorce and to marry the man she loves; she will choose a life of chastity and service, even though earthly happiness may elude her for ever. They both divest themselves of charm, success, of terrestrial happiness and prominent visibility in order to become worthy of Grace.

Charles Ryder, an utterly unreligious individual at the beginning of the novel, and throughout it, converts to Catholicism by the time World War II is on. In the broadest sense, *Brideshead Revisited* might be said to be a novel about the conversion and redemption of Ryder. The terrestrial paradise of Brideshead collapses under the reader's eyes. The castle is ruined, the family dead and scattered; of four members of the younger generation, not a single one engenders off-spring. The model is anti-Romantic: Waugh is not seeking for a „Paradise regained“, but rather describes why and how the terrestrial paradise must disappear. What survives is described on the one hand in the „epilogue“ when Jermaiah's „Quomodo sedet sola civitas“ is seen defeated:

„Something quite remote from anything the builders intended has come out of their work, and out of the fierce little human tragedy in which I played; something none of us thought about at the time: a small red flame – a beaten-copper lamp of deplorable design, relit before the beaten-copper doors of a tabernacle; the flame which the old knights saw from their tombs, which they saw put out; that flame burns again for other soldiers, far from home, farther, in heart, than Acre or Jerusalem. It could not have been lit for the builders and the tragedians, and there I found it this morning, burning anew among the old stones.“ (BR, 351)

The light in the chapel is but the icon of the survivors' faith: the destiny of the four children, but more powerfully the majestic victory gained by Catholicism through the death-bed conversion of the Byronic Lord Marchmain. Lady Marchmain's husband, her children are all versions (male or female, young or old) of the „prodigal son“. At bottom, the book as a whole narrates a victory of vast proportions for Lady Marchmain, even though she does not live to know it and probably would not even have recognized it as such had she seen it.

„Mummy carrying my sin with her to church, bowed under it and the black lace veil, in the chapel; slipping out with it in London before the fires were lit; taking it with her through the empty streets, where the milkman's ponies stood with their forefeet on the pavement; Mummy dying with my sin eating at her, more cruelly than her own deadly illness.

Mummy dying with it; Christ dying with it, nailed hand and foot; hanging over the bed in the night-nursery; hanging year after year in the dark little study at Farm Street with the shining oilcloth; hanging in the dark church where only the old charwoman raises the dust and one candle burns; hanging at noon, high among the crowds and the soldiers; no comfort except a sponge of vinegar and the words of a thief; hanging for ever; never the cool sepulchre and the grave clothes spread on the stone slab, never the

oil and spices in the dark cave; always the midday sun and the dice clicking for the seamless coat.

Never the shelter of the cave or of the castle walls. Outcast in the desolate spaces where the hyenas roam at night and the rubbish heaps smoke in the daylight. No way back; the gates barred; all the saints and angels posted along the walls. Nothing but bare stone and dust and the smouldering dumps. Thrown away, scrapped, rotting down; the old man with lupus and the forked stick who limps out at nightfall to turn out the rubbish, hoping for something to put in his sack, something marketable, turns away with disgust.

Nameless and dead, like the baby they wrapped up and took away before I had seen her.“ (BR 288)

These are by far the most touching words ever put in Julia's mouth, and arguably in the whole book, close to passages in T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*.

Evelyn Waugh a thinker endowed with uncanny flashes of foresight may well have been thinking of the fate awaiting the Church he had embraced after Vatican II. (Another example of such foresight is the conclusion of *Vile Bodies* with its depiction of a World War II battle-field 10 years before the event.)

In a sense, Ryder's original intuition is proved justified. He had seen the whole Brideshead scene as a kind of aestheticist canvass: Pater and Rossetti had been (as they had been for Waugh himself) the great models, and his sequence of paintings had been an attempt to recapture and preserve the past. In the end, at another level, a higher one, it is again the aesthetic memory that acts as a saving force, „profane“ though it may be in contrast to the „sacred“ one, both alluded to in the title.

VI.

It may seem strange to seek analogies between the tradition of Walter Scott and many 20th century luminaries; at least the above discussed Evelyn Waugh belongs to the same English literature. However if we are to provide supportive evidence to an earlier proposition – namely that the pursuit of memory, the salvaging of the past, and the enabling of mildly humane transitional processes are among literature's foremost tasks – then we have to try. The truth is that it is not at all difficult to find similarities wherever we look. Is it not the case that Ulrich in Musil's *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* is like the young male heroes of the *Waverley* novels, solicited from all directions by competing bids for the future, by alternative versions of the past, while he himself wanders perplex and somewhat aimless in their midst, inclining first in one direction, later in the other? Is it not the case that in Thomas Mann's masterpiece, *Joseph und seine Brüder*, the main character is a displaced and alienated individual who tries to adapt to the environments of a cosmopolitan modernity while preserving the virtues and emotional memory of the ethnic and tribal past into which he was

born and bred? Are not the novels of William Faulkner, of Robert Penn Warren, of Walker Percy imbued by the effort to demonstrate that the qualities of the past can and should be remembered no matter how altered the circumstances of the present might be?

The case of Ernst Jünger might be even more interesting in that it is more challenging or intriguing than those of some of his above-mentioned contemporaries. It is not worth our while entering here into a controversy as to the merits of Jünger's *œuvre* that is slowly becoming rather tedious.¹³ Let us simply have a look at a few of Jünger's books that can be clearly described as novels and we will be surprised at the wealth of points of comparison with Walter Scott, an author whom Jünger rarely, if ever, mentions in his otherwise richly erudite literary comments.

I will focus on merely two main features. The first is the nature of the main hero in these novels, the second is the main issue of this essay, the transfer of values. In an author so often accused of idolizing the triumph of absolute will and of displaying an inhuman coldness, it is almost amusing to note that these main heroes are passive, ill-suited to decisive action, victims or scapegoats for others, weak and emotion-filled souls, vaguely unearthy, dreamers and artists, almost sleepwalkers, in touch perhaps with archetypal patterns of reality, but seldom able to grasp the mechanism of social movement. These main characters are the object, not the subject of fictional activity.

Thus in *Auf den Marmorklippen* (1939) the narrator and his brother Otho observe and suffer, but seem unable to respond, indeed even to defend themselves, from the onslaught of destructive horror. In *Die Zwille* (1973) Clamor Ebling is a weakling who is ever unjustly punished, always dependent on others. In *Heliopolis* (1949) although Lucius de Geer is an officer and supposed to be a man of action, he lacks initiative, is plagued by moral dilemmas, and shows himself barely able to save those closest to him, let alone influence the broader course of things. In *Eine gefährliche Begegnung* (1985) Gerhard zum Busche is likewise the least street-smart and resourceful among the main characters and escapes unjust destruction through the agency of others. In *Gläserne Bienen*

¹³ Karl-Heinz Bohrer: *Die Ästhetik des Schreckens. Die pessimistische Romantik und Ernst Jüngers Frühwerk*. München 1978; Martin Meyer: *Ernst Jünger*. München 1990; Marcus Bullock: *The Violent Eye. Ernst Jünger's Visions and Revisions on the European Right*. Detroit 1992; Thomas Nevin: *Ernst Jünger and Germany. Into the Abyss 1912-1945*. Durham/N.C. 1996; Peter Koslowski: *Der Mythos der Moderne. Die dichterische Philosophie Ernst Jüngers* (München 1991) have recently undermined the hegemonic (or „absolutist“) view as expressed for instance by Wolfgang Kaempfer: *Ernst Jünger*. Stuttgart 1981. For an overview see Virgil Nemoianu: *Processuality and Conservation. The Case of Ernst Jünger*. In: *Modern Language Notes* 108 (1993), pp. 945-952.

(1957) much as the main character, a middle-aged unemployed former cavalry officer, behaves as a good-natured swaggering rogue, he seems helpless in the horizons of modernity that surround him, barely able to fall back upon elementary instincts of honorable behavior, but not to respond in a creative and original way.

At the same time however these weak characters are precisely the most precious ones in the author's eyes. They are the ones who deserve to be saved and who indeed *are* served and saved. The two scholarly brothers in *Auf den Marmorklippen* are saved by natural powers and find themselves transferred into another, secure, land. In *Heliopolis* Lucius de Geer is admitted into an ample galactic withdrawal, after his political and military party is roundly defeated in the civil war. The subject of these and other novels follows a similar pattern: it describes the confrontation of highly lucid and strongly violent forces, often „beyond good and evil“, with variable results. The main hero (Clamor in *Die Zwille*, Gerhard in *Eine gefährliche Begegnung* and others yet) is saved in extremis, usually with some difficulty, and yet the crux of the narrative is embodied in him. Preserving for the future some memory, some subtle essence of the past is, Jünger seems to suggest to his readers, the best one can expect at the end of all our ephemeral turbulences and battles.

The highly ambiguous (and almost post-modern) late novel *Eumeswil* (Stuttgart 1977) has a kind of open ending that allows or encourages at least two interpretations. Manuel (Martin) Venator is perhaps too lucid and too involved as an observer in the action in order to survive; we miss in him the innocent helplessness of some other Jüngerian main characters. The other is that young Venator *has* managed to survive; the methodical preparations for his withdrawal in Robinson-like seclusion in the forest bear fruit – when the system collapses, the foresight of the cautious and wise individual offers escape.¹⁴

VII.

Are there any conclusions to these reflections on the continuity of memory and the peaceful transfer of values in narrative prose? I believe so.

The first would be of interest to the theory of genre. As mentioned before, pastness is inscribed inexorably in any novel. Any work of prose (through the very act of being written) partakes in this pastness. „Contemporary“ novels,

¹⁴ Cf. to *Der Waldgang* (1951) where this kind of individualist withdrawal from the pressures of sociopolitical presentness are explicitly recommended and encouraged. The ambiguous ending of the novel is however significant for the indeterminacies that are part of the thinking of the older Jünger. Cf. *Eumeswil*, pp.156-157 to *ibid.*, pp. 417-434.

novels of topicality and of interest for the present are sheer illusion. Any novel is in its own way a historical novel.

On some level this becomes obvious through the passing of time; Dos Passos' *USA* or John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* or indeed the above-commented *Brideshead Revisited* are read nowadays as historical novels, no less than Petronius' *Satyricon* or Cervantes' *Don Quixote* or Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*. In other words, the historical novel merely actualizes loudly and clearly what is virtual in any kind of fiction or work of imagination. The historical speaks openly to the issue of continuity, all other kinds of literature are concerned with the same matter, although just obliquely and more allusively.

The second is more philosophical and perhaps religious: it has to do with the point of articulation between probability and possibility. This is an issue that already Aristotle had evoked in his *Poetics*. We could put it in the following way. Historiography as a „serious“ or „true“ narrative speaks about the improbable: the events of this world in their occurrence. The work of imagination is „more probable“: it is founded on coherence and predictable developments and outcomes. Yes, but the opposite is true also. It is the work of imagination that speaks to us about the multiple possibilities (their overwhelming majority never realized) embedded in the matrix of the world. History can speak only about one (with, at best, some of its conceivable variants).

Both these conclusions are connected with the continuities and the stabilities of this world. Gently, the historical novel suggests to us that change and progress, painful as they may be, are in good part also an illusion, wishful thinking. Reticence and prudence assure the survival of humane existence with its openness.