
The Vocation of Evelyn Waugh

Faith and Art in the Post-War Fiction

D. MARCEL DECOSTE

THE VOCATION OF EVELYN WAUGH

For Susan, who called me

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ASHGATE

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
Introduction: The Post-War Vocations of Evelyn Waugh	1
1 Deplorable Design, Divine Providence: <i>Brideshead Revisited</i> and the Callings of Charles Ryder	15
2 The Plasticity of the Human: The Death of Art in <i>The Loved One</i> and <i>Love Among the Ruins</i>	45
3 “A Single Peculiar Act of Service”: <i>Helena</i> and the Stylish Pilgrimage of Factual Faith	71
4 The Man of Letters in Middle Age: Secular Perdition and Ecclesial Art in <i>Scott-King’s Modern Europe</i> and <i>The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold</i>	97
5 “It’s <i>sauve qui peut</i> now”: Art’s Death Wish and Charity’s Vocation in the War Trilogy	125
Conclusion: The Late Art of Evelyn Waugh	161
<i>Bibliography</i>	169
<i>Index</i>	179

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D. Marcel DeCoste

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Introduction

The Post-War Vocations of Evelyn Waugh

Apparently if one is ever going to do good work one has to give one's whole life to it. I suppose this is really true of everything. There is no place for the dilettanti.

Evelyn Waugh, *Diaries*, December 16, 1919

There are those who, lacking other objects of reverence, now attribute a priest's, even a martyr's, sanctity to the artist. It is to them primarily that I wish to offer the spectacle of a man born with every aptitude and sensibility that make for literary eminence, who has without betrayal of that vocation subordinated it to, and harmonized it with, a higher.

Evelyn Waugh, "Mgr Ronald Knox"

Though often hailed as "one of the great prose stylists of the twentieth century" (Hastings 1), Evelyn Waugh did not rush to assume the mantle of writer.¹ Author of three books by the age of 26, Waugh nonetheless disavowed this title. Thus he writes in his first travel book, *Labels* (1930), of his incredulity at being commissioned to produce such a volume: "I had only written two very dim books and still regarded myself less as a writer than an out-of-work private schoolmaster" (22). Indeed, it is part of the project of this book to detail how his acceptance of the roles of writer and artist was always tinged by a degree of ambivalence. Certainly, the 16-year-old who penned my first epigraph would take a dilatory path toward actually giving the whole of his life to any, much less the writer's, vocation. Having helped in 1919 found an association of students' discussion groups that went by the name "the Dilettanti," a name he himself chose (*Learning* 128), Waugh would take charge of the colloquia devoted to Art, not Literature (*Diaries* 34). And despite the realization recorded in his December diaries, Waugh would cling to an ideal of dilettantish nonchalance, rather than to an ethos of devotion and specialization, for years to come. Thus, as he reflected, in his final year, on his time at Lancing College, Waugh still identified the "dilettantism" his cohort had helped

¹ Such praise is near unanimous, even from otherwise hostile critics. Thus Lebedeff leavens an unsympathetic portrait of the man by deeming Waugh and Orwell "the literary giants of their time" (xv). Anthony Lane applauds Waugh's prose for "its exactitude ... the curtness of its controlled irony, and ... a fanatical pursuit of the *mot juste*" (409). Indeed, according to his frequent editor, Douglas Woodruff, "Evelyn was incapable of bad or slovenly work" (130). Similar plaudits are offered by Calvin Lane (44) and Carens (*Satiric* 10). Hall, in fact, dubs Waugh "almost certainly the best British novelist of the depression decade" (187). Comparably high estimations are proffered by Paul Johnson, who names Waugh the "greatest writer in English of the 20th century" (38), and by Myers, who places his *oeuvre* "high in the catalogue of great fiction" (ix).

cultivate there as their greatest gift to the school and feared its passing with their departure (112).

It is fair to say that the next decade would bear witness, if not to Waugh's continued allegiance to the ideal of the insouciant amateur, then certainly to his failure to find that calling to which he could give himself entirely. Though he won his scholarship to Hertford College, Oxford, on the strength, as college Vice-Principal Cruttwell informed him, of his exemplary prose style (152–3), the undergraduate Waugh devoted himself a good deal more to drink and visual design than to the cause of belles-lettres. Indeed, his life through the 1920s, both at Oxford and afterward, was a chaos born, at least in part, of his inability to find or commit to any one discipline, profession, or way of life. At Oxford, he was certainly more the dilettante, even gourmand, than the committed student: "I wanted to do everything and know everyone ... I wanted to taste everything Oxford could offer and consume as much as I could hold" (*Learning* 171). Such broad "tasting" would also define his life after university. Leaving Oxford without a degree in 1924, a debt-ridden Waugh floundered in his attempts to find his calling or even to secure a reliable income. The next five years would see this bibulous young dilettante trying his hand as an art student in London (210–11), seeking, unsuccessfully, the post of amanuensis to Proust translator Charles Scott-Moncrieff (Hastings 133–5), being sacked after six fruitless weeks as a stringer for the *Daily Express* (Stannard, *Early* 134–5), serving as a disaffected schoolmaster in Denbighshire and Aston Clinton, and even meeting with one Father Underhill to discuss his suitability for the Anglican priesthood (*Diaries* 281).² Thus, while he would later affirm that his education had prepared him "for one trade only; that of an English prose writer" (*Learning* 140), Waugh resisted this call rather strenuously. It was only after all these false starts that he would, rather facetiously, record the following resolution in his diary of 1927: "It seems to me the time has arrived to set about being a man of letters" (281).

Yet as his enrollment, eight months later, in a carpentry course at the Central School of Arts and Crafts reveals (Hastings 161), Waugh's decision in favor of literature was still tentative. Indeed, his autobiography confesses a committed program in these years "to escape from [his] literary destiny into pleasanter but less appropriate work" (*Learning* 190). Why he should have balked at such a fate is unclear, particularly given that he had been crafting literary narratives since he had learned to write: *A Little Learning* recalls composition of *The Curse of the Horse Race* when he was not yet seven (62). Perhaps, as his grandson Alexander Waugh maintains, this reluctance derived from an acute sense of growing up in the shadow of his family's accomplishments in this field, his anxiety as to "the adverse effect that his father's reputation and his brother's fame might have on

² From his early stints in a teaching profession he particularly reviled—"I expect you'll be becoming a schoolmaster, sir. That's what most of the gentlemen does, sir, that gets sent down for indecent behaviour" (*Decline* 14)—emerged much of Waugh's first novel, 1928's *Decline and Fall*.

his ambitions" (14). Be that as it may, brother Alec himself maintains that, prior to 1945, Waugh was "almost the only writer I know who did not like writing" (179), suggesting a still more belated commitment to the writerly vocation. Nor is this assessment at odds with Waugh's own comments on his career. In a 1946 essay for *Life* magazine, he reports only recently having discovered that English prose could be an absorbing "end in itself," as opposed to a mere livelihood (*Essays* 302). The diaries, too, disclose this discovery as the chief fruit of his frustrating wartime experiences. By 1943, Capt. Waugh is pining to get back to the business of writing and finally identifying it as his true calling: "I simply want to do my work as an artist" (*Diaries* 548). Indeed, by war's end, the work of the writer is seen not only as his proper craft, but as a blessing: "I thank God to find myself still a writer" (627). In fact, an examination of Waugh's life and work makes clear that the Second World War represented for his view of himself, and of his proper ends as both artist and Catholic, a decisive turning point. Hence the focus for this book, which will argue that it is precisely in the often under-appreciated later fiction that Waugh articulates and fulfills his sense of both these vocations.

Jeffrey Heath is correct, then, to argue that the concept of vocation is central to Waugh's work (*Prison* 7), but this centrality emerges largely with the war's conclusion, particularly in *Brideshead Revisited* and the writings that follow this watershed text. Certainly, these years see Waugh not just presenting himself, as his gravestone succinctly states, as quintessentially a writer, and no mere dilettante who occasionally writes, but also increasingly meditating on the discipline proper to anyone who seeks to ply this trade. As early as a 1943 review of Robert Graves's and Alan Hodge's *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*, he charges contemporary writers with the vital, if ascetic and thankless, job of preserving a language already degenerating in the face of broader social change (*Essays* 276). This is a task fulfilled by taking up the writing of prose as a craft received at the hands of tradition and as a style, personal, yet continuous with past practice, to be developed through committed and careful labor. Conceived in such terms, style is often cast by the post-war Waugh as "of the essence of a work of art" (478). Indeed, hard at work on *Brideshead*, which he was already dubbing his "magnum opus" in correspondence (*Letters* 176, 182), Waugh understood this book not just as his belated heeding of the call of the writer—"I think perhaps it is the first of my novels rather than the last" (*Diaries* 566)—but as his becoming a writer through an attention to craft and the pursuit of style: "English writers, at forty, either set about prophesying or acquiring a style. Thank God I think I am beginning to acquire a style" (560). The enduring importance of this conception of his art—not as self-expression or ecstatic inspiration or innovation, but as a life's work, demanding care and humble submission to one's medium and the techniques appropriate to it—to Waugh's post-war writings cannot be overstated. As late as 1960, Waugh writes to the Editor of the *Spectator* a manifesto along just these lines, articulating a professional conception of his work far removed from the dilettantish ideals of his youth. For this mature Waugh, "a work of art is not a matter of thinking beautiful thoughts or experiencing tender emotions (those are its raw materials),

but of intelligence, skill, taste, proportion, knowledge, discipline and industry; especially discipline. No number of disciples can compensate for lack of that" (*Letters* 553).

But the concept of vocation does more in these years than underwrite for Waugh a new commitment to the art of his prose, a belated reconciliation with his literary destiny. It emerges increasingly as the linchpin to his thinking on, and his attempts to live out, that faith he first avowed when, on September 29, 1930, he entered the Roman Catholic Church. As Gallagher fairly states, Waugh held to an "often-reiterated belief that God 'calls' every man and woman to perform some unique service" ("Humanizing" 21). Again, this was a belief developed particularly in the post-war years, in tandem and in tension with his ever more explicit adoption of the writer's calling. As articulated in the 1946 essay, "Palinurus in Never-Never Land," this entailed faith in "an all-wise God who has a particular task for each individual soul, which the individual is free to accept or decline" (*Essays* 310). This particular task is, for Waugh, key to each individual's identity and salvation, to each unique person's becoming the saint he or she is called to be. Indeed, Waugh is notably uneasy with exhortations to emulate the canonized saints of his Church, for individual Christians are not, in his view, to be saved by following another's path, but only by seriously pursuing as a labor for God that commission which is properly theirs and theirs alone. As he puts it in 1952, "[t]here is only one saint that Bridget Hogan can actually become, Saint Bridget Hogan, and that saint she *must* become ... if she is to enter heaven" (*Holy* 927). Such a personalized vocation Waugh saw in Saint Helena's fourth-century search for the one True Cross (932), on the one hand, and in his own friend Ronald Knox's single-handed translation of the Vulgate, on the other (*Knox* 369). Waugh the Roman Catholic, then, saw the faith, across the centuries, as a matter of works as well as of creeds, of knowing and serving God by heeding His call and fulfilling one's life through the completion of that specific job that is one's God-given purpose: "[God] wants a different thing from each of us, laborious or easy, conspicuous or quite private, but something which only we can do and for which we were each created" (*Holy* 933).

According to Gallagher, this is an idiosyncratic notion of vocation, somewhat out of step with Catholic traditions ("Humanizing" 29). Yet as Edward Hahnenberg has recently detailed, there are numerous antecedents for this understanding of the term in Christian teaching, Protestant and Catholic alike. While it is true, for Hahnenberg, that the late medieval Church had largely restricted the term "vocation" to the notion of being called to life in religious orders, Luther's break with Rome soon entailed a vision of more worldly, yet still divine callings for all God's people. For early Protestantism, then, "every state of life is a calling (*Beruf*) that comes from God" (4); thus the world itself, and not just the monastery, becomes "the place where we live out our God-given call" (12). Hahnenberg sees similar currents in post-Reformation Catholicism, as well, in, for example, the model of discernment offered by the Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola (60) and in the writings of St. Francis de Sales (28–31), who indeed maintained, in line with Waugh's own views, that God "commands Christians, who are the living

plants of his Church, to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one according to his kind and vocation” (de Sales 41). But Hahnenberg, like Gallagher, sees such teaching, whether Catholic or Protestant, as dealing less with unique individuals than with states of life, with social stations and, in a more secular and common usage, vocational paths. Though Hahnenberg agrees vocation is something more personal, “a particular imperative—a call that comes to each person inviting and expecting each individual to choose something specific” (130), this is a view he sees emerging in Catholicism only in the lead-up to, and in the documents of, the Second Vatican Council, an event whose outcomes lay rather far from Waugh’s own sympathies.³

Yet clearly the devout, indeed sectarian, Waugh who could so berate Christian friends like John Betjeman—“Awful about your obduracy in schism and heresy. Hell hell hell” (*Letters* 248)—understood himself to be orthodox and Catholic on just this point, even before Vatican II spoke to God’s call to the laity. It is certainly the case that Catholic tradition always taught that vocation meant more than one thing, more than just the call to the priestly or religious life. As Farrell writes in his *Theology of Religious Vocation*, there has always been room in the Church for at least two broad senses of the term. First, there is the “general call” (43), that by which all are called to a faith-filled life that follows Christ’s own example, and so to a “union with God which is accomplished by charity” (49). Waugh, who adamantly insisted that “[m]an is made for the knowledge of God and for no other purpose” (*Essays* 387), is scarcely at odds with such teaching. But there is also the individual call to a certain way of life, which is, Farrell concedes, vocation “in its strictest sense” (16), and which can become part of the general call so long as it is lived, as de Sales counselled, as an act of devotion, as a gift from and offered in service to God (Farrell 95). If this does not quite add up to Waugh’s talk of the unique commission with which each soul is tasked, and upon which that soul’s sanctification depends, such Catholic traditions seemed not only to afford, but even to dictate, such a view for those peers and mentors who were essential to Waugh’s coming to and growing in the Church. The Jesuit priest who instructed him in the faith, Father Martin D’Arcy, maintained, at least by the 1930s, a similar view of the unique vocation, claiming that “each [person] has a function and purpose which alone he can fulfil” (*Morals* 35). Likewise, Father Ronald Knox, who named Waugh his biographer and literary executor, would teach in retreats

³ Waugh was opposed to and disheartened by changes proposed by the Council. Suspicious of its concern for a “Voice of the Laity” he judged “largely that of the minority who demand radical reform” (*Essays* 604), Waugh feared liturgical innovations would only see “many souls ... put at a further distance from their true aim,” namely, their prayerful communion with God (608). Waugh himself confessed to correspondents that “[t]he Vatican Council has knocked the guts out of me” (*Letters* 638). As he wrote to Cardinal Heenan, Council reforms had made his faith more a test than a consolation: “Every attendance at Mass leaves me without comfort or edification. I shall never, pray God, apostatize but church going is now a bitter trial” (Reid 53). Waugh never failed this test: he died on Easter Sunday having just attended Mass (Stannard, *Later* 490).

designed for the laity an even more forceful version of Waugh's definition of the Christian call: "God has a job for you to do in this world; probably a very modest one—to overcome such and such a weakness in your own nature, to be of use to such and such souls with whom he brings you into contact ... That is your talent, given you to trade with, not to bury it underground" (*Layman* 197).

From his thoughtful engagement with such traditions and teachers, then, Evelyn Waugh developed in the aftermath of the war an understanding of what Gallagher pithily dubs "a universal call to unique service" ("Humanizing" 35). The vocation, in other words, that so preoccupied him during the last 20-odd years of his life was not simply the worldly call to take seriously his talent for prose, but a more Christian vocation that insisted that this work be made responsive to Farrell's general call of devotion and service to God. Reflecting after the six-year upheaval of the war on his purpose as man and writer, Waugh both embraced writing as his calling and sought to have it serve, as my second epigraph claims Knox succeeded in having it serve, a "higher," because explicitly Catholic, vocation. What this means is that vocation is operative in Waugh's post-war thought and fiction in two distinct senses: it means both his affirmation of himself as writer (and of writing as discipline, as a style to be worked at) and his attempt to have his work express and accomplish his particular, God-given task in this world. From this duality would emerge both Waugh's own sense of the meaning of his life's work and the particular plots and obsessions that define that literary legacy.

Now, Heath contends that these two callings were, for Waugh, nearly one, that "vocation is a question of spiritual good taste" in his writings (*Prison* 8), so that excellent achievement of one's aesthetic vocation might itself fulfill one's Christian call to sanctity. Yet it is the argument of this book that this is to gravely misconstrue Waugh's work and to miss much of the anxiety over allowing one's trade, the call to beauty, to trump God's call that animates the later fiction. Waugh's dual sense of his own vocation, I maintain, could only give rise to tensions, precisely as it involved so clear a hierarchy. Surely the man who could state the human being's whole purpose in five words—"to love & serve God" (*Letters* 560)—would not hesitate to put service to his Lord ahead of the more worldly business of serving his art. In fact, these years are punctuated by many declarations to this effect. His scolding of Betjeman for the latter's loyalty to Anglo-Catholicism zeroed in on just this point, on Waugh's belief that his friend was making a merely aesthetic decision on rather heftier matters of truth, right, and salvation: "It would be a pity to go to HELL because you prefer Henry Moore to Michelangelo" (243). Likewise, in a 1949 essay on American Catholicism, the very same Waugh who was pleased in other venues to expatiate on the proper claims of style to the labor of the writer could be dismissive of the claims of art altogether. Whatever duties the artist owes to craft, to elegance, to beauty, these are, for Waugh, relatively unimportant, even dispensable, matters when viewed with the eyes of faith: "The Church and the world need monks and nuns more than they need writers. These merely decorate. The Church can get along very well without them" (*Essays* 387). The general call to Christ, in other words, here dwarfs the values and demands of

Waugh's own, more particular, vocation. As he put it in a letter to Lord Cecil that same year, we are all called first to God, and "Beauty, Harmony and Order are only desirable as attributes of His" (*Letters* 303).

Far from Heath's equation of taste and grace, art and God, Waugh's vocation inevitably set up conflicts between these rival goods, both so close to his heart. Like Knox, Waugh himself understood that "the Christian religion expresses itself in music and the arts, yet will not admit good taste into the highest range of values ... she will not be captured by mere beauty, or confuse the aesthetic with the moral" (Knox, "Brute" 240). But as a man who had, by war's end, given himself to the cause of beauty, taste, and elegance in literature, Waugh longed to be able to express his religion through his art, to reconcile his particular vocation in this world with that higher calling Knox so visibly served. Indeed, he sought to achieve what he felt Knox had himself done: namely, to turn prodigious artistic gifts, a clear literary vocation—Waugh would praise him, in 1955, as author of "the greatest work of literary art of the century" (*Essays* 479)—away from the exaltation of mere art and to the task of bearing compelling witness to his God. Yet this synthesis was, if a clear enough ideal for Waugh, one rather difficult for a man who, even in his dilettante days, was, as Heath notes, always drawn to "the enchanted world of art for art's sake" (*Prison* 42). For the staunch post-war defender of literary craft, as much as for the young dandy at Oxford or the author of the early satires, it may well still seem that, as Dooley puts it, "Style is everything" (8). Even when dealing, in 1935, with the martyr's witness of Edmund Campion, Waugh cannot help but begin with his literary gifts, praising him as "a stylist for whom form and matter were never in conflict" (*Campion* 27). Likewise, as late as 1955, Waugh insists that the mature writer must devote himself ever more exclusively to his art if he is to nourish himself and progress in his proper work:

[A] writer must face the choice of becoming an artist or a prophet. He can shut himself up at his desk and selfishly seek pleasure in the perfecting of his own skill or he can pace about, dictating dooms and exhortations on the topics of the day. The recluse at his desk has a bare chance of giving abiding pleasure to others; the publicist has none at all. (*Essays* 481)

That style here should trump the more biblical role of prophet serves to indicate that, however much Waugh understood his truest vocation to lie in his service to God, he was still, as a man self-consciously possessed of a literary vocation, inclined to identify artistry for its own sake as the true end and calling of his craft.

Put simply, the post-war Waugh who dwelt increasingly upon both the artistic and the Christian vocations was often at odds with himself in attempting to reconcile the two. Blunt in his statements as to the latter's unimpeachable priority, he was always acutely aware of his own susceptibility to taking stylistic excellence, aesthetic achievement itself, as his idol and creed. This problematic, key to Waugh's striving to have his art itself become the fulfilment of his unique God-given task, is, I argue, definitive of his post-war work. This being the case, the novels of Waugh's last 20 years are, I maintain, uniquely revealing of his

intentions and accomplishments as an artist, of how he understood himself, his work, his faith, and the purpose, the unifying vocation, these all served. As such, these fictions should be of particular interest to students of the man and his art. Yet, sadly, these works have too typically been overlooked, diminished, or even dismissed by literary scholars. Wykes is scarcely alone in seeing these books as, for the most part, unfortunate misfires, Waugh's ill-judged abandonment of his true calling as anarchic satirist: "the later novels, most of which can fairly be called 'Catholic,' are ... of lesser value than those written before *Brideshead*" (8).⁴ While there have been studies, such as Robert Garnett's *From Grimes to Brideshead* (1990), devoted exclusively to works completed before the end of the Second World War, because critics have tended, like Garnett, to see the journey toward and beyond *Brideshead Revisited* as a decline in which Waugh's true genius for "comic uplift faltered" (Garnett 26), there have been no comparable studies of the later fiction.⁵

Nor has twenty-first-century scholarship redressed this oversight. Recent work has, to be sure, maintained his status as a saleable subject for biographers. He is, naturally, central to grandson Alexander's 2004 study of five generations of Waughs in *Fathers and Sons*, and David Lebedoff's *The Same Man* (2008) traces his life and work as they compare and intersect with those of his contemporary, George Orwell. Most recently, Michael G. Brennan frames his 2013 study, *Evelyn*

⁴ This critical unease with Waugh's later work dates to the publication of *Brideshead* and is forcefully initiated by Edmund Wilson's review of that novel. Wilson judged its move from comedy to what he saw as Catholic apologetics "more or less disastrous" (Stannard, *Heritage* 245). By 1960, John Coleman could already write of a critical consensus that Waugh's humor and art are both best seen in his pre-war fiction (277). This dim assessment of *Brideshead* and its successors has proved impressively durable. Iterations may be found, for example, in Wykes (2) and McDonnell (30). For Alain Blayac, a post-war turn to realism meant the death of Waugh's gift for humor (128), and Myers sees the war as undermining Waugh's customary craft (81). I nonetheless hope that this study will go some way toward countering these decades of low esteem for works that are as inventive and powerful as any Waugh wrote.

⁵ While A.A. DeVitis's slim monograph, *Roman Holiday: The Catholic Novels of Evelyn Waugh* (1956), undertakes a project similar to my own, insofar as it focuses on the interplay of Waugh's faith and art, its discussion is cursory, dated, and limited by the fact that two major novels appeared after its publication. Heath's *Picturesque Prison* (1982) distinguishes itself by offering full chapters dealing with each of the post-war, as well as the earlier, fictions. Moreover, Heath takes seriously Waugh's idea of Christian vocation. Nonetheless, his study is over 30 years old and given to abbreviated discussions of many of the later works. What's more, his claim that Waugh conflates faith with aesthetic taste represents, as I will show, a distortion of Waugh's keen sense of the difference, even antagonism, between just these competing goods. Apart from these two studies, only *Waugh without End: New Trends in Evelyn Waugh Studies* (2005), edited by Carlos Villar Flor and Robert Murray Davis, might be counted as a study of this period, if only because the majority of its essays deal with later works; it is not, however, focused on the post-war period per se, nor on my question of art's intersection with faith by way of vocation.

Waugh: Fictions, Faith and Family, with an exploration of Waugh's forebears and descendants, as well as his own life.⁶ What's more, such biographical interest has gone hand in hand with an abiding concern for the author's faith, with a healthy contingent of critics seeking still to trace, as indeed I will do in the pages to follow here, the impact of Waugh's Catholicism on such works as *Brideshead Revisited*, in particular. From Mary Reichardt's 2003 designation of *Brideshead* as perfectly exemplary of her proposed genre of Catholic literature (129–43) to Rosemary Johnson's 2012 treatment of that same text in terms of ambivalent conversion, of a coming to faith which "can be both a human tragedy and a divine comedy" (171), Waugh's religion remains a matter of some fascination in the criticism of his work.⁷ So, too, has the matter of style and literary form, particularly Waugh's role as satirist and his use of modernist technique, generated much worthwhile analysis. Following up on George McCartney's groundbreaking study, *Confused Roaring: Evelyn Waugh and the Modernist Tradition* (1987), critics such as Jonathan Greenberg and Aaron Jaffe have sought to position Waugh's early work, in particular, in terms of the history of Anglo-American modernism. Thus, while Marina MacKay's 2007 study of British modernism's response to, and dissolution in, the Second World War reads Waugh's two wartime novels, *Put Out More Flags* (1942) and *Brideshead Revisited*, as "novels about modernism and very self-consciously after modernism" (126), Ian Scott Todd's "Editing Corpses in Evelyn Waugh's Hollywood" (2013) sees Waugh still allying himself in 1948's *The Loved One* with a modernist aesthetic that privileges discontinuity, taboo-breaking, and the abject. Perhaps most unexpectedly, another post-war sensibility has led literary historians of the past decade to engage with Waugh's work in terms of its colonialist or even post-colonialist tendencies. Such readings of *Black*

⁶ Other recent biographies have been rather more focused on a specific period or a particular text. Thus D.J. Taylor's *Bright Young People: The Lost Generation of London's Jazz Age* deals with Waugh's acquaintance with, and work, in *Vile Bodies* (1930), as chronicler to, that Mayfair set made notorious by theme parties and avid press coverage at the end of the 1920s. Paula Byrne's *Mad World: Evelyn Waugh and the Secrets of Brideshead* (2010), by contrast, is a biography committed to "find[ing] the hidden key to Waugh's great novel, to unlock[ing] for the first time the full extent to which *Brideshead* encodes and subtly transforms the author's own experiences," most particularly his pre-war relationship with the Lygon family (3).

⁷ Recent readings of the fiction's Catholicism have not been restricted to this one watershed tale of conversion. While Manganiello (2006) and Faulstick (2011) likewise focus their concern with faith in the fiction on *Brideshead*, Dugan's 2000 essay is committed to affirming *Helena's* status as a religious novel, "and a great one" (320), whereas John H. Wilson's 2008 article, "Quantitative Judgments and Individual Salvation in Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour*" and Naomi Milthorpe's "'Death is at the Elbow': *The Loved One* and *Love Among the Ruins*" take a similar approach to other post-war texts. Finally, Timothy J. Sutton's *Catholic Modernists, English Nationalists* (2010) features a chapter devoted to tracing a specifically recusant brand of non-evangelical Catholicism through the whole of Waugh's *oeuvre*.

Mischief, *Robbery Under Law*, and the *Sword of Honour* trilogy may be found in work by Rita Barnard, Patrick Query (*Ritual*), and Lewis MacLeod, respectively.

Yet while recent criticism has thus not ignored the twin vocations that form the heart of this study, it has still not provided any focused, intensive exploration of just how these relate to one another in and ramify through Waugh's post-war corpus, specifically. Given the ways that fiction grapples with and crystallizes what Evelyn Waugh took his art to be and what he meant for it to achieve, this elision, I maintain, only helps foster an incomplete or even caricatured portrait of this writer, whose talents still draw the plaudits of critics and lay readers alike, now some 50 years after his death. Extending current work on the literary fruits of Waugh's faith and on his self-conscious concern for literary form, this book also attempts to remedy this long-lasting critical blind spot. It does so in two ways. First, it undertakes a study as yet unattempted by Waugh scholars: a detailed analysis of each of the post-war novels and novellas, beginning with the decisive new direction plotted by *Brideshead*'s introduction of the question of Christian vocation into Waugh's fiction, and proceeding through an analysis of the eight book-length narratives that follow: *Scott-King's Modern Europe* (1947), *The Loved One* (1948), *Helena* (1950), *Love Among the Ruins* (1953), *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957), and the three volumes that make up the *Sword of Honour* trilogy (1952–1961). These works offer an extraordinary range of subjects, styles, and forms, and thus repay a renewed critical scrutiny as testimonies to the full scope of Waugh's literary talents. More than this, studied on their own, in that post-war context so marked by Waugh's deepening concern for his craft and his faith as life-defining callings, these fictions reveal him not only indulging, but also attempting to rein in, his readiness to be style's servant; they show him striving to harmonize this love of his art with a religious vocation that reveals that human designs can only ever be subordinate to one's service to God. Thus *The Vocation of Evelyn Waugh* also seeks to fill the critical lacuna noted above in a second way, by uncovering how these later novels, for all their remarkable diversity and stylistic excellences, pursue a new, abiding, and for their author, essential exploration of Waugh's aestheticism and Catholicism both, and of the manner in which they may be made to coincide in that single, Knox-like vocation of Christian writer that he, after the war, understood as his own. The following pages will be pursuing their own larger end or thesis, namely the argument, first, that the tensions between, and the struggle to reconcile, two competing and importunate ideas of vocation form the consistent foundation for the post-war work's varied generic experiments; and, second, that these ideas' ultimate synthesis is found in this fiction's sustained critique of secular modernity as an age that has lost its soul by taking a humanist aesthetic as its own highest good and calling. By means of this latter critique, I argue, Waugh not only works to foreground, in his plots and characters, more properly Christian ends and vocations, but offers in his art that stylish and memorable testimony that ultimately fulfills his own unique vocation as a Catholic writer.

This argument unfolds over the course of five chapters. My first chapter, "Deplorable Design, Divine Providence: *Brideshead Revisited* and the Callings of

Charles Ryder,” undertakes an analysis of Waugh’s watershed novel of 1945. First, it argues that *Brideshead*’s turn to Catholicism, a move new to Waugh’s fiction, is definitive of its much-remarked divergence from the style and substance of the earlier fiction. As I will show, Waugh’s faith here informs both the biographical events that prompted the novel and the final shape of its tale of conversion. Second, the chapter contends that this tale’s theme is not simply, as Waugh describes it in his 1959 Preface, “the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters” (7), but also the manner of grace’s operation, elaborated in the novel in terms of calling. I approach the text as a study of thwarted or repudiated vocation in the Christian sense, a study which prompts sustained meditation on what Waugh has, at this point, only recently accepted as his own worldly calling: that of artist. This chapter examines, first, the Flyte family’s struggles with God-given vocation and, second, Ryder’s stumbling after his own calling, as this leads him first to connoisseurship, then to professional art, and finally to faith. Through its presentation of this journey, and particularly of the various moral uglinesses which mark Ryder’s years of artistic self-definition, *Brideshead*, I conclude, offers a portrait of the allure and danger, even the potential grotesquerie, of a life which takes the beautiful, and not the beatific, as its sole good.

While Anthony Lane maintains that the conflict between style and morality central to *Brideshead* “makes no more than fitful appearances in the later works” (417), the fictions that follow in fact prove that tension to be rather more abiding than he suggests. Thus Chapter 2 offers paired readings of *The Loved One* (1948) and *Love Among the Ruins* (1953) as further critiques of a strictly secular call to craft. Though often read as political works—a satire on the fatuity of a newly dominant America, in the former case, a screed against Britain’s Welfare State, in the latter—these novellas are best understood as condemnations of a worldly devotion to art. Both present worlds where God is denied, and in both, this indifference to Christian vocation dooms Waugh’s characters to dystopias where human artifice alone governs all. Whether in a Hollywood in which starlets are surgically reconstructed for their next vehicle or in Satellite City, where the Euthanasia Centre queues grow ever longer, everywhere we turn in these two texts we find a modernity marked not just by the blurring of life and death, but by this phenomenon’s marriage to the unchallenged reign of art. The chapter details how both tales disclose worlds in which the artwork is substituted for God, and in which the call to art culminates in the deathly transformation of human selves into fungible artifacts. In both books, the empire of beauty and of strictly human goods posits the endless plasticity of the human person and swiftly, therefore, achieves that person’s dehumanization. In this way, I argue, these are very Christian satires, aimed at demonstrating how a culture called only to art is called not just to the death of the human, but to the death of the beautiful itself.

Chapter 3 maintains that no just appreciation of Waugh’s post-war career is possible without some understanding of *Helena*, Waugh’s clearest articulation of his concept of vocation. The chapter traces how this idiosyncratic hagiography extends that critique of modernity offered by the ostensibly more secular texts