

EVELYN
WAUGH
—
SCOOP

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Scoop

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WAUGH

Scoop

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY ALEXANDER WAUGH



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For
LAURA

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Introduction

Scoop was first published on 7 May 1938 when Evelyn Waugh was thirty-four years old. It was his eleventh book and his fifth novel. Within ten days it had sold 17,000 hardback copies and the critics were unanimous in praise of his extraordinary achievement, hailing it a 'brilliant and sparkling display' (*Saturday Review*); 'ingenious, satirical and extremely funny' (*Times Literary Supplement*); 'exceedingly amusing' (*New Statesman*) and a 'superb entertainment' (*Tablet*). Derek Verschoyle, in the *Spectator* of 13 May, asked his readers: 'What makes Waugh's novels so much superior as entertainment to any other fiction today?' His answer:

His inventive talent, his intelligence, the flexibility of his prose contribute; but more important than these is his gift, so desirable in a satirist and so rare, of never losing either head or temper while engaging in the work of demolition. The world he seems to regard as an asylum, but he walks through it with calm and distinguishes the eccentricities and unpleasant habits of the inmates without surprise

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sentiment or resentment. Almost all his contemporaries could take lessons from him in technique.

The 'demolition' referred to was Waugh's unsparing take-down of newspapermen and journalists, inspired by his personal experiences among the 120-strong international press corps that descended upon on the East African town of Addis Ababa in the Summer of 1935 to report the invasion of Abyssinia by the Italian forces of fascist leader Benito Mussolini. Waugh was sent to cover the conflict by the *Daily Mail*, whose proprietor, Lord Rothermere, insisted on his paper's adoption of a pro-Italian policy. The moment Mussolini declared to his people 'Abyssinia, which we are going to conquer, we shall have totally', newspaper editors around the world started boosting circulations with fear-stories claiming that, since Abyssinia was a member of the League of Nations, any breach of her sovereignty would lead to a world war, potentially more catastrophic than the last. As Mussolini's rhetoric persisted, they scabbled to find suitable war correspondents to report the anticipated cataclysm. Few however had even heard of Abyssinia let alone been there. Two English newspapers (*The Times* and the *Daily Express*) chose their special correspondents on the grounds that they had been born in South Africa. In *Scoop* (where Abyssinia is represented as 'Ishmaelia') a loutish door-stopping hack called Corker, of the down-market *Universal*

News, describes how he was hired as the paper's war correspondent:

Next day the Chief has me in and says, 'Corker, you're off to Ishmaelia. 'Out of town job?' I asked. 'East Africa,' he said, just like that, 'pack your traps. [. . .] I don't see anything in it myself, but the other agencies are sending feature men, so we've got to do something. We want spot news,' he said, 'and some colour stories. Go easy on the expenses.' 'What are they having a war about?' I asked. 'That's for you to find out,' he said, but I haven't found out yet. Have you?

It is unlikely that Lord Rothermere had read Waugh's 1931 book on Abyssinia (*Remote People*) or any of his books for that matter, or that he knew much about the uncolonized, unsafe East African state of multiple kingdoms, cultures and languages, to which he was sending him as war correspondent, but in the competitive frenzy of press barons vying to out-do each other, he was surely delighted to have secured the services of a famous name with a modicum knowledge of that obscure place. Waugh had been recommended to him by a friend in common, the redoubtable, aristocratic socialite actress, Lady Diana Cooper (Mrs Stitch in *Scoop*). Needing money and craving adventure he was at first excited by the opportunity, but soon found himself in at the deep end. After

shopping for supplies at the *Daily Mail*'s expense in a London heatwave, he recalled:

I thought I had treated myself with reasonable generosity until I saw the luggage of my professional competitors – their rifles and telescopes and ant-proof trunks, medicine chests, gas masks, pack saddles and vast wardrobes of costume suitable for every conceivable social or climatic emergency. Then I had an inkling of what later became abundantly clear to all, that I did not know the first thing about being a war correspondent.

When Waugh reached Addis Ababa in the drenching rain of late August, Mussolini's troops had yet to be mobilised from encampments around Massawa and Asmara, respectively the port and the capital of Italian Eritrea to the North East. The Italians had resolved not to attack during the rainy season and thus the correspondents, whether those attached to Mussolini's forces in Eritrea or those beholden to the Abyssinian press bureau in Addis Ababa, were forced to wait around for the rains to stop in a state of growing listlessness and despair. For weeks, with nothing worthy of report, they were harassed by their foreign editors, relentlessly demanding copy with threats of dismissal if sensational scoops were not instantly forthcoming. On all sides movements were restricted, incoming cables spied upon and outgoing cables

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censored and, as the pressures mounted on the correspondents to produce something, they started fabricating reports. Waugh complained of the *Daily Mail's* second stringer, W. F. 'Binks' Hartin, who was stuck in French Djibouti unable to get an entry visa into Abyssinia: 'He doesn't speak French, has never set foot in Abyssinia or met any Abyssinians except consular officials, who refused him admission. He sits in his hotel describing an entirely imaginary campaign'. Among Hartin's fabrications was a story about the destruction of seven mosques 'in a place he found on the map which in point of fact consists of one brackish well and a dozen huts.'

Sir Percival Phillips of the *Daily Telegraph* (Sir Jocelyn Hitchcock in *Scoop*) concocted stories of savage spearsmen amassing on the Tigre front and of the mutilation of a whole Italian scouting party, interlacing his grisly details with unacknowledged paraphrases of an old book on Abyssinia called *In the Country of the Blue Nile*. The foreign desk at the *Telegraph* was deceived, as were rival editors who resented Phillips' appearance at the head of the pack, and furiously cabled their correspondents demanding copy as good as his. O'Dowd Gallagher, a young reporter for the *Daily Express*, received the following from A. H. Sutton, his foreign editor in London:

BEG YOU EMULATE PHILLIPS STOP YOUR LACK
CABLES MOST DISCONCERTING STOP NOT ONLY

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YOUR JOB BUT MINE AT STAKE SAYS CHRISTIANSEN [the editor] BECAUSE EYE SENT YOU ABYSSINIA – SUTTON.

As a proud and confident prose stylist Waugh was dismayed at the ‘ass Rothermere’ infecting his copy with ‘wild pro-Italian propaganda’ while encouraging ignorant sub-editors to change and distort his meaning. ‘I hope you don’t see the Mail,’ he wrote to a friend, ‘I got a batch the other day and was appalled at the way everything I wrote had been mangled, every joke cut out, half the cablese misconstrued . . . nothing there is as I wrote it.’

On 28 October 1935 Waugh’s father, a London publisher, wrote to the historian Arthur Bryant:

Today is Evelyn’s 32nd birthday and it is a cause of great regret to his mother and me that he should be spending it in Abyssinia, where he is not a bit happy, and where it doesn’t seem to us that the work he is doing is at all worthy of his abilities. But he was restless and bored in England; also he needed money, and this seemed one way of getting it immediately. So he accepted the job in hectic haste, and is now repenting it at leisure.

One of the principal causes of Waugh’s unhappiness in Abyssinia was the press corps, which once, perhaps only in

his imagination, he had held in high esteem. In 1957 he explained that the 'main theme' of *Scoop* 'is to expose the pretensions of foreign correspondents, popularized in countless novels, plays, autobiographies and films to be heroes, statesmen and diplomats'. What he found in Addis Ababa was the opposite. 'The journalists are lousy, competitive, hysterical and lying,' he wrote to a friend, 'It makes me unhappy to be one of them but that will soon be OK as the *Daily Mail* don't like the messages I send them and I don't like what they send me.' To the teenage Laura Herbert (soon to be his fiancée) he complained: 'There is no news and no possibility of getting any and my idiot editor keeps cabling me to know exactly what arrangements I am making for cabling news in the event of the destruction of all means of communication.'

Waugh's vivid description of his professional colleagues' duplicity, corruption, madness and internecine squabbling in *Scoop*, is perhaps more accurate than parodic. Herbert Matthews, who reported with the Italian army for the *New York Times*, recalled how the 'stupid censorship, bad living conditions, the altitude, the crazy climate, the strain on heart lungs and nerves, all combined to create a colony of half-mad correspondents rushing frantically about in a state of chronic hysteria.'

For those who, like Waugh, were not attached to the Italian army but stationed at Addis Ababa, matters did not improve

when the fighting began, because the Abyssinian authorities denied them access to the front. With no actual battle to report Waugh gloomily recorded ‘the heaviest fighting is among the journalists’. George Steer of *The Times*, Linton Wells of the *New York Herald Tribune*, Laurence Stallings of *Fox-Movietone*, O. D. Gallagher of the *Daily Express* and J. Walter Collins of *Reuters* were among the worst offenders, intercepting each other’s messages, feeding out false stories, blocking access to sources, fiddling expenses and frequently punching each other in the face. Steer, Waugh wrote, was ‘never without a black eye’. But Waugh himself was far from blameless. He barricaded Steer into his room, put wet fish into another journalist’s bed, loudly applauded the Italians and hissed the Abyssinians at a newsreel screening hosted by Abyssinian officials and challenged the distinguished American reporter, Hubert Knickerbocker of the *International News Service* (Wenlock Jakes in *Scoop*), to a fist fight after Knickerbocker had declared Waugh and Aldous Huxley to be England’s finest contemporary novelists – a statement which was apparently not good enough for him.

Frustrated, as all the correspondents and editors undoubtedly were by restrictions preventing their getting to where real news was happening, Waugh alone could see a clear and useful purpose to his unfulfilling presence on the scene. ‘This will make a funny novel so it isn’t wasted’ he wrote on 11th October, and on the 26th: ‘I am lonely and bored and

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have all the material for a jolly good novel about journalists which I want to do before it gets stale to me'

On 5 November, a month into the invasion process when Italian troops were still far out of sight, he wrote to Edwin Chapman-Andrews the British Vice-Consul stationed in the remote Abyssinian town of Harar:

I read in the paper that they are flogging Harar chaps to death in the square in batches of twelve. Sorry to miss that but we are having some fun here. Heavy fighting broke out among the journalists on Friday evening preceded by some light skirmishing on the Linton Wells-Stallings-Hammond front. Casualty lists to date reveal heavy losses of blood and teeth in the Gallagher army. Steer commanding the *Times* heavies wholly incapacitated. Collins on Reuter front out of action for two days now resuming offensive. A communist army at Majestic Hotel has established outposts at strategic points on frontier and is harassing Gallagher's communications. So far no loss of life but it is expected in knowledgeable quarters that there will be firing on the Wells front when troops move to winter quarters at Dessye.

The great scoop of the campaign was won by Percival Phillips for the *Telegraph* with James Mills of the *Associated Press*,

who had jointly learned from a mysterious adventurer called Francis W. Rickett (Baldwin in *Scoop*) that Britain and America had conspired to secure significant oil and mineral rights in Abyssinia in the run up to hostilities. Thus the two Western governments' pro-Abyssinian policies turned out to be motivated by rather more than their stated support of the League of Nations. Rickett had himself negotiated the deal with the Abyssinian emperor, but Waugh, who was on social terms with him and had tried to investigate his presence in Addis Ababa before the story was broken, wrongly dismissed him as an 'armament tout who pretends to be an envoy of the Coptic Patriarch'; this failure he described as 'sad'.

Waugh's scoops were few. He had discovered through a hired spy that the French Consul and his wife had been arrested for espionage and that the Abyssinian Emperor's Chief of Staff was making lion pits to trap the advancing army, but these were small reward. In late September he wrote to his literary agent from Frau Heft's Deutsches Haus (Frau Dressler's Pension in *Scoop*): 'By the same mail as this I am sending in my resignation to the *Mail*. It wasn't possible for me to work with them. They have all the wrong ideas . . . I imagine I shan't be popular in Fleet Street at the moment or ever again.' In panic the *Mail* persuaded him to stay on at least until the paper's feverish second stringer at Djibouti regained his health. Waugh obliged and to his relief received a cable

from the Mail terminating his employment in early December. He wrote to Diana Cooper:

Well we are all getting recalled and I am very glad. I didn't realize how much I hated this job until I got the cable. Now I am deliriously happy. I suppose it is priggish to hate one's job but there it is. I felt ashamed all the time.

On 15 December with mixed feelings of relief and anticlimax he left Abyssinia, travelled to Jerusalem for Christmas and to Damascus, Baghdad, Haifa and Rome before returning to London on 3 February 1936. On 7 May the Italians, fresh from taking Addis Ababa, announced their inevitable victory, proclaiming their king, Victor Emmanuel III, Emperor of Ethiopia. As much as he may have wished to start his novel about journalists, Waugh's life in England was unsettled (he had no home) and was plagued by infinite interruptions and distractions, not least of which was a looming contractual obligation to complete a book about the Italian invasion for the Longman's publishing company, which required his return to Abyssinia to garner fresh material for a final chapter describing the country under occupation. In April he was unofficially engaged to Laura Herbert whose tough and disapproving mother tried every means at her disposal to delay the announcement.

Two months later Waugh's agent, A. D. Peters, wrote to his

American publisher: 'Evelyn has been awarded the Hawthornden prize, ostensibly for his *Life of Edmund Campion*, but really of course for his work in general. It is the most important literary award in England.' On the day that he was to receive it, he was threatened with imprisonment for debt and summoned to appear in court, but somehow managed to send his agent to plead his case. Peters sent an ironic telegram to Waugh on the day of the Hawthornden ceremony: 'SINCEREST CONGRATULATIONS SORRY I CANNOT BE PRESENT AM SPENDING AFTERNOON AT POLICE COURT'. Waugh's rickety finances were rescued by an advance from Peters on a lucrative six-book publishing deal with Chapman & Hall, agreements to write regular opinion pieces for Nash's *Pall Mall Magazine* and book reviews for a new weekly, *Night & Day*, edited by Graham Greene. At the same time, he was contracted to write a film script (*Lovelies over London*) for Alexander Korda's London Film Productions company. *Scoop* was put on hold. *Waugh in Abyssinia* went into print on 9 October and on the fifteenth of that month he wrote in his diary: 'made a very good start with the first page of a novel describing Diana's [Cooper's] early morning.'

Progress however soon stalled. On top of his writing commitments he had his marriage to Laura to think about and, on his return from honeymooning in Portofino at the end of May 1937, he immediately set about moving into and

decorating a spacious new home in Gloucestershire, bought with a £3500 wedding present from Laura's grandmother, Lady de Vesce. Only four chapters of *Scoop* had been completed which he considered 'good material but shaky structure'. After finishing a fifth in June he wrote disconcertingly to Peters: 'The novel is to be entirely rewritten. It will be ready on time for publication before Christmas. It will be called SCOOP.' Work, however, progressed slowly. In August he gave an interview to Caroline Cambridge of the *Daily Express* from 1937 explaining some of the difficulty:

[Evelyn Waugh] does not think it is clever to write brilliant novels but a trick like balancing a penny on a pin. What's more he loathes doing it. Work nauseates him. He writes his stuff slowly, painfully by hand, rewrites several times, agonises over all that spontaneous wit, becomes pop eyed with despair, is led by his characters and forsakes them frequently for a crossword puzzle.

By the following month work had come to a stand-still: 'I have stopped working on the novel because I understood there was no hope of serialization. The book couldn't come out before Christmas so there was no point in hurrying it.' *Scoop* was finally finished on 20 February 1938. A fortnight later Laura gave birth to their first child, Maria Teresa, named after the Austrian empress, on the day that Hitler's *Wehrmacht*

marched on Vienna. 'The daughter is large and blond' Waugh wrote, 'no one has had the insolence to suggest it is like me.'

Waugh's creative process has been much discussed and analysed by biographers and literary critics. To what extent are the events and characters in his novels imagined? To what extent are they real? Although he claimed to have based all the characters in his masterpiece, *A Handful of Dust*, on a single person – an impossible girlfriend, Teresa Jungman – it was his usual practice to merge two or three characters or events into one. The war in *Scoop*, for instance, is a civil war, not a foreign invasion. In 1963 he explained:

At the time of writing public interest had just been diverted from Abyssinia to Spain. I tried to arrange a combination of these two wars . . . The geographical position of Ishmaelia, though not its political constitution, is identical with that of Abyssinia and the description of life among the journalists in Jacksonberg is very close to Addis Ababa in 1935.

William Boot's ramshackle family home, Boot Magna, from whence he is summoned to London by the *Daily Beast*, fuses two family houses into one: Pakenham Hall in County Westmeath, Ireland – where Waugh was staying when he was summoned to London by the *Daily Express* in 1930 to be sent on his first visit to Abyssinia to report the coronation

of Ras Tafari as Haile Selassie I – and Pixton Park in Somerset, the home of Laura Herbert’s mother, daughters, son, retired servants, nannies and eccentric distant cousins.

The menage at Boot Magna may seem incredible to readers in the twenty-first century. Even in Waugh’s lifetime such a set up would have seemed improbable but, as he explained in the ‘Preface’ to a 1963 edition,

The most anachronistic part is the domestic scene of Boot Magna. There are today pale ghosts of Lord Copper, Lady Metroland and Mrs Stitch. Nothing survives of the Boots. Younger readers must accept my assurance that such people and their servants did exist quite lately and are not pure fantasy.

Waugh rarely discussed or wrote about his work, but in 1946 when *Brideshead Revisited* became a sudden and unexpected best-seller in America, he wrote a piece for an American magazine in which he attempted to answer questions sent to him by post from admiring fans which he claimed he was unable to answer directly as the royalties collected per copy were less than the cost of a stamp. ‘Are your characters drawn from life?’ he was asked.

In the broadest sense, of course they are. None except one or two negligible minor characters is a portrait; all

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the major characters are the result of numberless diverse observations fusing in the imagination into a single whole. My problem has been to distil comedy and sometimes tragedy from the knock about farce of people's outward behaviour. Men and women as I see them would not be credible if they were literally transcribed; for instance the international journalists whom I met for a few delirious weeks in Addis Ababa, some of whose abandoned acts I tried to introduce into *Scoop*.

In *Scoop* the author veils himself behind two characters, one major and one minor. In the first paragraph he is easily recognisable as the respected young novelist John Courtney Boot, who between novels, like Waugh, published 'unprofitable but modish works on history and travel'. Boot's first book was a life of Rimbaud written at the age of eighteen, while Waugh's was a life of Rossetti written at the age of twenty-three. Boot's latest, called *Waste of Time*, was a travelogue about Patagonia, while Waugh, who had written a 'studiously modest description of some harrowing months' in South America (*Ninety-Two Days*), had also dismissed the writing of his latest (*Waugh in Abyssinia*) as a waste of time. 'The Abyssinian book is quite honourable and readable' he wrote to a friend in June 1936, 'but no one will want to read about it by the time it comes out.' Boot's visit to Mrs Stitch, finding her in bed wearing a clay face compact, is a largely true account

of a visit to Diana Cooper's bedroom at Admiralty House in 1936. His diary for 7 July recalls 'Message to call on Diana, found her with face expressionless in mud mask'. Boot's need to go abroad to escape the vexations of an unhappy love affair was based on Waugh's troubles with Teresa Jungman. On 29 December 1934 he wrote her a remarkable letter from on board a P&O liner bound for North Africa:

Darling Teresa,

You will say it was sly to go away without saying anything. I meant to tell you that evening at the Savoy but when it came to the point, I didn't want to spoil a pleasant evening . . . You see it would be affected to pretend I have any reason except you for going away. But please believe it isn't only selfish - running away from pain (though it has been more painful than you know, all the last months, realising every day that I was becoming less attractive and less important to you) - but also I can't be any good to you without your love and it's the worst possible thing for you to have to cope with the situation that had come about between us.

If you're inclined to think too bitterly about my behaviour in the summer, please remember this. That for all the first part, when you say you liked me, I was not allowed any expression at all of my love - it isn't surprising if I was sometimes jealous and quarrelsome and ill-at-ease in your house. One loving gesture would have taken all the nonsense out of me and made me humble and gentle - but that didn't come until one evening

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at Cuckoo Weir and by that time I had quarrelled with your mother and it was not to be expected that you would last out alone for long. Then everything seemed beautiful until the stab in the back from Cowes and since then everything has been worse and worse until you couldn't even bring yourself to kiss me or take a decent present without feeling ashamed of it. That day I went straight off and booked my passage.

In other respects, Waugh aligned himself to the principle character, William of Boot Magna, who wishes nothing more than to be left in peace in the country to write his 'Lush Places' column and to experience, once at least, the thrill of flying in an aeroplane. This Boot is accidentally and inappropriately dispatched to Ishmaelia as a war correspondent. Although the prose style of his nature column is gently lampooned – 'through the plashy fen passes the questing vole', 'the waggons lumber in the lane under their golden glory of harvested sheaves' – the unsuitability of his literary style to the exigencies of war reportage for the *Daily Beast* precisely matches the unsuitability of Waugh's finely tuned and fastidious prose to the kind of writing that the *Daily Mail* expected of him from Abyssinia. Waugh habitually escaped the city to write in the quiet country houses of his friends, he shunned the modern world and yet, like Boot wanting to fly, he constantly harboured desires for dramatic or dangerous experience.

During the war the Abyssinians ensured that word rates for sending telegrams in and out of the country were the most expensive in the world – a policy that raised some \$2m for their war effort from cables alone. In reaction, a condensed and often incomprehensible language, known as ‘cablese’, was developed by the newspapers and their correspondents to save on costs. In *Scoop* William Boot inadvertently taunts his employers by sending them long florid and worthless messages at their charge. Waugh, who delighted in the frustrations and expenses that the cable system created for his employers proudly admitted ‘We telegraph abuse at 4 shillings and something a word’. He sent one of his stories in Latin which no one at the *Mail* could understand. To an urgent telegram demanding information on an American nurse apparently killed by Italian bombing at a hospital in Adowa (‘REQUIRE EARLIEST NAME LIFE STORY PHOTOGRAPH NURSE UPBLOWN ADOWA’), Waugh nonchalantly responded ‘NURSE UNUPBLOWN’.

William Boot’s impossible love affair with the golden haired Kätchen is distilled from the years of heartache that Waugh experienced in his courtship of the golden-haired Teresa ‘Baby’ Jungman. She was said to have been the daughter of a Dutch painter, Nico Jungman, and Waugh consequently called all things that were incomprehensible, complicated, painful and obscure ‘Dutch’ because of her. Others whispered that she was the natural daughter of an Irish peer. In

Scoop 'Kätchen' is described by one character as a 'German lady', though we later learn that her father is Russian, her mother Polish and she was born in Budapest. 'Kätchen', which suggests a baby cat or kitten (*Kätzchen* in German) was the affectionate nickname given by Diana Cooper to her mysterious Rumanian friend, Rudolf Kommer, who lived off unexplained wealth and once told her that if he stayed any longer at her house, he 'might fall in love with her'. Kommer, who was no doubt irritated by the teasing use of 'Kätchen' in *Scoop*, was jealous of Waugh's friendship with Diana.

Some of the names in *Scoop* – Lord Copper, Lord Zinc, Pigge, Whelper, Shumble, Corker etc are purely comic, while others appear to have been plucked from Waugh's past: a Baldwin, a Salter and a Troutbeck appear in the register of boys and masters at Lancing College, West Sussex where Waugh was a boarder from 1917 to 1921, while *The Beast* was the original name of the *Lancing College Magazine*. 'Cruttwell' which sounds like a comic invention, is in fact the real name of Waugh's sadistic history tutor at Oxford University, historian C.R.M.F. Cruttwell, late of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. This name, which appears in all of Waugh's early novels, is habitually given to unsavoury characters – a vendetta which he believed eventually contributed to Cruttwell's death. In *Scoop* General Cruttwell is the manager of a camping shop and the words associated with him (Glacier, Falls, Leap, Folly) reflect C.R.M.F. Cruttwell's spectacular humiliation in

the General Election of November 1935. Standing for the Conservative Party in one of the two Oxford University seats Cruttwell failed to poll an eighth of the votes cast and consequently forfeited his deposit. Waugh responded to the news sent to Addis Ababa by his brother and sister-in-law:

It was delightful of you and Alec to cable me the news of Cruttwell's ignominy. It has made my week. I needed cheering up as I have just returned from an unsuccessful attempt to get to the front . . . Really Cruttwell's failure is supremely comforting. It must be the first time in history that the official conservative has botched things so thoroughly.

Scoop contains more recognizable characters and is more closely allied to actual events than any of Waugh's previous novels, and yet somehow survives as an ever-living testament to his controlled wit, irrepressible humour and kaleidoscopic imagination. The week before starting work on it he had reviewed P. G. Wodehouse's novel *Laughing Gas* for *The Tablet* laughing as he read it in bed. He had long regarded Wodehouse as a literary hero. Not only is the 'superb dialogue and natural grace' which he found in *Laughing Gas* also to be found in *Scoop*, but the whole novel reveals the assimilation of what Waugh once described as Wodehouse's 'unflinching mastery of our exacting trade'. As the late Professor Murray Davis opined 'though Waugh transcended his master he was

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an observant and dexterous pupil.' But for all his sincere admiration the two great writers are essentially opposites, for Wodehouse's work is perennially happy while Waugh's, however comic, is underpinned by sadness. Failure of communication provides the pervading theme of *Scoop*, as one individual after another is shown struggling to play his part in a topsy-turvy, unlistening and often barbaric world. Only by laughing at the Coppers, Shumbles, Boots and Piggies of Waugh's eccentric world is it possible to appreciate how truthful his message is. While Waugh considered creative writing to be an arduous and difficult process, he believed, nevertheless, that only the writer is free - that personal failure, irritation, unhappiness, boredom, loneliness, pain, indeed whatever it is that irks, is best disburdened by writing about it. *Scoop* was born of Waugh's sense of personal failure but as the veteran journalist William Deedes, who was with him in Abyssinia, recalled: 'Waugh's failure with the *Daily Mail* gave no fair impression of his talents. He was incomparably the best writer among us. His novel based on our adventures, *Scoop*, is rightly hailed as a classic.'

Alexander Waugh

Preface

This light-hearted tale was the fruit of a time of general anxiety and distress but, for its author, one of peculiar personal happiness.

Its earlier editions bore the subtitle: 'A novel about journalists'. This now seems superfluous. Foreign correspondents, at the time this story was written, enjoyed an unprecedented and undeserved fame. Other minor themes, then topical, are out of date, in particular the 'ideological war', although some parallels to it might still be found in the Far East.

At the time of writing public interest had just been diverted from Abyssinia to Spain. I tried to arrange a combination of these two wars. Of the later I knew nothing at first hand. In Abyssinia I had served as the foreign correspondent of an English daily paper. I had no talent for this work but I joyfully studied the eccentricities and excesses of my colleagues. The geographical position of Ishmaelia, though not its political constitution, is identical with that of Abyssinia and the description of life among the journalists in Jacksonburg is very close to Addis Ababa in 1935.

The most anachronistic part is the domestic scene of Boot

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Magna. There are today pale ghosts of Lord Copper, Lady Metroland and Mrs Stitch. Nothing survives of the Boots. Younger readers must accept my assurance that such people and their servants did exist quite lately and are not pure fantasy. They will also find the sums of money recorded here very meagre and must greatly multiply them to appreciate the various transactions.

E. W.

Combe Florey 1963