

## Sloth, Disillusionment, and the Higher Chivalry: Evelyn Waugh's Elegiac *Sword of Honour* Trilogy<sup>1</sup>

(This essay by Professor Robert Hickson has been posted on the *Apropos* website:  
[www.apropos.org.uk](http://www.apropos.org.uk) )

### Epigraphs:

“*It is not always true that suffering makes people unselfish. But sometimes it is.*” (Madame Kanyi, a dignified Jewish refugee in Yugoslavia in 1944, speaking to Captain Guy Crouchback)

“*As for Guy, he had recognized from the first a certain remote kinship with this most dissimilar man [Commando Captain Ivor Claire], a common aloofness, differently manifested – a common melancholy sense of humour; each in his own way saw life sub specie aeternitatis; thus with numberless reservations they became friends.*” (Captain Crouchback's thoughts, as expressed in late 1940, during commando training on the Isle of Mugg in Scotland.)

“*‘You poor bloody fool,’ said Kertsie, anger and pity and something near love in her voice, ‘you’re being chivalrous – about Virginia. Can’t you understand men aren’t chivalrous any more and I don’t believe they ever were.’ ... It was no good trying to explain, Guy thought. Had someone said: ‘All differences are theological differences?’ He turned once more to his father’s letter: If only one soul was saved, that is full compensation for any amount of ‘loss of face.’*” (Kertsie Kilbannock speaking to Captain Guy Crouchback in London shortly after Childermas 1943 – the Feast of Holy Innocents – and most probably on 29 December 1943, on the Feast of Saint Thomas à Becket of Canterbury, Martyr.)

### The way of sacrifice

At thirty-three years of age, in early 1936, two and a half years before he would volunteer to serve as a combatant officer in World War II, Evelyn Waugh expressed his integrity and his Catholic Faith in a published letter responding to a Protestant critique of his 1935 book, *Edmund Campion* – a study of Saint Edmund Campion, the Jesuit Protomartyr in Elizabethan England. Waugh was attempting thereby to resist another attempt bent on “fouling a name which all of my Faith and countless others, who know the true marks of heroism and sanctity, hold in the highest honour.”<sup>2</sup>

Speaking of the increasingly unjust laws and practices of Queen Elizabeth I's reign, Waugh says:

*Elizabeth's legislation left the Catholics with the choice of three positions – apostasy, conspiracy, or sacrifice. There was no place for legitimate opposition under the Tudors. The reason that we love Campion was that his teaching and example showed the way of sacrifice.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Sword of Honour* was first published as a single volume only in 1965 – less than a year before Evelyn Waugh's death in April of 1966. The *Sword of Honour* comprises three historical novels finally re-edited by the author. Originally, they were sequentially published between 1952 and 1961. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations and page references will be to the original three volumes — *Men at Arms* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1952); *Officers and Gentlemen* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1955); and *Unconditional Surrender* (London: Penguin Books, 1967 – first edition 1961) – or, in the American title, *The End of the Battle* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *The Essays, Articles, and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh* (edited by Donat Gallagher) (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1984), p. 183. The Letter, entitled “Edmund Campion,” is to be found in its entirety on pages 183-185.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184 – my emphasis added.

Captain Guy Crouchback, the un-self-assuming hero of Evelyn Waugh's historical military trilogy, *Sword of Honour*, is later himself memorably shown to reflect upon the meaning and way of sacrifice.

### Quantitative judgments don't apply

In November of 1943, Guy now remembers his gifted friend and fellow Commando Officer, Captain Ivo Claire, who had seemed chivalrous, but later deceived him and “proved to be an illusion,” and had even deserted his unit in Crete in 1941, in the face of the enemy.<sup>4</sup> Guy is now having a conversation in London with the superficial and cynical Scottish Lord, Ian Kilbannock, and Guy says to this dishonorable propagandist – “an arch-imposter”<sup>5</sup> – something very important:

*“Ivor doesn't believe in sacrifice. Who does, nowadays? But he had the will to win.”*<sup>6</sup>

Lord Kilbannock flippantly responds and thereby inspires Guy's further reflections:

*“I can't think of anything more sacrificial than plodding about the jungle [of Burma] with those desperados [Ord Wingate's “Chindits” in Burma]. I don't know what he's going to win there.”*

*“There was a time I was very fond of Ivor.” [said Guy]*

*“Oh, I'm fond of him. Everyone is and everyone has forgotten his little faux pas [sic] in Crete. That's what makes it so rum his charging off to be a hero now.”*

*When Ian left, Guy brooded about the antithesis between the acceptance of sacrifice and the will to win. It seemed to have personal relevance, as yet undefined, to his own condition. He re-read the letter from his father which he carried always in his pocket-book [“in which he had kept his notes for his War Diary”]: “The Mystical Body doesn't strike attitudes or stand on its dignity. It accepts suffering and injustice ... Quantitative judgements don't apply.”*

*There was a congress at Teheran at the time [in November of 1943, between Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin] entirely occupied with quantitative judgements.*<sup>7</sup>

The contrast between the Church and the War Councils of the “New Allies” (now also including Stalin's Soviet Union) was already becoming clearer to Guy.

At the time, in late 1943, Guy was languishing as an essentially unemployed “liaison officer” at “HOO HQ” – “Hazardous Offensive Operations Headquarters” – a then-expanding organization of “Special-Service forces” which was full of eccentrics, cranks, geniuses, fakes, and lunatics. Guy was unmistakably demoralized:

*But it was not for this that he had dedicated himself on the Sword of Sir Roger of Waybroke that hopeful morning four years back.*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Guy remembered Claire as he first saw him in the Roman spring in the afternoon sunlight and the embosoming cypresses of the Borghese Gardens, putting his horse faultlessly over the jumps, concentrated as a man in prayer. Ivor Claire, Guy thought, was the fine flower of them all [*i.e.*, the flower of “The Flower of the Nation”]. He was quintessential England, the man Hitler had not taken into account.” – Evelyn Waugh II – *Officers and Gentlemen*, pp. 146-147. These words were spoken in South Africa in February 1941 while Guy and Ivor were enroute to Egypt by troop ship. In May 1941, Captain Ivo Claire was to desert his unit in combat on the Island of Crete – and to escape to Burma by way of Egypt. In June of 1941, we hear these following thoughts of Guy Crouchback, who is now himself in Alexandria, Egypt, after “the debacle in Crete”: “He [Guy] had no old love for Ivor, no liking at all, for the man who had been his friend had proved to be an illusion.” (*Ibid.*, p. 320.)

<sup>5</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Men at Arms*, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender*, p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128 – my emphasis added, but Italics are in the original.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

## Knight and Englishman

For, Guy had been for many years deeply inspired by Sir Roger of Waybroke, an earlier Knight and an Englishman who died in Italy. Sir Roger's sword, buried beside him in Italy, is a Sword of Honor. Though Guy was then naïve, he was not, however, inspired by illusion.

The reader learns about Sir Roger and his own historic vow – but poignantly unfulfilled mission – in the first volume of the trilogy, *Men at Arms*, soon after being introduced to Guy Crouchback himself at his family home in Italy: in the momentous month of August 1939.

Before Guy departs Italy to return to his homeland with a mission to become an officer in the British armed forces, he wants to make two visits: “one to a life-long friend” and, after that special act of *pietas*, to make a fitting visit to “the confessional,” for the Sacrament of Penance.

Waugh now introduces us to Guy Crouchback and to one of Guy's abiding inspirations (in addition to his own father, Gervase) with respect to the ethos of honor and chivalry: namely, Sir Roger of Waybroke.

Speaking of Guy as we first see him now in 1939, Waugh says:

*Now there was a last piece of private business to transact. Thirty-five years old, slight and trim, plainly foreign [in Italy] but not so plainly English, young, now, in heart and step, he came to bid good-bye to a life-long friend who lay, as was proper for a man dead eight hundred years, in the parish church [of Santa Dulcina della Rocce on the coast] ... His name, just legible still, was Roger of Waybroke, Knight, an Englishman; his arms five falcons. His sword and one gauntlet still lay beside him ... Waybroke, now Waybrook, was quite near London. Roger's manor had long ago been lost and over-built. He left it for the Second Crusade, sailed from Genoa and was shipwrecked on this coast. There he enlisted under the local Count who promised to take him to the Holy Land but led him first against a neighbor on the walls of whose castle he fell at the moment of victory. The Count gave him honourable burial and there he had lain through the centuries, where the church [like his manor in England] crumbled and was re-built above him, far from Jerusalem, far from Waybroke, a man [like Guy now] with a great journey still before him and a great vow unfulfilled [like Guy's own sacramental vow of marriage, as we shall soon discover].<sup>9</sup>*

## Sir Roger, pray for me

The local people also understood this poignant Mediaeval history and this unfulfilled vow:

*But the people of Santa Dulcina della Rocce, to whom the supernatural order in all its ramifications was ever present and ever more lively than the humdrum world about them, adopted Sir Roger [even in preference to their patroness, Santa Dulcina!] and despite all clerical remonstrances canonized him, brought him their troubles and touched his sword for luck, so that its edge was always bright.<sup>10</sup> All his life, but especially in recent years, Guy had felt a special kinship with “il Santo Inglese.” Now, on his last day [before his departure, never to return], he made straight for the tomb and ran his finger, as the fishermen did, along the Knight's sword [a “Sword of Honour”]. “Sir Roger, pray for me,” he said, “and for our endangered Kingdom.”<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>9</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Men at Arms*, pp. 8-9 – my emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> For Guy himself, the supernatural order would also soon become increasingly important and “ever present and ever more lively.” For example, at a formal “Dining-In” Feast during his early Halberdier training:

*“Guy found himself talking religion with the chaplain [i.e., the Anglican chaplain].*

*‘Do you agree,’ he [Guy] asked earnestly, ‘that the Supernatural Order is not something added to the Natural Order, like music or painting, to make everyday life more tolerable? It is everyday life. The supernatural is real; what we call ‘real’ is a mere shadow, a passing fancy. Don't you agree, Padre?’*

*‘Up to a point.’*

*‘Let me put it another way...’ [Guy attempted to say, but]*

*The smile [of the Anglican chaplain] had become set during Major Tickeridge's performance; it was like an acrobat's, a professional device concealing fear and exhaustion.” (Ibid., pp. 99-100 – my emphasis added)*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9 – my emphasis added. Two years later, in May of 1941, during his escape by sea from the military “debacle in Crete,” Guy in his near delirium prayed: “Saint Roger of Waybroke defend us in the day of battle and be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil.” See Evelyn Waugh, *Officers and Gentlemen*, p. 305.

### Interior spiritual devastation

Although Guy was apparently “young, now, in heart and step,”<sup>12</sup> he also had a heavier burden of soul to bear and an interior spiritual devastation: namely, an ineffable and, as yet, largely unrecognized burden of spiritual sloth:

*Just seven days earlier [in August of 1939] he had opened his morning newspaper on the headlines announcing the Russian-German alliance [the Soviet-Nazi alliance, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact]. News that shook the politicians and young poets of a dozen capital cities brought deep peace to one English heart [i.e., to Guy's heart]. Eight years of shame and loneliness [1931-1939] were ended. For eight years Guy, already set apart from his fellows by his own deep wound, that unshaken, internal draining away of life and love, had been deprived of the loyalties which should have sustained him.<sup>13</sup>*

(Guy had hoped now to find new loyalties to sustain him in war – and maybe also new friends.)

Therefore, after his visit to Sir Roger, Guy now had good reasons to go to Confession before his departure. With the help of Sister Tomasina, he “interrupted the succession of peccant urchins,” the schoolchildren whom she had brought “to their duties,” and entered the confessional himself:

*Guy found it easy to confess in Italian. He spoke the language well but without nuances. There was no risk of going deeper than the denunciation of his few infractions of law, of his habitual weaknesses. Into that wasteland where his soul languished he need not, could not, enter. He had no words to describe it. There were no words in any language. There was nothing to describe, merely a void. His was not an “interesting case,” he thought. No cosmic struggle raged in his sad soul. It was as though eight years back [in 1931, when his wife, Virginia, abandoned him in Kenya, committed adultery in England, and subsequently divorced him] he had suffered a tiny stroke of paralysis; all his spiritual faculties were just perceptibly impaired. He was “handicapped” as Mrs. Garry of Villa Datura would have put it. There was nothing to say about it. The priest gave him absolution and the traditional words of dismissal: “*Sia lodato Gesu Cristo*” [“Jesus Christ be praised”], and he answered, “*Oggi, sempre*” [“Today, always”].<sup>14</sup>*

### That ubiquitous death wish

Near the end of the Trilogy, near the end of Guy Crouchback's long “unaccomplished journey,” Madame Kanyi spoke some important words to him, in the winter of late 1944. Her candor also revealed to Guy, unexpectedly, a little more about himself: a sudden revelation of a part of his own earlier, though sincere, motivation to serve in the War.

Guy was about to leave Yugoslavia for southern Italy and then to return to England. He was speaking to Madame Kanyi, a dignified Jewish refugee, and he was also compassionately speaking to her about her fellow Jewish refugees (about 108 of them in total) whom he had also tried to help: to assist them especially in their liberation from Yugoslavia and evacuation to Italy. Trying to console Mme. Kanyi a little, Guy said to

<sup>12</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Men at Arms*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, *Men at Arms* – Volume I of the Trilogy, p. 7 – my emphasis added. Very soon, however, as Guy was painfully to discover:

*“Russia invaded Poland [in late September 1939]. Guy found no sympathy among those old soldiers for his own hot indignation [Guy was speaking at Bellamy's with veterans of “the First World War”].*

*‘My dear fellow [said the old soldiers to Guy], we've quite enough on our hands as it is. We can't go to war with the whole world.’*

*‘Then why go to war at all?’ [replied Guy] If all we want is prosperity, the hardest bargain Hitler made would be preferable to victory. If we are concerned with justice, the Russians are as guilty as the Germans.’*

*‘Justice?’ said the old soldiers. ‘Justice?’*

*‘Besides,’ said [Arthur] Box-Bender [a Member of Parliament also present at Bellamy's, and Guy's brother-in-law] .... ‘The socialists [here in England] have been crying blue murder against the Nazis for five years but they are all pacifists at heart. So far as they have any feeling of patriotism it's for Russia. You'd have a general strike and the whole country in collapse if you set up to be just.’*

*‘Then what are we fighting for?’ [said Guy]” (*Ibid.*, p. 25 – my emphasis added). Guy is already attentive to the importance of purpose, “the purpose of it all.”*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10 – my emphasis added.

her that the Communists and their observant spy – “the lurking figure of Bakic” – “can't make any trouble,” really.<sup>15</sup> And she unexpectedly replied:

*“Not for you, perhaps. You are leaving. There was a time when I thought that all I needed for happiness was to leave [for Palestine or for Australia]. Our people [i.e., the Jewish people] feel that. They must move away from evil. Some hope to find homes in Palestine. Most look no farther than Italy – just to cross the water, like crossing the Red Sea.*

*“Is there any place [this Refugee Jewish wife continued] that is free from evil? It is too simple to say that only the Nazis wanted war. These Communists [now further infiltrating England and the British Army, and pervading 1944 Yugoslavia] wanted it too. It was the only way in which they could come to power [a “Power without Grace”]. Many of my people wanted it [war], to be revenged on the Germans, to hasten the creation of a national state [in Zionist Palestine]. It seems to me there was a will to war, a death wish, everywhere. Even good men thought their private honour would be satisfied by war. They could assert their manhood by killing and being killed. They would accept hardships in recompense for having been selfish and lazy [idle and spiritually slothful]. Danger justified privilege. I knew Italians – not very many perhaps – who felt this. Were there none in England?”*

*“God forgive me,” said Guy, “I was one of them.” Guy had come to the end of the crusade to which he had devoted himself on the tomb of Sir Roger.<sup>16</sup>*

### Chivalry and honor in the modern age

What could have happened to this well-meaning young man? And, after his besetting sloth at the outset and his later disillusionments and discoveries, what was to be the destiny of his enlarging sense of honor in the end? What glimpses may we come to have of his Higher Chivalry, so well rooted in his gradually deepened Catholic Faith, and in the magnanimous and humble example and memory of his beloved father?

By means of his three-fold sequence of novels concerning World War II, unmistakably based on his own distinguished and valorous and disillusioning experience from 1939-1945, Evelyn Waugh also proposes to show us the way of sacrifice: the way of honor and the higher chivalry.

His Military Trilogy, finally edited and published in one volume only in 1965, and entitled *Sword of Honour* is, at root, a study of chivalry and honour “in the Modern Age” – and also a revelation of unchivalrous dishonor – especially during a time of “Total War” and “People's War.”<sup>17</sup> (Evelyn Waugh was to die less than a year later, in his sixty-third year of life, in his home, after Father Philip Caraman, S.J., privately celebrated the Traditional Mass on 10 April 1966 – Easter Sunday.)

### Adumbrating the dismemberment of Christendom

Moreover, as Waugh later shows us in the final volume of his Trilogy:

*Sir Ralph Brompton [of “HOO HQ”] had been schooled in the old diplomatic service to evade irksome duties and to achieve power by insinuating himself into places where, strictly, he had no business. In the looser organization of total war he was able to trip from office to office and committee to committee ... Liberation was*

<sup>15</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender*, p. 305.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 305-306 — my emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Officers and Gentlemen*, p. 130. Later describing a subversive Communist and active Homosexual leader of a “coterie” of Army Officers, Evelyn Waugh says, for example: “This [“dandy”] was Sir Ralph Brompton, the diplomatic adviser to H.O.O. HQ. He seemed a figure of obsolescent light comedy rather than of total war. 'It [the dishonorable “Sword of Stalingrad”] affords the People an opportunity for self-expression,' said Sir Ralph.” (Evelyn Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender*, p. 25) The “It” to which he refers is the “Sword of Stalingrad”: “It had been made at the King's command as a gift to 'the steel-hearted people of Stalingrad’” (*Ibid.*, p. 16); also called the “State Sword,” which is, as Waugh unmistakably presents it, the Sword of Dishonor. On display in Westminster Abbey between two candles like the Holy Monstrance, it is also depicted as an Idol, “exposed for adoration nearby the shrine of St. Edward the Confessor, and the sacring place of the Kings of England.” (*Unconditional Surrender*, p. 17) (See *Ibid.*, *Unconditional Surrender*, pp. 13-17, and pp. 32-33).

*Sir Ralph's special care. Wherever those lower than the Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff adumbrated the dismemberment of Christendom, there Sir Ralph might be found.*<sup>18</sup>

This essay, therefore, especially now proposes to examine how Waugh's main hero, Guy Crouchback – increasingly inspired by the example of his own father – develops from his initial and abiding spiritual sloth, through several purifying disenchantments and disillusionments, to live a life of higher chivalry and greater personal honor, generously sacrificing himself to protect and raise a little child: to raise him in his home as his own son and heir. Accepting his wife's child by another man, Guy was to return, in the end, to the continuity of his father, Gervase Crouchback's rooted family estate at Broome. Guy's adopted little son was also to be named Gervase, “and the sanctuary light still burned at Broome as of old.”<sup>19</sup>

### **An obituary of the Roman Catholic Church in England**

Through the rich variety of Waugh's three novels – *Men at Arms* (1952), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955), and *Unconditional Surrender* (or *The End of the Battle*) (1961) – the attentive reader will come to savor much eloquence, subtle irony, and wisdom, though it is often poignant and elegiac wisdom. Those of the Catholic Faith will especially appreciate the purifications and gradual expiations that come to certain of the characters – and “forgiveness from the heart.”

In Evelyn Waugh's own 1964 Preface to his final version of his *Sword of Honour* (1965) Trilogy, he elegiacally said:

*On reading the book [once again, and now in its final recension] I realized that I had done something outside my original intention. I had written an obituary of the Roman Catholic Church in England as it had existed for many centuries. All the rites and most of the opinions here described are already obsolete. When I wrote *Brideshead Revisited* [1945] I was consciously writing an obituary of the English upper class. It never occurred to me, writing *Sword of Honour*, that the Church was susceptible to change. I was wrong and I have seen a superficial revolution in what then seemed permanent. Despite the faith [i.e., the Catholic Faith] of many of the characters *Sword of Honour* was not specifically a religious book. Recent developments [in the Church] have made it, in fact, a document of Catholic usage of my youth.*<sup>20</sup>

### **The deepening of personal honor**

By way of further clarification, Waugh says:

*The three books, of which this is a recension, appeared at intervals throughout a decade [1952, 1955, 1961] ... The product is intended (as it was originally) to be read as a single story. I sought to give a description of the Second World War as it was seen and experienced by a single, uncharacteristic Englishman [i.e., Guy Crouchback], and to show its effects on him. For this purpose I invented three downs [i.e., comic and ironic figures – Apthorpe, Trimmer, and Ludovic] who have prominent parts in the structure of the story, but not in its theme.*<sup>21</sup>

The meaning and way of honor – of public and private honor – is certainly its moral theme. Honor, in its deepened and tested understanding, implies the sustained practice of chivalry. That is to say, the more defenseless (and unwanted) someone is, the more that one calls out for our defense. Guy Crouchback comes to understand this ethos, and, in imitation of his cherished father, to live it.

In other words, a prominent and pervasive theme of these three historical novels of World War II is honor and chivalry, especially the attainment and sustenance of personal honor in the Modern World – yes, even in the Modern World of Total War; of opportunism and base expediency; of propaganda and betrayals; of cynicism and fakery, laxity and luxury.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182 – my emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Men at Arms*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Sword of Honour* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1965), pp. 9-10. “Usage” means “the customs, traditions, rites and symbolic forms and culture of the Faith,” as they were intimately manifested in the first forty years or so of Evelyn Waugh's life. (He was born in 1903.)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9 – my emphasis added.

The deepening of this personal honor, as we shall see, gradually leads Guy to the Higher Chivalry, in a religious sense. Even amidst the cynical acids and atmosphere of “the Modern World in Arms,”<sup>22</sup> that Higher Chivalry can be attained and sustained – and personal honor fortified. But, honor implies honesty – honesty about oneself and honesty before God (*coram Deo*).

Shortly after the Russian-German Alliance of late-August 1939, Guy Crouchback first imagined that “everything had become clear,” namely

*The enemy at last was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off. It was the Modern Age in arms. Whatever the outcome there was a place for him in that battle.*<sup>23</sup>

So he thought.

### **Overcoming spiritual sloth**

As we shall better come to see, Guy Crouchback's long-standing and recurrent attitudes of sloth will encounter, after some temporary joy with his military comrades, many deep disillusionments. But, with the loss of certain generous illusions, he will also come to discover a Higher Chivalry and deepen his personal honor through sacrifice. That is to say, sacrifice for the little ones of the world, especially for the little child, Gervase, lest he be “born unwanted in 1944.”<sup>24</sup>

We see Guy gradually and humbly overcome his sloth. For, the temptations to spiritual sloth are very subtle – and the consequences of that sin deeply destructive.

In 1962, Evelyn Waugh wrote about spiritual sloth in a contribution to a larger book on *The Seven Deadly Sins*,<sup>25</sup> of which sloth was only one of the mortal sins so destructive of grace, but, especially in the modern world, too little understood.

Waugh's fresh insights will illuminate for us the deeper disorder from which Guy Crouchback habitually suffers as a Catholic and which he must, with grace, overcome, lest he perish.

What is this spiritual sloth which can kill the life of sanctifying grace in a man? What is the core of this mortal sin of *accidia* (*acedia*)?

For, Waugh says:

*The word “sloth” is seldom on modern lips. When it is used, it is a mildly facetious variant of “indolence,” and indolence, surely, so far from being a deadly sin, is one of the most amiable of human weaknesses. Most of the world's trouble seem to come from people who are too busy [or too restless and rootless]. If only politicians and scientists were lazier, how much happier we should all be. The lazy man is preserved from the commission of almost all the nastier crimes, and many of the motives which make us sacrifice to toil [i.e., to labor and to restless action] the innocent enjoyment of leisure are among the most ignoble – pride, avarice, emulation, vainglory and the appetite for power over others [Saint Augustine's *Libido Dominandi*]. How then has Sloth found a place with its six odious companions as one of the Mortal Sins?*<sup>26</sup>

### **Hell is there for those who choose it**

When theologians “condemn an act as a mortal sin they are not merely expressing disapproval in a striking phrase,” but:

*They mean something specific and appalling; an outrage against the divine order committed with full knowledge and consent which, if unrepented before death, consigns the doer to eternal loss of salvation. Prelates and preachers may be found who use the words irresponsibly. One sometimes sees proclamations in which the faithful are exhorted to vote in an election or refrain from an entertainment “under pain of mortal sin.” Moral theologians give little support to such utterances. Indeed many [in the laxer interpretative direction] speculate*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender*, p. 151.

<sup>25</sup> Waugh's essay on “Sloth” was first printed in the London *Sunday Times* on 7 January 1962 and later appeared in *The Seven Deadly Sins* (ed.) Raymond Mortimer (London 1962).

<sup>26</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 572.

that, the sanctions being so awful and the conditions so stringent, very few mortal sins have ever been committed. We only know that Hell is there for those who deliberately choose it.<sup>27</sup>

Then comes his essential question: “What then is this Sloth which can merit the extremity of divine punishment?”<sup>28</sup> (“Shall we go there [i.e., to Hell] for lying too long in the bath or postponing our letters of congratulations or condolence? Obviously not.”<sup>29</sup> )

### **Aversion to the apparatus of salvation**

To the heart of the matter, Waugh deepens our understanding:

*Saint Thomas's answer is both comforting and surprising: Tristitia de bono spirituali, sadness in the face of spiritual good. Man is made for joy in the love of God, and this love he expresses in service. If he deliberately turns away from that joy, he is denying the purpose of his existence. The malice of Sloth lies not merely in the neglect of duty (though that can be a symptom of it) but in the refusal of joy. It is allied to despair.*<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, “the depth of Sloth” can, all too easily, conduce to the darkness of final Despair, an essentially unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost and the Mercy of God. Very dangerous, for sure, is spiritual sloth.

However, says Waugh:

*There is a well-known pathological condition of religious melancholy in which the sufferer believes himself to be eternally damned through no particular fault of his own but by the ineluctable whim of the Almighty. In recent years, with the waning of Calvinist eloquence, this aberration seems to have tended to shed its religious trappings, but there are recognizable traces of it in some of the utterances of the “beatniks.” Despair of this kind is not Sloth. Sloth is the condition in which a man is fully aware of the proper means of his salvation and refuses to take them because the whole apparatus of salvation fills him with disgust.*<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, Waugh adds, many of “these new apostates do not [stricto sensu] wrestle with historical and philosophic doubts; they simply lapse into 'sadness in the face of spiritual good.'”<sup>32</sup>

### **The stock figure of stage and novel**

Moreover, with reference to the post-World War II era, as of 1962, Waugh argues that

*In this generation the man of Sloth, in all his full theological implications, has become one of the stock figures of stage and novel. The protagonists of these popular spiritual dramas, French, English, and American, sometimes priests, are spoken of as having “lost their Faith” as though Faith were an external possession, like an umbrella, which can be inadvertently left behind in a railway-carriage; but in fact their predicament is quite different from that of their unhappy great-grandfathers who, confronted with plausible arguments that the universe took longer than six days in the making, decided that the whole foundation of their religion was spurious.*<sup>33</sup>

Once again, the “new apostate” – “the man of Sloth” in “this generation” – simply lapses into “sadness in the face of spiritual good.” His *Tristitia de bono spirituali* likewise constitutes a defect of love. He is even “sickened by the applause of admirers” who “persist in attributing his [artistic] achievements [, for example,] to a love of God he has ceased to exercise.”<sup>34</sup>

Such, says Waugh, is “the prime temptation of men living in the world” today – also in the military, and especially in one's old age. Waugh then reveals the subtle and dangerous manifestations (and ambushes) of Sloth in both of these conditions: in a military culture and in one's senescence.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 572-573 – my emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 573.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* – my emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* – my emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* – my emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* – my emphasis added.

## Neo-pagan sloth

Just as “the last centuries of European paganism before the revelation of Christian joy were sunk deep in *accidia*,”<sup>35</sup> so, too, is the Modern Age:

*Now that paganism is returning we see the symptoms again [in its precise theological sense, i.e., “the Sloth of the theologian”]. Can we accuse our listless and torpid contemporaries of Sloth in the [strict, theological] sense defined above? I think not, because the great majority have been deprived by the State of religious instruction. The phrase “spiritual good” is totally foreign to them and they lack the full knowledge of its nature [i.e., the nature of the sin of Sloth] which is an essential element in the commission of mortal sin. There are, however, very near parallels, especially in those whose calling has a superficial resemblance to monastic life, the armed services. These men accept higher standards of obedience than civilians and are expected on occasion to make greater sacrifices.<sup>36</sup>*

From Waugh's own military experience in training and in combat, he has seen how the mentality and volitional paralysis of “troops present a type of Sloth”:

*I have seen soldiers in defeat [as in Crete in 1941] who could not be accused of laziness. They were making strenuous exertions to get away from the enemy. Nor were they impelled by fear. They had simply become bored by the mismanagement of the battle and indifferent to its outcome [cf. “Whatever!"]. There were ill-found camps and stations in the war where men refused to take the actions which would have alleviated their own condition [of misery], but instead luxuriated in apathy and resentment. There was a sense of abandonment there which, though it was not recognized as such, was theological in essence; instead it [this “type of Sloth”] found expression in complaints, just or unjust, against the higher command and the politicians [and sometimes, too often, also against God!].<sup>37</sup>*

## A roaming unrest of spirit

Waugh implies that a dangerous type of Sloth always declines to live up to a higher calling:

*It was suggested above that we were not putting ourselves in danger of Hell by indolence, but, just as he is a poor soldier whose sole aim is to escape detention [i.e., capture and imprisonment], so he is a poor Christian whose sole aim is to escape Hell. Besides *accidia* there is *pigritia*, plain slackness [laxity], which is a deflection from, if not an outrage against, the divine order ... It is strange ... that this vice so largely escapes censure, for if, as has been said, the personal motives of industry [and dominance] may be base, the consequences of idleness on society are conspicuously deleterious. It is a fault about which we are particularly liable to self-deception.<sup>38</sup>*

Later we shall consider Waugh's illustrations of this slothful indolence and self-deception in military life as they are so vividly depicted in *Sword of Honour*.

Waugh will also depict another aspect of Sloth, what Saint Thomas calls “*evagatio mentis*”: “a roaming unrest of spirit” which is interiorly uprooted and restless and unable to have, even in prayer, “a repose of the mind in God” (*Quies mentis in Deo*). Such a roving orientation certainly lacks a contemplative disposition and its pre-condition, a receptive attentiveness.

## The time to make one's soul

By way of conclusion of his essay on Sloth, Waugh says:

*Sloth is not such an innocent weakness as at first glance it appeared. It is easy to find explanations of modern laziness ... But Sloth is not primarily the temptation of the young. Medical science has oppressed us with a new huge burden of longevity. It is the last undesired decade, when passion is cold, appetites feeble, curiosity dulled and experience has begotten cynicism, that *Accidia* lies in wait [as a snare and ambush] as the final temptation to destruction. That is the time which is given a man to “make his soul.” For few of us the hero's and martyr's privilege of a few clear days ending on the scaffold [as in the case of Saint Edmund Campion, S.J., on 1*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 574 – my emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* – my emphasis added.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* – my emphasis added.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 574-575 – my emphasis added.

December 1581]; *instead an attenuated, bemused drifting into eternity. Death has not lost its terror in the new clinical arctic twilight. In this state, we shall have to face the last deadly assault of the devil. It is then, perhaps, that we shall be able to resist only by spiritual strength [virtue and graces] we have husbanded [and cultivated] in youth.*<sup>39</sup>

In the *Sword of Honour* Military Trilogy, Guy Crouchback has to struggle persistently with the deeper temptations of Sloth, and has to come to recognize Sloth more fully for what it truly is – and in all its insidious and pernicious camouflages. The masks of Sloth were to prove hard to tear away, despite Guy's general unselfishness.

### **A mysterious tranquil joy**

Guy's good father, however, has not these difficulties, even in his old age, and he is an abiding and inspiring example to his son – his youngest son and last child. The contrast between the two men is especially illuminating:

*The Crouchback family, until quite lately rich and numerous, was now much reduced. Guy was the youngest of them and it seemed likely that he would be the last. His mother was dead, his father over seventy. There had been four children [Angela, Gervase, Ivo, and Guy].*<sup>40</sup>

When we first meet the elderly Mr. Crouchback, his son Guy is visiting him on the Seacoast, at Matchet, in 1939, where he has been living for nine years as a pensioner at the Marine Hotel:

*Father and son and dog [Felix, Mr. Crouchback's companion, a golden retriever] walked out together into the sunset down the steep little streets of the town. Despite the forty years that divided them [Guy was almost 36] there was a marked likeness between Mr. Crouchback and Guy. Mr. Crouchback was rather the taller and he wore an expression of steadfast benevolence quite lacking in Guy [who was more melancholy]. Racé rather than distingué, was how Miss Vavasour, a fellow resident [for 6 years] at the Marine Hotel, defined Mr. Crouchback's evident charm. There was nothing of the old dandy about him, nothing crusted, nothing crotchety. He was not at all what is called "a character." He was an innocent, affable old man who had somehow preserved his good humour – much more than that, a mysterious and tranquil joy, throughout a life which to all outward observation had been overloaded with misfortune. He had like many another been born in full sunlight and lived to see night fall ... Mr. Crouchback acknowledged no monarch since James II [the last Catholic king, who was illegitimately deposed and excluded during the usurping "Glorious Revolution" of 1688]. It was not an entirely sane conspectus but it engendered in his gentle breast two rare qualities, tolerance and humility. For nothing much, he assumed, could reasonably be expected from the commonality; it was remarkable how well some of them did behave on occasion; while, for himself, any virtue he had came from afar [as a gift, as a grace] without his deserving, and every small fault [acknowledged in himself] was grossly culpable in a man of his high tradition.*<sup>41</sup>

### **High and sobering standards**

To whom much has been given, much will be expected. To whom much has been entrusted, more will be required. For our own greater good, these standards which were set by the Lord for us are very high and sobering, indeed.

Waugh's characterization of Mr. Crouchback memorably continues:

*He had a further natural advantage over Guy; he was fortified by a memory which kept only the good things and rejected the ill. Despite the sorrows, he had had a fair share of joys, and these were ever fresh and accessible in Mr. Crouchback's mind. He never mourned his loss of Broome ["Mr. Crouchback had lost his home," – p. 38 – his family ancestral estate]. He still inhabited it as he had known it in bright boyhood and in early, requited love.*<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 576 – my emphasis added.

<sup>40</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Men at Arms*, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-39 – my emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39 – my emphasis added.

For example, when Mr. Crouchback learned that his grandson, Tony Box-Bender, was missing in action as an officer, after combat in France in May of 1940 at Calais, he wrote to his son Guy, on 2 June:

*My Dear Guy,*

*I do not know where you are and I suppose you are not allowed to tell me, but I hope this letter will reach you wherever you are to tell you that you are always in my thoughts and prayers. You may have heard that Tony was at Calais and that none of them came back. He is posted as missing ... He was always a good and happy boy and I could not ask a better death for anyone I loved. It is the *Bona Mors* [the good death, in a religious sense] for which we pray.<sup>43</sup>*

Shortly after, Guy receives another affectionate letter from his father on 12 June 1940.

*My dear Guy,*

*I know you would have written me if you could. Have you heard the news of Tony? He is a prisoner ... It is God's will for the boy but I cannot rejoice. Everything points to a long war – longer perhaps than the last. It is a terrible experience for someone of Tony's age [in his early 20s] to spend years in idleness, cut off from his own people – one full of temptations.<sup>44</sup>*

### **Not long for Purgatory**

In the third volume of the Trilogy, *The End of the Battle (Unconditional Surrender)*, Guy learned from his sister, Angela, that “his father has died suddenly and peacefully at Matchet” – in November of 1943.<sup>45</sup>

When Guy at once returned from his temporary wartime military location for the Requiem Mass, “Guy followed the familiar rite with his thoughts full of his father”<sup>46</sup>:

*His father had been a “just man;” not particularly judicious, not at all judicial, but “just” [i.e., holy] in the full sense of the psalmist ... Few people, Guy thought, had ever spoken ill of his father ... His father had suffered as much as most men – more perhaps – from bad news of one kind or another [like such as the death of his sons, Gervase and Ivo]; never fearfully.<sup>47</sup>*

Many people, including priests, spoke to Guy about his father:

“Not long for purgatory,” his confessor had said of Mr. Crouchback. As the nuns sang the *Dies Irae* with all its ancient deprecations of divine wrath, Guy knew that his father was joining his voice with theirs:

*Ingemisco, tamquam reus:*

*Culpa rubet vultus meus*

*Supplici parce, Deus ...*

*That would be his prayer, who saw, and had always seen quite clearly the difference in kind between the goodness of the most innocent of humans and the blinding, ineffable goodness of God. “Quantitative judgements don't apply,” his father had written. As a reasoning man, Mr. Crouchback had known that he was honourable, charitable, and faithful; a man who by all formularies of the faith should be confident of salvation; as a man of prayer he saw himself as totally unworthy of divine notice. To Guy his father was the best man, the only entirely good man, he had ever known.<sup>48</sup>*

### **Contemplation of death**

It was on September 1943, from the Marine Hotel at Matchet, that Mr. Crouchback had written what proved to be one of his last letters to his son Guy. It was a letter Guy never forgot:

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281 – my emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender*, p. 70.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.78-79.

*My Dear Guy,*

*I haven't been happy about our conversation on your last evening [of your recent visit to me]. I said too much or too little. Now I must say more ...*

*I write like this because I am worried about you and I gather I may not live very much longer. I saw the doctor yesterday and he seemed to think I have something pretty bad the matter.*

*As I say, I'm worried about you. You seemed so much enlivened when you first joined the army. I know you are cut up at being left behind in England [once again, after some brief combat missions abroad]. But you mustn't sulk ...*

*Have you thought at all about what you will do after the war? There's the house at Broome ... You'll have to live somewhere and I doubt if you'll want to go back to the *Castello* [Castello Crouchback in Santa Dulcina, Italy] even if it survives, which doesn't seem likely the way they are bombing everything in Italy.*

*You see I am thinking a lot about death at the moment. Well that's quite suitable at my age and condition.*

*Your ever affectionate father, G. Crouchback*<sup>49</sup>

(Mr. Crouchback's first name was Gervase, which was the first name of his own father and also the name of his first son, Guy's brother, who was killed on the battlefield at the very beginning of World War I. Moreover, one of Mr. Crouchback's distinguished ancestors in the Sixteenth Century had been beatified by the Catholic Church, namely "Blessed Gervase Crouchback," a priest who was caught at Broome during the reign of Queen Elizabeth Tudor and executed, a martyr for the Faith.)<sup>50</sup>

### **The Mystical Body doesn't strike attitudes**

The most important words of Mr. Crouchback's paternal September 1943 letter, however, concern the Church – and the implications of his simple, piercing sentence: "Quantitative judgements don't apply"<sup>51</sup>:

*Of course in the 1870s and 80s every decent Roman disliked the Piedmontese [usurpers and violators of the Vatican States and of Pope Pius IX], just as the decent French now hate the Germans. They had been invaded. And, of course, most of the Romans we know kept it up [i.e., their hatred], sulking. But that isn't the Church. The Mystical Body doesn't strike attitudes and stand on its dignity. It accepts suffering and injustice. It is ready to forgive at the first hint of compunction.*

*When you spoke of the Lateran Treaty [the Diplomatic Concordat between the Vatican and Mussolini] did you consider how many souls have been reconciled and have died at peace as a result of it? How many children may have been brought up in the Faith who might have lived in ignorance? Quantitative judgements don't apply. If only one soul was saved, that is full compensation for any amount of "loss of face."<sup>52</sup>*

### **In that hush**

The profound words remained in Guy Crouchback's heart and decisively shaped his later reflections and conduct, especially concerning the illegitimate child his wife had adulterously conceived. (Guy's wife, Virginia, was later herself to become a Catholic and, not long thereafter, was to be killed in an enemy bombardment of London.)

At his father's Requiem Mass, Guy remembered his father's trenchant letter, and also his father's exemplary life and witness to the Faith:

*Of all the people in the crowded church, Guy wondered, how many had come as an act of courtesy, how many were there to pray that a perpetual light should shine upon Mr. Crouchback? Well, he reflected [remembering and quoting Hilaire Belloc's exquisite little poem, "Courtesy"], "the Grace of God is in courtesy" ...*

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-7.

<sup>50</sup> See the second volume of the Trilogy, *Officers and Gentlemen*, pp. 19-20 for further information about Blessed Gervase Crouchback and his capture, after being betrayed by "a spy who came to Broome asking for shelter, pretending to be a Catholic." (p. 19)

<sup>51</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender*, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

“Quantitative judgments don't apply.” The temptation for Guy, which he resisted as best he could, was to brood in his own bereavement and deplore the countless occasions when he had failed his father. That was not what he was here for. There would be ample time in the years to come for these selfish considerations. Now, *praesente cadavere*, he was merely one of the guard who were escorting his father to judgement in heaven ... It was a huge transition for the old man who had walked with Felix [his companion golden retriever] along the cliffs at Matchet – a huge transition, even for the man who had knelt so rapt in prayer after his daily Communion – to the “everlasting mansion prepared for him in heaven.” The celebrant [of the Requiem Mass] turned the page of his Missal from the Preface to the Canon. In the hush that followed the Sacring Bell Guy thanked God for his father ... <sup>53</sup>

Guy's thoughts then “strayed to his own death, that had been so near in the crossing from Crete [i.e., to Egypt in May of 1941, after the anarchy and rout and the defeat by the German combatants on the Greek Isle of Crete], that might now be near in the mission proposed for him.”<sup>54</sup> (What is being proposed now for Guy is another combat-liaison mission in the war zone, this time with Tito's Communist Partisans in Yugoslavia.)

Guy's reflections, therefore, go deeper now about the meaning, and implications for him, of his father's words:

“I'm worried about you,” his father had written in a letter, which though it was not his last ... Guy regarded as being in a special sense the conclusion of their regular, rather reserved correspondence of more than thirty years. His father had been worried, not by anything connected with his [Guy's] worldly progress, but by his evident apathy [i.e., spiritual sloth]; he [Mr. Crouchback] was worrying now perhaps [for his son] in that mysterious transit camp [i.e., Purgatory] through which he must pass on his way to rest and light.<sup>55</sup>

### God requires more

Now, immediately thereafter, come, I believe, the most important thematic words in the whole Trilogy: Guy Crouchback's own recognition, finally, of the masks and of the sapping realities of Sloth, and their implications for his future life:

Guy's prayers were directed to, rather than for his father. For many years now the direction in the Garden of the Soul, “Put yourself in the presence of God,” had for Guy come to mean a mere act of respect, like the signing of the Visitor's Book at an Embassy or Government House. He reported for duty, saying to God: “I don't ask anything from you. I am here if you want me. I didn't suppose I can be of any use, but if there is anything I can do, let me know,” and left it at that.<sup>56</sup>

As is always true of the draining, culpable habits of sinful Sloth, Guy is also starting to realize that he did not generously live up to his full supernatural vocation. He had not lived up to the Graces he had received. He had not co-operated with God's gifts, even for the sake of his own fulfillment, much less for the greater supernatural good of others, unto their Beatitude.

Guy's deepening reflections therefore continue:

“I don't ask anything from you [Lord];” that was the deadly core of his apathy; his father had tried to tell him, was now telling him. That emptiness had been with him for years now, even in his [brief and still un-disillusioned] days of enthusiasm and activity in the Halberdiers. Enthusiasm and activity were not enough. God required more than that. He had commanded all men to ask.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, — my emphasis added.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, — my emphasis added. We humorously – and traditionally – used to say in our own American Special Forces (the “Green Berets”): “Cheer up! No one is completely useless; you can always serve as a bad example!”

<sup>57</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender*, p. 81 – my emphasis added, except for Waugh's own emphatic italics.

## Show me what to do, O Lord

Guy's reflections go now deeper still:

*In the recesses of Guy's conscience there lay the belief that somewhere, somehow, something would be required of him [something of sacrificial and selfless generosity in the end]; that he must [now] be attentive to the summons when it came. They also served who only stood and waited. He saw himself as one of the labourers in the Parable who sat in the marketplace waiting to be hired and were not called into the vineyard until late in the day. They had their reward on an equality with the men who had toiled since dawn [such is the Mercy of God!]. One day he would get the chance to do some small service which only he could perform, for which he had been created. Even he must have his function in the divine plan. He did not expect a heroic destiny. Quantitative judgements did not apply. All that mattered was to recognize the chance when it was offered. Perhaps his father was at that moment [in his prayers from Purgatory] clearing the way for him. "Show me what to do and help me to do it." he [Guy Crouchback] prayed.<sup>58</sup>*

## The lonely captain

While still at his father's funeral, Guy then recalled his own mother and some other "November days" of his childhood. They were in sharp contrast with this serene day of his father's burial, in November of 1943:

*Guy remembered boistrous November days when he and his mother had tried to catch [falling] leaves in the avenue [of Broome]; each one caught insured a happy day – week? Month? Which? – in his wholly happy childhood. Only his father remained to watch the transformation of that merry little boy into the lonely captain of Halberdiers who followed the coffin.<sup>59</sup>*

However, Guy Crouchback, who was for long now like a falling "feather in the vacuum" (in the image of one of his fellow combatants), will later come to make his own unique contribution, one that only he can perform, as intended by God, especially in the eyes of the Faith. Guy's contribution is remotely analogous to Saint Helena's. But howso?

## Something which only we can do

As Waugh once wrote in an earlier religious essay, "Saint Helena Empress," which was also a sort of thematic introduction to his especially beautiful 1950 historical novel, simply entitled *Helena*:

*We are advised to meditate on the lives of the Saints, but this precept originated in the ages when meditation was a more precise and arduous activity than we are tempted to think it today. Heavy apparatus has been at work in the last hundred years to enervate and stultify the imaginative faculties ... There are evident dangers in identifying ourselves with Saint Francis or Saint John of the Cross. We can invoke the help of the Saints and study the workings of God in them, but if we delude ourselves that we are walking in their shoes, seeing through their eyes and thinking with their minds, we lose sight of the one certain course of our salvation. There is only one saint that Bridget Hogan [or, analogously, Guy Crouchback] can actually become, Saint Bridget Hogan, and that saint she must become, here or in the fires of Purgatory, if she is to enter heaven. She cannot slip through in fancy-dress, made up as Joan of Arc ... To this class Helena eminently belongs [because of her unique act of finding the true cross] ... That was Helena's [special and inimitable] achievement, and for us who, whatever our difficulties, are no longer troubled by those philosophical confusions [Trinitarian and Christological Heresies] that clouded in the fourth century [A.D. – during the Reign of her son, Constantine], it has the refreshing quality that we cannot hope to imitate it. The Cross is very plain for us today; plainer perhaps than for many centuries. What we can learn from Helena is something about the workings of God; that He 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 created.<sup>60</sup>*

So, too with Captain Guy Crouchback.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81 – my emphasis added.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82 – my emphasis added.

<sup>60</sup> Evelyn Waugh, "Saint Helena Empress," in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh* (1984), pp. 407 and 410, my emphasis added, italics in the original.

We may remember in this context that, in Our Lord's "Parable of the Talents," it was the One who had the Least Talents who was finally punished – because he was afraid to make good (and further) use of the little he had received. He should have, rather, filled his little cup to the top and generously used his talents to the full, no matter how few they be – either objectively or only in his own eyes.

## Part II

### Waugh's formation

It is my belief, not so easy to prove, that two of Evelyn Waugh's profound studies and books – *Edmund Campion* (1935) before the War, and *Helena* (1950) after the War – deeply influenced all of his subsequent writing and were intimately formative of his presentation of the pervading chivalrous ethos of *Sword of Honour*.

*Edmund Campion* and *Helena* were certainly formative of Waugh's own understanding of the Catholic Faith in history, and of his own sacred sense and standards of honor and fidelity and chivalry. What he learned from the religious and cultural wars of the Sixteenth Century and Late-Third and Early-Fourth Centuries, he applied to his understanding of the widening Wars of the Twentieth Century and of our proper, honorable response to them. How was a faithful Catholic to serve in such wars, and how was he to conduct himself?

Waugh's own insights about Modern War and about the deeper implications of his own wartime experiences incubated over several years. There were twenty years between the formal end of World War II and the final fruit of his *Sword of Honour* Trilogy.

It was not easy for him to take the measure of all he had so unexpectedly seen and done and heard – and of all that he had not seen at the time. Like Guy Crouchback himself in the face of poignant mystery, Waugh knew, too, that there would always remain “countless unexplained incidents of war”.<sup>61</sup>

Some of these incidents were very dark indeed; but some were moments of grace and moments of moral beauty.

From his own deep study, Waugh had concluded that Saint Edmund Campion had a special “genius to express, in sentences that have resounded across the centuries, the spirit of chivalry in which they suffered.”<sup>62</sup> The way in which Edmund Campion and his fellow Jesuits suffered also became a standard for Evelyn Waugh.

Waugh thereby also sought to understand how other good men and women – not just heroes and saints – learned to suffer well, and with a resilient heart capable of deep forgiveness. He certainly became clearer and more eloquent in his understanding of how they ought to suffer well.

Then there came the example of Saint Helena. Not only was Waugh profoundly moved and permanently affected by his study of Edmund Campion and his fellow Jesuit Martyrs, but he also came to cherish what he had learned of Helena in the face of her own troubling times. The main fruit of that study was his historical novel, *Helena* (1950), which was the only one of his own novels – as his daughters later revealed – which their father would read aloud to the family – and he always read it with joy. (Waugh was also always a little saddened by the fact that his cherished book on Helena was not well received by the critics.)

For example, the prayer of Helena for her own son, Constantine, is one of the most beautiful things Waugh ever wrote – and he later apparently thought (as may be seen in some of his letters) that he showed too much of himself in that section of his novel. He thought that what he wrote was too intimate to express in the larger public forum. Perhaps, that is one reason that the letters and prayers of Guy Crouchback's father to – and for – his son are more reserved, though nonetheless very moving and “from the heart.”

In his historical novel, *Helena*, Waugh is able to express some of his own trenchant views about power and governance and self-governance. Through Helena's words and timeless insights Waugh wrote about the theme of “Power without Grace” and about “the foetid termitary of power” and its pervasively destructive effects, both privately and publicly. Saint Helena also understood in her own time – as in the time of Christ

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<sup>61</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Officers and Gentlemen*, p. 275.

<sup>62</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Edmund Campion*, p. 231 – my emphasis added. The first edition of this study was published in England in 1935, when Waugh was thirty-two years of age.

– “that unended war of mobs and magistrates against the innocent”!<sup>63</sup> – and the indispensable need to resist such intimate injustice always.

### The patrons of late-comers

Identifying with the three Magi (Wise Men), who were also “late-comers to Christ,” Saint Helena, herself (like Waugh) a late convert, says:

*“You are my especial patrons ... and patrons of all late-comers, of all who have a tedious journey to make to the truth, of all who are confused with knowledge and speculation, of all who through politeness make themselves partners in guilt, of all who stand in danger by reason of their talents. Dear cousins, pray for me ... and for my poor overloaded son [Emperor Constantine, who is not yet a Christian]. May he, too, before the end find kneeling-space in the straw [beside the Christ Child] ... For His sake who did not regret your curious gifts, pray always for all the learned, the oblique, the delicate. Let them not be quite forgotten at the Throne of God when the simple come into their kingdom.”<sup>64</sup>*

### Love joyfully completed

At the beginning of the *Sword of Honour* Trilogy, before we encounter the wound and sapping sorrow of Guy Crouchback, Waugh presents us with another affecting scene of moral purity, of true moral beauty. He thereby also sets another high standard for us – and shows us the joy that comes therefrom.

The first volume of the Trilogy was first published only two years after *Helena*. Her words still echoed in Waugh's heart, I think, as he opens *Men at Arms*.

Before meeting Guy Crouchback, we meet his grandparents, Gervase and Hermione. On their honeymoon, Pope Pius IX had received them in Rome,

*in private audience and gave his special blessing to the union of two English families which had suffered for their Faith and yet retained a round share of material greatness [on their family estates]. The chapel at Broome had never lacked a priest through all the penal years and the lands of Broome stretched undiminished and unencumbered from the Quantocks to the Blacktown Hills. The City [Rome] ... still remembered with honour its old companions in arms.<sup>65</sup>*

Even on their otherwise joyful honeymoon, “all was not entirely well for them”<sup>66</sup> – not yet:

*No sign or hint betrayed their distress but when the last wheels [of carriage and other traffic] rolled away and they mounted to their final privacy, there was a sad gap between them, made by modesty and tenderness and innocence, which neither spoke of except in prayer.<sup>67</sup>*

But, soon, while on a yacht sailing up the Italian coast to “unfrequented harbours,” Gervase and Hermione were given a great consolation:

*And there, one night in their state room, all at last came right between them and their love was joyfully completed.<sup>68</sup>*

Beautiful words from our Waugh.

### Until the shadows closed

More joy was soon to follow for Guy's paternal grandparents:

*When Gervase came on deck at dawn, he found that the ship lay in the shelter of a high peninsula [as at Portofino still today!]. He called Hermione to join him and so standing together hand-in-hand, at the moist*

<sup>63</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Helena* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), p. 223.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>65</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Men at Arms*, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, — my emphasis added.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

*taffrail, they had their first view of Santa Dulcina delle Rocce and took the place and all its people into their exulting hearts.*<sup>69</sup>

This is how, in part, Guy's family came to own Castello Crouchback, their home in Italy since the Nineteenth Century, and "it was the place of Guy's happiest holidays with his brothers and sister."<sup>70</sup>

Indeed,

*The Castello kept the character of its origin [as did Broome]. For fifty years, until the shadows closed on the Crouchback family, it was a place of joy and love.*<sup>71</sup>

### **Inevitable war**

But, now in August of 1939, much had changed for Guy, since 1931 especially, when his wife, Virginia, first deserted him for another man:

*But as Guy descended [from the Castello] to the piazza on his last morning, he saw little that would have been unfamiliar to Gervase and Hermione. Already, an hour before midday, the heat was fierce but he walked as blithely as they on that first morning of secret jubilation. For him, as for them, frustrated love had found its first satisfaction. He was packed and dressed for a long journey, already on his way back to his own country to serve his King. Just seven days earlier he had opened his morning newspaper on the headlines announcing the Russian-German alliance ... When [earlier] Prague fell, he knew that war was inevitable. He expected his country to go to war in a panic, for the wrong reasons or for no reasons at all, with the wrong allies, in pityful weakness. But now, splendidly, everything had become clear. The enemy at last was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off. It was the Modern Age in arms. Whatever the outcome there was a place for him in that battle.<sup>72</sup>*

So Guy thought.

However, almost two years later – in June of 1941 – things had already deeply changed for him, also Guy's sense of belonging and sense of purpose and understanding.

### **Never cause trouble but for advantage**

After his dangerous and desolating escape from the humiliating defeat on Crete in May of 1941, Guy was in Egypt, slowly convalescing from his exposure and bare survival at sea:

*Guy lay on his bed [in Julia Stitch's diplomatic residence, himself having been hospitably received and recently removed from his military-hospital bed], too much shaken by the physical events of the day to concentrate on the moral issues [involved in his friend, Ivor Claire's "desertion in the face of the enemy" on Crete, as he has just so shockingly discovered]. For Julia Stitch there was no problem. An old friend was in trouble. Rally round. Tommy [i.e., Colonel Tommy Blackhouse, the Acting Commanding Officer and the first Adulterer with Guy's wife, Virginia] had his constant guide in the precept: never cause trouble except for positive preponderant advantage ... [By this selfish precept of expediency and of dishonor, therefore,] to instigate a court-martial on a capital charge [against Ivor Claire] was inconceivable; in the narrowest view it would cause endless professional annoyance and delay; in the widest [view] it would lend comfort to the enemy.<sup>73</sup>*

### **The hypodermic needle of charm**

Guy was very shocked at this sophistry and cynicism and moral corruption. These were grave jolts and violations of his higher sense of chivalry and honor, which now increasingly seemed so "out of step" with "the real world" at war, increasingly a "Total War":

*Guy lacked these simple rules of conduct [i.e., those of Julia Stitch and Tommy Blackhouse]. He had no old love for Ivor [Ivor Claire the deserter of his men in combat], no liking at all for the man who had been his friend had proved to be an illusion. He had a sense, too, [after his growing and cumulative disillusionments]*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*— my emphasis added.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8 – my emphasis added.

<sup>73</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Officers and Gentlemen*, pp. 319-320 – my emphasis added.

that all war [especially Modern “Total War”] consisted in causing trouble without much hope of advantage. Why was he here in Mrs. Stitch's basement [safely convalescing], why were Eddie and Bertie in prison [in German camps as fellow officers and comrades in combat], why was the young soldier lying still unburied in the deserted village of Crete [where he was movingly discovered by Guy], if it was not for Justice? So he lay pondering until Mrs. Stitch called him up to cocktails.<sup>74</sup>

In a few days, something else was to happen to Guy, a further shock of disillusionment.

“While Guy lay in the chaise-longue beside the strutting and preening peacocks” in the Stitch's elegant diplomatic residence in Alexandria (Egypt), all kinds of high-level “guests came and went singly and in large parties”<sup>75</sup>:

*Pashas, courtiers, diplomats, politicians, generals, admirals, subalterns, Greek and Egyptian and Jewish and French, but Mrs. Stitch never neglected Guy. Three or four times a day she was at his side with the hypodermic needle of her charm.*<sup>76</sup>

### **It's nice to have one ally**

Then the shock came again:

*That was early in the morning of June 22<sup>nd</sup> [1941] – a day of apocalypse [i.e., a revelation of reality] for all the world for numberless generations, and for Guy among them, one immortal soul, a convalescent Lieutenant [no longer now a Captain] of Halberdiers. Algernon Stitch [Julia's Ambassadorial husband] brought the news of the [German] invasion of Russia when he returned [home] for luncheon.*<sup>77</sup>

More people arrived and Mrs. Stitch asked a simple question: “Is it a Good Thing?” – i.e., this new eastward invasion; and then she said: “It's nice to have one ally [the Soviet Union now].”

### **Blundering into dishonor**

Moreover, as Guy saw:

*Nothing else was spoken of at luncheon – the Molotov Pact, the partition of Poland, the annexation of the Baltic republics [by the Soviets], the resources of the Ukraine, the numbers of airplanes, of divisions, transport and oil, Tilsit and Tolstoi, American popular opinion, Japan and the Anti-Comintern Pact – all the topics that were buzzing everywhere in the world at that moment. But Guy remained silent.*<sup>78</sup>

Julia Stitch saw Guy, and “briefly held his hand on the tablecloth,” and then said to him:

“Feeling low to-day? ... Cheer up. Your chum [Colonel Tickeridge] is coming to dinner” –

*But Guy needed more than Colonel Tickeridge. It was just such a sunny breezy Mediterranean day two years before [in August of 1939, in Santa Dulcina, Italy] when he read of the Russo-German alliance, when a decade of shame seemed to be ending in light and reason, when the Enemy was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off; the Modern Age in arms. Now that hallucination was dissolved, like the [imagined] whales and turtles on the voyage from Crete [in Retreat], and he was back after less than two years pilgrimage in a Holy Land of illusion, in the old ambiguous world, where priests [the Alsatian-Vichy priest] were spies and gallant friends [Ivor Claire] proved traitors and his country was led [by Churchill and certain Soviet sympathizers] blundering into dishonour.*<sup>79</sup>

### **Like the man at Sphakia**

Waugh now gives a further powerful image to Guy Crouchback's disillusionment and disgust – some two years before his father's death and funeral. Guy suddenly destroys his War Diary, which he had long carried

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320 – my emphasis added.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320 – my emphasis added.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 320-321 – my emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321 – my emphasis added.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 321-322 – my emphasis added.

with him in combat, just as a disgusted retreating soldier on Crete had destroyed his own automatic weapon before his shame-faced evacuation:

*That afternoon [of 22 June 1941] he [Lieutenant Crouchback] took his pocket-book to the incinerator which stood in the yard outside of the window [of Julia Stitch's house], and thrust it in. It was a symbolic act; he stood like the man at Sphakia [on the southern coast of Crete] who dismembered his Bren [Bren Gun] and threw its parts one by one out into the harbour, ... into the scum.<sup>80</sup>*

### The Judas kiss

A final betrayal now comes, perpetrated by Julia Stitch herself, but it is a perfidy of which Guy never learns. The act discloses, however, another frustrated attempt of Guy's unselfish honor and generosity.

For, Guy had also brought with him out of Crete "the red identity disc" of a dead British soldier to whom he had been led by a bare-footed little Greek girl in tears. The dead soldier, as Guy discovered, was a Roman Catholic. Guy did not want his parents not to know what had happened to him, lest he be heaped anonymously into a mass grave and his loved ones be left in the dark and ignorant of his fate.

Therefore, in the morning before his departure home to England from Alexandria, Guy "thought of a more satisfactory way of paying his debt [of *pietas* and honor]," and he gave to Julia a sealed envelope containing that red identity disc with a personal note therein, saying: "Taken from the body of a British soldier killed in Crete. Exact position of grave unknown." He then said: "Julia, do you think Algie could possibly get one of his staff [at the Embassy] to deal with this for me?" She replied:

*"Of course. What is it?"*

*"Just a bit of unfinished business from Crete. I don't know the right man to send it to. Algie's secretary will know."*

*Mrs. Stitch took the envelope. She noted the address. Then she fondly kissed Guy.<sup>81</sup>*

Implicitly believing, however, that this unspecified note contained some potentially damaging evidence against Ivor Claire, her friend and a deserter of his own men in combat, Julia Stitch revealed her "fond" kiss to Guy to be a "Kiss of Judas." For, shamefully,

*As he drove away she waved the envelope; then turned indoors and dropped it into a waste-paper basket. Her eyes [like the seductive Cleopatra before her] were one immense sea, full of flying galleys.<sup>82</sup>*

Here, not the heart of Guy, but of the reader, is pierced to the root.

### Another Thwarted Attempt at Mercy – and Justice

As had happened before, "Guy would never know." That is to say, Guy Crouchback never learns what Mrs. Stitch did: how she insouciantly and thoughtlessly thwarted his sense of duty and work of mercy for "a young English soldier who lay on a stretcher motionless" in Crete.<sup>83</sup> Mrs. Stitch, the Charming and the Beautiful, never knew what was in Guy's heart. Nor did she ever ask. Another piercing superficiality.

### As though at rest

But Guy vividly remembered that incident on Crete, and the Deserted Village:

*There a young girl, ruddy, bare-footed and in tears approached him frankly and took him by the sleeve. He showed her his empty bottle ["his empty water-bottle"], but she shook her head, made little inarticulate noises and drew him resolutely towards a small yard on the edge of the village, which had once held livestock but was now deserted except by a second, similar girl, a sister perhaps, and a young English soldier who lay on a stretcher*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 322 – my emphasis added.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 326-327 – my emphasis added.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327 – my emphasis added. *Nota Bene*: For some reason, and quite unaccountably so, the American edition of *Officers and Gentlemen*, p. 330, entirely deletes the important words "and dropped it into a waste-paper basket." The English edition of *Officers and Gentlemen* contained these important words, however!

<sup>83</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Officers and Gentlemen*, p. 275.

motionless. The girl pointed helplessly towards this figure. Guy could not help. The young man was dead, undamaged. He lay as though at rest.<sup>84</sup>

Gazing on the young man, Guy then also remembered his “life-long friend,” that “Knight,” and “an Englishman,” who “lay, as was proper for a man dead eight hundred years, in the parish church,” where “his sword and one gauntlet still lay beside him.”<sup>85</sup> Sir Roger’s sword was still a “Sword of Honor” and a deeply abiding inspiration for Guy.

But now this other young soldier and Englishman “lay as though at rest”:

*The few corpses which Guy had seen in Crete had sprawled awkwardly. This soldier lay like an effigy on a tomb – like Sir Roger in his shadowy shrine at Santa Dulcina. Only the bluebottles [blue-bodied carrion-flies] that clustered round his lips and eyes proclaimed that he was flesh. Why was he lying here? Who were these girls? Had a weary stretcher-party [of Medics from the British Army] left him in their care and had they watched him die? Had they closed his eyes and composed his limbs? Guy would never know. It remained one of the countless unexplained incidents of war.<sup>86</sup>*

Now we are presented with another image which further reveals the heart of Waugh — and it is based on his own experience in Crete as an officer. It is an image which also reveals a larger reality. Waugh deftly makes an analogy to Golgotha: to the Blessed Mother, Mary Magdalene, and John at the Foot of the Cross. It is an analogy in this new scene of sorrow which discerns and discloses some additional nuances of intimacy.

Speaking of the two little tearful and reverent girls standing beside him in Guy’s silent presence, Waugh quietly says: “Meanwhile, lacking words [for there was also between them no common spoken language] the three of them stood by the body, stiff and mute as figures in a Sculptured Deposition.”<sup>87</sup>

### **Requiescat in pace**

Another imaginative scene of a *Pietá* is suddenly offered to us, and we shall not forget it. (Nor did Waugh.) In glimpsing the spontaneous *pietas* of Guy himself, we are further reminded of what the vivacious and charming Julia Stitch, in her shallowness, is never shown to reveal or to be capable of. She was not a woman of *pietas*. Nor could she understand, it appears, the pieties of others. (But, it must be acknowledged that Guy himself inordinately omitted to convey his own sense of reverence or mission on behalf of the fallen English soldier. Guy was still somewhat impaired in some of his expressive moral faculties, though it was not always perceptible to others, and certainly not to Julia Stitch.)

But, Waugh’s narrative then continues to convey, even moreso, the inward *pietas* of Captain Crouchback in the presence of the fallen:

*To bury the dead is one of the corporal works of charity. There were no tools here [in this abandoned village] to break the stony ground. Later, perhaps, enemy would scavenge the island and tip this body with others into a common grave and the boy’s family would get no news of him and wait and hope month after month, year after year. A precept came to Guy’s mind from his military education: “The officer in command of a burial party is responsible for collecting the red identity discs and forwarding them to Records. The green disc remains on the body. If in doubt, gentlemen, remember that green is the colour of putrefaction.” Guy knelt and took the disc from the cold breast. He read a number, a name, a designation, RC [Roman Catholic]. “May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, in the mercy of God, rest in peace.” Guy stood. The bluebottles returned to the peaceful young face. Guy saluted and passed on.<sup>88</sup>*

Even if a man has never known personally such a scene, who now could forget it? And whose heart would not, thereby, be gratefully enlarged?

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>85</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Men at Arms*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>86</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Officers and Gentlemen*, p. 275 – my emphasis added.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 276-277 – my emphasis added.

After Julia Stitch later so uncomprehendingly thwarted Guy's further acts of duty, *pietas*, and mercy – in that momentous June of 1941 – it was also to happen to him again three years later in Yugoslavia.

### **It is not always true that suffering makes people unselfish**

In 1944, Guy was assigned by HOO HQ to Yugoslavia as part of the British Liaison Mission to Marshal Tito's Communist Partisans and their ever-present Cadre of Political Commissars. In this awkward position, Guy tried to alleviate the suffering of a group of Jewish Refugees, and to do it under the suspicious and vigilant eyes of the local Communist Leadership and their morally base and begrudging spy, Bakic. (That unworthy man was attached to the British "Special Mission" as a translator of the Serbo-Croatian language.)

Guy's chivalrous efforts again finally failed. But he was, this time, to find out what had so shockingly ensued, and why. At least, it was partially revealed to him.

Waugh now introduces the situation:

*In mid-April [of 1944] a new element appeared. Guy had finished breakfast, and was attempting to memorise a Serbo-Croat vocabulary with which he had been provided, when Bakic announced: "Dere's de Jews outside." ... "Dey can't come in. Why dere's more'n hundred of dem." Guy went out and found the farmyard and the lane beyond thronged. There were some children in the crowd, but most seemed old, too old to be the parents, for they were unnaturally aged by their condition ... The Jews were grotesque in their remnants of bourgeois civility [in their rags and tattered clothes]. They showed little trace of racial kinship. There were Semites among them, but the majority were fair, snub-nosed, high cheek-boned, the descendants of Slav tribes Judaized long after the Dispersal [i.e., the Diaspora]. Few of them, probably, now worshipped the God of Israel in the manner of their ancestors.<sup>89</sup>*

Among the Jews, Guy first met and addressed Madame Kanyi, and then:

*The woman said: "I only speak German and Italian." Guy said: "We will speak Italian. I can't ask you all in. You three had better come in [as representatives of your people] and leave the others outside." ...*

*With a sudden vehemence the woman, Mme. Kanyi, shook off her advisors and began her story ... Most [of the Jewish people outside] were Yugoslav nationals, but some, like herself, were refugees from Central Europe [probably from Hungary]. She and her husband were on their way to Australia in 1939; their papers were in order; he had a job waiting for him in Brisbane. Then they had been caught by the war ... [Later] Her husband had been attached to the Army headquarters as electrician [i.e., after having been conscripted by the Communist Yugoslav Partisans]. Then the Germans moved in [in 1940-1941]; the partisans fled, taking the Jews with them. And here they were, a hundred and eight of them, half starving in Begoy.*

*Guy said: "Well, I congratulate you."*

*Mme. Kanyi looked up quickly to see if he were mocking her, found that he was not, and continued to regard him now with sad, blank wonder.*

*"After all," he continued, "you're among friends."*

*"Yes," she said, "too doleful for irony, we heard that the British and the Americans were friends of the partisans [Tito's Communists]. It is true, then? ... But it is [also] well known that Churchill is a friend of the Jews."*

*"I'm sorry, Signora, but I simply do not see what the Jews have got to do with it."*

*"But we are Jews. One hundred and eight of us."*

*"Well, what do you expect me to do with that?"*

*"We want to go to Italy."<sup>90</sup>*

Later, somewhat surprisingly, Madame Kanyi advised Guy to work through the Communists, if he really wanted to help her and to help her fellow Jews:

<sup>89</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender*, pp. 228-229 – my emphasis added.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 229, 230, 231 – my emphasis added.

"It is better that you do nothing except through the Commissar. I know these people. My husband works with them."

"You have rather a privileged position with them."

"Do you believe that for that reason I do not want to help my people?"

Some such thoughts had passed through Guy's mind. Now he paused, looked at Mme. Kanyi and was ashamed. "No," he said.

"I suppose it would be natural to think so," said Mme. Kanyi gravely. "It is not always true that suffering makes people unselfish. But sometimes it is."<sup>91</sup>

These are important words, especially from the lips of a candid and dignified Jewish woman. For she knows the suffering of her people, as she always calls them, down the course of history – and not only their suffering in wartime.

### **Cold malice**

Later, after Guy's own return to Italy, he happily "learned that the Jews of Begoy had escaped," after all, and were now in a camp in the northeast of Italy, near Trieste:

*Guy got permission to visit them. They were back behind barbed wire in a stony valley near Lecce ...*

*"I can't see the point of their being here," said the Commandant [of the camp]. "We feed them and doctor them and house them. That's all we can do. No one wants them. The Zionists are only interested in the young. I suppose they'll just sit here till they die." ... [In prompt reply, Guy sharply says] "I'm particularly interested in a pair called Kanyi."*

*The Commandant looked down his list. "Not here," he said.*

*"Good. That probably means they got off to Australia all right."*

*"Not from here, old man. I've been here all along. No one has ever left."*<sup>92</sup>

After further inquiries, Guy was shocked to find out that "The Kanyis never left Begoy. They got into some kind of trouble there and were jugged [perhaps cruelly harmed, and even slain, after a bogus trial, by the Communists]." <sup>93</sup>

The Commandant could not understand why Guy was taking so much trouble to find out the fuller truth, merely about a Mr. and Mrs. Kanyi: "What do two more or less matter?", he said.

But, once again, as Guy recalls: "Quantitative judgements do not apply."

It then came to pass that, from the other Begoy-Jews in the camp, Guy learned further things about the fate of the Kanyis, namely, that "they had been taken off the truck by the partisan police just as it was about to start" on its long journey enroute to Trieste through Croatia in the snow.<sup>94</sup>

Guy, as a consequence, became even more unrelenting in his search, but all he was essentially able to discover was a further encounter with cynicism and indifference, and even cold malice in the end.

First, he took his searching questions to Major Marchpole in Bari, Italy. He was the younger brother of the hidden chief of Counter-Espionage in London, Colonel Grace-Groundling-Marchpole, who had been for some years inordinately suspicious of Guy's activities, especially about his putative "Fascist connections."

### **Operation Keelhaul**

However, with too much breezy facility and cynicism and impudence, the younger Major Marchpole now unexpectedly said to Guy:

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237 – my emphasis added.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308 – my emphasis added.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 308-309.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

“We [sic] don't really want to bother the Jugs any more [i.e., the Communist Partisans and Commisars]. They really co-operated very well about the whole business [sic]. Besides the war's over now in that part. There's no point in moving people out [like the Kanyis, for example]. We're busy at the moment moving people in.” This man was in fact at that moment despatching [Yugoslav, anti-Communist] Royalist officers – though he did not know it – to certain execution.<sup>95</sup>

This project, as we now know, was but a smaller part of a much larger and deliberate operation, “Operation Keelhaul”: i.e., the forced re-patriation of large groups of anti-Communists back to Stalin and to certain torture and execution.)

### No Christian Creed or Code

Futhermore, says the well-informed Waugh, and expressing his thoughts with an increasingly bitter irony:

*Guy spent his last days in Bari [on the southeast seacoast of Italy] revisiting the offices where by signal [i.e., from his signal post in Yugoslavia] he had begun his work of liberation [i.e., the liberation of the Jews]. But this time he received little sympathy. The Jewish office showed little interest in him when they understood that he had not come to sell them illicit arms. They showed no interest in the Kanyis when they learned they were bound for Australia and not Zion. “We must first set up [but, contrary to the Balfour Agreement] the State [i.e., the Zionist State, not merely “a Jewish Homeland,” as was stipulated by the 1917 Declaration sent by Lord Balfour to the Zionist leaders present in Britain, Rothschild and Weizmann.],” they said. “Then it will be a refuge for all [for all Jews, that is]. First things first.”<sup>96</sup>*

Clearly, from these words, the new State came first, and then Compassion and Mercy for the Vulnerable and Defenseless. This is not the Way of Chivalry. This was not Guy's Christian Creed or Code, nor his spontaneous and chivalrous disposition of heart.

### In the presence of vileness

It may be difficult to believe, but Guy's shocks and disillusionments are not over yet! Gilpin has not yet fully displayed his turpitude. (And we must also, then, remember Ivor Claire!)

For Guy was unfortunately to meet again this Gilpin, one of Sir Ralph Brompton's friends, one of those with an assigned pro-Communist political mission. Sir Ralph was still somehow at HOO HQ, and still influential with his “Leftist” and morally perverted “coterie” of British officers (and arguable traitors), even the Anglo-Sephardic Jew, Frank de Souza, a “Cambridge man,” who also, unexpectedly, spoke Serbo-Croatian and thus came later to serve with Guy in Yugoslavia, with Gilpin himself remaining back in Italy at “Special Mission” headquarters. Guy had also gone through parachute school – under Major Ludovic, the darkly strange and culpably felonious Commandant – in the same training class with de Souza and Gilpin. (Gilpin, as Guy soon found out at parachute training, was, very suspiciously, from “the Education Corps.”<sup>97</sup>) Moreover, de Souza was then acutely dishonest – deliberately disingenuous – with Guy, pretending not to know the fuller truth about Gilpin. For, de Souza himself was also “one of Sir Ralph's set” and he knew that Gilpin was also in “the set.”

Gilpin – like Trimmer – was always an unpleasant provocation to Guy, and in Gilpin's presence Guy always felt in the presence of vileness – and with good reason.

Now, Guy has the misfortune to see this Gilpin again, on the day before Guy was to leave Bari for Naples, enroute home to England. It was in late 1944, or even early 1945.

*He was accosted by [the crude] Gilpin, who said:*

*“Before you leave I shall want your security pass back.”<sup>98</sup>*

How revealing it is, expressed now in Waugh's undisguised irony, that this Communist or Fellow-Traveler Gilpin is so attentive to “security” issues and to “counter-intelligence dangers” – like Colonel Grace-

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, – my emphasis added.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, – my emphasis added.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

Groundling-Marchpole himself, who is still inordinately attentive to “Fascists,” but completely inattentive to the infiltrated and now permeating Communists.

Gilpin then sarcastically reveals to Guy his “Confidential Report” about Madame Kanyi. He says, “The woman was the mistress of a British liaison officer,” but Gilpin thought it not likely to be “Frank de Souza exactly.”<sup>99</sup>

### **A sense of futility intervenes**

Gilpin proceeds at once to denounce the Jewish couple unjustly and also claims that this certain “suspect” British Liaison officer “was seen leaving her home when her husband was away on duty,” and that a “whole heap of American counter-revolutionary [sic] propaganda was found in their room,” which was to be found in their impoverished, but well ordered, little hut that Guy had so very briefly visited in the snow.<sup>100</sup>

Then, Gilpin slyly added:

*The whole association [between Guy and the Kanyis] was most compromising to the Mission [suspiciously unspecified!]. It's luck that Cape [the British Brigadier General in charge] handed over to Joe [i.e., Major Cattermole] before we [at “Security”] got the report. He [Joe Cattermole] just moved you where you couldn't do any harm. Though I may say that some of the names you sent us as displaced persons at Dubrovnik are on the black list [as Anti-Communist Counter-Revolutionaries].”<sup>101</sup>*

Guy's loyalty to the vulnerable still manifests itself, and quietly perseveres; and he says directly to Gilpin:

“What happened to the Kanyis?”

“What do you suppose? They were tried by a Peoples' Court. You may be sure that justice has been done.”

*Once before in his military career Guy had been tempted to strike a brother officer – Trimmer [McTavish] at Southsands.<sup>102</sup> The temptation was stronger now, but before he had done more than clench his fist, before he had raised it, the sense of futility intervened. He turned and left the office.<sup>103</sup>*

Except for the Trilogy's five-page *Epilogue*, which takes place in 1951, during the Cold War and the Korean War, some six years later, this flagitious passage involving the dark Gilpin constitutes almost the final words of the *Sword of Honour*.

### **Perfidy's reward**

In the 1951 *Epilogue*, the reader soon repellently discovers that Gilpin has risen in the post-War politics of Britain, another sordid fruit of the Total War of the Modern Age in arms:

*Elderberry [once Arthur Box-Bender's political colleague and fellow Member of Parliament] was alone in the middle hall [of Bellamy's Club] reading Air Marshal Beech's reminiscences. He, also [like Box-Bender] had lost his seat [in Parliament]. His successful opponent, Gilpin, was not popular in the House but he was making his mark and had lately become an under-secretary.<sup>104</sup>*

The sense of futility that Guy Crouchback had had about the Modern Age and Modern War presents for our reflection a very sobering conclusion to Waugh's elegiac Military Trilogy.

After Guy Crouchback's long journey and many disillusionments and gradually cathartic purification, he was now more able (than with Trimmer, at the outset of the Trilogy) to restrain himself with the cruel and debased Gilpin. Part of Guy's forbearance, we must admit, was not because of his virtue, but because of his increasing and cumulative sense of futility about the whole secular world of war and its “Power without Grace.” The moral turpitude and ideology of Gilpin, Guy resignedly recognized, could not be easily, much less immediately, corrected. And, certainly, Nature was not enough. Grace would also be required.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, – my emphasis added.

<sup>102</sup> See Volume I – Evelyn Waugh, *Men at Arms*, Chapter X, pp. 137-138.

<sup>103</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender*, pp. 310-311 – my emphasis added.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

### Disillusioned by a former friend and fellow officer

But, the sharpest and most inward instance of Guy's disillusion was that which concerned Captain Ivor Claire, when Guy first discovered that Ivor was a deserter, having abandoned his own Commando troop in battle. Guy had not earlier recognized, either on the Isle of Mugg or on the Island of Crete, the subtle but revealing signs of Claire's selfish comfort-seeking and sophistry, nor his "sliding heart" and ethos of "moral relativism," especially concerning the reality of Honor. (Guy was blinded by his affectionate trust for Ivor, and maybe also by the dulling effect of his lingering intellectual and spiritual sloth.)

In a night training exercise with the whole Commando on the Scottish Isle of Mugg, Captain Claire had clearly broken the unstated rules and, instead of marching overland with his troop in the night, he had "hired a bus" to transport his troop in comfort.<sup>105</sup>

While Ivor later held a mug of rum "in the comparative comfort of a sheep-pen"<sup>106</sup> he said to Guy about his resourcefully "requisitioned" bus: "You might call it 'captured transport.'"<sup>107</sup>

Pretending to be especially concerned for his troop, he asked Guy:

*"Can I take the troop back and dismiss. They're getting cold ... I make their comfort my first concern [and not the accomplishment of his assigned mission]. Well, can we go?"<sup>108</sup>*

Later, Ivor Claire sophisticatedly justified himself before the Commanding Officer, Colonel Tommy Blackhouse. In the ironic words of Waugh's narrator:

*But Claire's case was unanswerable. The Commandos were expressly raised for irregular action, for seizing tactical advantages on their own initiative. In the operation [i.e., in the actuality of combat], Claire explained, there would probably be a bus lying about somewhere."<sup>109</sup>*

In May of 1941 – shortly thereafter – Guy and Ivor meet on the Island of Crete during the British retreat. Their whole conversation in the night is then recorded on three pages of *Officers and Gentlemen*,<sup>110</sup> all of which should be read and savored. For, they are very subtle and very important. The conversation also implicitly reveals Captain Ivor Claire's "awkward" and very fragile sense of Honor.

### When we are completely democratic

The careful reader, unlike the over-trusting and inattentive Guy, will not be so surprised when he later learns that Commando-Captain Claire has deserted his own men in the face of the enemy and abandoned them to much discomfort and despondent idleness. (They consequently were captured and kept in German prisons for the remainder of the War.)

As a part of their conversation, in the night, Ivor Claire suddenly said to Guy:

*"Guy, what would you do if you were challenged to a duel?"*

*"Laugh ... What made you think of that now?"*

*"I was thinking about honour [said Ivor]. It's a thing that changes, doesn't it? I mean, a hundred and fifty years ago we [sic] would have to fight if challenged. Now we'd laugh. There must have been a time ["a time of transition" and of equivocal "moral sliding"!] a hundred years ago when it was rather an awkward question."*

*"Yes. Moral theologians [and the prohibitions of the Church] were never able to stop duelling – it took democracy [not aristocracy] to do that."*

*[Ivor then responds] "And in the next war, when we are completely democratic [and dishonorable], I expect it will be quite honourable for officers to leave their men behind. It'll be laid down in King's Regulations as their duty – to keep a cadre going to train new men to take the place of prisoners."*

<sup>105</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Officers and Gentleman*, p. 109.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, — my emphasis added.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, — my emphasis added.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 294-296.

“Perhaps [only a weak vagueness comes from Guy, once again!] men wouldn't take kindly to being trained by deserters.”

[Claire's sliding sophistry again responds] “Don't you think in a really modern army they'd respect them the more for being fly [i.e., resourcefully fleeing and evading and escaping]? I reckon our trouble is that we're at the awkward stage – like a man challenged to a duel a hundred years ago.”

Guy could see him clearly in the moonlight [“where they sat together, speaking between long pauses in the listless drawl of extreme fatigue,”<sup>111</sup> the austere face, haggard now but calm and recollected, as he had first seen it [in Rome] in the Borghese Gardens [riding his beautiful horse and “concentrated as a man in prayer”]. It was his last sight of him. Ivor stood up saying: “Well, the path of honour lies up the hill,” and he strolled away.<sup>112</sup>

Ivor Claire's sense of “the path of honor” was not what Guy had come to realize. For, as Guy saw, the path of honor also included “the way of sacrifice.” Indeed, the path of honor is a way of sacrifice, in light of the reality of Divine Grace, as well, which was increasingly operating and growing in Guy Crouchback's heart.

Later, therefore, Guy was able to rescue and love the little son which Trimmer had fathered upon Virginia – in adultery, an adultery which had begun even in 1940 “in Glasgow in the fog.”

### “Blessed Be He Who Has Saved a Child's Heart From Despair”<sup>113</sup>

Before Guy Crouchback had attempted to protect Madame Kanyi, her husband, and the other Jewish refugees in Begoy, Yugoslavia, he had already made his deep and generous decision to protect “little Trimmer,” his wife Virginia's child. The father of the child who would soon be called “little Gervase” was Trimmer McTavish, a Scottish rogue and an impostor, as well as an adulterer.

Preparing his heart for further acts of Honor and the Higher Chivalry “beyond the call of duty,” Guy's prior decision to be bound again in civil marriage with his vulnerable wife and even to accept and raise little Gervase as his own son and heir was fundamental and truly determinative of his life henceforth. It also revealed the profundity of his principles and of his humble heart.

At the end of book two – ironically entitled *Fin de Ligne* (End of the Line) – in the Trilogy's final volume, *Unconditional Surrender*, and just before the final section (entitled “Death Wish”), Waugh presents us again with Kertsie Kilbannock. She is the wife of the Scottish nobleman, Lord Ian Kilbannock, Trimmer McTavish's “accomplice in fraud” and “accomplice in indignity,” whose shameless “morale-boosting” stunt and deception made Trimmer out to have been a combat hero on a fake raid against the Germans' Strategic Lines of Communication, for which he was thereby then promoted to Colonel and sent to America on a speaking tour as a British “War Hero”!

Guy's true wife, Virginia (still called Mrs. Troy), was also at the time working for Ian Kilbannock at HOO HQ (Hazardous Offensive Operations Headquarters): “She's just handed in official notification that she is giving up war work to be a housewife,” for, said Ian to his wife, she has “found a husband” – “the obvious man. Guy.”<sup>114</sup> Kertsie immediately said of Guy: “He must be insane.”<sup>115</sup> Her husband replied: “I've always thought he was. It's in the family you know. There was that brother of his [Ivo].”

Although Kertsie had been an avid and prompt accomplice in helping Virginia to procure an abortion (though their intended murder, thankfully, never came to pass), Kertsie is so shaken by this news of Guy's “re-marriage,” and by other altogether incongruous developments that she now takes resolute action:

*There were depths of Scotch propriety in Kertsie, hard granite near the surface. Life in London, life with Ian, had not entirely atrophied her susceptibility to moral outrage. It happened to her rarely, but when shocked she*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 295-296 – my emphasis added.

<sup>113</sup> George Bernanos.

<sup>114</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender*, p. 193.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

suffered no superficial shiver but a deep seismic upheaval. For some minutes after Ian had rung off [from HOO HQ] she sat still and grim and glaring. Then she made off for Carlisle Place [Guy's apartment in London].<sup>116</sup>

### If only one soul is saved

Now we have the climactic encounter between Kertsie Kilbannock and Captain Guy Crouchback:

"Hello, Kertsie," said Guy, "Nice of you to come. I expect you've heard of my change of life" ...

"Guy," she said, "I've only got a minute. I'm due at my office. I had to stop to see you. I've known you a long time if never very well. It just happens you're one of Ian's friends I really like. You may think it's no business of mine but I've got to tell you ... " And then she delivered her message [about Virginia's conceived child, "Trimmer's child"].

"But, dear Kertsie, do you suppose I didn't know?"

"Virginia told you?"

"Of course."

"And you're marrying her in spite of — ?"

"Because of."

"You poor bloody fool," said Kertsie, anger and pity and something near love in her voice, "you're being *chivalrous* – about *Virginia*. Can't you understand men aren't chivalrous any more and I don't believe they ever were. Do you really see Virginia as a damsel in distress?"

"She's in distress."

"She's tough."

"Perhaps when they *are* hurt, the tough suffer more than the tender."

"Oh, come off it Guy. You're forty years old. Can't you see how ridiculous you will look playing the knight-errant? Ian thinks you are insane literally. Can you tell me any sane reason for doing this thing?"

Guy regarded Kertsie from his bed. The question she asked was not new to him. He had posed it and answered it some days ago. "Knights-errant," he said, "used to go out [like Don Quixote] looking for noble deeds. I don't think I've ever in my life done a single positively unselfish action. I certainly haven't gone out of my way to find opportunities. Here [with Virginia and "Little Trimmer" in her womb] was something most unwelcome, put into my hands; something which I believe the Americans describe as 'beyond the call of duty'; not the normal behavior of an officer and a gentleman; something they'll laugh about in Bellamy's. Of course Virginia is tough. She would have survived somehow. I shan't be changing her by what I'm doing. I know all that. But you see there's another" – he was going to say 'soul'; then realized this word would mean little to Kertsie for all her granite propriety – "there's another life to consider. What sort of life do you think her child would have, born unwanted in 1944?"

"It's no business of yours."

"It was made my business by being offered."

"My dear Guy, the world is full of unwanted children. Half the population of Europe are homeless – refugees and prisoners. What is one child more or less in all the misery?"

"I can't do anything about all those others. This is just one case where I can help. And only I, really. I was Virginia's last resort [after she couldn't find a doctor to abort "Little Trimmer"]. So I couldn't do anything else. Don't you *see*?"

"Of course I don't. Ian was quite right. You're insane."

And Kertsie left more angry than she had come.

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, – my emphasis added.

*It was no good trying to explain, Guy thought. Had someone said: "All differences are theological differences"?<sup>117</sup> He turned to his father's letter [of 20 September 1943]: *Quantitative judgements don't apply. If only one soul was saved, that is full compensation for any amount of "loss of face."*<sup>118</sup>*

### **Little Trimmer stirred**

Shortly thereafter, and "at almost the same time" as Virginia, Guy was himself going to Confession in Italy on his way to Yugoslavia:

*In Westminster Cathedral ... Virginia made her first Confession. She told everything; fully accurately, calmly, without extenuation or elaboration ... "Thank God for your good humble confession," the priest said. She was shriven. The same words were said to her as were said to Guy. The same grace was offered. Little Trimmer stirred as she knelt at the side-altar and pronounced the required penance.<sup>119</sup>*

Trimmer's child, "Little Trimmer" soon was born, and born not "unwanted in 1944," and Gervase was to be his name.

*Virginia's son was born on June 4<sup>th</sup>, the day on which the allied armies entered Rome. "An omen," said Uncle Peregrine.<sup>120</sup>*

Little Gervase is now his name – the name of Guy's beloved father, and of the Elizabethan Martyr, Blessed Gervase Crouchback.

Virginia was not long after killed by an aerial bomb in London, at Carlisle Place, along with her increasingly gracious host, Uncle Peregrine: "They were all killed instantly."<sup>121</sup> As Angela also soon told her brother, Guy:

*Gervase ["Little Gervase"] is safe with me here ... You have had a difficult life, Guy, and it seemed things were at last going to come right for you. Anyway you have Gervase. I wish Papa had lived to know about him. I wish you had seen Virginia these last weeks [after her reception into the Church and her becoming a mother]. She was still her old sweet gay self of course but there was a difference. I was getting to understand why you loved her and to love her myself. In the old days I did not understand."<sup>122</sup>*

In the 1961 first edition of *Unconditional Surrender: The conclusion of Men at Arms and Officers and Gentlemen*, the *Epilogue*, which is ironically entitled "Festival of Britain" and is set in 1951, during the Cold War, itself concludes with the following conversation. The ever-shallow Arthur Box-Bender is speaking to Guy, after Guy's Military Reunion at Bellamy's with now-Major-General Tommy Blackhouse. The former Member of Parliament, Elderberry, is also present at Bellamy's but not at the Military Reunion.

### **So Guy's happily settled?**

Waugh's ironic presentation in this conclusion of his Trilogy is very artful and especially brilliant, revealing by contrast Guy's higher standards and depth of heart, beyond Box-Bender's and Elderberry's comprehension:

"How's everything at Broome?" [says Arthur]

"Very well thank you." [Guy replies]

"Domenica all right, and the children?"

"Yes."

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<sup>117</sup> See Hilaire Belloc, *The Cruise of the Nona* (1925) – where Belloc memorably quotes and discusses Cardinal Manning's luminous words: "All human conflict is ultimately theological."

<sup>118</sup> *Unconditional Surrender*, pp. 194-196 – my emphasis added; italics in the original.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223 – my emphasis added.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* — my emphasis added.

"Farm paying?"

"At the moment" ...

When [Guy] had gone, Elderberry said:

"That's your brother-in-law, isn't it? He's putting on weight. Didn't I hear something rather sad about him during the war?"

"His wife was killed by a bomb."

"Yes, that was it. I remember now. But he's married again?"

"Yes. First sensible thing he's ever done. Domenica Plessington, Eloise's girl. Eloise looked after the baby [Little Gervase] when Guy was abroad [in wartime Yugoslavia]. Domenica got very fond of it. A marriage was the obvious thing. Now they've two boys of their own. When Domenica isn't having babies she manages the home farm at Broome. They're in the agent's house. They aren't at all badly off. Angela's uncle Peregrine left his little bit to the child [Little Gervase]. Wasn't such a little bit either."

Elderberry remembered that Box-Bender had had trouble with his own son. What had it been? Divorce? Debt? No, something odder than that. He'd gone into a monastery. With unusual delicacy Elderberry did not raise the question. He merely said: "So Guy's happily settled?"

"Yes," said Box-Bender, not without a small, clear note of resentment, "things have turned out very conveniently for Guy."<sup>123</sup>

In this poignant context of incomprehension and empty superficiality, we may usefully recall H.W. Fowler's profound definition of "Irony" and thereby further enhance our appreciation of Evelyn Waugh's trenchant ironical art. Fowler says:

*Irony is a form of utterance that postulates a double audience, consisting of one party that hearing shall hear and shall not understand, and another party that, when more is meant than meets the eye, is aware both of that more and of the outsider's incomprehension.*<sup>124</sup>

### **Echoes of *il Santo Inglese***

It is important to note, moreover, that in Waugh's final authorial recension of his one-volume *Sword of Honour* Trilogy, he omits the lines which openly say that Domenica and Guy Crouchback, in addition to Little Gervase, have also had their own younger children as a fruit of their marriage. We may wonder why Evelyn Waugh made these final editorial changes:

In Waugh's final recension, Box-Bender now says to Guy:

"Domenica is all right, and the boy?"

And to Elderberry, Box-Bender now says:

"Pity they haven't any children of their own."<sup>125</sup>

Why did Waugh delete any suggestion that Guy and Domenica have also had children of their own?

Mrs. Laura Waugh, Evelyn Waugh's wife, explained to a visiting scholar that her husband "wanted to reinforce the fact that Guy had married Domenica as an act of generosity, to provide a home for her and for Virginia's child."<sup>126</sup>

This same visiting scholar later wrote an addition to Laura Waugh's insight:

<sup>123</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender* (London: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 239-240 – my emphasis added)

<sup>124</sup> H.W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 305.

<sup>125</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Sword of Honour: A Final Version of the Novels – Men at Arms* (1952), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955), and *Unconditional Surrender* (1961) (London: Chapman and Hall, 1965), p. 796.

<sup>126</sup> Gene D. Philips, *Evelyn Waugh's Officers, Gentlemen, and Rogues: The Fact Behind the Fiction* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1975), p. 137.

Since Little Gervase is Guy's "first born," he is Guy's heir, whether or not Guy has any more children. Hence, when Guy decided to remarry Virginia [civilly, not in the Church, it should be said, because they were still sacramentally wed!], he in effect unselfishly willed the Crouchback name and all that went with it to the son of Trimmer. One is reminded of Mme. Kanyi's words to Guy, "It is not always true that suffering make people unselfish. But sometimes it is." At the conclusion of the trilogy Guy seems at long last to have overcome the temptation of spiritual sloth which has dogged him throughout his adult life. The overcoming of this temptation had led Guy to unselfish charity and generosity towards others.<sup>127</sup>

These words express well a large part of Guy's Higher Chivalry, rooted in Grace and in the abiding virtuous example of his beloved father. The image and known life of Sir Roger Waybroke the Crusader – "il Santo Inglese" – are likewise an inspiration and constant companion to Guy, also in his prayers and even in his desperate moments of desolation and hallucination at sea in the escape from Crete after defeat.

### **A greater substance of true chivalry**

Guy Crouchback's personal honor survived and increased, unlike that of Ivor Claire and many others, even though Guy was often disillusioned and thwarted in his acts of mercy and selfless sacrifice.

For example, having seen in Yugoslavia the worsening plight of Mme. Kanyi and her fellow refugees, and having apologized to her from his heart for his own tainted motives for going to war, Guy finds little consolation, after all, despite his generosity:

*He had come to the end of the crusade to which he had devoted himself on the tomb of Sir Roger. His life as a Halberdier was over. All the stamping on the barracks square and the biffing of imaginary strongholds were finding their consummation in one frustrated act of mercy.*<sup>128</sup>

That is to say, his "act of mercy" toward the refugee Jews under the Communist hegemony. Then "the sense of futility intervened"<sup>129</sup> once again when he faced a strong temptation of anger against Gilpin, a man of deep turpitude, and one of Sir Ralph Brompton's perfidious (and pervert) agents.

With difficulty Guy restrained himself.

Guy Crouchback inspires us, too, for he had come to live a fuller life of virtue in his Faith, having overcome the very devastating and subtle disorder of spiritual sloth. He also nobly withstood his many disillusionments, not only with the military and political life and modern war. He replaced those lost illusions with a greater substance of true chivalry and personal honor and humble self-denial.

### **The way of sacrifice personified**

At the beginning of the essay, we quoted Evelyn Waugh's own words about Saint Edmund Campion: "The reason that we love Campion was that his teaching and example showed us the way of sacrifice" – not the way of conspiracy or apostasy, but the way of the higher chivalry and the spirit of chivalry in which he suffered. For, like Christ, Campion also "loves his own to the end."

This recalls Waugh's depiction of Blessed Gervase Crouchback, another priest and Catholic martyr of the Sixteenth Century, who was Mr. Gervase Crouchback's inspiring collateral ancestor, as well as Guy's.

At the end of our study of the Sword of Honour Military Trilogy, and on the premise that "all human conflict is ultimately theological" (H. Belloc), we may also fittingly say that "the reason we love Captain Crouchback is that his teaching and example – as well as his father's – show us the way of sacrifice" – "Blessed be he who saved a child's heart from despair." (Georges Bernanos)

### **Epilogue**

Before Waugh himself went to Yugoslavia in 1944 as an officer, and while he was recovering from an accident sustained in parachute training, he finished his earlier novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, which was first

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Sword of Honour – A Final Version of the Novels* (1965), p. 788.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 792.

published in 1945. In his new explanatory preface added by Waugh in 1959, two years before *Unconditional Surrender* appeared, he says with gratitude, but also with some fine irony:

*In December 1943, I had the good fortune when parachuting to incur a minor injury which afforded me a rest from military service. This was extended by a sympathetic commanding officer, who let me remain unemployed until June 1944 when the book was finished. I wrote with a zest that was quite strange to me and also with impatience to get back to the war. It was a bleak period of present privation and threatening disaster – the period of soya beans and Basic English – and in consequence the book is infused with a kind of gluttony, for food and wine, for the splendours of the recent past, and for rhetorical and ornamental language, which now with a full stomach I find distasteful. I have modified the grosser passages but have not obliterated them because they are an essential part of the book.*<sup>130</sup>

### The operation of divine grace

In that same 1959 Preface Waugh explicitly revealed the theme of *Brideshead Revisited*, which was set in England in the 1920s and 1930s, but was, in a sense, also “a souvenir of the Second War”:

*Its theme – the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters – was perhaps presumptuously large, but I make no apology for it. I am less happy about its form, whose more glaring defects may be blamed on the circumstances in which it was written.*<sup>131</sup>

At the beginning of *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh reveals the disillusionment of Captain Charles Ryder and has him express in his narrated thought an unforgettable analogy between disenchantment in marriage and disenchantment with the army. (Captain Ryder and Captain Crouchback have some common disillusionments, but Guy had deeper sources of sustaining Faith than Charles, and also a more exemplary and chivalrous and warm-hearted father.)

The narrator, Charles Ryder, conveys his own thoughts as he looks down at the military camp where he had been for three months, first when the place was “under snow,” but “now the first leaves of spring were unfolding.”<sup>132</sup> In his own person, Ryder expresses his burden of sorrowful experience:

*I had reflected then that, whatever scenes of desolation lay ahead of us, I never feared one more brutal than this, and I reflected now that it had no single happy memory for me. Here love had died between me and the army.*<sup>133</sup>

Here, at the age of 39, Captain Ryder “began to be old” and, in his sloth, he adds:

*Here my last love died. There was nothing remarkable in the manner of its death ... As I lay in that dark hour [“as I lay awake before reveille”], I was aghast to realize that something within me, long sickening, had quietly died, and felt as a husband might feel, who, in the fourth year of his marriage, suddenly knew that he had no longer any desire, or tenderness, or esteem, for a once-beloved wife; no pleasure in her company, no wish to please, no curiosity about anything she might ever do or say or think; no hope of setting things right, no self-reproach for the disaster. I knew it all, the whole drab compass of marital disillusion; we had been through it together, the army and I ...*<sup>134</sup>

### The danger and paralysis of sloth

Here – and much more than ever was the case with Guy Crouchback – here is truly and frightfully depicted the corrosion of sloth and hopelessness – and the congealment of lovelessness and indifference. (“A terrible thing to think upon!” in the words of François Rabelais.)

Captain Guy Crouchback, though wounded and desolated by his wife Virginia's defection, was never as paralyzed by sloth and joylessness as was Captain Charles Ryder here. But this depiction from *Brideshead*

<sup>130</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, (London: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 7 (The Preface of 1959). The novel, first published in 1945, came out again in a revised edition, first published in London by Chapman and Hall in 1960.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7 – my emphasis added.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* – my emphasis added.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11 – my emphasis added.

*Revisited* helps us further to know, and in a special way, the temptation and grave danger and paralysis of sloth. (It was, for sure, the recurrent temptation that Guy had to combat.)

The remaining, vivid words of Charles Ryder's analogy – a similitude – between sudden estrangement in the army and sudden estrangement in marriage are even more piercing and frightening. They should be read and considered and deeply savoured – and prayerfully so. Ryder's final words are:

*She [the wife, even moreso than the army] was stripped of all enchantment now and I knew her for an uncongenial stranger to whom I had bound myself indissolubly in a moment of folly.*<sup>135</sup>

These piercing words are unmistakably words of pain from the heart of Waugh himself. Those who know more about Waugh's life and first marriage (which was later annulled by the Church) will immediately recognize the likely source of these insights.

### **God writes straight with crooked lines**

It finally came to pass, at the end of the *Sword of Honour* Trilogy, that Guy Crouchback had returned and was dwelling and rooted at Broome with his new family, and the sanctuary light was lit, as of old. So, too, was it lit when Captain Charles Ryder memorably visited again the Marchmain estate at the end of *Brideshead Revisited*:

*The art-nouveau lamp burned once more before the altar. I said a prayer, an ancient, newly-learned form of words [for he, too, had, in the mercy of God, now graciously received the gift of Faith] ... “And yet,” I thought, ... “and yet that is not the last word ... Something quite remote from anything the builders [of Brideshead] intended, has come out of their work, and out of the fierce little human tragedy [like War] in which I played; something none of us thought at the time; a small red flame [the Sanctuary Lamp] – a beaten-copper lamp of deplorable design relit before the beaten-copper doors of a tabernacle; the flame which the old Knights [like Sir Roger Waybroke] saw from their tombs, which they [unlike at Broome] 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 but for the builders and the tragedians [as with Guy himself in the annealing time of Total War] and there I found it this morning, burning anew among the old stones.*<sup>136</sup>

As the Portuguese proverb has it: “God writes straight with crooked lines.” (“*Deus escreve direito por linhas tortas*.”) He not only makes use of our minor prevarications; He even makes good use of our sins – *etiam peccata* (Saint Augustine). Such is the Providential Mercy of God – a profound Mystery.

Like Captain Charles Ryder, like Mr. Gervase Crouchback, like Captain Guy Crouchback, may we, too, remember and cherish – *Fortes in Fide* – the rooted implications of the Sanctuary Lamp and the nourishing, indwelling presence of the Humility of God.

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 330-331 — my emphasis added. [Note by Editor: Alas that lamp it burns there no more – It is said that Waugh used as his figure for the chapel in *Brideshead Revisited* the college chapel at St Stanislaus College, Beaumont. The chapel is now a function room in an hotel; the site of the altar now used for the plucking of profane musical instruments rather than the Sacrifice of the Mass.]