Brideshead Exposed: Evelyn Waugh, the Newspaper, and the Modern Age

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Abstract

This thesis explores representations of newspapers and journalists in Evelyn Waugh’s novels, focusing specifically on *Vile Bodies*, *Scoop* and *Brideshead Revisited*. The central argument of the thesis is that Waugh’s depiction of the newspaper industry is highly similar to his portrayals of modernity. In Waugh’s novels, newspapers, like modernity, cause tremendous problems for his characters. Even with these flaws, however, newspapers retain some overall value for society. In addition to providing insight into Waugh’s views of journalism, this thesis places Waugh’s novels in a historical context with a thorough examination of British journalism history.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 explores the function of newspaper readership in Waugh’s novels. The fact that Waugh’s characters read the newspaper has a profound impact on individual and societal behavior within the novels. Chapter 2 concentrates on Waugh’s presentation of the newspaper business. Using a Marxist theoretical framework, the chapter shows how Waugh is deeply critical of the newspaper industry while remaining sympathetic to reporters. The third chapter focuses entirely on *Brideshead Revisited*, describing how individual members of an aristocratic family respond to the constant barrage of newspaper articles detailing their lives. With his analysis, Waugh both derides and preserves an era of journalism history that has come to be regarded as the industry’s golden age.
BRIDESHEAD EXPOSED:
EVELYN WAUGH, THE NEWSPAPER, AND THE MODERN AGE

A THESIS

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by

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**Introduction**

In the late 1920s, when the English author Evelyn Waugh embarked on his literary career, the mythic center of London’s newspaper industry known as Fleet Street was experiencing a golden age. The newspapers and the men who produced them had a profound impact on British society and culture commanding the respect, and often the outrage, of everyone from the common man to prime ministers. As historian John McEwen describes it: “The British people enjoyed, or suffered from, a system of national newspapers that was unequalled in the world” (McEwen 461).

A primary reason for the vast cultural impact of the newspaper is that people were reading them in greater numbers than at any other period in British history. Statistics show a dramatic spike in circulation in the 1920s and 1930s. At the end of World War I, Britain’s national newspapers had a circulation of roughly three million, by the start of World War II that number was at 10 million (Clarke 116). The *Daily Express*, which Waugh parodied in *Vile Bodies* as the *Daily Excess*, went from half a million readers in 1921, to 1.5 million in 1930, and to 2.5 million in 1937 (Brookes 33).

This boom in readership was directly tied to the explosion of modern transportation in England, specifically the railroad in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The railroad unified the country in profoundly new ways. Once the system was completed, a traveler could get to and from any two stations in Britain in less than one day (Clarke 111-12). In addition to human cargo, these trains also carried the nation’s mail and newspapers. “It was this distribution network which enabled British national newspapers to gain a circulation unparalleled anywhere” (Clarke 113).
Waugh appears to have been deeply influenced by the newspaper industry's role in Britain at this period in history. Newspapers play a central part in many of his novels, including *Vile Bodies*, *Scoop* and *Brideshead Revisited*. Characters read the newspaper; they help produce newspapers; and they appear in the newspaper. While this could be dismissed as nothing more than a form of realism, the papers actually have profound meaning in Waugh's novels. Given the newspaper industry's historical connection with so many aspects of modern technology, such as electricity, which fueled the presses; the telephone and telegraph, which sped up communication; and the rise of mass transportation, which enabled such widespread distribution and influence, one can conclude that Waugh's representations of newspapers are an extension of modernity itself.

There is general agreement among Waugh's biographers, critics and historians that Waugh's views on technology and the modern age were contradictory. He liked to present himself as old-fashioned, disparaging new technology within his novels as a sign of the demise of society. "For Waugh in his first two novels [*Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*], the modern waste land is not merely awful; it is quite literally Hell" (Carpenter 299). But to depict Waugh as totally anti-modern is not entirely accurate, since he often embraced modernity, writing modern novels where technology such as automobiles, airplanes, telephones, trains, and film are essential elements of his stories. As McCartney notes about Waugh: "In his official pose he was the curmudgeon who despised innovation, but the anarchic artist in him frequently delighted in its formal and thematic possibilities. He was never quite the scourge of the new he pretended to be" (McCartney 3). The same argument could be made for Waugh's views on journalism.
On one level, Waugh is deeply critical of the print media, depicting Fleet Street’s flaws with venomous accuracy. The critic Michael Salwen attributes this deep resentment to Waugh’s first-hand experience working as a journalist. “He criticized their obsession with ‘getting in first with the news’ and ‘giving the public what it wants,’ the two dominating principles of Fleet Street” (Salwen “Scoop” 152). Although Waugh loved poking fun at the fourth estate, to describe Waugh as anti-journalist would be just as problematic as depicting him as anti-modern. While Waugh often depicted journalism in a negative light in his novels, he was an ardent practitioner of the craft. As a young man he served as editor of two school newspapers and later contributed extensively to various news publications at Oxford University (Hastings 88). For almost all of his professional life, he wrote for a number of newspapers and magazines: “He sought out any work he could get and was willing to satisfy any editor’s whim” (Gallagher 36). This love/hate relationship with the newspaper is apparent throughout his novels. Waugh demonstrates newspapers’ propensity to lie and spin news, which ultimately have harmful consequences for society and his characters. His depictions, however, are not completely negative. In Waugh’s view, newspapers had the ability to connect people with the world in ways that were not possible before this new age of mass communication.

Waugh’s discussions of the media have been largely overlooked by academia. Most of the criticism that directly addresses the newspaper in Waugh’s novels focuses on *Scoop* – a logical choice given the novel’s multi-faceted examinations of the press from the perspective of reporters, editors, publishers, and readers. Salwen claims that the absence of academic criticism about newspapers is largely due to the fact that critics who examine Waugh’s writings are mostly literary scholars and not journalism scholars.
Yet, Salwen’s two articles do not quite make up for this deficiency. In his work, Salwen compares Waugh’s portraits of the news media in *Scoop* to Waugh’s actual experiences as a reporter in Ethiopia prior to the outbreak of hostilities with Italy in the 1930s. While providing insight into Waugh’s past, the articles fail to pose larger questions about Waugh’s representations of journalism within the novel itself, or how these depictions compare with those in Waugh’s other works.

Brigid Elson takes a different approach, focusing on the telegrams that journalists send back and forth from the fictional African nation of Ishmaelia to London in *Scoop*. Elson describes how this form of “cabalese” is similar to “Newspeak,” the official language of Oceania in George Orwell’s *1984* (Elson 138). Although Elson’s discussion is rather limited, it serves as a useful starting point for a more detailed analysis of newspapers and their relationship to technology and modernism. Describing one of the main characters in *Scoop*, William Boot, Elson notes: “Boot has to acquire a whole new style of expression, one based on the telegraph, which is of course the device without which a twentieth century newspaper could not exist” (Elson 137). Beyond Elson and Salwen’s work, the newspaper is often relegated to secondary status among critics, earning only the occasional mention in articles that focus on completely different topics.

This thesis explores the primary themes that permeate Waugh’s novels in connection with the newspaper. The first chapter assesses Waugh’s presentations of newspaper readership. Using the postmodern theories of Jean Baudrillard, it addresses how reading the newspaper impacts characters’ understanding of the world around them. The second chapter analyzes how Waugh depicts the newspaper industry from the inside. This chapter applies the Marxist theories of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno to
examine how the structure of the newspaper business exerts pressure on two reporters, William Boot in *Scoop* and Simon Balcairn in *Vile Bodies*, to fabricate information. The third chapter explores how the newspaper plays an integral role in the decline of modern Britain within *Brideshead Revisited*, a novel that is vastly different from the freewheeling satire of *Scoop* and *Vile Bodies*. Interpreting Waugh’s complex representations of newspapers adds another level to our understanding of both his novels and the age in which he was writing.
Throughout his career, Evelyn Waugh published a number of articles that provide insight into his thoughts about the power and limitation of newspapers. For instance, in a satirical article describing the benefits of a career in journalism, Waugh acknowledges the vast influence newspapers have on everyday life, telling aspiring journalists: “Your lightest word will reverberate to provincial breakfast tables, making and unmaking governments, creating fashions in table decorations and nursery furniture, banning novels, detecting murders, probing the innermost secrets of national life” (Waugh, “Complete Journalist” 47). In his view, newspapers had the ability to influence how people think and feel and inspire them to make decisions about their everyday lives.

Although Waugh understood the newspapers’ power, he was deeply skeptical about the quality of their content. Once, when asked about his position on the Spanish Civil War, he replied: “I know Spain only as a tourist and a reader of newspapers” (Pryce-Jones 2). Simply reading about the conflict did not make him an adequate judge of the situation. Within his novels, Waugh draws this distinction between the newspapers’ capacity to reach the masses and their ability to accurately portray events.

Outrageous as they are, Waugh’s fictional representations of newspapers appear to be firmly rooted in the historical actualities of Fleet Street in the 1920s and 1930s. During this period, the newspaper industry had tremendous influence over people’s day-to-day lives in Britain. Historian Rod Brookes argues that this brave new world of British media helped shape national identity. Brookes describes the Daily Express, a popular British daily, as
One of the key political and media institutions in redefining Britishness during the period. Its editorial policies promoted an economic, political and cultural vision of Britain which attempted to speak to all classes in a period marked by increasing social and regional inequalities (Brookes 32).

Newspapers, backed by the full weight of modern industry, which enabled their vast distribution, defined not only the outside world, but an individual’s place in it. “By documenting the extraordinary events befalling the aristocracy, film and sports stars and royalty, the Daily Express provided a daily diet of excess, difference and modernity” (Brookes 32). Reflecting this trend, the newspaper assumes a profound importance in Waugh’s characters’ lives. It enables them to connect with and gain knowledge about the world, informs them about events, political incidents, sports scores, and even provides the upper class with a means of learning about their contemporaries. The newspapers become society’s ultimate source of information, creating a new form of reality and altering characters’ perceptions of the world around them.

To better understand how newspapers create and recreate reality in Waugh’s novels, it is useful to turn to the postmodern theories of Jean Baudrillard as laid out in The Precession of Simulacra. Although the work appeared decades after Waugh’s death, Baudrillard’s discussions of the media’s ability to shape reality offer key insight into how the newspaper functions in Waugh’s novels. In Simulacra, Baudrillard argues that what we call reality does not actually exist. Reality is a form of simulation created from a number of different sources: “The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command modules – and with these it can be reproduced an infinite number of times” (Baudrillard 1733). In this particular discussion, Baudrillard does not specifically mention newspapers, however, it could be inferred based on his arguments that newspapers in Waugh’s novels are examples of these theoretical
command modules. Baudrillard claims that command modules (also known as signs and symbols) create reality from nothingness. For example, Baudrillard argues that God does not exist but it is created by humanity with a complex system of signs and symbols, such as religious texts and rituals (Baudrillard 1736). Just as these signs shape God’s existence out of a void, newspaper in Waugh’s novels often take information and reproduce it a number of times until readers believe the stories they are reading are completely factual.

The images and stories that appear in the newspaper become so embedded in Waugh’s characters’ psyches that the false information morphs into a new form of reality, what Baudrillard refers to as the “hyperreal.” According to Baudrillard, once the command modules, signs, and symbols form the hyperreal people are unable to distinguish “between the real and the imaginary” (Baudrillard 1733). When newspapers create the hyperreal in Waugh’s novels one of two things can happen: either chaos ensues – the dissemination of false information causes a government to fall in *Vile Bodies* and multiple wars to break out in *Scoop*; or characters are forced to make profound changes in their lives, as is the case with Charles Ryder in *Brideshead Revisited*. These divergent representations of newspapers’ abilities to create reality are emblematic of Waugh’s own mixed feelings on modernity. The newspaper often acts like an extension of Waugh’s concerns about the negative impact of modernity and technology on society, especially when articles containing false or misleading stories. However, in some instances, these newspaper-driven fabrications mirror Waugh’s slight affinity for the modern age in that they occasionally provide some benefits to their readers, shocking them out of their dreary lives.
Within his novels, Waugh highlights how newspapers often unintentionally distort reality on the simplest level. In *Scoop*, when John Boot encounters Algernon Stitch, an English cabinet minister, Boot tells him he read a copy of the minister’s speech from the previous day. Waugh does not repeat Stitch’s remarks, but we can assume the article reprinted what the minister said by quoting the entire speech or providing a summary. Yet, Boot’s perception of the speech is very different from that of the minister. Boot tells him: “Your speech reads very well this morning” (*Scoop* 5). But the minister does not agree with this interpretation: “Speech? Mine? Ah. Reads well, eh? Sounded terrible to me” (*Scoop* 5). While the text of speech might have seemed eloquent in print, the actualities of what happened when Stitch spoke, including the audience reaction, speaker’s inflection, even the acoustics in the room, could have been vastly different from what Boot was able to ascertain from the paper. Thus, what appears to be an accurate representation is actually quite different from what happened. The newspaper creates a version of reality about a specific event in Boot’s mind. Although Stitch’s speech has a minimal impact on the outcome of the novel, and is never mentioned again, it is indicative of how the newspaper can manipulate even minor events.

As reality becomes more and more distorted by the various newspapers in Waugh’s novels, the results are much more problematic. Within both *Vile Bodies* and *Scoop*, Waugh provides multiple examples of newspapers intentionally expanding on and recreating reality until the articles no longer contain any semblance of truth. In *Vile Bodies* there are two potentially scandalous events, which, when chronicled in print, exemplify the newspaper’s ability to manipulate the truth. When the Prime Minister’s daughter, Jane Brown, invites members of the Bright Young Things – a popular London
social set – home with her after a night of partying the story appears in the morning papers with the headline: "Midnight Orgies at No. 10" (Vile Bodies 75). The scandalous words do not accurately reflect the mundane events of the previous evening (all of the guests merely ate eggs). But when the information hits the papers, the story leads to a national outrage. That same evening a wild party thrown by Lottie Crump ends with the death of a woman. When the article about the tragic gathering makes it to the papers, the stories downplay what actually occurred, ensuring that the authorities will overlook the calamity. By manipulating the truth, these newspaper articles have a very "real" impact on how subsequent events unfold.

As people all over Britain read about the Prime Minister’s “orgy,” they interpret the stories as absolute fact. While riding on a train, Adam overhears two old ladies discussing the events, admitting that they learned about the events from reading the paper. “‘I no sooner opened the paper,’ said one, ‘than I was on the 'phone at once to all the ladies of the committee.’” (Vile Bodies 84-85). The lady then recounts the exact words of a letter she sent to her representative in Parliament condemning the Prime Minister’s actions.

*Members of the Committee of the Ladies’ Conservative Association at Chesham Boise wish to express their extreme displeasure at reports in this morning’s paper of midnight party at No. 10. They call upon Captain Crutchwell ... strenuously to withhold support to Prime Minister. (Vile Bodies 85)*

With this exchange, Waugh highlights the power of these false stories. A lie gets told and people believe it, react, and suddenly the Prime Minister’s reputation is in ruins. One can infer from the ladies’ conversation that they never asked themselves whether or not the story they read in the paper was true. The mere existence of the story was the only truth the old ladies needed to conclude that the events at No. 10 actually occurred.
The Number 10, Downing Street affair ultimately leads to the downfall of the Prime Minister’s government, which Adam also reads about in the paper: “It was generally held in Parliamentary circles that the deciding factor in this reverse had been the revolt of the Liberals and the Nonconformist members at the revelations of the life that was led at No. 10, Downing Street” (Vile Bodies 100). The impact of false information is bolstered when it is repeated again and again by people in the streets and on the floor of Parliament. This, in turn, allows readers to ingest the same information multiple times, from different sources, reinforcing the perception that the stories are absolute fact. So by the time the Prime Minister is sacked, the fabrication has already become a part of society’s collective consciousness.

In the same paper where Adam reads about the Prime Minister’s downfall, he also spots a lone paragraph about Miss Ducane’s death at Lottie Crump’s party. The article distorts the truth – Miss Ducane was actually a prostitute who fell from a chandelier while drunk – and does not mention Lottie’s name:

The death occurred early this morning at a private hotel in Dover Street ... Miss Ducane fell from a chandelier which she was attempting to mend ... Miss Ducane, who was formerly connected with the stage, was well known in business circles. (Vile Bodies 100-01)

It is no accident that the article has little resemblance to what actually happened. When the mishap occurs earlier in the novel, Waugh describes how Lottie, the proprietress of the hotel, entertains the reporters and the police as they investigate the death. “There were policemen and reporters teeming in every corner of the hotel, each with a bottle of champagne and a glass” (Vile Bodies 83). After Adam himself witnessed Lottie’s abilities to schmooze the news, he is impressed by the way the story is later treated in the papers. “Which only showed, thought Adam, how much better Lottie Crump knew the business
Waugh’s portrayal of the press as an entity that manipulates reality on its own and can be influenced to twist the facts is emblematic of the relationship that existed in the 1920s and 1930s between people in power and the newspaper industry. The papers were so skillful at perverting information based on the whims of reporters, editors and publishers that British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, who served from 1925-9 and 1935-7, once complained that the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* were:

> [N]ot newspapers in the ordinary acceptance of the term. They are engines of propaganda for the constantly changing policies, desires, personal wishes, personal likes and dislikes of the two men [Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Rothmere – the papers’ owners]. ... What the proprietorships of these papers is aiming at is power, and power without responsibility: the prerogative of the harlot down the ages. (Jenkins 23)

Though Baldwin criticized the press, he knew, like Lottie Crump, that it could be manipulated for his own political gains. “Baldwin was able to communicate a vision of modern constitutional democracy using the techniques of the new mass media” (Brookes 32).

As a result of all these fabricated stories, Waugh’s characters do not read about reality but a cleverly contrived version of reality. Yet, when people interpret the stories as being true there are very real consequences for the subjects. One can infer from the article about Lottie Crump that the chandelier incident will have little effect on her ability to run a business. But the midnight orgy will be recorded in the history books as the main reason for the Prime Minister’s removal, which it was – even though it never occurred.

The newspapers’ ability to create the hyperreal works on an even larger scale in *Scoop* where they effectively have the power to start wars through their efforts to
misrepresent reality. Throughout the novel, every time there are hints of war in exotic locales, British newspapers dispatch reporters hoping they will bring in the big scoop. Upon arrival, however, the reporters find that the situation is quiet. As a result, they mask this lack of activity by writing stories about the supposed clash, stories which ultimately play a role in sparking that conflict.

Waugh’s tone may be satiric, but the history of English journalism is filled with instances where newspapers helped intensify conflicts before hostilities had actually broken out. For example, in 1904, a Russian warship accidentally fired on British ships. Fleet Street critic, W.T. Stead, notes that when the press responded: “They entirely misread the situation, and woefully misled the public. Instead of allaying passion, they fomented anger, and aggravated every difficulty with which the Governments [English and Russian] had to deal” (qtd. in McEwen 460). Since readers were so far away from the action, they only knew what the press told them. So if the press provides them with fabrications in the absence of concrete news to report, as happens in *Scoop*, the lies have the tendency to become the truth.

While in Ishmaelia, Corker tells William Boot a story about Wenlock Jakes, a famous American journalist whose very presence in hot zones incites violence. Once, when Jakes missed a train to a suspected war zone, he decided to make up accounts of the battles. After Jakes submitted his cable, many other journalists followed him into the imaginary battle zones and wrote similar stories, despite the fact that nothing had happened. The stories cause such a stir that soon an actual war breaks out.

That day every special in Europe got orders to rush to the new revolution. They arrived in shoals. Everything seemed quiet enough, but it was as much as their jobs were worth to say so, with Jakes filing a thousand words of blood and thunder a day. So they chimed in too. Government stocks dropped, financial
panic, state of emergency declared, army mobilized, famine, mutiny – and in less than a week there was an honest to God revolution under way. (*Scoop* 93)

William Boot follows the example from Corker’s tale and brings in the greatest “scoop” of them all, reporting that there has been a coup in Ishmaelia.

Boot learns about the supposed coup when he talks with a source who had earlier spoken with the President’s governess. The source casually informs Boot that the President has been imprisoned.

The President’s governess had tea with the Austrian yesterday, but I am afraid you will be disappointed. She has not seen the president for four days. You see he is locked up. … This time it is Dr. Benito and the Russian and the two black secretaries who came from America; they locked him up three days ago. (*Scoop* 207)

Based on hearsay from this dubious source, information that ironically turns out to be right, Boot pens a cable to the home office. “THE PRESIDENT WHO HAS BEEN IMPRISONED IN HIS OWN PALACE BY REVOLUTIONARY JUNTA HEADED BY SUPERIOR BLACK CALLED BENITO AND RUSSIAN JEW WHO BANNISTER SAYS IS UP TO NO GOOD” (*Scoop* 208). Boot has already embellished a number of stories, so in the absence of any certifiable information he does not hesitate to write something to fill the void and keep the home office happy. The cable makes headlines all over the world, despite the fact that nobody, not even Boot, bothers to verify the facts.

What Waugh describes in both these episodes in *Scoop* can be classified as examples of Baudrillard’s hyperreality. Baudrillard claims that when the real no longer exists, untruths begin to multiply and replicate themselves: “There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity” (Baudrillard 1736). In *Scoop*, the stories about fictional battles obscure the fact that nothing has happened. When reporters write fictional articles they create simulations,
which Baudrillard’s defines: “to feign to have what one hasn’t” (Baudrillard 1733). Once the simulations are put into circulation they begin to multiply at a furious pace. Editors read the phony stories in rival newspapers and assume they are true, so they send in their own reporters who begin creating their own simulated stories. The readers in the suspected war zone read the misrepresentations and believe that they are true. Suddenly, because so many people have actually read the story, what was once false, becomes true, causing tremendous repercussions for all the characters in the novel.

Waugh was clearly concerned about the consequences of these manipulations. However, a competing theme emerges within his novels about the benefits of this newspaper-inspired hyperreality. McCartney highlights, using an anecdote about Waugh flying in a stunt plane, how Waugh had mixed views about the benefits of modern technology. “Like stunt flying, it [modernity] turned the ordinary world upside down, giving one a glimpse of the abyss guaranteed to unsettle everything one has taken for granted” (McCartney 5). McCartney uses this example as the basis for his exploration of the connections between Waugh’s *Decline and Fall* and Nietzsche’s writings. His arguments, however, are also pertinent to Waugh’s depiction of journalism in the context of modernity. Like the stunt plane, newspapers, backed by the full weight of modernity driving their publication and circulation, have the power to enact positive changes. Even when they distort information, newspapers can jolt people out of their drab day-to-day lives in ways that are not always problematic.

In *Decline and Fall*, as Paul Pennyfeather wanders around his new school and into the faculty lounge where he sees “yesterday’s *Daily News*” among the clutter (*Decline* 20). He later learns that the newspaper belongs to Mr. Prendergrast who admits
that reading the newspaper is part of his daily routine. “Except for my tobacco and the
*Daily News* and occasionally a little port when it’s very cold, I don’t think I’ve bought
anything for two years” (*Decline* 50). This habit changes his very existence.

Augustus Fagan tells Paul in a letter how Prendergast was inspired to become a
clergyman after reading several articles about it. “Apparently he has been reading a series
of articles by a popular bishop and has discovered that there is a species of person called
a ‘Modern Churchman’ who draws the full salary of a beneficed clergyman and need not
commit to any religious belief” (*Decline* 188). After reading several articles, Prendergast
leaves his post at the school and take up a new life as a prison chaplain. This is a
momentous change for someone who throughout the novel is defined by his inability to
commit to any particular brand of organized religion. Prendergast’s story demonstrates
how the newspaper inspires its readers in Waugh’s novels to make drastic changes in
their lives bases on the information they read, even though the characters do not really
taking the time to consider the factual relevance of the articles.

For Charles Ryder in *Brideshead Revisited*, the newspapers help bring him back
from his self-imposed exile in France. While studying art in Paris, he begins seeing
newspaper articles depicting the chaos in England around the time of the general strike in
1926: “Every evening the kiosks displayed texts of doom” (*Brideshead* 193). Based on
these reports, Charles becomes swept up in the excitement and decides to return home.
As he would later find out, the “texts of doom” were inventions, completely overplaying
the potential impact of the strike.

Charles’ thinking that the strike would lead to a revolution was influenced by
what he read in the papers:
I, at any rate, had formed in my mind a clear, composite picture of ‘Revolution’ – the red flag on the post office, the overturned tram, the drunken N.C.O.s, the gaol open and gangs of released criminals prowling the streets, the train from the capital that did not arrive. One had read it in the papers, seen it in the films, heard it at café tables again and again for six or seven years now, till it had become part of one’s experience, at second hand. (*Brideshead* 194)

Charles’ mistaken idea of “experience” could be seen as a direct byproduct of the real being replaced with signs and simulations. Baudrillard claims that young people in particular are often inspired to behave a certain way based on what they see and read.

Baudrillard suggests that we all live our lives as if within quotation marks, as if playing a part in a movie. The student who is starting college, for example, has so many images of college students (from movies or TV) in mind that his or her way of being a student will inevitably be patterned in response to those preexisting images. (“Jean Baudrillard” 1731)

Charles’ “clear, composite picture” of the revolution is actually a type of hyperreality, inspired by the headlines and films about events in other places. He patterns his behavior based on these delusions by returning home expecting to fight.

After forming this definite picture in his mind, Charles is surprised by the absence of conflict when meets the “old routine” at the customs house when he arrives back in England. Hyperreality has so shaped his world that he cannot comprehend anything other than what he was conditioned to believe. He does not consider how the events may have been distorted in the papers, nor question the connection between the previous revolutions he had read about and the situation in England.

Although the conflict does not occur, Charles’ decision to return home is a turning point in his life because it leads him to become reacquainted with the Flyte family. Had he not read the accounts in the newspaper he might have remained in France – perhaps putting his life on an entirely different track. Both Charles and Prendergast’s situations demonstrate Waugh’s views that modernity, as exemplified by the newspaper, with all its
faults can have a momentous influence on people's destinies, even if the consequences are out of the characters' hands.

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Unlike Baudrillard, Waugh was not entirely convinced of the reading public's naiveté. As the information in the newspapers reaches the most heightened state of hyperreality, when it has "no relation to reality whatsoever," Waugh's characters are, on some level, capable of detecting the lies (Baudrillard 1736). While Baudrillard claims the once simulation reaches this point hyperreality continues endlessly, just the opposite occurs in Waugh's novels. When stories in the newspaper become complete fiction readers have the tendency to reject them with venomous intensity.

Upon seeing his nature column in the *Beast*, William Boot discovers that his aunt changed his article before it he submitted it, replacing the word "badger" with "great crested grebe." The goof prompts his readers to respond with a torrent of mail, questioning his claims:

His mail had been prodigious; some correspondents were skeptical, others derisive; one lady wrote to ask whether she read him aright in thinking he condoned the practice of baiting these rare and beautiful birds with terriers and deliberately destroying their earthly homes; how could this be tolerated in the so-called twentieth century? A major in Wales challenged him categorically to produce a single authenticated case of a great crested grebe attacking young rabbits. (*Scoop* 25)

Unlike other instances in Waugh's novels when the phony information prompts readers to start wars or sack a Prime Minister, Boot's readers do not accept the falsehoods presented in his article. The reason for the difference, however, is that they intimately familiar with the topic, so they are not fooled by the false reality. And their response is swift and
powerful, so much so that Boot assumes he will be fired for allowing such a careless mistake to appear in his work.

Waugh also shows that readers will accept fake news when they cannot confirm its authenticity but begin to doubt it once they can verify the information. In *Vile Bodies*, when Adam is first hired to be the gossip columnist for the *Daily Excess*, he creates fictional members of London society. His most important invention is a woman named Imogen Quest, whose exploits – as presented in the column – quickly become the talk of London.

He could hear her name spoken reverently in cocktail clubs, and casually let slip in such phrases as “My dear, I never see Peter now he spends all his time with Imogen Quest,” or “As Imogen Quest would say …” or “I think the Quests have got one like that I must ask them where it came from.” *(Vile Bodies 159)*

When people cannot deny that Imogen Quest exists, they assume she is a part of upper-class society whom they have not seen or met.

But when Adam begins placing Imogen Quest in real situations, such as arranging parties for her, people begin to recognize the flaws in his story. “One day Imogen gave a party, the preparations for which occupied several paragraphs. On the following day Adam found his table deep in letters of complaint from gate crashers who had found the house in Seamore Place unattended” *(Vile Bodies 159)*. Like the badger/grebe mix-up, when people can verify facts and information for themselves the power of the hyperreal begins to dissipate.

This contrast between familiarity and unfamiliarity often means the difference between belief and disbelief, as exemplified by a letter that Nina writes to Adam while he is at war.
It is difficult to know what is happening quite because the papers say such odd things. Van has got a divine job making up all the war news, and he invented a lovely story about you the other day, how you’d saved hundreds of people’s lives, and there’s what they call a popular agitation saying why haven’t you got the V.C.¹ (Vile Bodies 314)

Based on what she knows about Adam, Nina concludes that the article could not possibly be accurate. The readers, who have little knowledge about Adam other than what they have read, simply assume that the information is true.

Despite extensively describing situations where the populace is blinded by newspapers, Waugh maintains some hope, as evidenced by these examples, that the masses reading the newspaper will have the ability to determine for themselves what is real and what is false. These examples prove that Waugh was not entirely skeptical about the influence of the modern age – even if he went to great lengths to point out its flaws.

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Baudrillard’s theories are useful for the purposes of analyzing newspapers in Waugh’s novels because they provide a solid framework for questioning how news is presented in the papers. Yet Waugh’s representations of the newspaper go much deeper than the final product. When Waugh’s characters read what is on the page, it is the result of an economic decision. The simple words in Vile Bodies “He bought an evening paper,” open up the possibility of a closer analysis of Waugh’s presentation of the newspaper industry as a whole (Vile Bodies 99). Adam’s decision to spend his money on a paper when he arrives at a train station reminds us that newspapers are first and foremost a business with the goal of enticing their readers to purchase a copy. Understanding how Waugh depicted the newspaper business will provide greater insight into this “final

¹ Victoria Cross – One of England’s highest military honors.
product” as well as a more complete understanding of his views about the power and influence of Fleet Street.
Chapter 2
“Profitable Writing”: The Newspaper Industry in *Vile Bodies* and *Scoop*

Evelyn Waugh is remembered primarily for his contributions to the world of literature. But if one of his editors had been better versed in Latin, Waugh might have been lionized as one of the great journalists of Fleet Street as well. While in Ethiopia prior to the outbreak of the country’s war with Italy – where Waugh developed much of the basis for his novel *Scoop* – he got a news tip that Italy’s diplomatic legation was leaving the country because of the pending invasion. In the hopes of avoiding having his story picked off by rival journalists, Waugh sent a cable to his editors coded in Latin. His editor either thought the message was a joke or could not read it and promptly tossed it out (Hasting 339).

Within *Scoop*, Waugh rewrites history allowing his alter ego, William Boot, to succeed where Waugh himself failed. In one of the novel’s climactic moments, William beats out the competition when he learns about a coup in the fictional African nation of Ishmaelia. Unlike Waugh, when William sends his story over the wires his editors publish it, transforming him into an industry legend.

No one observing that sluggish and hesitant composition could have guessed that this was a moment of history – of legend, to be handed down among the great traditions of his trade, told and retold over the reeking bars of Fleet Street, quoted in books of reminiscence, held up as a model to aspiring pupils of Correspondence Schools of Profitable Writing, perennially fresh in the jaded memories of a hundred editors; the moment when Boot began to make good. (*Scoop* 208)

Biographers and critics agree generally that Waugh based William’s triumphant story on a famous article from Ethiopia prior to the war about the government’s secret oil deal
with an American businessman. Yet the sequence where Waugh describes Boot’s success is highly similar to a passage from his earlier novel *Vile Bodies*. In that scene, Simon Balcairn – a gossip columnist – sends in a phony story about a mass religious conversion at a high society event.

Excitement spread at the *Excess* office. The machines were stopped. The night staff of reporters, slightly tipsy, as always at that hour, stood over the stenographer as he typed. The compositors snatched the sheets of copy as they came. The sub-editors began ruthlessly cutting and scrapping; they suppressed important political announcements, garbled the evidence at a murder trial, reduced the dramatic criticism to one caustic paragraph, to make room for Simon’s story. It came through “hot and strong, as nice as mother makes it,” as one of them remarked. “Little Lord Fauntleroy’s on a good thing at last,” said another. (*Vile Bodies* 144)

Even though the stories set off similar frenzies, William and Simon’s fates could not be more different. Upon returning to London, the *Beast*, William’s newspaper, gives the now-famous journalist a hero’s welcome. Simon, knowing that the phony story he made up will lead to an inevitable backlash, escapes any repercussions by shoving his head into a gas oven. Instead of being remembered as a master of his craft, he is quickly replaced.

The vast similarities between the two sections describing Simon and William’s big stories, coupled with the fact that the two reporters have very different destinies, leads to some intriguing questions about the nature of Waugh’s depiction of the business of journalism in the two novels. Why did William and Simon write their stories? Why were the two men’s fates so different? Was it simply because William’s story was true and Simon’s article was fiction? What factors allowed them to write the stories in the first place? As one begins to delve into these questions, one sees how Simon and William’s articles are an extension of Waugh’s representations of the entire newspaper industry.
Within both novels Waugh offers an ambivalent view of the newspaper business, similar to his depictions of modernity. In some instances, Waugh lumps the newspaper business in with other negative aspects of the modern age. He demonstrates how the news is produced in a similar manner to other disposable goods – forcing reporters and editors to spin information and constantly turn out new products to keep the entire system going. Waugh also goes to great lengths to show how the newsroom structure, the publishers, and the paper’s reliance on technology all help lead to the creation of many forms of reality. Despite all of this, he remains sympathetic to the plight of reporters and their equally underserved fates. By depicting the newspaper business as he does, Waugh essentially argues that the difference between being a Fleet Street hero and a Fleet Street outcast had little to do with ability, but more to do with how an individual reporter’s work is received by this massive technological and economic system.

The theoretical architecture for this discussion is largely derived from Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Their theories are useful for interpreting Waugh’s novels because they too are extremely skeptical about the impact of the modern age on society. Horkheimer and Adorno claim that the rise of the modern age has led to the creation of a “culture industry,” which includes film, television, radio and magazines. This industry exerts tremendous pressure on all levels of society creating what the two describe as, “cultural chaos” (120). This chaos is the end result of a complex system, designed to control the masses, while at the same time perpetuating its own prosperity. By doing this, the industry creates uniformity among consumers while it destroys the individuality of everybody connected to it. “The
individual is wholly devalued in relation to the economic powers, which at the same time press the control of society over nature to hitherto unsuspected heights” (xiv).

Although Horkheimer and Adorno were largely concerned with how these cultural apparatuses influenced social thought and behavior, their arguments are still pertinent when examining how businesses, such as newspapers, exert tremendous pressure on their employees. The theorists claim that the end result of the cultural industry is that it forces people to conform with certain accepted beliefs and behaviors.

The dutiful child of modern civilization is possessed by a fear of departing from facts which, in the very act of perception, the dominant conventions of science, commerce, and politics – cliché-like – have already molded; his anxiety is none other than the fear of social deviation. (xiv)

Simon and William, while working as reporters for major newspapers, experience this fear of deviation through heightened pressure from both their bosses and their colleagues. It is a more powerful form of persuasion than if they were simply consumers because their livelihoods, their social and psychological well beings, and, most importantly, the success of their newspapers is tied to their ability to produce stories in a timely matter.

When William questions whether or not he should expose a competitor’s story for being false, his buddy, Corker, warns him off, saying: “Risky, old boy, and unprofessional. It’s the kind of thing you can do once or twice in a real emergency but it doesn’t pay. They don’t like printing denials – naturally. Shakes public confidence in the press” (Scoop 138). In Corker’s view, deviating from the acceptable norms of the business could potentially make William an outcast and be harmful for the entire industry. William and Simon both buy into this delusion and make their best effort to fulfill their paper’s needs, no matter what the cost.
Simon and William’s monumental stories are the final products of a system that needs to constantly renew and reinvent itself so that millions of newspaper readers can purchase a new paper everyday. The simple act of buying a newspaper in Waugh’s novels is a paradoxical one. When characters purchase a newspaper, they think they are satisfying a basic need for knowledge about the world. While seeming to fulfill a desire for “news” what these readers are actually doing is helping to perpetuate a business that seeks to control and manipulate their actions and emotions. This paradox ties into Horkheimer and Adorno’s theory that the culture industry strengthens and sustains itself by constantly putting out new products under the guise of satisfying consumer demand. “It is claimed that the standards were based in the first place on consumers’ need, and for that reason were accepted with so little resistance. The result is a circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows even stronger” (Horkheimer, Adorno 121). Newspapers in Waugh’s novels operate according to this same pattern. As Lord Copper, the publisher of the Beast, tells William Boot: “What the British public wants first, last and all the time is News” (Scoop 56). The result of giving people what they want is a strange cyclical effect: the consumers demand more news and the newspapers respond by giving it to them, which only increases the public’s desire for more information. With every scoop the newspapers are just strengthening their own chokehold over society.

In Waugh’s view, many of the problems associated with newspapers stem from the fact that they have a very limited shelf life. Waugh’s exploration of this topic brushes up against the theories of another Marxist critic, Walter Benjamin. In “The Storyteller,”
Benjamin theorizes that information deteriorates in value once it is made public. “The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time” (Benjamin 81). Waugh demonstrates this phenomenon in the opening pages of *Scoop* when Mrs. Stitch and John Boot work on the crossword puzzle while driving. The moment they finish, the newspaper no longer has any value to them. “Mrs. Stitch folded the paper and tossed it over her shoulder into the back seat” (*Scoop* 9).

The disposable nature of the newspaper also ties in with Horkheimer and Adorno’s theory that the appeal of new and state-of-the-art technology quickly diminishes with the passage of time. “The new bungalows on the outskirts are at one with the flimsy structures of world fairs in their praise of technological progress and their built in demand to be discarded after a short while with their empty food cans” (Horkheimer, Adorno 120). Waugh presents a similar idea when he lumps newspapers in with other modern innovations by contrasting Mrs. Stitch’s use of the newspaper to her treatment of automobiles. “Julia always drove herself, in the latest model of mass-produced, baby car; brand new twice a year, painted an invariable black” (*Scoop* 8-9). Just as Mrs. Stitch quickly discards her new cars to keep up with these trends, she disposes of the newspaper the minute she is finished with it.

The economic necessity of producing a newspaper on daily basis, combined with the intense competition for the reader’s penny, ultimately forces reporters and editors to manipulate information so that their product will be the most newsworthy. In Ishmaelia, Corker explains to William Boot why new information is so vital to the business: “News is what a chap who doesn’t care about anything wants to read. And it’s only news until
he's read it. After that it's dead” (*Scoop* 91). Waugh here contends that the newspaper industry faces even greater pressure to produce than other manufacturers because reporters and editors must come up with new material on a daily basis.

Waugh explores the connection between newspapers and manufactured goods in a different way in *Vile Bodies*. Brooke Allen notes how in that novel Waugh shows how dirigibles, airplanes and automobiles are easily forgettable once their initial novelty wares off. “Waugh’s work is everywhere permeated with the idea that the only advantage ‘progress’ can bring is the perishable one of novelty; when that has worn off, the machine is empty of any value” (Allen 323). Allen specifically cites the auto race scene in *Vile Bodies* where Waugh parodies the intellectual movement known as futurism. Adherents to the futurist cause believed that technology and war offered the ultimately solution to mankind’s problems. “The car, of course, is the prototypical Futurist symbol” (Allen 323). Allen notes, however, that while Futurists saw automobiles as a symbol of the glory of technology, Waugh shows the ultimate flaw in the technology by describing all the crashes and carnage that occurs during the race.

Allen might have added that there is a direct correlation between newspapers and auto racing. As Adam and his friends are wandering around the grounds before the race, they see the newspaper’s connection to the event: “Banners floated over it between the telegraph posts, mostly advertising the *London Dispatch*, which was organizing the race and paying for the victor’s trophy” (*Vile Bodies* 230). Newspaper and automobile promotion are genuinely linked. Not only do the industries rely on each other to promote their wares, but by sponsoring the auto race the newspaper creates its own news, ensuring
that there will be something new to report the next day – whether it be about the victor or the crash.

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As reporters go out into the field to collect new information we see that they are not just concocting information to satisfy the reading public. What they are actually doing is trying to live up to their editors and publishers’ expectations. It is the internal structure of the newspaper that puts reporters in a position where they feel they must continue to provide their superiors with information – whether it’s true or false – in order to maintain their jobs.

Horkheimer and Adorno claim that the setup of the culture industry forces producers to churn out a highly specific product. Citing the publishing industry specifically, they note how texts are censored by the virtue of the channels they must go through to get published.

The process which a literary text has to undergo, if not in the anticipatory maneuvers of the author, then certainly in the combined efforts of readers, editors, sub-editors and ghost writers in and outside of the publishing houses exceeds any censorship in thoroughness. (Horkheimer, Adorno xii-iii)

Their analysis is based on literary publishing, yet the same argument could be made for the newspapers in Waugh’s novels. The newspaper apparatus forces reporters like Simon and William to produce certain types of stories, in a rigid timeframe, regardless of any concerns for accuracy or newsworthiness. Exploring how Waugh depicted the top-to-bottom structure of the newspaper is essential to understanding why Simon and William wrote the stories that they did.

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2 Waugh satirizes the publishing industry in Vile Bodies as well. At one point, Adam’s publisher Sam Benfleet discusses what can and cannot go into the final copy of a book: “‘No damn it, she can’t print that. She’ll have us all in prison.’ For it was one of his most exacting duties to ‘ginger up’ the more reticent of manuscripts and ‘tone down’ the more ‘outspoken” (Vile Bodies 32).
Waugh takes his readers into newspaper offices to show the number of people responsible for some form of the paper’s production.

William had been led from room to room; he had been introduced to the Managing Editor, the Assistant Managing Editor, the Art Editor (who had provided the camera), the Accounts Manager, the Foreign Contacts Adviser, and a multitude of men and women with visible means of support but no fixed occupation. *(Scoop 48-9)*

Waugh is clearly poking fun at the over-bloated size of the newspapers staff, however, this structure plays an important role in how the papers are produced. Having this gigantic staff in place not only enables production on a daily basis, but the various editors and subeditors also dictate what information gets into the papers and how it is produced. The fact that newspapers employ so many people also puts reporters in a precarious situation. If they fail to live up to the expectations they risk not only their jobs, but the jobs of everyone from the Assistant Managing Editor to the Foreign Contacts Adviser to those with “no fixed occupation.”

Waugh personally understood how this newsroom structure could compel its reporters to write fictitious articles. When he took his first trip to Ethiopia as a reporter, Waugh was in the minority among his fellow journalists by insisting that he actually attend the events he was writing about. This desire for accuracy actually put him miles behind the competition. As his biographer Selina Hastings notes: “Evelyn’s amateurish insistence on actually being present at the events he described resulted in victory for the competition. As a telegram from the *Daily Express* curtly informed him ‘Coronation cable hopelessly late beaten every paper London’ ” *(Hastings 234)*. Although Waugh made the trip to Ethiopia after he wrote *Vile Bodies*, the anecdote is notable because it describes the reality about how the need to satisfy the demands of their editors pressured
journalists to file and publish the stories ahead of the competition, even if the stories did not get the information right.

Both Simon and William are pushed by the demands of their editors to concoct new stories, even in the absence of new information. As an inexperienced reporter, William is confused when he receives a message from the home office ordering him to “FLASH FACTS” (Scoop 94). Corker, a Fleet Street veteran, advises William to do what the cable says, even if William does not have anything new to send them. Corker demonstrates to William how to go about spinning information by taking him around town on a series of interviews. When people refuse to answer his questions, Corker still manages to work their comments into a story. For example, when Corker asks the hotel proprietress Mrs. Jackson a question about the conflict, she gets angry and refuses to answer. Corker then responds by writing: “Doyenne of Jacksonburg hostesses pans police project as unwarrantable interference with sanctity of Ishmaelite home” (Scoop 132).

William learns the lesson and begins to operate in much the same manner, twisting everything he hears so that it fits into what he believes his editors want. In doing so, William exemplifies Horkheimer and Adorno’s theory that the structure of the culture industry forces its producers to anticipate their superiors’ requirements and mold their work accordingly.

As a gossip writer in London, Simon operates under very different conditions than William. But his newspaper puts just as much pressure on him to unearth information. When Simon invites Adam out to lunch, he laments about the fact that he has not received an invitation to Lady Metroland’s party, without which he will surely lose his job. “If I miss this party I may as well leave Fleet Street for good” (Vile Bodies 115).
Simon understands that when he misses stories it is not the public that will be upset, it is his editors who will be fuming. His worries are compounded when he walks through his office door and his editor immediately demands to know if he received an invitation to Lady Metroland’s party, which the paper is planning on highlighting in the next day’s edition. She tells him: “I’ve got to have a first-hand story before we go to press” (Vile Bodies 117). Just as Horkheimer and Adorno hypothesize that the structure of the literary publishing company pigeonholes the final products into certain acceptable forms, the editor’s decision to create a spot in the paper for a story – before it even occurs – puts Simon in a situation where he feels he has to create a lie to keep his job.

The structure of the newsroom alone does not dictate how the stories will finally appear in the newspaper. Reporters and editors are charged with a more important duty – fulfilling the whims of the papers’ publishers. The men who led Fleet Street’s largest papers occupy an intriguing place in British history. Simon Jenkins notes how, like their infamous American counterpart William Randolph Hearst, the men who dominated Fleet Street in the early part of the 20th century produced the newspapers that were extensions their political philosophies (Jenkins 7-10).

For example, Lord Beaverbrook, who published the Daily Express, used his paper to fulfill his own personal political agenda of keeping Britain isolated from international affairs.

Beaverbrook argued that interventions in foreign affairs, which were doomed to fail anyway, would have real effects at home in terms of financial and human costs, and this outweighed moral arguments. Hence, the Daily Express group newspapers were against the League of Nations from its inception, and against any form of pact or treaty which promised collective security backed up by the guarantee of military intervention. (Brookes 34)
This historical actuality is reflected in *Scoop*, when Lord Copper, who Hastings claims is based on Beaverbrook, tells Boot he wants the stories from Ishmaelia to reflect the newspaper’s position on the conflict:

> Remember the Patriots are in the right and are going to win. The *Beast* stands by them four-square. But they must win quickly. The British public has no interest in a war which drags on indecisively. A few sharp victories, some conspicuous acts of personal bravery on the Patriot side, and a colourful entry into the capital. That is the *Beast* policy for the war (*Scoop* 56).

With Lord Copper’s speech, Waugh reveals that the newspaper’s goal has little to do with providing facts to satisfy the reader. Instead, the paper’s coverage reflects Lord Copper’s personal politics.

Lord Monomark exercises the same sort of dictatorial power over the *Daily Excess* in *Vile Bodies*. After Simon’s big story leads to a wave of libel suits, Monomark decrees that nobody suing the paper should appear in any stories. Since these people are often the main focus of the gossip pages, Adam is forced to start inventing information. By exercising this direct influence over what can or cannot go into the paper, Lord Monomark – much like Lord Copper – puts his reporters in a position where they feel they have to manipulate the facts to get their articles in the paper.

Since reporters must satisfy the whims of both their editors and publishers, they find themselves constantly facing a no-win scenario. Their choice is between telling lies and wreaking all sorts of havoc on the British public or simply leaving Fleet Street. In order to make the decision between honesty and scooping the competition bearable, the newspapers in Waugh’s novels heap great financial reward upon their staffers.

Horkheimer and Adorno note how monetary inducements often serve as a way for big businesses and government to counteract any attempts at opposition. “Even though
the individual disappears before the apparatus which he serves, that apparatus provides for him as never before" (Horkheimer, Adorno xiv). By deciding to become producers for the culture industry, reporters in these novels essentially make a compact with their employers to carry out their duties for which the journalists are granted a life of privilege above that of the average man. The more these reporters enjoy the good life provided by their employers, the easier it is for them to lose their own individual conscience.

Waugh pays particular attention to how reporters live lavishly thanks to their limitless expense accounts. In *Vile Bodies*, a nameless journalist breezes through customs and then dashes off in a hired car. “And sure enough he was soon settled in the corner of a first-class carriage (for the paper was, of course, paying his expenses)” (*Vile Bodies* 22). In *Scoop*, William, during his brief tenure as a foreign correspondent for the *Beast*, takes advantage of his company’s generosity. Before going to Africa, William witnesses first hand the benefits of having an expense account: “They took a taxicab down Fleet Street and the Strand to the grillroom where the *Beast* staff always entertained when they were doing so at the paper’s expense” (*Scoop* 40).

Waugh’s critiques appear to be rooted in the historical realities of the time. Critic Michael Salwen notes how the practice of overspending was the norm for reporters in Ethiopia prior to its outbreak of war with Italy. “Knickerbocker, for example, purchased a US$2000 used truck. Linton Wells submitted a bill for a 19 mule train” (Salwen, “Ethiopia” 13). He compares this factual reality with its depiction in *Scoop*. “Expense account abuse was a job perk ... [the] *Beast*’s foreign editor, Mr. Salter, enticed Boot to become the newspaper’s Ishmaelia correspondent by telling him he could pad his
expenses” (Salwen, “Ethiopia” 13). And pad William does. Before he leaves for Africa he stocks up with an:

[O]verfurnished tent, three months’ rations, a collapsible canoe, a jointed flagstaff and Union Jack, a handpump and sterilizing plant, an astrolabe, six suits of tropical linen and a sou’wester, a camp operating table and set of surgical instruments, a portable humidor ... a Christmas hamper complete with Santa Claus costume and a tripod mistletoe stand, and a cane for whacking snakes. ... At the last moment he added a coil of rope and a sheet of tin. (Scoop 60)

This list represents the extreme excesses allowed to journalists. While Waugh does not necessarily exonerate journalists for their behavior, when he contrasts their work against the backdrop of these incentives he shows that reporters are very human in their pursuit of the better existence.

In Simon and William’s case, fiscal inducements alone are not enough to propel them to produce their fictional articles. While the two do not hesitate to accept the financial gain afforded to them by their employers, they are also driven by a desire for personal fulfillment. Both men are members of the aristocracy who write for the newspaper to derive psychological benefits that their social positions cannot provide them. William, who in the beginning of the novel is a nature columnist, reluctantly goes to Africa because his editors threaten to fire him if he does not accept the assignment. For William, writing the column gives him a sense of escape from his bland life in the country: “The work was of the utmost importance to him; he was paid a guinea a time and it gave him the best possible excuse for remaining uninterruptedly in the country” (Scoop 24). Even though Simon has a seemingly endless slew of aristocratic titles, writing his gossip column allows him to feel as though he’s a part of London High Society. Covering the events even lands him a mention in a rival newspaper’s gossip section: “Lord Balcairn is one of the few young men about town” [sic] (Vile Bodies 63).
Given the nature of these monetary rewards and intangible psychological benefits, it’s no wonder Simon and William go to such great lengths to come up with their exaggerations and lies. Becoming producers for the culture industry gives them a sense of prestige that money and titles cannot buy.

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The structure of the newspaper business alone is not enough to compel Simon and William to write their stories. The two actually need outside assistance from modernity in the form of technology to help them submit their articles before deadline. This necessity exemplifies Horkheimer and Adorno’s theory about capitalism. The two believe that all businesses are interconnected and must rely on each other for survival. “The dependence of the most powerful broadcasting company on the electrical industry, or of the motion picture industry on banks is characteristic of the whole sphere, whose individual branches are totally economically interwoven” (Horkheimer, Adorno 123).

Within both novels, Waugh shows how newspapers are heavily reliant on modern technology to create a new product on a daily basis. In order to have access to information reporters must rely on cars, trains, airplanes, steamships, telephones and telegraphs. This technology enables them to get to locations and report back to the home offices at a faster and faster pace. As Corker tells William: “Think of it: I was in Fleet Street on Tuesday; got my marching orders at ten o’ clock, caught a plane to Cairo; all night in a car and here I am” (Scoop 86). With his statement, Corker highlights the fact that newspapers and other technology-driven businesses rely on one another to sustain themselves. Waugh was clearly concerned about the impact that this technology/business inter-reliance had on the news. Although reporters are able to get to various locations
faster and to transmit information closer and closer to deadlines, the quality of the information is not improved.

An essential technological component of the newspaper production process in *Vile Bodies* is the telephone. It allows gossip reporters such as Simon and Vanburgh to call in their stories from the field, leaving little time in the editing process for scrutiny. This reliance on the telephone is emblematic of Horkheimer and Adorno’s theory that businesses in a capitalist system are interdependent on one another for survival. For example, the need to constantly produce a paper on a daily basis means that newspapers must get information faster, so its reporters use the telephone to phone in their stories, allowing the paper to go to press. Without the telephone, newspapers would not be able to get information out as quickly and perhaps consumers would not rush to get the morning paper. But if reporters and editors did not rely on the telephone as a way to communicate, the telephone companies would presumably lose a significant amount of revenue.

Waugh was not the only author from this period to make extensive use of the telephone within his novels. Historian John Brooks notes that in 1920 and 1930s the emergence of the telephone as a key factor in everyday life led to an explosion of its use in literature and drama. “The year 1930 – a time when the telephone was all but ubiquitous in most of American and European society, but had not yet been so long enough to be taken entirely for granted – may plausibly mark the all-time high-water mark of telephone literature” (Brooks 175).
One critic, Thomas Bronwen, specifically addresses Waugh’s use of the telephone in *Vile Bodies*. Bronwen claims that the telephone is essential to the world of the Bright Young Things in the novel.

For those with bustling lifestyles revolving around casual acquaintances it would have been indispensable. Organizing a party, making last minute arrangements, or impersonating someone for a joke are all facilitated by the advent of the telephone. (Bronwen 107)

Bronwen emphasizes that the telephone allows characters to talk with each other more frequently, but does not necessarily make communicating any easier. “Waugh exaggerates the mechanization of telephone conversations both for comic effect and to highlight the difficulties the characters face in attempting to ‘get through’ to one another in anything but a superficial way” (Bronwen 107). Bronwen devotes a majority of the article to one specific phone conversation between Adam and Nina, noting how the phone enables the two to mask their emotions when speaking to each other.

One issue that Bronwen does not address is how the telephone makes it easier for Simon and Vanburgh to provide their editors with phony stories. Just as the telephone enables Adam and Nina to converse without revealing their emotions, when Simon and Vanburgh phone in stories from high society gatherings, they can easily conceal their lies. While the telephone speeds up the production process, it ensures that nobody will have time to verify the accuracy of the facts. The problem becomes even more acute in *Scoop* when the distance between reporters and the home offices is enlarged, requiring them to use the telegraph.

For his journey from Boot Magna Hall to Ishmaelia William takes a train, an airplane, a fast-moving ship, then another train and an automobile. Once there he uses the telegraph to keep in touch with his editors. The telegraph served as a major catalyst for
uniting the world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. After the first transatlantic cable was laid in the 1860s the technology connected the world.

Within a generation submarine telegraphy had made it possible for every major nation in the world to be in nearly instant communication with each other. These cables had not only become vital parts of the modern world – indeed, helped powerfully to bring the modern world into being – they had also become important national assets (and targets) in time of war. (Gordon 212)

Unlike the telephone, which was largely used for domestic communication, the telegraph remained the primary method of intercontinental communication until the 1950s (Gordon 215). Thus the telegraph would have been the best way for Waugh’s reporters to communicate with their editors in London.

The telegraph is an essential component of the journalists’ day-to-day routines in Ishmaelia. It connects them to the home office, allowing them to send and receive information. While helping to boost newspaper circulation by delivering information faster, it presumably allowed the telegraph agency in Ishmaelia to prosper from the heavy traffic of all the journalists. As I noted previously in the introduction, Elson contends that the newspaper could not function without these telegraphs. Her theory actually echoes Horkheimer and Adorno’s sentiments about the interconnectivity of businesses within the system as a whole. Just as the newspapers needed the telegraph offices, the telegraph operators needed the newspapers to flourish.

It is this inter-reliance of the telephone and telegraph industries and the newspaper business that enables Simon and William to pull off their big stories. When William gets information about the coup, he sends a telegraph to London. Later on, he receives a telegraph informing him of what a great job he has done: “CONGRATULATIONS STORY CONTRACT UNTERMINATED UPFOLLOW FULLEST SPEEDILIEST”
To compensate for being kicked out of Lady Metroland’s party, Simon uses the telephone to call his editors to tell them that he has just witnessed a mass religious conversion at a London high society event: “Barely had Lady Everyman finished before the Countess of Throbbing rose to confess her sins, and in a voice broken with emotion disclosed hitherto unverified details of the parentage of the Present Earl” (Vile Bodies 144). Waugh’s emphasis on modern technology highlights the impact these inventions had on the business of news. Without these innovations William would not have been celebrated among the great reporters of Fleet Street, and Simon might not have been tempted to offer such a blatant fabrication to his editors.

By showing how technology-driven businesses depended on one another, Waugh implies that the technology itself is just as responsible for the creation of false and misleading information as those who produce it. With the entire structure of the news business behind them, reporters had little choice but to make use of these technological apparatuses to send in their stories. Since the technology enabled them to create their stories, Simon is somehow less responsible for his failures and William less deserving of his success.

In the end, the newspaper business itself ultimately benefits from both Simon and William’s stories. When William makes his triumphant return to England his paper proudly promotes its “victory” by publishing a special section about him. “The man who made journalistic history, Boot of the Beast, will tomorrow tell the tale in his own inimitable way the inner story of his meteoric leap to fame” (Scoop 267). The Beast makes William famous, then bolsters its own image by turning its own reporter into news, thus perpetuating its very business. The story ensures that the newspaper will have
money to continue sending its reporters to the far reaches of the world to bring back more stories, all so it can sell more newspapers and use the telephone, telegraph and all the transportations systems available to provide the “best” news.

The industry also benefits, in a small way, from Simon’s story. As he shoves his head into a gas oven, he uses a newspaper – his rival, the Morning Dispatch – to ignite the flame. If Simon purchased the paper before using it to bring about his own demise, he actually helped perpetuate the very business that ruined him. Presumably rival newspapers carried stories about Simon’s gruesome demise the following morning. Such an article would be consistent with Waugh’s own imagination. In Waugh’s 1934 novel, A Handful of Dust, a character named Lady Brenda gives her husband a quick recap of the day’s top stories from the paper, including one about: “Two more chaps in gas ovens” (Handful 15).

This self-perpetuation is indicative of Horkheimer and Adorno’s theory that the culture industry’s ability to constantly churn out new products strengthens the system, as opposed to providing any direct benefit to consumers. Although the two theorists were not necessarily concerned with how the industry manipulates its own employees, Simon and Boot’s cases illustrate how the pressure to conform is just as great, if not greater for those on the inside, than it is for society as a whole. Culture industry producers are pressured to conform to both societal norms as consumers and to the business needs of their employers. While the need for consumers to buy into the culture industry’s vision of society is crucial, the internal stress on culture industry producers to suppress their individual consciences is just as essential to the industry’s survival as its ability to manipulate consumers with final products.
The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* serves as a useful guide for exploring the business of news in Waugh’s novels. There is, however, another level to Waugh’s depictions of the newspaper that comes out in his later novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, which Horkheimer and Adorno’s theories are not as well suited for. When Horkheimer and Adorno discuss the impact of the culture industry on society the theorists assume people are at the culture industry’s mercy: “The flood of detailed information and candy-floss entertainment simultaneously instructs and stultifies mankind” (xv). Waugh did quite agree with this view. Within *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh’s characters interact with newspapers in ways that make them much more knowledgeable about the industry than Horkheimer and Adorno would give most people credit for. Evaluating how these characters intermingle with and relate to the newspaper provides another level to our understanding of Waugh’s complex portrayal of the industry and its influence on society as a whole.
Chapter 3
“A Notice In The Times”: The Newspaper and the Flyte Family

*Brideshead Revisited* is a profoundly different novel from Evelyn Waugh’s previous endeavors. The biting satire and laughable caricatures that dominate his earlier work are replaced with a somber portrait of an aristocratic family going through hard times while struggling to maintain its Catholic identity in an Anglican country. The story is told from the perspective of Charles Ryder, a friend of the family. Through a series of flashbacks, he describes his experiences with the family: first, as a college student when he was friends with, and possibly lover to, Sebastian Flyte, then secondly when, as an older man, he carried on an affair with Sebastian’s older, married sister, Julia.

The novel itself was written in a very different time period from Waugh’s earlier books. Instead of the roaring twenties, or the pre-war thirties, Waugh wrote the novel in the midst of World War II, while living a dreary existence as a soldier. According to Waugh’s biographer Selina Hastings, he fell into a deep depression, which, in turn, shaped the tone and character of the novel:

> The secure, hierarchal pre-war world he believed in was in the process of disintegration, a disintegration metaphorically represented by the disbanding of the Flytes, the demolition of the Marchmain house, the departure from Brideshead in all its voluptuous beauty. (Hastings 490)

This gloom finds its way onto his pages from the beginning. In the opening paragraph, Charles Ryder reflects while packing up an army camp: “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” (*Brideshead* 9).

Among Waugh’s works, *Brideshead Revisited* has inspired the most significant amount of criticism. Jonathan Pitcher, as well as numerous other critics, attributes the
novel’s enduring popularity in critical circles to the success of the 1980s BBC adaptation (Pitcher 1). Critics have explored many facets of the novel including its discussions of modernism, British country house architecture, the perceived homosexual relationship between Sebastian and Charles, and Catholicism. Much of the focus on the last topic appears to be directly related to Waugh’s very public conversion to the religion in 1930.

Even with such a wide-ranging critical dialogue on the novel, critics generally agree that Brideshead Revisited is Waugh’s personal lament for the Britain’s decline. Laura Coffey contends that within the novel Waugh is deeply skeptical of anything modern in Britain, while at the same time he glorifies the past.

This structure allows Waugh to juxtapose the privations of the modern world against the paradise of the past, and the nostalgia that pervades the novel also gives it its unique character and illuminates Waugh’s anxieties regarding the changing nature of Britain in the 1940s. (Coffey 66)

Although Coffey uses her theories to explore Waugh’s presentation of the Flyte country house, known as Brideshead, her idea that Waugh balances the modern world with the past is central to understanding journalism’s place within the novel.

Discussions about the newspaper are notably absent from the critical dialogue about modernity in Brideshead Revisited. Unlike Scoop and Vile Bodies, newspapers are not placed at the forefront, and only a few minor characters even practice the trade. But despite the appearance of a reduced role, the newspaper actually plays a profound part in the story. Although Waugh does not say it directly, as the novel ends with scenes of desolation and despair he implies that the newspaper and the rapid dissemination of information in 20th century England might have been partially responsible for the Flytes’ downfall. Within the novel, Waugh asserts that as the Flytes – and perhaps old Britain – fall into disarray, the press intrudes on their lives and documents the family’s long
descent into obscurity. Yet while reporting the facts, the newspapers somehow miss the essence of why the family’s world is falling apart. Waugh essentially claims that the newspapers are inherently flawed because they completely misinterpret the very nature of the Flytes – and perhaps Britain’s – downfall. This failure suggests a larger problem. Modernity, even when it takes the shape of something as commonplace as a newspaper, is unable to coexist with religion and traditional British aristocratic values.

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As members of Britain’s aristocracy, the Flytes regularly appear in the newspaper. This constant interaction is the most devastating to Sebastian. For the shy, teddy-bear-toting Oxford dandy, the newspaper, and the modern age it represents, is an intrusive force. The newspaper first appears in Sebastian’s life in the novel when he and Charles spend a summer together at the Brideshead mansion. Charles remembers that time in his life with great reverence: “I, at any rate, believed myself very near heaven, during those languid days at Brideshead” (Brideshead 77). Toward the end of the summer the newspaper becomes a wedge between the two. When Charles tries talking with Sebastian about religion, Sebastian avoids the subject by burying himself in a newspaper. “He turned back to the pages of the News of the World and said, ‘Another naughty scout-master’” (Brideshead 84). As the argument becomes more heated Sebastian keeps referring back to it again and again. In response to Charles’ remonstrations of Sebastian’s devotion to Catholicism, he responds: “I’ll never mention it again … thirty-eight other cases were taken into considerations in sentencing her to six months – golly” (Brideshead 85).
Understanding the newspaper’s presence in this scene largely depends on how one interprets the nature of Charles and Sebastian’s involvement. Tilson Pugh notes how critics have been sharply divided about whether or not to classify their relationship as homosexual, often taking an either/or approach to the argument (Pugh 64). The debate is perhaps more heated because Waugh purposefully leaves the question unanswered in the text: “Waugh wanted the readers to confront the haziness of his characters’ sexualities, not to define them in rigid categories” (Pugh 71). Pugh argues that the two are actually involved in a relationship known as a romantic friendship, common among young men and woman sequestered in same-sex environments in 19th and 20th century boarding schools (Pugh 65). He notes how these friendships, which were not always physical, were accepted in some circles, as long as the two men moved on from the attachment later in life, as Charles does in the novel.

These multiple perspectives on sexuality in the novel lead to a number of possible interpretations about the newspaper’s presence in the scene. If Charles and Sebastian are indeed sexually involved, then the articles that Sebastian reads, which appear to be all about scandals, are a reminder to them of what might happen if their intimacy is discovered. Their story could become fodder for the tabloid press. However, if one follows Pugh’s reasoning – and concludes that they are romantic friends – then the newspaper’s intrusion represents the outside pressure that will be exerted on them to grow up and grow apart. If one believes their friendship is completely platonic, then the paper could be a symbol of how modernity serves as an excuse for people to avoid debating truly serious questions of faith. Regardless of one’s interpretation of Charles and
Sebastian’s relationship, the newspaper is—perhaps on multiple levels—emblematic of the modern world creeping into their heavenly summer at Brideshead.

Although Sebastian uses the newspaper as a way of avoiding reality, he soon finds his own life in print when he and Charles are arrested for drunk driving. From the moment the two are apprehended Sebastian and Charles’ lawyer insists that he will try to keep the events out of the papers. “You two will plead guilty, say you’re sorry, and pay your five bob fine. I’ll see what can be done about squaring the evening papers. The Star may be difficult” (Brideshead 116). The lawyer is right to be cautious, since the newspapers turn the minor offense into a full-blown scandal.

When Sebastian appears in court, the papers begin spinning and twisting the story with headlines such as “Marquis’s son unused to wine” and “Model Student’s career at stake” (Brideshead 119). The newspapers here take on a role similar to their function in Scoop and Vile Bodies in that these articles are sensational and inaccurate. Sebastian is neither a model student nor unused to wine. Despite the fact that the articles do not depict who he really is, later on the novel, his younger sister, Cordelia, quotes the headlines verbatim when he goes on a drinking binge. Cordelia is clearly mocking her brother. But the fact that she knows the headlines are ridiculous does not mean that the rest of the reading public understands that the stories are fabricated. Her decision to quote the articles as they appeared in the paper highlights the fact that the newspapers’ representations of Sebastian have become a form a reality for people outside of his immediate circle.

The fact that the newspapers are so interested in Sebastian’s downfall is also emblematic of the how the modern age undermines the aristocracy within the novel by
turning the upper-class into celebrities to be gawked at by the masses. The newspaper publicizes Sebastian’s problems, not because they are necessarily newsworthy, but because of who he is. As the magistrate says: “The better the home the more shameful the offence” (Brideshead 119). Yet the newspaper carries out the real punishment. After first intruding on his life in the countryside, the newspaper exposes Sebastian’s faults to the entire nation.

Waugh’s portrayal of Sebastian’s debacle is significant because it marks a drastic change from how he depicted the relationship between the upper crust and the newspaper in previous novels. In Vile Bodies, the Bright Young Things actively try to get into the paper as a way of padding their own egos, even though they’d never admit openly admit to wanting to see themselves in print. “Everyone looked negligent and said what a bore the papers were, and how too like Archie to let the photographers come, but most of them, as a matter of fact, wanted dreadfully to be photographed” (Vile Bodies 67). Mrs. Stitch is even more accepting of publicity in Scoop. When she plows her car into a men’s restroom, she basks in the attention she receives from the reporters: “She was chatting in a composed and friendly manner to the circle of reporters and plain-clothes men” (Scoop 53). Mrs. Stitch and the Bright Young Things welcome the newspaper coverage in their lives, but Sebastian is victimized by the press’s intrusion into his life. The constant barrage of articles reminds Sebastian that he cannot escape who he is or his position as a member of the British aristocracy. The knowledge does not sit well.

Shortly after the ordeal, Sebastian begins his freefall. When he returns to Oxford and is forced to lead a restricted life because of his previous indiscretions, he cannot cope. By the following year he is a complete wreck.
But the shadows were closing round Sebastian. We returned to Oxford and once again the gillyflowers bloomed under my windows and the chestnut lit the streets and the warm stones strewed their flakes upon the cobble; but it was not as it had been; there was mid-winter in Sebastian's heart. (Brideshead 135)

Even the brightness of springtime at Oxford cannot fully bring him out of this long depression, which never quite resolves itself.

Unlike Sebastian, whose relationship with the newspaper is passive, his older brother Brideshead uses it for his own advantage. During Julia's long engagement to Rex Mottram, Brideshead discovers that Rex had been previously married and divorced in Canada prior to moving to England. This would make Rex and Julia's marriage impossible under Catholic law. As the family debates whether or not it is possible for the now converted Rex to marry Julia, Bridey wants to put an end to the whole affair with an announcement in the newspaper. "'There's nothing to discuss,' said Brideshead, 'except what is the least offensive way we can close the whole incident. Mother and I will decide that. We must put a notice in The Times and the Morning Post; the presents will have to go back' " (Brideshead 190). He knows that the newspaper will rapidly spread the information throughout the country, informing both friends and strangers in a timely manner that the engagement has come to an end. This will ensure that the split is permanent. For Brideshead, the newspaper is not an agent of destruction but a means to helping him maintain his power over his siblings and force them to adhere to his particular vision of Catholicism. Like a sly politician, Brideshead understands the power of the press and wants to use it to satisfy his own aims.

Brideshead even benefits from the newspaper coverage when an article appears describing his habit of collecting matchboxes. "At first he was bashful about the notoriety which the newspaper caused, but later greatly pleased, for he found it the means of his
getting into touch with other collectors in all parts of the world" (Brideshead 267). By having his matchbox obsession made public, Bridey meets a number of people he would not have otherwise met, including his future wife. This instance mirrors Waugh’s divergent views of modernity. Like Waugh’s experiences with the stunt plane, the newspaper coverage serves as a useful intrusion in Brideshead’s life because it shocks him out of his own isolation.

Julia too has a series of differing interactions with the newspaper. Her initial relationship with the industry is a positive one. Instead of bringing about her downfall, the press coverage about her debut places her at the forefront of British society, much like the Bright Young Things in Vile Bodies. Julia’s constant appearance in the newspaper allows readers all over England to believe they are on familiar terms with her. When Charles Ryder dines with Anthony Blanche, a schoolmate from Oxford, Blanche describes Julia’s constant appearance in the press: “And Julia, you know what she looks like. Who could help it? Her photograph appears as regularly in the illustrated papers as the advertisements for Beecham Pills” (Brideshead 54). This coverage is an example of the modern world creeping into the country life of the Flytes, turning Julia into a product for mass consumption much like her brother Sebastian.

Unlike Sebastian, who does not deal well to the limelight, Julia takes all the press coverage in stride. Even those close to her see the articles as a positive force. This is mainly due to the fact that the press coverage she receives affirms her position as one of England’s top debutantes. When Julia does appear in the newspaper, Waugh shows – in a way that strongly differs from his previous novels – how the press does not necessarily
lie or manipulate information about her. Julia’s Nanny points out that the description of Julia in an article announcing her debut is accurate, saying:

“Did you see that piece about Julia in the paper? She brought it down for me. Not that it’s nearly good enough of her, but what it says is very nice. ‘The lovely daughter whom Lady Marchmain is bringing out this season ... witty as well as ornamental ... the most popular debutante,’ well, that’s no more than the truth.” *(Brideshead 38)*

If the Nanny, who loves Julia very deeply, can accept the article at face value, it means that there were probably no major discrepancies in the representation, or she simply does not want question the positive articles. With such glowing coverage, Julia makes no attempt to avoid the exposure or condemn it, nor does she become a recluse the way her brother does.

The newspaper does not always retain such a high degree of accuracy when reporting on Julia. As Julia becomes engaged to Rex, Charles follows the changes in her life by reading the articles about her in the paper. First he sees the engagement announcement. Then he reads about what happened at her wedding. “No royalty was present; nor was the Prime Minister; nor were any of Julia’s family” *(Brideshead 171-2)*. The absence of friends and family at the wedding leads Charles to conclude that somehow, something was missing from the press coverage of Julia’s marriage: “It was not for several years that I heard the full story” *(Brideshead 172)*.

When Charles learns about and subsequently narrates the real story about the days leading up to Julia’s wedding, he highlights a key point about the engagement that the newspapers were unlikely to mention. With her decision to marry Rex, Julia turned her back on Catholicism. That was the reason why her family did not attend. And without the family’s approval, one can assume that other members of the aristocracy decided to shun
the ceremony as well. By using the newspaper articles to introduce the story of Julia’s engagement and failed marriage, Waugh asserts that newspapers are incapable of writing stories that capture the essence of people’s spiritual beliefs. The absence of religion in the articles on Julia could be simply dismissed as structural problem in the newspapers themselves – engagement announcements and wedding stories are not designed to convey these truths. But the announcements demonstrate how the industry’s drive to give the people what they want and put out information in quick and sensational manner results in the newspapers missing the essence of who people are and why things happen as they do.

Waugh further demonstrates the newspaper’s inability to capture the importance of religion later in the novel when he describes what happens to Sebastian after he leaves England and his family behind. Cordelia learns his whereabouts after discussing his condition with a journalist.

“I heard he was dying,” she said. “A journalist in Burgos told me, who’d just arrived from North Africa. A down-and-out called Flyte, who people said was an English lord, whom the fathers had found starving and taken in at a monastery near Carthage. That was how the story reached me.” (Brideshead 289)

In Cordelia’s view, seeing Sebastian struggle is painful, yet she is at peace with the fact that he found religion as a maintenance man for the monastery. While Charles feels great pity for his old friend, Cordelia reassures him that her brother has found his place in the world: “I’ve seen others like him, and I believe they are very near and dear to God” (Brideshead 293). Cordelia’s version of events undermines the journalist’s tale. By just seeing him as a British aristocrat gone sour, much in the same way the newspaper relates his bout of drunk driving as an example of a good boy turning bad, the journalist misses the real story about what happened to Sebastian – that he had found God. It serves as
another example of how newspapers, like the modern age itself, are incapable of grasping the spiritual world.

Waugh’s decision to show the newspaper as being incapable of defining a characters’ religion is emblematic of his larger theme that the modernity and spirituality are unable to coexist. There are a substantial number of critical articles about *Brideshead Revisited* that focus on how Waugh positions religion against modernity in the novel. Michael Gorra claims that Waugh’s exploration of Catholicism is the primary reason why the novel is so different in theme and scope from his previous work. Gorra argues that within *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh: “replaced the anarchic comedy of this early work with an assertive Catholicism, a vision of the Roman church as civilization’s only defense against the terrors of the modern world” (Gorra 201). Marina MacKay makes a similar claim while attempting to place the novel in the tradition of 20th century Catholic literature. She argues that with *Brideshead Revisited* Waugh expands on T.S. Eliot’s theory that the end of Catholic influence on culture will bring on “many centuries of barbarism” (MacKay 221). As a result, she claims, Waugh attempted to use Catholicism a force opposing the modern world that is slowly overtaking society.

Waugh’s bleak outlook on the modern age in the novel is similar to Horkheimer and Adorno’s view of the culture industry’s impact on society. In fact, Horkheimer and Adorno note how the culture industry and modernity could be tied to “the loss of the support of objectively established religion” (Horkheimer, Adorno 120). Just as Horkheimer and Adorno are pessimistic the modern world, Charles Ryder feels that the age of Hooper – Ryder’s term for the modern age named after one of his fellow Army officers – has destroyed nearly everything sacred in British society. Near the end of the
novel, when describing the history of the Brideshead mansion, Ryder notes how: “in sudden frost, came the age of Hooper, the place was desolate and the work all brought to nothing” (*Brideshead* 331). Horkheimer, Adorno and Waugh might have adhered to different ideologies, Marxism and Catholicism respectively, but they were equally pessimistic about what modernity meant for humanity.

Within Waugh’s critique of the modern age in the novel, newspapers plays an important role in his depiction of modernism and Catholicism as opposing forces. Since the newspaper is incapable of grasping the religious complexities of Julia and Rex’s engagement or Sebastian’s spiritual redemption, Waugh claims that it somehow misses the entire story about the family’s decline, even though it technically gets the facts right. In doing so, he postulates that the newspaper is simply an extension of the barbarous modern world because of its very inability to coexist and convey the importance of religious views.

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The distinction between newspapers and religion presents itself again in a much more dramatic fashion near the end of the novel. As Flyte family patriarch, Lord Marchmain, is on his deathbed, his children attempt to bring him back by reading him the newspaper. But Marchmain simply turns away: “His mind was far from world affairs; it was there, on the spot, turned in on himself; he had no strength for any other war than his own solitary struggle to keep alive” (*Brideshead* 316). Lord Marchmain’s decision to renounce newspapers, and modernity, affirms the critical argument that religion trumps modernism in the novel. Soon after rejecting the newspaper, Lord Marchmain reaffirms his faith by making the sign of the cross when receiving absolution on his deathbed.
Shortly after witnessing this, Julia decides to end her romantic attachment with Charles, for whom she was going to divorce Rex, because she does not want to give up her religion:

I’ve always been bad. Probably I shall be bad again, punished again. But the worse I am, the more I need God. I can’t shut myself out from his mercy. ... it may be a private bargain between me and God, that if I give up this one thing I want so much, however, bad I am, he won’t quite despair me in the end. (Brideshead 324)

For a brief moment, these two instances seem to place Catholicism as source of salvation from the horrors of modernity in a bleak world.

The combination of Lord Marchmain’s deathbed reconciliation and Julia’s reaffirmation led one critic, Evelyn Tonton, to accuse Waugh of over-romanticizing Catholicism.

Waugh ... presents his religion as wholly a matter of gorgeous rite and mystery. Nowhere is there any real suggestion that it has moral content, that it might have any relationship to human feeling or human conduct. Catholicism, in this view, is simply Higher Romance, complete with solemn renunciations ... and dramatic deathbed reconciliations. (Tonton 137)

Yet this analysis, as well the other criticism about Waugh’s Catholicism, seems a bit off base when one considers the end result of Julia’s decision to rekindle her faith.

Although it first appears that religion has triumphed over the barbarism of modernity, the Flyte family’s devout Catholicism ensures its decline. Perhaps the Flytes’ only salvation is they get to fade away on their own terms. But by accepting her religion Julia pushes away her last viable chance to produce a legitimate heir. And although Julia is content in her relationship with God, one is not entirely convinced by her final speech that her decision to stay married to Rex and give up her love of Charles will lead to happiness in this world. In the end, neither the rejection of modernity in the form of
newspapers nor their Catholicism can save the Flyte family from dying out – even
religion is crumbling under the weight of the modern age. That is a story that will never
make it onto the pages of Fleet Street’s daily publications. Perhaps that’s why Waugh felt
needed to write a novel about the subject. The themes are too monumental to fit into one
of his many newspaper or magazine articles.
Conclusion

As a prolific journalist, Evelyn Waugh understood the limitations of newspaper and magazine writing. In his novels, Waugh expands on a number of themes and ideas that first appeared in his articles. David Lodge cites Waugh’s 1929 piece “The War and The Younger Generation,” where Waugh outlines his views on the disillusioned younger generation whom he also satirizes in Vile Bodies, which was released in 1930 (Lodge 189). Within the article, Waugh severely criticizes his contemporaries – primarily people too young to have fought in World War I – for their lack of focus and discipline. In one passage (which Lodge partially quotes, and I will provide in its entirety) Waugh laments not only that the younger set is disaffected, but also that its foibles are constant fodder for the tabloid press.

There was nothing left for the younger generation to rebel against, except the widest conceptions of mere decency. Accordingly it was against these that it turned. The result in many cases is the perverse and aimless dissipation chronicled daily by the gossip-writer of the press. (Waugh “War” 62)

Lodge claims that within Vile Bodies Waugh built on this portrayal of the younger generation, transcending the confines of a simple opinion piece: “One is not surprised to work out that Waugh must at this time have been preparing to write Vile Bodies … the novel has a humour and compassion which the article lacks” (Lodge 190). Given Lodge’s analysis one can conclude that the novel, as a medium for expression, enables Waugh to provide a more in-depth portrait of the Bright Young Things than a newspaper or magazine article would allow. This makes his exploration of their lifestyle more profound and his satire more biting.

A similar argument could be made for Waugh’s depiction of the newspaper. There are number of clear connections between Waugh’s numerous articles about the
press and his novels. For example, in a comedic piece written in 1929, Waugh encourages young reporters to fabricate information as a way of satisfying their editors' whims (Waugh “Complete Journalist” 47). This is the underlying principle driving Waugh’s fictional reporters including William Boot and Simon Balcairn. Yet, like Waugh’s discussion of the younger generation, his articles about the press were short pieces that did not allow him to go into great detail about his subjects. Within his novels, however, Waugh pushes his satire further, transforming his gags about journalists and newsrooms into extensive satires of the business as a whole. The novels enable Waugh to illustrate how the press works on multiple levels, including the daily newspaper’s impact on readers, the inner-workings of the business side of the news, and the interaction between the press and its subjects.

_Brideshead Revisited_ becomes an even more powerful medium for Waugh’s explorations of the newspaper. Within the novel, he reveals that the newspaper is unable to encompass complex subjects like religion and the slow decline of the British aristocracy. The very nature of this critique implies that Waugh understood the limitations of print news as a means of conveying information. In Waugh’s view, just because newspapers are technologically capable of delivering news and information in a timely manner, does not mean that they are providing accurate information. His depictions of the press ultimately lead one to question whether easy access to information is worth the potential pitfalls that accompany rapid-fire news. And, in a larger context, Waugh’s vision of the newspaper enables us to question whether the so-called gains ushered in by the modern age, including – but certainly not limited to – more timely news, are worth the negative consequences that modernity inevitably brings.
Another systemic problem with the newspaper is that articles can be quickly disposed of and forgotten, as in *Scoop* when “Mrs. Stitch folded the paper and tossed it over her shoulder into the back seat” (*Scoop* 9). A novel, however, stands a better chance of being preserved. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh parallels the lasting influence of novels with an analogy to the art world by describing how Charles Ryder gains great success by anthologizing his paintings into a series of books. Ryder’s specialty is capturing British country mansions: “I was called to all parts of the country to make portraits of houses that were soon to be deserted or debased; indeed, my arrival seemed often to be only a few paces ahead of the auctioneer’s” (*Brideshead* 216). By cataloguing these paintings into books, Ryder ensures that memories of the golden age of British country houses, as well as his own work, will live on. Perhaps Waugh, like Ryder, knew that his novels would preserve a period of history, and wrote them as accordingly.

One historian, Peter Clarke, actually treats Waugh’s novels as historical artifacts. In his work, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990*, Clarke refers to a number of Waugh’s novels to show how they embody certain trends. For example, Clarke cites Waugh’s depictions of the modernization of the city of Oxford in *Brideshead Revisited* (Clarke 178). Additionally, Clarke notes how *Decline and Fall* encapsulates the spirit of early 20th century boarding school mismanagement and how Waugh’s novel *Put Out More Flags* provides an accurate depiction of British society the early 1940s (Clarke 192, 286). Waugh’s novels might have been fictional, but Clarke’s decision to use them for historical purposes shows that they offer a keen insight into Britain’s past.

Clarke does not discuss Waugh’s analysis of journalism. But one can argue that Waugh’s efforts to parody, ridicule, and criticize the newspaper industry result in a
distinct portrait of the British newspaper business from the 1920s through the 1940s. Such a depiction is especially useful since British journalism from that period has come to be regarded with the same enthusiasm for days-gone-by that Waugh held for pre-World War I Britain. Simon Jenkins notes that in the latter part of the 20th century there was a strong sense of nostalgia for Fleet Street’s golden age (Jenkins 10). As people long for this idealized past, Waugh’s novels serve as a sobering reminder that in its heyday Fleet Street’s newspapers were far from perfect. The fabled publications had the propensity to invent news stories, crush the souls of their employees, and misconstrue the very nature of the society they were charged with covering. By writing about Fleet Street in his novels, Waugh ensured that this chapter of British newspaper history would live on in some form long after readers crumbled up their papers and tossed them aside. Waugh even managed to get in a number of jokes about the industry along the way, which may have been his intention all along.
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