EVELYN WAUGH’S (1903–1966) novels *Black Mischief* (1932) and *Scoop* (1938) are intimately related with the writer’s travel books *Remote People* (1931) and *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936) that draw from his experience as a correspondent in Ethiopia. *Remote People* includes a report of Emperor Haile Selassie’s coronation in Addis Ababa in November 1930, commissioned by *The Times*, while *Waugh in Abyssinia* was the outcome of Waugh’s work as a war correspondent for the *Daily Mail*, when he was covering the Italo-Ethiopian war from August to December 1935 and the Italian occupation of Addis Ababa in August 1936. *Black Mischief*, written soon after Waugh’s first visit to Ethiopia, is set in an imaginary East African island state called Azania. The events of *Scoop*, in turn, take place in the fictional East African country of Ishmaelia, which is also embroiled in civil war.

The many correspondences between Waugh’s African travel books and the novels have been thoroughly investigated in biographies and criticism.

1. Twelve dispatches appeared in *The Times* between October 27 and November 13, 1930. Waugh also published three articles about his travel in *The Graphic*, and five dispatches appeared in the *Daily Express* between October 29 and November 6 (Gallagher 1983, 110). Sections of chapters from *Waugh in Abyssinia* were also published in the *English Review*.

2. In English-language historical contexts, and in Waugh’s writings, Ethiopia was commonly called “Abyssinia” and its inhabitants “Abyssinians.” This study uses the terms Ethiopia and Ethiopians except in quotations or summary where the use is Waugh’s. The choice of the terms is similar, for instance, to Salwen’s (2001b, 161).
that have shown how Waugh’s fiction uses and transforms the facts of his travel experience (Salwen 2001a, 2001b; Stannard 1986, 301–4, 470–75). In what follows, I will pose the question of the relation between Waugh’s travel writing and fiction from the opposite direction: in what sense was fiction also a source of information, and even a kind of conceptual model, for Waugh’s travel books and reportages? How, further, are the novels and travel writing also significantly different from each other? Furthermore, I work from the assumption that Waugh’s writings about real and imaginary East African spaces reveal a symptomatic image of Africa, common to all of his writings across the generic divide. By this I mean the projection of Ethiopia, and East Africa, as a unique space of potentiality and possible worlds, and a source of endless comic or absurd juxtapositions of cultural incongruity. Waugh refers to such juxtapositions in Remote People, for instance, as the “unique stage of the interpenetration” of Ethiopian and European cultures (2003, 212), and as a “system of life in a tangle of modernism and barbarity,” consisting of a unique blend of European, American, and African cultural elements (2003, 220).

To answer these questions, and so as to make some progress toward a fuller characterization of the complex relation between travel writing and the novel in Waugh’s work, I will read his African fiction and nonfiction side by side without privileging either side of the comparison. Before going any further, however, it must be noted that it is difficult and perhaps impossible to classify Waugh in Abyssinia within one nonfiction category. In Waugh in Abyssinia, unlike in Remote People, Waugh clearly attempted to influence public opinion, especially in the last two chapters, to become more favorable toward Italian intervention in Ethiopia. The first chapter of the book, moreover, focuses on the history of Ethiopia and colonialism in Africa without describing the author’s travel. Given the political tendentiousness, and the relative distance of the perspective from the travel experience in the book’s beginning and end, Waugh in Abyssinia is much less clearly a travel book than Remote People. Waugh’s descriptions and observations are, furthermore, based on two separate visits to Ethiopia. This is reflected in the book’s outline as well, chapters two to five describing the situation before and during the opening stages of the war in the fall of 1935, and chapters six and seven concentrating on the situation after the war in occupied Addis Ababa in August 1936. Yet, simultaneously, the main body of the book, from the second to the fifth chapter, is structured around the writer’s travel experience in Addis Ababa and elsewhere in Ethiopia. This is similar to Remote People where the perspective consistently follows the traveller’s movements and observations through Ethiopia, Aden, Zanzibar, Kenya, and the Congo. Waugh in
Abyssinia can thus be classified as a hybrid text between travel writing and a journalistic-political tract and, as such, it stands out among the other examples of travel writing included here.3

**Motivation for Travel**

In his travel books, Waugh often made it clear to the reader that his descriptions were not pure mimesis but shaped by his subjective vision and other travellers’ descriptions. Typically, Waugh self-consciously stressed his lack of knowledge and innocence about the destination in the beginning of his travel account. In his first travelogue, *Labels: A Mediterranean Journal* (1930), the writer claims that “I did not really know where I was going, so, when anyone asked me, I said to Russia. Thus my trip started, like an autobiography, upon a rather nicely qualified basis of falsehood and self-gloration” ([2003, 7]). In *Remote People*, Waugh explains that six weeks prior to the journey he had barely heard of the name Ras Tafari (to be called Haile Selassie upon his ascension to the status of an emperor).

Escape and the thrill of estrangement were a strong, if not the main motivation for Waugh’s travels. The writer explains in his article “Travel—and Escape from Your Friends” in the *Daily Mail* in January 1933 that

I do not wish to pretend that we travellers are in a perpetual state of high courage, being ambushed by cannibals, pounced by lions, hissed at by snakes, but that as soon as one leaves the ordinary highways of civilization there is a certain agreeable sense of danger never very far away. (Gallagher 1983, 133)

In *Ninety-Two Days* (1934), where Waugh describes his travels in British Guiana and Brazil in 1932, he writes in the same spirit, emphasizing the vividness of the travel experience, which is also a source of inspiration for his writing:

---

3. Salwen (2001a) goes so far as to claim that it would be incorrect to describe *Waugh in Abyssinia* as a travel book, even if a segment of the book had been included in the first edited collection of his travel writings (*When the Going Was Good*, 1943). Salwen tries to justify the claim by stating that Waugh was not an “insouciant travel writer” when he wrote the book, but a war correspondent. I would hesitate to make such a strict distinction between the genres, however, and instead would characterize the book as a generic hybrid between travel writing and war journalism. *Waugh in Abyssinia* describes various episodes of actual travel and largely consists of material that was not published in newspapers. The book has also been included in a collection of Waugh’s travel writing in Everyman’s Library (2003).
One does not travel, any more than one falls in love, to collect material. It is simply part of one's life. Some writers have a devotion for rural England; they settle in Sussex, identify themselves with the village, the farm, and the hedgerow and, inevitably, they write about it; others move into high society; for myself and many better than me, there is a fascination in distant and barbarous places, and particularly in the borderlands of conflicting cultures and states of development, where ideas, uprooted from their traditions, become oddly changed in their transplantation. It is there that I find the experiences vivid enough to demand translation into literary form. (2003, 379)

Likewise, the central characters in *Black Mischief* and *Scoop*, Basil Seal and John Courteney Boot, are motivated to travel to Azania and Ishmaelia, of which they hardly know anything, simply out of the promise of adventure in a distant location—a sense of adventure created by a similar expectation of oddly transformed ideas and experiences—and boredom with their everyday life in London. These travellers' self-conscious naiveté, just like Waugh's own cultivated and controlled desire for estrangement, is then contrasted over the course of their journey with the reputation of the place and the other travellers' hackneyed notions. As to the choice of the title *Labels*, Waugh explains that it also stems from the sense of the traveller's belatedness:

I have called this book *Labels* for the reason that all the places I visited on this trip are already fully labelled. I was no adventurer of the sort who can write books with such names as *Off the Beaten Track in Surrey* or *Plunges into Unknown Herts*. I suppose there is no track quite so soundly beaten as the Mediterranean seaboard; no towns so constantly and completely overrun with tourists as those I intend to describe. (2003, 13)

What appears, thus, interesting to Waugh is the reputation of the famous destinations, in contrast with his own experiences, impressions, and interpretation that gradually disqualify this reputation. Waugh's tone is mockingly sensitive when he discusses in *Labels* the thick layer of descriptions that some places, like Paris, have attracted over time. He argues that the “overwhelming variety” of reputations, and fictions, has made the historical French city almost fade away:

The fiction of Paris, conceived by Hollywood and the popular imagination, seems yearly to impose its identity more and more as the real city of Richelieu and Napoleon and Verlaine fades into the distance. This fictitious city expresses itself in dress parades, studios, and night clubs. (2003, 14)
Waugh makes a point, then, about having missed the authentic experience of Paris, and the difficulty of finding a topic “about which one can get down one's seventy thousand words without obvious plagiarism” (2003, 15). Yet, at the same time, his travel books convey the sense that, despite all disappointments, deception and false reputation, the challenge of finding a new ironic angle on travel experience and the famous places are worth the effort.

The self-consciousness in which Waugh implicates himself in his text is a central element in the early travel books. What was important for Waugh in travel writing at this time, as he makes clear in an approving reference to Gide's *Voyage au Congo* (Gallagher 1983, 129), was the opportunity to present the writer's personality, not his material or the destination. Valentine Cunningham has made the important observation that Waugh's self-conscious, self-mirroring travel writings, including his text-side chats with the reader, blend “into those few moments in his fiction that are, formally speaking, more obviously serious disruptions of traditional narrative's claims on realism” (1989, 393). Such disruptions in his novels include, for instance, the narrator's reflections on the nature of Paul Pennyfeather's existence in Waugh's first novel *Decline and Fall* (1928). Further, in his early travel writing, Waugh does not look back in nostalgia, but may be even fascinated, in his self-ironic way, by the lack of authenticity, such as various aspects of modern “fictitious” Paris, involving the “inscrutable” world of fashion and women's clothing. In his last African travel book, *A Tourist in Africa* (1960), similarly, Waugh seems to enjoy the layered legends, and the false reputation, of certain African attractions, and the provocative clash between the ancient and the modern that these attractions evoke in his mind. While in Aden, he explains that

Most of the passengers drove off to see the water-tanks ascribed to King Solomon. In a thousand years' time, will Central African guides show tourists the mighty ruins of the Kariba dam as one of the works of Solomon? I wish I could think so. (2003, 972)

Again, as so often in reading Waugh, the reader faces the difficulty of knowing the extent and the direction of the writer's irony. What if anything is Waugh mocking when he explains that he wishes to think that future guides will attribute the ruins of a modern dam to King Solomon? The irony is potentially directed toward the other passengers, but also the whole culture of tourism, our feeble sense of history and, further, the traveller himself, who is keenly “looking for remembered landmarks and finding none” (2003, 972).

---

Waugh’s dilemma as a travel writer consists, therefore, not so much in knowing whether the space in question blocks in advance interpretative passage due to the traveller’s belatedness—since this blockage is taken as a given, and sometimes even an inspiration for his writing—but knowing what exactly the traveller makes of this blockage: how effectively, and by which means, the writer can manipulate the legends, stories, and reputations of places for his own purposes.

Paul Fussell has suggested that Waugh’s dilemma in *Labels*, with regard to the Mediterranean locales that were already fully labelled, was the need to “disclose the odd in the familiar, that is, to spot anomalies” (1980, 178–79). In other words, the emphasis on the strange and the anomalous in much-travelled Mediterranean places functioned for Waugh as a means by which he could differentiate himself from previous travelling writers and their accounts. In Waugh’s East African travel books, the traveller’s sensitivity to the strange, the absurd and the incongruous around him is the writer’s central focus. However, the strangeness that he associates with Ethiopia is quite different in quality from his strange experiences in the Mediterranean. This may in part be because the Ethiopian places and the people were not at all familiar to Waugh or his readers, but also because he kept on perceiving and finding unexpected blends of the familiar (European, English, colonial) and the unfamiliar (African, primitive, the archaic).

**Fiction in Waugh’s Travel Writing**

With regard to *Remote People* and *Waugh in Abyssinia*, the question of the discrepancy between the object of description, the East African realities, and the traveller’s expectations is perhaps even more significant than in *Labels*. Despite the writer’s seeming seriousness in wanting to tell accurately about Haile Selassie’s coronation or the East African political situation, Waugh’s African travel books from the 1930s foreground the paradox of the subjective viewpoint, thus exploring the gap between expectations, reputation, and the reality of a foreign place. Waugh pays much attention in these books to the foreign, which appears to him strangely familiar, and to any odd blends of the ancient and the modern, the primitive and the civilized, splendor and banality. In *Remote People*, while visiting the British settlement in Kenya, for instance, he conveys the impression that the real Africa is somewhere else: “In Kenya it is easy to forget that one is in Africa; then one is reminded of it suddenly, and the awakening is agreeable” (2003, 332). The appeal of such moments for Waugh stems from a complex interplay between the familiar and
the strange, involving the transplantation of the West in the African setting on the one hand, and the African interruptions in this transplanted Western presence on the other. At one point in Kenya, Waugh was sitting with a group of settlers on a terrace, drinking cocktails and listening to a gramophone—“all very much like the South of France” (2003, 332)—when suddenly a Kikuyu woman and her son “came lolloping over the lawn” asking for a pill for her son’s pain. While this African “intrusion” has elements of the comical and stereotypical (the lolloping of the Kikuyu woman), Waugh’s rendition of the event emphasized its absurdity and enabled the writer, once again, to make comparisons with England. Waugh concludes that the Kikuyu passion for pills is only equalled by similar passions in English Bohemia or the way Europeans might beg for sixpences. England remains always the touchstone in Waugh’s impressions of strangely altered forms of life.

Waugh also sometimes highlights the gap between expectation and East African realities by a reference to fictional worlds and creates, thus, an effect of superimposed worlds of fact and fiction. Especially in the Ethiopian section of Remote People, the writer conjures up absurd juxtapositions that reveal a heterogeneous and nearly fantastic reality. In a central, opening description of the Emperor’s coronation in Addis Ababa, Waugh resorts to fiction as the only possible means of access to the reality around him:

In fact, it is to Alice in Wonderland that my thoughts recur in seeking some historical parallel for life in Addis Ababa. There are others: Israel in the time of Saul, the Scotland of Shakespeare’s Macbeth, the Sublime Porte as one sees it revealed in the dispatches of the late eighteenth century, but it is in Alice only that one finds the peculiar flavour of galvanised and translated reality, where animals carry watches in their waistcoat pockets, royalty paces the croquet lawn beside the chief executioner, and litigation ends in a flutter of playing-cards. How to recapture, how retail, the crazy enchantment of these Ethiopian days? (2003, 200)

His observations prompt the writer to formulate a notion of a translated reality, where fact and fiction become ever more intertwined. Attempting to find historical parallels to the coronation ceremonies and the new town of Addis Ababa, where nothing “appears to be really finished” (2003, 200), Waugh’s description thus turns to fiction as the most, and possibly only, accurate point of comparison, becoming itself hyperbolic by way of the imaginary, with the help of the fantastic. The difficulty in closing the gap between the demands of description and the world even leads Waugh to suggest a new definition for reality: reality as the translated reality of metamorphoses, mixed forms, and
strange juxtapositions, or the galvanized reality, that is, a reality stimulated to action by administering a shock.

For Waugh, there is a specific kind of appeal in the Alice-like Addis Ababa with its systematic lack of regularity, punctuality, and logic: “In Addis Ababa everything was haphazard and incongruous; one learned always to expect the unusual and yet was always surprised” (2003, 228). The surprise effects in Waugh’s East African reportages, and particularly the peculiar flavor of the “preposterous Alice in Wonderland fortnight” (2003, 199) during the Emperor’s coronation, are to a large extent inspired by the charm and potentiality that he found in the strange blends between the ancient and the modern, the European and the African:

After all, there really was something there to report that was quite new to the European public; a succession of events of startling spectacular character, and a system of life, in a tangle of modernism and barbarity, European, African, and American, of definite, individual character. (2003, 220)

At the end of the chapters that portray the Emperor’s coronation in Remote People, as well as in one of his dispatches that appeared in The Times in December 1930, Waugh summarized what seemed to him the most typical characteristic of these ceremonies, that is, their “absurdity.” Late one evening when he was returning to his hotel in Addis Ababa, he found that the insight of profound absurdity was affirmed as he noticed “on one side the primitive song of unfathomable antiquity; on the other, the preposterously dressed European, with a stockade between them” (Gallagher 1983, 118; see also Waugh 2003, 232). The European here was Waugh himself, dressed in evening clothes and white gloves and, what he calls the absurd white tie and tall hat of civilization. The “primitive,” then, was the wakeful Ethiopian party in one of the “native huts” close to his hotel, and their monotonous music, drumming, and clapping. The modern and the primitive are thus, again, juxtaposed in Waugh’s mind and a strange affinity is forged between the two. Waugh was, after all, returning from a party at one of the legations only to witness yet another party. At the same time, Waugh caricatures himself as an absurd figure in his own right, ridiculously removed from his proper context.

It is important to note, further, that the references to the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, made both in Remote People and in Waugh’s Diary entries from the end of 1930, tie the fictional and the factual together. The story of the romantic figure of the gun-runner poet Arthur Rimbaud’s life in Harar, in Ethiopia, structures Waugh’s experience in this town around a wish to find new information on the poet. Yet, here again, the passage reveals a wide
schism between the traveller’s expectations and the reality of the travel experience, and one that Waugh does not fail to exploit. The description of his inquiries into Rimbaud while meeting with the famous Monsignor Jerome, the Bishop of Harar, is marked by self-irony. Hoping to find some new details on the poet’s life—“perhaps even to encounter a half-caste son keeping a shop in some back street” (2003, 261)—Waugh insisted on posing questions to Monsignor Jerome who allegedly knew the poet. The irony is that in their interview in French, Monsignor Jerome confuses Waugh’s “poète” for “prêtre” and maintains for a long time that no Father Rimbaud had ever ministered in Ethiopia. Later, the confusion is cleared up, but the information that Waugh received was a disappointment. Monsignor Jerome shared his memories of the poet’s seriousness, sadness, and life with a woman from Tigre, but, as Waugh is keen to note, those memories were of no great significance (“It was rather a disappointing interview”; 2003, 261).

The discrepancy between reputation and Waugh’s experience of reality, and the blends between the primitive and the modern, on which he focused during his visits in Ethiopia, was in part dependent on two mediating sources of misinformation: Haile Selassie’s propaganda efforts, specifically the Emperor’s ongoing project to modernize the country, and the Western journalists and their practices, in particular their battle for scoops. On the one hand, as Waugh saw it, the Emperor had been at pains to impress foreign visitors as the natural ruler of a powerful, organized, modern state, and his own countrymen as an absolute monarch. Most of the modernizing project, however, was clearly unfinished and unconvincing. In reality, Addis Ababa was still, as Waugh reports, in a rudimentary stage of construction with half-finished buildings at every corner. On the other hand, the journalists who were covering the coronation, and later the Italo-Ethiopian war that Waugh covered as a war journalist, created a kind of parallel world of their own, a form of reality, or a blend of reality and invention, transformed into news.

A similar clash between the primitive and the modern is a central theme in *Black Mischief*. In this novel, the Azanian Emperor Amurath has just died and his grandson Seth, who has a bachelor’s degree from Oxford, has returned from Europe to claim the small East African Empire. Seth, inspired by the technological progress and modern lifestyle of the West, but also by the socialism of the Soviet Union, is determined to fight what he sees as the barbarism of his country, be that the use of traditional languages or the lack of communal physical exercises. Seth’s honorary title also dramatizes the para-

5. Rimbaud’s legend is also a potential source of parody in Waugh’s fiction. In *Scoop*, we learn that the writer John Courteney Boot began his career with a life of Rimbaud (2000a, 5).
doxical blend of savagery and modern society: “Emperor of Azania, Chief of Chiefs of Sakuyu, Lord of Wanda, and Tyrant of the Seas, Bachelor of the Arts of Oxford University” (Waugh 1960, 9). Seth’s efforts in modernization, including the military, school system, birth control, and many other institutions and areas of social life, are futile and unfortunate, however. What highlights the futility of Seth’s idealistic projects further is that he suffers a nervous breakdown amidst the chaotic situation of misguided social reform and the ongoing civil war:

The earnest and rather puzzled young man became suddenly capricious and volatile; ideas bubbled up within him, bearing to the surface a confused sediment of phrase and theory, scraps of learning half understood and fantastically translated. (Waugh 1960, 195)

Seth is clearly reminiscent of Waugh’s caricature of Haile Selassie and his unstable empire in *Remote People* but, at the same time, just like all characters in this novel, he is a self-consciously made composite character. Seth is also a satirical caricature with little psychological depth.

Furthermore, as Waugh writes in *Remote People*, the international world of reporters and colonialists “jumbled together” in this “rich African setting” (2003, 228), contributed to the sense of ceaseless, and sometimes absurd, translations of meaning, reality, and truth. The journalists and photographers in Addis Ababa, as Waugh reports in *Waugh in Abyssinia*, “showed almost every diversity which the human species produces” (2003, 625). Both in *Remote People* and *Waugh in Abyssinia*, much of Waugh’s attention is directed at the other Western travellers, officials, diplomats, settlers, and journalists and their views and fabrications. The driving question that Waugh repeats in the beginning of *Remote People* is “Why all the fuss?” pointing to his puzzlement over the justification for the sudden international press interest in Haile Selassie’s coronation. In the rest of the travel account, unable to fully answer this question, Waugh describes the many fabrications of the Western press. The Associated Press, for instance, as Waugh claims, turned the Emperor’s nighttime ride from his palace to the church, which in reality had a minimum of display, into a spectacular event at dawn, during which scores of natives were supposedly “trampled in the dust” (2003, 217). The reason for such inventions was, as Waugh argues, that the London newspapers, to win the battle for scoops, preferred any “incomplete, inaccurate, and insignificant report” of

---

6. Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, had the titles King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Elect of God, and Power of the Trinity.
an event, “provided that it came in time for an earlier edition than its rivals” (2003, 218).

In Waugh in Abyssinia, Waugh’s criticism of journalism is even more biting, and he points out how the pressure to produce news from Ethiopia regularly forced writers to combine fantastic rumor and trivial gossip with “here and there embedded, a few facts of genuine personal observation” (2003, 631). Waugh gave much space both in Waugh in Abyssinia and Scoop to portray the manipulation of reality as news, not by discovering new realities but by inventing materials. Both the travel book and the novel point out how news may be made by carefully manipulating the frames of reference and reception, that is, by giving them credence as historical facts, regardless of their truth value. All statements of fact may thus imply a re-elaboration, as with the hermetic language of radiograms that was used by the journalists in Addis Ababa, and that creates its own model for a world of reference, as is made explicit in the many hilarious exchanges of telegrams in Scoop. Consequently, the empirical argument concerning that which has actually happened is exposed as inadequate, even as absurd, when the hunger for news scoops about the Italo-Ethiopian war overrides the principles of veracity and accuracy. Similar satire is found in Waugh’s short story “Incident in Azania” (1932), where an anonymous “star journalist,” who has the habit of writing his news stories in advance, based on what he expects to happen, gets involved in a rescue operation concerning a supposedly kidnapped young English woman. The journalist finds out that the “journey was in all respects totally unlike his narrative” (2000, 106).

However, to focus on the illusions and fabrications of reality, or references to fictional worlds like Alice in Wonderland, does not necessarily “fictionalize” Waugh’s travel writing, that is, make it any more fictional. The Alice reference functions, to a large extent, in the same way as the nonfiction that Waugh read or recalled in his mind while travelling. For instance, the travel literature with which Waugh was familiar served him as a point of comparison that justified to him or, perhaps more importantly, failed to justify to him the reputation of a place, and gave practical hints about when and where to travel, what to avoid, or how to focus one’s attention. On various occasions during the journey, travel literature, legends, and fiction alike enabled the writer to position himself and his writing in relation to earlier interpretations. Potentially, the readings also suggested a way to close the gap between the expectations that he had before the journey, involving for instance ideas

---

7. See Salwen 2001a and 2001b for Waugh’s journalism criticism, and the correspondences between Scoop and actual news coverage in Ethiopia during the Italo-Ethiopian war.
Figure 3. Map of East Africa, showing the places that Evelyn Waugh visited between October 1930 and March 1931 (© 2003 Everyman's Library).
of astonishing Ethiopian glamor (2003, 187), and the less glamorous reality. The many graphic descriptions of the train journey between Djibouti and Addis Ababa, with which Waugh familiarized himself on his way to Ethiopia, function literally in this way, giving him useful advice as to when to get on the train and what to expect from the journey. Waugh's own description of the same journey seems not to invalidate the earlier descriptions, the anonymous “many” books that he had read between West Meath and Marseille, but rather gives added value to remarks about the trains’ frequent failures and parts of the line getting washed away, or the “primarily homicidal” interests of the Galla and the Danakil, who live in this region (2003, 194). Later, after the coronation, when Waugh visited the Ethiopian town of Harar, Richard Burton's *First Footsteps in East Africa or, An Exploration of Harar* (1856), stood out as his main reference (2003, 252, 257; 1976, 337). Burton's descriptions of the marketplace, and the beautiful women of Harar, and his drawings of the town from the side of the Somali coast, helped Waugh to frame his observations of what he calls the unique spectacle of a Moslem city also in *Waugh in Abyssinia*, but also to differentiate his impressions from the more glamorous associations of his predecessor. Waugh respected the distinction between nonfiction and fiction, for instance, in his few direct references to the act of writing. In *Remote People* and *Waugh in Abyssinia*, he emphasizes on a few occasions that he was travelling so as to write, that is, in order to write and publish a travel book. One such instance occurs when Waugh explains near the end of his travel in *Remote People* that to fight boredom aboard the boat *Prince Leopold* that was taking him from Kabalo to Bukama in the Congo, he ground out the first two chapters of the travel book (2003, 357). However, Waugh never mentions in *Remote People* or *Waugh in Abyssinia* that the events of his travels or his observations might end up in fiction. In his private correspondence, the matter is quite different. Waugh speaks of fiction-writing openly, for instance, in a letter to Catherine and Arthur Waugh, dated November 16, 1930 in Dire Dawa, where he explains that he has the plot “of a first-rate novel” (1980, 51). Five years later in Addis Ababa, in a letter to Laura Herbert, dated in October 1935, Waugh explains that, despite the circumstances that forced him to stay put in the town for several days, “all this will make a funny novel so it isn’t wasted” (1980, 100). The letters thus suggest that while Waugh wished to keep his fiction-writing ideas away from his travel writing, and thus respect the distinction between the genres, the processes of writing in these two genres, a travelogue and a novel, were perhaps not so far apart as it may seem.

However, while the distinction between Waugh’s African travel fact and fiction remains relatively intact, accuracy and adequacy in description is
always at issue in Waugh’s travel writing. The emphasis on the traveller’s subjective experience is not only manifest in the importance that Waugh gives to his reactions to various layers of interpretation and reputation, including the fabrications of the Ethiopian government or Western reporters, but also in the undermining of other travel writing. These adjustments, including disappointments, surprises, and correctives, reenact the author’s consciousness that is trying to capture some here and now of actual East African reality. For instance, in *Waugh in Abyssinia*, the example of Burton’s *First Footsteps in East Africa* helped Waugh to position himself in relation to contemporary colonial politics in Ethiopia. Here Waugh explains that Burton’s support for English interference in the region in the nineteenth century affected his description of the people of Harar to the extent that he tended to portray them as vicious and tyrannical. Waugh explains that Burton’s description was “no doubt somewhat modified by his [Burton’s] desire to make out a good case for interference” (2003, 607). Similarly, Waugh himself could not avoid being caught up in the politics of the 1930s Ethiopia and the question of Western intervention. While speaking for the Hararis, Waugh’s criticism of the Ethiopian government, including its authoritarianism, propaganda, and military involvement in the town, is motivated by an attempt to justify the approaching Italian intervention.

The way in which the *Alice* reference differs, however, from the travelogues and legends that structure Waugh’s travel writing, is the sense of extended possibility and the potentiality of a fictional world. This potential in fiction suggests a kind of model for the absurd juxtapositions and the metamorphosis of space and time that the writer was trying to capture. What is also quite specific in the *Alice* reference is that it enables Waugh to rethink the category of reality in terms of the notion of a translated or galvanized reality, or of many intertwined realities reacting to each other.

**The Superimposed Worlds in Fiction**

The same idea of many superimposed worlds and their transformed realities emerges strongly in Waugh’s African novels. Consider, for instance, how in *Black Mischief* Waugh appropriated the ancient name Azania that had been used in relation to various parts of sub-Saharan Africa since the Roman times, including for instance the East African coast in “The Periplus

---

8. A possible world, if we take this notion to mean constructs of the mind concerning possible worlds and the grounds of their possibility (Ryan 1991, 19), could be another way to describe this principle of potentiality.
of the Erythraean Sea” (A.D. 60). In Waugh’s version, the name resonates with the sound elements of Abyssinia and Zanzibar, fusing these two together. Another explicit reference is to Cunard liners like Aurania, Alba-nia, or Alunia, and, closest of them all, Ascania. The allusion to Cunard ships surfaces in the novel when some anonymous Londoner who, having just heard the name, remarks “Azania? It sounds like a Cunarder to me” (1960, 86). The composite structure of Waugh’s Azania includes, further, the enclosed world of Western colonials, diplomats, and adventurers, and the enlightened Emperor Seth’s imitation of Western institutions—all of whom are somewhat detached from the realities of their actual (textual) world, as if they were travelling on a cruise ship or living out their own fantasies of possibility.

Onto the Azanian geographical microcosm are also projected other isolated spaces and zones. The impression of many superimposed worlds emerges again in the novel’s ending where Gilbert and Sullivan’s popular comic opera The Mikado (1885) is heard played by a gramophone in the Portuguese Fort in the coastal town of Matodi. The fragments from the two songs “Three Little Maids From School Are We” and “Willow, tit-willow” (or “On a tree by a river”) function here as a structuring device, providing the narrative with a sense of closure, while they also emphasize the hilarious absurdity of Seth’s imperial commands, modernising mission, and planned economy. The songs ring clear, as the narrator explains, over the silent city, the harbor and the water that softly laps against the sea-wall of the port. The Azanian city is quiet since, according to new “modern” regulations, the stray dogs have been killed and all restaurants have to close before ten-thirty. The last song from The Mikado that is quoted, “Willow, tit-willow,” is sung in the comic opera by a character called Ko-Ko,10 who is the lord executioner of Titipu, to an elderly lady called Katisha:

On a tree by a river a little tom-tit
Sang “Willow, tit-willow, tit-willow!”
And I said to him, “Dicky bird, why do you sit
Singing Willow, tit-willow, tit-willow?”
“Is it weakness of intellect, birdie?” I cried,

9. In Roman times, the name Azania referred to an area of the Southeast African coast south of the Horn of Africa. A later imaginary projection onto Azania is the interest of some leaders of the South African political organization Pan-African Congress (PAC) who, familiar with Waugh’s novel, wanted to use “Azania” to rename South Africa in the 1960s.

10. Many of the names in the opera, for instance, such as Yum-Yum, Nanki-Poo, or Titipu are not Japanese at all but perfectly understandable as English “baby talk.”
“Or a rather tough worm in your little inside?”
With a shake of his poor little head, he replied,
“Oh, willow, tit-willow, tit-willow!” (1960, 311)

At this point in the opera, Katisha has rebuffed Ko-Ko who begs her hand in marriage. Incorporated at the end of Waugh’s novel, however, the reference to *The Mikado*, and the scene describing Katisha’s initial indifference and Ko-Ko’s desperate insistence to repeat the question, can be given different meanings. The song is a possible parable for the events in the novel in that it is perhaps similarly meaningless or even absurd, to ask why a bird would sit and sing, as it is to pretend to modernize a country like Azania. As unchangeable as Azania, the bird simply sings by pure instinct, because singing is in its nature. At the same time, however, this scene of Katisha’s deception is a pivotal scene at the end of the opera. The speaking and feeling bird is Ko-Ko’s desperate fabrication to save himself, by way of marriage to Katisha, from the execution that the Emperor has ordered. The bird’s words and feelings are Ko-Ko’s words and feelings, not because he is in love with Katisha, but to the extent that Ko-Ko is certain of his death if Katisha remains “callous and obdurate.”

Through *The Mikado*, further, an imaginary Japan is superimposed on Azania. As Azania is loosely connected with Abyssinia and Zanzibar, the romance of *The Mikado*, set in Japan, does not try to be very authentic in its presentation of Japanese culture. It might have been of interest to Waugh that the imaginary Japan in *The Mikado*, which is ruled by strange laws and royal commands, allowed Gilbert to freely satirize English politics and institutions by disguising them as Japanese. The invention of Azania enabled Waugh, in turn, to poke fun at the colonial administration, the civilizing mission in Africa, and travelling snobs such as Basil Seal, who are on the lookout for an authentic adventure and primitive culture in the tropics.

The drawn map of the Azanian Empire included in the beginning of *Black Mischief*, mimicking the cartographic impulse of travel writing, where maps are placed in the beginning of the book, functions as another model of a porous reference world. Here, the map’s simplicity may remind us of maps of utopian islands and fantastic worlds. The Azanian island that is shown in the map is relatively large in size in comparison to the Italian Somaliland that Azania faces across the Sakuyu channel—“Sakuyu” being a name for a local tribe (like Kikuyu) but also another possible reference to Japan. The empire includes only a few towns, most importantly the coastal town of Matodi and the new capital Dire Dawa, a monastery, one railway, a jungle called Wanda, some swampland, and hills. The name Debra-Dowa is obviously close to the
Figure 4. Fictional map from *Black Mischief* by Evelyn Waugh. (Copyright © 1932 by Evelyn Waugh. By permission of Little, Brown, and Company. All rights reserved.)
Ethiopian town of Dire Dawa (or “Dirre Dowa” in Remote People) that was part of Waugh’s itinerary in 1930.

In Scoop, there is no graphic map of Ishmaelia, but the question over the “wildly deceptive map” of the country contributes, in a similar fashion, to the theme of a disorganized world of reference, suggesting a sense of profound deception in space and time. It is, for instance, told about the map of Ishmaelia that there is a place called Laku, which means “I don’t know” in the local language (Waugh 2000a, 99). This town was born at the very moment when it was drawn on a map: once when a member of a boundary commission that was on its way to Sudan asked one of their boys for the name of a nearby hill, they received “Laku” as an answer. “Laku” was then copied onto the map and all subsequent maps from then on. Later, the Ishmaelite president Jackson had Laku marked large in the maps since he wanted the country to look important on atlases (2000a, 99). In the fictional world of Scoop, further, in another absurd superimposition of space, some features of the contemporary Spanish Civil War, as well as the history of Liberia, have been transported into the caricature of Ishmaelia. Instead of Italian fascist troops and Ethiopians, the warring parties in this novel are local fascists (the whites) and communists (the reds), resembling the opposed forces of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), the Nationalists having close ideological ties with Nazi Germany while the Republicans were supported by the Soviet Union. At the same time, like the history of Liberia, the presidents and the ruling elite of the country have a past heritage as freed American slaves. The narrator tells us, for instance, that an African-American, or perhaps rather Americo-Ishmaelite, family, called Jackson, has been in power for so long that General Elections were called, according to the ruler’s name, “Jackson Gnomas” whenever they were held (2000a, 75). Finally, we may consider the name Ishmaelia that, through its various possible connotations, including Islam, the Hebrew Bible and Melville, also contributes to the sense of multiple worlds.

Waugh’s Model Traveller

The question of multiple intertwined worlds, and the effect of absurd spatial juxtapositions that characterize Waugh’s novels, may enable us to read some aspects of the author’s travel writing in a new light. By this I mean the question of potentiality and possible worlds that comes forth particularly in Remote People. In this respect it is relevant to refer to Waugh’s interest in Count Hermann Keyserling’s The Travel Diary of a Philosopher (Das Reisetagebuch eines Philosophen, 1919). Keyserling’s notion of the “impulse” that drove
him into the wide world was not curiosity for foreign places and cultures, but
the desire for self-realization through controlled estrangement:

I therefore begin my journey round the world. Europe has nothing more
to give me. Its life is too familiar to force my being to new developments.
Apart from this, it is too narrowly confined. The whole of Europe is essen-
tially of one spirit. I wish to go to latitudes where my life must become
quite different to make existence possible, where understanding neces-
sitates a radical renewal of one’s means of comprehension, latitudes where
I will be forced to forget that which up to now I knew and was as much as
possible. I want to let the climate of the tropics, the Indian mode of con-
sciousness, the Chinese code of life and many other factors, which I cannot
envisage in advance, work their spell upon me one after the other, and then
watch what will become of me. (1925, 16)11

Keyserling’s ideal travel journal was one that could be read like a novel. Key-
serling explained that despite The Travel Diary of a Philosopher being inspired
by the external stimulus of a journey round the world, and although the trav-
elogue contains various more or less objective descriptions of places, the book
represents, “nevertheless, an inwardly conceived and inwardly coherent work
of fiction, and only those who regard it as such will understand its real mean-
ing” (1925, 9).12

In Labels, Waugh self-consciously casts himself as a particular kind of trav-
eller: a detached figure who, happily nonchalant about the routes and destina-
tion of journey, simply wants to keep on moving and forget his whereabouts,
and to experience the potential in estrangement. Trying to avoid the pitfalls
and expectations of typical tourists, he travels so as to write. Waugh thus
positions himself in opposition to the tourist, especially when tourism means
haste and compulsion, or the ridiculous “machinery of the uplift” (2003, 38),
but also in opposition to the antimodern antitourist, meaning the travel snob

schon diese Welt, um meine Seele zu neuen Gestaltungen zu zwingen. Und dann ist sie an sich
auch zu beschränkt. Ganz Europa ist wesentlich eines Geistes. Ich will in Breiten hinaus, wo-
selbst mein Leben ganz anders werden muß, um zu bestehen, wo das Verständnis eine radikale
Erneuerung der Begriffsmittel verlangt, wo ich möglichst viel von dem vergessen muß, was
ich ehemal wußte und war. Ich will das Klima der Tropen, die indische Bewußtseinslage, die
chinesische Daseinsform und viele andere Momente, die ich gar nicht vorausberechnen kann,
umschichtig auf mich einwirken lassen und zusehen, was aus mir wird (Keyserling 1920, 7).

12. See also Fussell (1980, 177) who has suggested that Waugh’s wish in his travel writing to
do justice to the potentialities of subjective meaning and experience, and the inwardly coherent
work of fiction, rather than facts, is indebted to Keyserling’s philosophy of travel.
or the pretentious pilgrim who, as Waugh explains in reference to Hilaire Belloc and his *The Path to Rome* (1902), believes the world to be his oyster and finds “peculiar relish in discomfort” (2003, 36–37). Waugh also focused, self-critically, on the potential of travel experience to change his state of mind when he had just left for Ethiopia in October 1930 and writes in his *Diary*, in relation to other passengers on the ship, that “I become slightly hypocritical as soon as I am away from my own background, adopting an unfamiliar manner of speech and code of judgments” (2003, 330). In *Remote People*, much more than in his *Diary*, Waugh makes observations of his changing state of mind during travel, almost as much as he is interested in the behavior and intentions of his fellow travellers. In contrast, he has little to say about the potentiality of actual foreign ways of life or, for instance, what it might feel like to be an Ethiopian. Self-realization and self-estrangement is also a central theme in *Scoop*, which is structured around a series of crisscrossing, mistaken identities and *quid pro quo*: the horticulture writer William Boot is taken for his distant cousin, the fashionable novelist John Courteney Boot, and sent to cover the civil war in Ishmaelia, while John Boot is thought to be William Boot. In the same novel, a character called “Mr Baldwin,” who speaks many languages fluently, claims to be able to “dissemble one’s nationality” whenever necessary (2000a 174). In another substitution of identity, “Mr Baldwin” takes William Boot’s place and writes a news dispatch in Boot’s name to satisfy, as he claims, the expectations of the editors at home.

Yet, Waugh also portrays himself as a kind of tourist with a difference. Pleasure cruising, for instance, suggests to him a new system of travel, wholly dedicated to comfort and pleasure, without the haste and other negative aspects of tourism (2003, 38). Waugh’s position may be interpreted as an acceptance of what John Urry would call the posttourist version of the tourist gaze, by which he means a playful approval of inauthenticity, and the reproducibility of the travel experience. This involves a way of seeing that regards the institution of tourism as a kind of game with inauthenticity, or series of games that can be played for the sake of personal amusement (Urry 2002, 12).  

The provincial garden columnist William Boot in *Scoop*, who enters a “foreign and hostile world” whenever he has to leave his ancestral home (2000a 24), Boot Magna, and who has never been abroad before going to Ishmaelia, is the converse of all the hypocritical travellers, travel snobs and men of the world, whom Waugh portrays in his travel writing. In contrast, the

---

Armenian hotelkeeper in Harar called Bergebedgian, whom Waugh described fondly in Remote People, and his less likable and more egotistical double Mr. Krikor Youkoumian in Black Mischief, are men of the world that serve Waugh as another point of contrast in his self-portrait, or self-caricature as a traveler. For Waugh, Armenians like Bergebedgian are the only genuine men of the world, highly competent journeymen, who are tolerant, sociable, and have no scruples concerning race, creed, or morals (2003, 258). These enviable Armenians, as Waugh sees them, easily adjust to new situations and simply take advantage of them. Given his exceptional capability and energy to survive under any circumstances, this man of the world is perhaps comparable only to characters in fiction. Having described Bergebedgian at length, Waugh feels that

However I deplore it, I shall never in actual fact become a “hardboiled man of the world” of the kind I read about in the novels I sometimes obtain at bookstalls for short railway journeys; that I shall always be ill at ease with nine out of every ten people I meet. (2003, 267)

In Waugh's pessimistic view, men like himself, even if they sometimes may wish to picture themselves as having some of the same qualities as Bergebedgian, or envy their friends' cosmopolitanism, hospitality, and adaptability to diverse company, cannot cut themselves off from the most conventional prejudices. Waugh makes a case in his travel writing about the persistence of his identity, such as his unwillingness to fully adapt to the foreign environment. It may be, in fact, that he finds some forms of colonial life to be quite comfortable, particularly in the isolated settler communities in Port Said, Aden, and British Kenya, since these settler communities showcase to him a way of life that is scarcely different from Britain.

It is debatable how sympathetic the narrator is toward the character Youkoumian in Black Mischief. Youkoumian, the Armenian jack-of-all-trades in Debra-Dowa and later Basil Seal's financial secretary, puts his wife's life at risk to make a profit and is indifferent to her suffering. Martin Stannard points out in his biography of Waugh that in the novel's manuscript Youkoumian appears for many pages under the name “Youkonmi” (1986, 302), implying thus “conning” and “con man.” It is significant that, besides Black Mischief, the resourceful Mr. Youkoumian also emerges in “Incident in Azania,” where his personality and qualities cast the members of the English community in an ironic light. At one point in the short story, the narrator explains that the Azanian English community accepted Mr. Youkoumian as “a foreigner who so completely fulfilled their ideal of all that a foreigner should be” (Waugh
Incongruous Worlds of Waugh’s Ethiopia • 169

2000b, 101). In this story, Mr. Youkoumian helps the heroine, Prunella Brooks, and her future husband, in a great swindle, involving a fake kidnapping by a local rogue. Much of the joke is on the Europeans and their prejudices concerning African native men. Prejudice, however, also seems inevitable; it may even be tied, as a specific condition, to the existence of a moral standpoint. In contrast to the prejudiced English in this story, who may still be honest, Youkoumian’s loyalty and honesty never seem that certain. Particularly in Black Mischief, Youkoumian is caricatured as a man without moral values. His opportunism is contrasted with the stubborn persistence and prejudiced viewpoint of Western identity.

Narrative Techniques in Waugh’s African Novels

While Waugh’s fiction often complements the descriptions of East Africa in his travel writing, the historical and the autobiographical also penetrate into his novels. As was already mentioned, much of Black Mischief and Scoop is grounded in actual travel experience. These correspondences include many individuals and events, not just the pseudo-African setting and geography in the novels, thus creating an effect of continuity between fiction, travel writing, and travel experience. The descriptions of individuals such as Bergebedgian in Remote People and Youkoumian in Black Mischief and “Incident in Azania,” appear to be complementary despite the slight differences in the focus of these characters’ traits (Bergebedgian’s ingenuity versus Youkoumian’s opportunism and lack of morality).

However, what interests me specifically in Waugh’s use of autobiographical material is that it not only allows us to make comparisons between fiction and travel writing (for instance, it permits us to check how facts are transformed in fiction) but that it may also prompt us to reflect on the generic divide between travel writing and fiction. More difficult considerations about the nature of the correspondences between these texts arise, for instance, when we compare the narrative mode of the novels and the travel-writer’s narrative perspective. First of all, the observing point of view of an anonymous narrator in the novels, or what narratology would define as the heterodiegetic narrator, may recall Waugh’s perspective as a travelling journalist, at least as far as the descriptive sections in his travel writing are concerned. Second, the descriptive passages in the novels, concerning especially the history of Azania and Ishmaelia, or the description of the present political situation in these imaginary countries, easily calls to mind Waugh’s style in travel writing.
Third, the focalization of the novels through the antiheroic main characters Basil Seal and William Boot may also remind one of Waugh’s self-caricature and the often embarrassing situations where the travelling writer found himself. Humphrey Carpenter has, in fact, argued that Remote People and Black Mischief are “evidently meant to be complementary, which is possibly why Waugh omits any sort of ‘control’ character from the novel, a Paul Pennyfeather or Adam Fenwick-Symes who can view the cavortings of its inmates without being entirely drawn into their lives” (1989, 238). Carpenter, thus, claims that Waugh is by implication present in his third novel as observer and critic, as he is explicitly present in Remote People (1989, 238). Carpenter does not specify what he means by a “control” character, but in Black Mischief it is at least true that the fictional world is relatively rarely focalized through Basil Seal, whom we may take as the novel’s most central character. In fact, since there is no extended internal focalization of any character in the novel, no one can enjoy any extended privileged perspective over the events. I mean by internal focalization the presentation of the perceptual and conceptual position in the story mediated through a character’s perspective (Prince 2003, 31–32). What further relativizes the importance of Basil Seal’s viewpoint in the novel is that he is introduced relatively late in the text, and becomes a more constant focus of attention only in the second part of the novel, when he acts as the High Commissioner and Controller General of Emperor Seth’s modernization project. Carpenter’s argument about Basil Seal’s potential role as one of the writer’s self-portraits, or rather self-caricatures, can be further justified by calling to mind that after Black Mischief, Basil Seal becomes a recurrent figure in Waugh’s works. He is featured as a central character in the novel Put Out More Flags (1942),14 as a side character in the unfinished novel “Work Suspended” (1942), and the main character in Waugh’s final fiction, “Basil Seal Rides Again” (1963).

The similarities in narrative and descriptive techniques across the genres seem to be more superficial than profound, however. Basil Seal’s relative distance from the point of perception in the novel creates a stark contrast with the constant presence of the author’s mediating consciousness in his travel books. What, furthermore, distinguishes Waugh’s fiction from his nonfic-

---

14. Basil Seal’s Azanian experience is mentioned in Put Out More Flags when his sister Barbara asks: “D’you remember how he took mother’s emeralds, the time he went to Azania?” (Waugh 1961, 16), and again when the narrator explains that “from time to time he disappeared from the civilized area and returned with tales to which no one attached much credence—of having worked for the secret police in Bolivia and advised the Emperor of Azania on the modernization of his country” (Waugh 1961, 49). The intrafictional references in Waugh’s novels, including recurring characters such as Basil Seal and Lady Metroland, further authenticate a sense of a sovereign fictional reference world.
tion in this respect are the dynamic means of focalization and the use of uninterrupted passages of dialogue that report speech verbatim. Throughout *Black Mischief*, for instance, the narrative follows, from a more or less equal distance, various characters and units of characters, including Basil Seal, the Armenian Krikor Youkoumian, Emperor Seth, General Connolly, who has defeated Prince Seyid’s army, as well as the English diplomats at the British Legation (William Bland, Sir Samson Courteney, and Prudence Courteney). The focus falls consistently on these characters’ actions and dialogue, and sometimes sense perceptions, rather than the contents or inner movements of their minds. In mediating the dialogue, further, the narrator typically shifts between various windows of focalization, following different characters from one chapter to another, often from one passage to another. If there is thought report, or free indirect discourse, it remains localized and brief. This limitation on direct access to the characters’ minds, as well as scarce use of the narrator’s direct discourse and description, is a common feature in much of Waugh’s fiction (see Palmer 2004, 206). Frequently in *Black Mischief*, *Scoop*, and in many of Waugh’s other novels, the characters’ thoughts, feelings, and motivations are presented in and through what they say, in short narratorial descriptions of their manner of speaking and acting, and in their behavior and actions. Exceptions from this general rule often serve a comical purpose. The longest passages in first-person discourse in *Black Mischief*, for instance, involve entries from Dame Mildred Porch’s travel diary in the sixth chapter. These citations highlight, also owing to their exceptional narrative mode, the comical aspect of Dame Mildred Porch’s and her companion Sarah Tin’s sufferings. The two women are leaders of an animal rights organization, the League of Dumb Chums, whose attempt to introduce the idea of compassion for animals is seriously misunderstood throughout their visit in Azania. Due to problems in translation, it is understood among the Azanians that the two women wish to educate Africans about modern methods of cruelty to animals.

We know from various extratextual sources, paratexts and the marketing of *Black Mischief* and *Scoop* that they are indeed meant to be read as novels, despite their thick layers of autobiographical materials and their perspectival techniques that may remind us of descriptive passages in travel writing. Their status as fiction, as novels, is further affirmed by a number of stylistic and narrative features that Waugh does not use in his travel books. The significance of the distinction between the impersonal narrator and the characters, which often allows the narrator an ironic distance towards the characters, clearly sets Waugh’s novels apart from his nonfiction.\(^\text{15}\) The role and func-

\(^{15}\) Waugh realized that he had taken his poetic license too much for granted, however.
tion of narratorial mediation, and the narrator’s changing attitude towards the characters, is an essential part of the novels’ meaning, unlike in travel writing. Moreover, much of *Black Mischief* and *Scoop* presents speech verbatim. This device plunges the text and the reader into the here and now of conversation, portraying the individuals who are engaged in conversation and action, in a manner that might pose problems of accuracy to much nonfiction.

In Waugh’s fiction and nonfiction alike, and as I have already shown, the recurring themes of spatial and temporal deception, or disorganized world of reference, further contribute to the problem of referentiality. Yet, in the two African novels, the question of spatial and temporal disorganization and deception is not only a thematic emphasis but characterizes the ambivalent ontological status of the fictional world and is, further, related to the formal experiments in the novels. Beyond the confusing maps of Azania and Ishmaelia, which multiply the worlds of reference, also the compositional device of literary montage contributes to a similar effect. For instance, in the beginning of the third chapter of *Black Mischief*, the cut up fragments of “direct” conversation by various Londoners, who are glancing through their evening papers in different places, and who are unimpressed by reports about the battle of Ukaka in Azania, create an illusion of various simultaneous spaces and situations. The juxtaposed fragments of conversations suggest a many-voiced, but unanimous world of discourse that exists somewhere at the back of the events described in the novel. There is no scenic description and most of the voices are not identifiable:

Namely, the satire of the European population and the Ethiopian regime in this novel, together with Waugh’s known pro-Italian sentiments, had created a bad reputation for the writer in Addis Ababa by the time he returned there in 1935. Waugh writes in a letter, dated August 24, 1935 in Addis Ababa, to his future wife Laura Herbert that

> I am universally regarded as an Italian spy. In fact my name is mud all around—with the Legation because of a novel I wrote which they think was about them (it wasn’t) [sic] with the Ethiopians because of the *Mail*’s policy, with the other journalists because I’m not really a journalist and it is black leg labour. (1980, 97)

16. The use of these narrative techniques and devices, however, should not be thought of as determining the text’s genre, but rather as cues for interpretation that are dependent on the overall interpretative frame of the text’s genre. As Genette has suggested, the “indices” of fiction are not all narratological in nature, but also involve thematic and stylistic conventions, or generic markers such as the use of a certain kind of a beginning and end or a character’s name. Perhaps the most stable indices, as Genette implies, are not textual in kind but paratextual, including for instance a book’s generic indication (as a “novel,” for instance), another writer’s authorized preface, a dust jacket definition, a review, or the marketing style for the book (2004, 163–164). *Scoop* has the subtitle “A Novel about journalists” (my emphasis).
“It came in a cross-word quite lately. *Independent native principality.* You would have it was Turkey.”

“Azania? It sounds like a Cunarder to me.”

“But, my dear, surely you remember that *madly* attractive blackamoor at Balliol.”

“Run up and see if you can find the atlas, deary. . . . Yes, where it always is, behind the stand in father’s study.”

“Things look quieter in East Africa. That Azanian business cleared up at last.”

“Care to see the evening paper? There’s nothing in it.” (Waugh 1960, 86–87)

The two-page passage from which this quotation is taken is only one of the several instances of inventive use of dialogue in long uninterrupted passages in Waugh’s novels, including the devices of stichomythia (dialogue in alternating lines), innuendo, incomplete sentences, ellipses (see Carens 1966, 5–6), and multiparty talk, in which the representation of the speech of a group foregrounds the sense of fragmentation and chaos (Thomas 2002; 2012, 85–86). Such techniques do not occur in any significant way in Waugh’s travel writing, where the writer uses dialogue sparingly, if at all.

In a subchapter to the second book of *Scoop*, in turn, the shifts in perspective, or what I have also called windows of focalization, are given a spatial form as the narrator presents the residents of the Hotel Liberty in their respective rooms in the capital city of Jacksonburg in Ishmaelia. The passage is structured around an effect of simultaneity, a kind of montage of juxtaposed scenes, with different people in different spaces of the hotel, engaged in various activities separately from each other. The patroness of the hotel is reading the Bible and smoking her pipe in the lounge while a complacent British star correspondent is writing a book about English social life in his room, four furious Frenchman are composing a “memorandum of their wrongs” in another room, and in yet another room four European journalists are playing cards (2000a, 79–82). The literary montage suggests that there is an “uneventful” world of many simultaneous but separate realities and activities. In Waugh’s travel writing such montages of juxtaposed scenes are not used, even if the relationship between the traveller’s subjective perspective, and persona, and the experiences of others in the same spaces of travel is a central concern.
Chapter 5

Generic Framing in the Novels

Certain passages in the two novels specifically draw attention to the divide between fiction and nonfiction. Let us focus, for instance, on the satire of Sir Samson Courteney, the Envoy Extraordinary in charge of the British legation in Debra-Dowa in *Black Mischief*, and thought to have been modelled after Sir Sydney Barton, who was the British Minister Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary in Addis Ababa before the Italian invasion. In the beginning of chapter seven, in a rare case of free indirect discourse in the novel, we can read Sir Samson Courteney’s inner thoughts quoted in a few sentences. One morning, as it is told, when Sir Samson is in a “mood of high displeasure,” having had to host too many visitors at his legation the previous night, we hear his thoughts in direct discourse: “Never known anything like it [. . .] These wretched people don’t seem to realize that a legation is a place of business. How can I be expected to get through the day’s work, with my whole house overrun with uninvited guests?” (1960, 261). The narrator then relates that

First there had been the Bishop, who arrived during tea with two breathless curates and an absurd story about another revolution and shooting in the streets. Well, why not? You couldn’t expect the calm of *Barchester Towers* in a place like Azania. Missionary work was known to involve some physical work. Nincompoops. (1960, 261)

The use of free indirect discourse—the citation of Sir Samson Courteney’s words (“absurd,” “Nincompoops”) and question (“Well, why not?”) inside the narrator’s discourse—foregrounds the envoy’s personality and way of thinking, revealing his self-importance. At the same time, the question over the fictional world of the novel is inherent in this passage by way of Sir Samson’s reference to Anthony Trollope’s *Barchester Towers* (1857). The mention of the calm of the world of *Barchester Towers* adds to the satire of the colonials and the diplomats, who have created a form of traditional British upper class life style in the colonies, gardening and tea parties, listening to gramophone records and playing bridge, bagatelle, and croquet. Sir Samson ridicules here one of his visitors, the Anglican Bishop Goodchild, for mixing African reality with the supposed calm of home, for trying to find the peacefulness of *Barchester Towers* in Azania. Yet, at the same time, Sir Samson himself is one of the narrator’s targets of satire.

The Trollope reference opens up the question of correspondences between the two fictions of Azania and Barsetshire. Azania, just like Trollope’s Barsetshire and the fictitious town of Barchester, is another version of a make-
believe microcosm. However, Sir Samson’s reference to the calm of *Barchester Towers* is somewhat misleading, considering that *Barchester Towers* is a novel about many intrigues, including a vicious battle for the position of Bishop of Barchester with the added issues of who should take over Hiram’s Hospital and who will marry Eleanor Harding. Unless we limit ourselves to thinking that at the end of Trollope’s novel life in the cathedral city of Barchester returns to its quiet ways, or that the fictional county of Barsetshire represents British “calm” in comparison to a (marginal) African country in a state of civil war, the peacefulness of *Barchester Towers* is a misguided notion. Much of the comic effect in *Black Mischief* is based on the stubborn refusal of the people at the British legation, as implied in Sir Samson’s comments, to adapt to their surroundings. The satire of the British is contrasted and further amplified by the satire of the Azanian Emperor’s refusal to accept reality, that is, his futile attempt at changing his surroundings according to misconceived ideals. Dame Mildred and Miss Tin’s ludicrous campaign against the Azanians’ cruelty to animals is similarly guided by ideals that are foreign and unreal to the local culture. The conservative British imaginary projections are no less comical and tragic than those of the ridiculed social reformers in the novel, but the author’s sympathies may lie with the former. This becomes apparent, in particular, when we read Waugh’s fiction and travel writing side by side.

In addition to its ironic potential, the Trollope reference activates a kind of multireferential process of signification in the author’s oeuvre. In his travel books, specifically in *Remote People*, Waugh uses “Barsetshire” as a metaphor for a certain national temperament of the white colonial settlers, a type of British mentality that persists in spite of time and, seemingly, change of place. When defending British imperialism in Kenya, Waugh points out the settlers’ attempt “to re-create Barsetshire on the equator” that some might regard as Quixotic (2003, 324). These settlers have re-created, quite out of tune with their time and place, a comfortable version of traditional English lifestyle, squirearchy, and society in the African colony. Their only weakness may be a Quixotic temperament: to be foolishly impractical and old-fashioned, and to believe too much in the power of imaginary projection. They are not “pirates or landgrabbers” as their critics have claimed, but “perfectly normal, respectable Englishmen” (2003, 324). In Waugh’s travel writing, therefore, the Barsetshire metaphor indicates a certain traditional mindset and colonial version of

---

17. See also Thomas who argues cogently, in her analysis of multiparty talk in *Black Mischief*, that “Waugh seems to delight in the dogged determination of the Legation members to pursue their own pleasures and in their total refusal to adapt to their surroundings” (2002, 668).
a mentality that projects traditional and in some ideal and fictional spaces in equatorial Africa and, in Waugh’s opinion, succeeds in living out these projections. At the same time, this mentality is characterized by an ambiguous combination of fear of the primitive, or chaos, and anarchy (and sometimes delight in chaos), and a sense of superiority.

Later in *Remote People*, Waugh’s Barsetshire metaphor reemerges as part of a discussion on racial fear. The travelling Northern races, Waugh believes, as they are unaccustomed to the reality of race antagonism, have an inborn fear of “domination or infection by a coloured race” (2003, 329). This fear, Waugh argues, is irrational, but also basically understandable given the multicultural complexities of East Africa. The issue of race becomes also evident when the writer once again refers to the specific temperament of the “equatorial Barsetshire” (2003, 330) and suggests, and not only jokingly, that “it is just worth considering the possibility that there may be something valuable behind the indefensible and inexplicable assumption of superiority by the Anglo-Saxon race” (2003, 330). As Waugh’s biographer, Martin Stannard, has pointed out, there is little doubt that Waugh shared this assumption (1986, 263)

Still another way in which Waugh’s two African novels draw attention to their genre and generic framing is the parody of journalistic practices. Just one of the many instances of such parody in *Scoop* is the moment near the end of the novel where the main character, the gardening columnist William Boot, returns home to Britain from Ishmaelia. While travelling through France in a train, Boot finds a copy of the *Beast*, the newspaper that had employed him in Ishmaelia, and, to his surprise, in this paper a framed notice on the front page promising an in-depth article by himself the next day. Boot has not heard about the arrangement. The story of the following day will be told, as the notice claims, in Boot’s own personal way, revealing the “inner story” of the reporter’s experience:

**BOOT IS BACK**

The man who made journalistic history, Boot of the *Beast*, will tomorrow tell in his own inimitable way the inner story of his meteoric leap to fame. How does it feel to tell the truth to two million registered readers? How does it feel to have risen in a single week to the highest pinnacle of fame? Boot will tell you. (Waugh 2000a, 185)

The article in question, which Boot also finds on his way through Dover, is authenticated with his photo and a facsimile of his signature. The text is written, as promised, in first-person discourse. Thus, in direct violation of the
principles of journalism, the editors of his newspaper had invented a form of
direct discourse and concealed it as authentic first-person (nonfiction) dis-
course. For the readers of this fictional world, in contrast, the story is true
and genuine since it has been framed as such and they have no reason to
believe that the frame is a fabrication. The ultimate fabrication, the inven-
tion of the author’s inner self, stands as another proof for the story’s veracity.
What matters to the press, therefore, is to create an impression of the over-
all interpretative frame of the text’s genre, its global nonfictional frame of
enunciation—since readers are likely to appreciate and value the impression
of accuracy in description and the witness perspective in itself—not the reli-
ability of facts.

The “Boot is Back” incident dramatizes Waugh’s criticism of journalis-
tic practices in Remote People and Waugh in Abyssinia. In his travel writing,
Waugh points out that the historical interest of news does not depend on the
reality of the events, but on the framing of something, such as the coronat
of an African emperor, as news and as historically important. Waugh points
out in Remote People that events in newspapers “become amusing and thrill-
ing just in so far as they are given credence as historical facts” and delight
the readers with “unexpected byways of life” (2003, 219). If these events or byways
of life, Waugh believes, were offered to the readers as fiction, they would
become utterly insignificant and uninteresting (ibid.). Waugh thus stresses the
importance of generic expectations: when something is presented and read as
news it is given a value and credence as an interesting event at the same time.
It is here that Waugh also makes one of his most direct statements about the
distinction between fiction and nonfiction, or what he calls the “great gulf”
between the novelist and the journalist:

The value of a novel depends on the standards each book evolves for itself;
incidents which have no value as news are given any degree of importance
according to their place in the book’s structure and their relation to other
incidents in the composition, just as subdued colours attain great intensity
in certain pictures. (2003, 219)

The value of the novel, as Waugh sees it, relies on the standards of composi-
tion that govern the whole narrative. In other words, the events of a novel
have a compositional function as parts of a whole and, thus, reflect the way
in which a fictional narrative—but possibly also other types of narratives in
contrast to mere news items—is conventionally read, that is, as a meaningful
composition. The stress is again on the overall structure and effect of the nar-
native, not its potential reference to actual reality.
Conclusion: Imaginary Ethiopia and Imperialist Ideology

Reading Waugh’s African fiction and travel writing side by side prompts questions about the differences, similarities, and possible continuity across the genres. Why, for instance, are certain real spaces in the author’s travel writing characterized by fictional worlds and characters? How, further, does the postulation of referentiality work differently in travel writing and how does it affect the reading of a text? And in what sense may fictional worlds be a model for world construction in travel writing?

The similarities between Waugh’s fiction and nonfiction include, as I have shown above, an ironic narrative voice, the pseudo-objective perspective of description, and the effect of multiple realities, that is, the effect of constructing possible worlds of different referential status superimposed on each other. With regard to Waugh’s African travel books, especially Remote People stages an epistemological spectacle where the traveller, perhaps too constrained by rules of authentication, is at pains to understand the world around him. Much of the comic predicament in this travel book is built on the insight that in order to represent facts and historical events one has to pass through many interpretive filters, not only the traveller’s personalized, and in many ways openly prejudiced viewpoint, but the social space of interpretation and representation on which the individual experience depends to a large extent.

Ethiopia, and to a lesser extent Zanzibar and Kenya, were for Waugh a composite reality, consisting of diverse elements, including various layers of fabrication. The unexpected and the surprising that attracted Waugh in Eastern Africa relates to the potentiality in certain fictional worlds and persisting fictions, like Alice in Wonderland or Barchester Towers, which have the capacity to provide the experience with ever new meanings. Due to its spectacular heterogeneity and fantastic features, “Abyssinia” is a festive body for Waugh, but the charm that it holds, as I have argued above, does not derive from any notion of the premodern, “primitive” or authentic exotic.  

The fictional worlds of Azania and Ishmaelia, by way of their various points of contact with other fictional spaces, but also with the real Ethiopia, create the effect of many superimposed worlds. This potentiality in fiction is reflected in the potentiality of the real world to create strange and incongruous cultural blends. We can thus perceive in Waugh’s fictional depiction of East Africa a kind of heteronomy of imaginary relays, including also

18. However, Waugh’s emphasis on the geographical plurality of location in his descriptions of Ethiopia, Azania, and Ishmaelia is intimately related to traditional European representations of Ethiopia, at least since medieval times (see Campbell 2009).
the stacking of cliché images, such as the dark humor stemming from cannibalism at the end of *Black Mischief* where Basil Seal unknowingly eats his sweetheart at a cannibal feast. In *Scoop*, similarly, the narrator exploits the stereotype of cannibalistic Africans when describing the history and political situation of Ishmaelia, as he explains that none of the first European visitors ever returned from this land:

> They were eaten, every one of them; some raw, others stewed and seasoned—according to local usage and the calendar (for the better sort of Ishmaelites have been Christians for many centuries and will not publicly eat human flesh, uncooked, in Lent, without special and costly dispensation from their bishop). (2000a, 74)

While the cliché image of African cannibals, and colonial Africa as the white man’s grave, is exaggerated beyond any exotic appeal, and the joke is on the travel snob Basil Seal, who unknowingly becomes involved in eating human flesh, the cliché images are at the same time affirmed as part of this absurd world where Christianity does not necessarily exclude cannibalism.

In contrast to his ambivalent and later hostile attitude toward independent Ethiopia, Waugh’s clearly positive experience in colonial Kenya, as outlined in the end of *Remote People*, is based on the writer’s impression of the seemingly peaceful coexistence between the coloniser and the colonized, and the comfortable isolation of the former from the latter. More precisely, in the Kenyan section of the book, Waugh’s sympathy is with the permanent European population in the area, not with the officials or commercial agents or the liberal “African Nationalists” who seek to defend the Africans’ right to their land. What seems particularly appealing to Waugh in this colonial society, as in the society of pleasure cruisers (portrayed in *Labels*), the businessmen in Port Said in Egypt, or the English bachelor community of the Aden protectorate, is the persistence of their ways of life and English traditions, in comfortable isolation also from modern Europe. Members of these communities, moreover, lack any compulsion to understand authentic local experience—an attitude that for Waugh stands for a realistic worldview. Waugh’s visit to the Kenyan colony offered him a true respite both from the modern world that he rejected and the confusion of Ethiopia.

Waugh’s notion of the strange and incongruous in Ethiopia was far removed from any notion of the authentic exotic. This is in line with the anti-exotic emphasis in his worldview. Waugh had ridiculed the Westerners’ search for the exotic other already in the Egyptian section of *Labels*, where he explained that he envied the agreeable life and good fellowship of the colonial
businessmen and officials in Port Said, since there was “no nonsense of tropical romance; no indomitable jungle, no contact with raw nature, no malaria, delirium tremens, or ‘mammy-palaver’; no one showed the smallest inclination to ‘go native’” (2003, 64).

In Waugh in Abyssinia, Waugh continues the same mockery of the “extreme lovers of the picturesque” (2003, 573), who desired to find an unspoiled African Ethiopia. Just that this time it was charged with political and ideological meaning, Waugh siding strongly with Mussolini and the Italian intervention. He also ridiculed what he saw as sentimentalizing comparisons that were made by the “apologists” of Haile Selassie’s regime between the Ethiopian monarchy and culture and some romanticized idea of medieval Europe (2003, 641–42). The same wish to downplay Ethiopian culture and history is prominent in Waugh’s other pro-Italian writings at the time. For instance, in an article entitled “We Can Applaud Italy” in the Evening Standard in February 1935, Waugh tried to question Haile Selassie’s historical right to govern the country (portraying the Ethiopian Emperor as another coloniser with no particular rights to the country), emphasized the barbarism of his rule, and again mocked what he saw as the sentimentalist views held by the Emperor’s supporters in Europe. The Ethiopian strangeness and the incongruity that Waugh construed and tried to capture more open-mindedly in Remote People had then become a negative value or another reason for a European intervention.

In Waugh in Abyssinia, Waugh emphasized less the sense of the absurd in Ethiopian society and culture and, instead, focused on the condescending idea of an empty culture that could, and should, be replaced by a new civilization. Waugh saw that Ethiopian culture lacked any true content, “aesthetic stimu-

19. It is also worth remembering that the Daily Mail for which Waugh covered the Italian-Abyssinian war, was one of the few British newspapers that were sympathetic to the Fascist cause.

20. The difference concerning the importance of politics and ideology between the two travel books is of degree, not kind. At the end of Remote People, Waugh is unambiguous in his defence of British imperialism in Kenya against its detractors, as he claims,

I am concerned in this book with first-hand impressions, and wish to avoid, as far as possible, raising issues which it is not in my scope to discuss at length, but personal experiences are dependent on general conditions and I cannot hope to make my emotions about Kenya intelligible unless I devote a few sentences to dissipating some of the humbug which has grown about it. (2003, 320)

Waugh critiques, for instance, Mr William Macgregor Ross’s Kenya from Within which, he feels, inconsistently portrays settlers as “a gang of rapacious adventurers” (2003, 320). Waugh’s belief in the benefits of colonialism is also reflected in the end of Black Mischief where, after the death of all Azanian competing emperors, the country is mandated by the League of Nations as a joint protectorate between England and France.
lus,” or artistic significance, and that for this reason, it should be controlled by a more advanced, that is, Roman/Italian/Catholic nation. Waugh also tried to justify his support for the Italian intervention by referring to what he saw as the stagnation of Addis Ababa and Ethiopia, that is, his impression of the lack of improvements between 1930 and 1935. The author claimed that the Ethiopians “had nothing to give their subject peoples, nothing to teach them” (2003, 569) and that “It was extraordinary to find a people with an ancient and continuous habit of life who had produced so little,” and, further, that “They build nothing; they made no gardens; they could not dance” (2003, 593). The notion of an empty and historyless culture, in association with the writer’s racist views of an “inferior race” (2003, 574), was yet another justification for the Italian intervention. Towards the end of Waugh in Abyssinia, Waugh, unabashedly, celebrates the Italian “expansion of a race,” in contrast to English colonialism that he thinks favors the expansion of the ruling class and capitalism. He refers to the establishment “of new pastures and cities” in a barren land, comparable only to the history of American settlements (2003, 709–710), and glorifies the Italians’ “inestimable gifts of fine workmanship and clear judgement” (2003, 712). Waugh’s earlier observations of cultural incongruity and strange blends are thus associated with a lack of culture and history and given a much more disconcerting ideological meaning than before.

We can always decide to read Waugh’s African fictions, and their satire that combines many different targets of ridicule, against the writer’s outspoken imperialist ideology in his travel writing, especially in Waugh in Abyssinia. This kind of ideological self-transgression is still another way that travel fiction can inform travel fact. However, it is also quite plausible to read the other way around, so that the author’s open imperialist ideology in his travel writing informs the interpretation of his African novels (if we are interested in determining, for instance, the most salient values and beliefs to which the novels and their author respond). In other words, Waugh’s travel writing can also be taken as an interpretive frame that guides our understanding of his novelistic satire and polyphony. This option, then, gives the issue of shared elements in Waugh’s African fiction and nonfiction a different context, raising the difficult question of how his African novels relate to the larger political and colonial narrative—the legitimation of colonial rule and economic exploitation—with which the author so clearly aligns himself in his nonfiction. The two options seem to suggest quite incompatible results. On the one

---

21. Waugh’s points of comparison are also Arabic or other African cultures such as “the gracious, intricate art of Morocco or the splendour of Benin” or “the dark, instinctive art of the negro” that, for centuries, had “offered Europe successive waves of aesthetic stimulus” (2003, 593).
hand, the reader can decide that the (implied) author of the novels is more
certain and possibly more democratic—in the sense of entertaining and
perhaps even embracing a multitude of voices and viewpoints on issues relat-
ing to race, colonialism, and so on—than the author of the travel narratives.
On the other hand, we can argue that not all targets of satire and ridicule in
the novels are equal. Furthermore, we can surmise that the kind of audience
for whom Waugh wrote the novels was aware of the author’s stance on colo-
nialism, as outlined in his travel books that were published before the novels,
and possibly shared this stance and, subsequently, read or was even expected
to read the satiric novels in this light. I do not seek to privilege or exclude one
or the other interpretive alternative, but want to underscore that the study of
the interplay between fiction and nonfiction can, as Waugh’s case makes par-
ticularly evident, require us to consider the ideological implications of how
that interplay is understood.