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PUT OUT MORE FLAGS

The second World War brought many ills in Western culture and society, and shook Western society's cultural value base. The war years not only affected the social and political life in England but the contemporary literature, too; received the war effects. It pressed very hard especially on creative writers and made them difficult to take either retrospective or classical view. The rise of Hitler, the Abyssinian War, the Spanish civil war, the final outbreak of the Second World War affected the literary history to a greater extent in England.

Younger generation in England stood against Hitler. The Labour Government, that came into power did not bring the kind of transformation of quality of life which the young socialist of 1930 had imagined. This was the ripe time for satirists like Norman Douglas, Ronald Firbank, Anthony Powell, Evelyn Waugh to strike hard on the follies in the contemporary society.

Evelyn Waugh, too, joined the army. He was the Captain in Royal Marines from 1939 to 1940. He worked as a lieutenant in Laycock's Layforce commandos in North Africa. He was also the Captain in Royal Horse Guards. In 1944, he served with the British Military Mission in Yugoslavia under Fitzroy Maclean.

Put Out More Flags was written on the tourship as Waugh was returning from the Middle East where his commando unit had been disbanded. David Lodge comments that the novel : "was written on tourship partly to relieve author's own boredom."¹ **Put Out More Flags** (1942) deals with the phoney war. The novel is set "In that odd, dead period before the Churchillian renaissance, which people called at the time the Great Bore War."²

Put Out More Flags is about the central character Basil Seal. At the beginning of the novel, on the outbreak of the war, three women - Basil's mother, sister and mistress link war with Basil Seal. They want to see him as a warrior and a hero. His sister, Barbara, dreams of him as Rupert Brooke. For his mother the war is an opportunity to reform and settle Basil. His mistress, Angela Lyne, sees Basil as a martyr in the war. Alastair Trumpington too, Peter Pastmaster, Freddy Cedric, too, join the army. Basil does not get a job. He goes to stay with Barbara who is living alone. He has a wish of writing a book, but he finds there three evacuees, Doris, Micky and Marlene. They are called connollys. Basil decides to play a trick with the help of these connollys. These connollys become victim of Basil's trick. Basil poses himself as a billeting officer and keeps three naughty evacuees in the houses of selected members. These evacuees disturb the order and peace of the house. Basil blackmails these families by threatening them to take the evacuees back. Basil makes Mrs. and Mr. Harkness his victim and blackmails them. He bargains with them bargains with them

to remove the children from their home. Then he takes Connollys at Stuco house and earns twenty-five pounds. Basil keeps Connollys at old Rectory and earns twenty pounds. Thus Basil earns profit and amusement by billeting and removing Connollys. Basil then works for the 'Ministry of Information'. His friend, Ambrose Silk, is also working in the same place. Jewish and Homosexual Ambrose is working in the religious department. Basil and Ambrose know each other since their undergraduate career. Now Basil plays a trick with Ambrose making him his victim in order to get quick promotion. He tricks Ambrose into writing a story which arouses suspicion. When Ambrose is going to be arrested Basil helps him to run away to Ireland. Ambrose becomes father Flannagan and runs away to Ireland. Ambrose settles in Ireland. Cedric is killed in the war. Angela takes Cedric's death very seriously. Basil and Angela plan to marry. Peter Pastmaster joins the new force and becomes the colonel. Basil wishes to kill Germans at the end of the novel.

The novel **Put Out More Flags** has two plots : one dealing with the anarchy of Basil, the other dealing with penitential warriors. The action of the novel takes place in and around London. As **Put Out More Flags** is regarded as Waugh's later novel, Malcolm Bradbury remarks : "In the earlier novels social delineation, though accurately and sharply given, is subordinate to fantasy; here and in later novels, this is reversed. Thus while the earlier novels tend so to speak, to start from the world of anarchy and put to the test the world of order,

the later ones tend rather to start from order and judge anarchy in terms of it."³

The novel **Put Out More Flags** begins with the following description :

"In the week which preceded the outbreak of the Second World War-days of surmise and apprehension which can not, without irony, be called the last days of peace-and on the Sunday morning when all doubts were finally resolved and misconceptions corrected, three rich women thought first and mainly of Basil Seal. They were his sister, his mother, and his mistress."⁴

Basil's sister, Barbara Sothill, remembers him on that Sunday morning strongly as she walks to the village. Barbara feels that Basil needs the war. She is proud of her brother knowing that he had stolen mother's emeralds when he went to Azania. She dreams of Basil as Rupert Brooke :

"She saw him as Siegfried Sassoon, an infantry subaltern in a mud-bogged trench, standing to at dawn, his eyes on his wrist-watch, waiting for zero hour; she saw him as Compton Mackenzie, Spider in a web of Balkan intrigue, undermining a monarchy

among olive trees and
sculptured marble; she
saw him as T. E. Lawrence
and Rupert Brooke."⁵

Basil's mother, Lady Seal, who had experienced the first World War and had lost her husband, Christopher, in the War, too, thinks of Basil on that Sunday morning. Now she has a son to offer for the country. She tells Mr. Joseph Mainwaring :

"I feel so much happier about him since this morning, Jo. Sometimes, lately, I've begun to doubt whether we shall ever find the proper place for Basil. He's been a square peg in so many round holes. But this war seems to take the responsibility off our hands. There's room for everyone in war time, every man."⁶

She looks at the war as an opportunity to reform Basil. She wants to see him as a hero in the war. Sir Joseph remarks that Basil no longer fits for the army as he is overaged. Lady Seal strongly remarks : "Nonsense, Jo. Men of forty-five and fifty enlisted in the ranks in the last war and died as gallantly as anyone else."⁷

Basil becomes an object of thought of his mistress, Angela Lyne too. Angela wishes to see him dead in the war. Although their relationship is 'morbid' they have been in love with each other for seven years. She imagines as the train passes :

"...Flaxman Greeks reclining in death, among the rocks of Thermopylx; riddled scarecrows sprawling across the wire of no-man's land.... Till death us do part.... Through the haphazard trail of phrase and association, a single unifying, thought recurred, like the sentry posts at the side of the line, monotonously in Angela's mind. Death."⁸

The women believe that the war will be useful for Basil. But Basil really fits none of these cases as "from his earliest days(he) had been a source of embarrassment and reproach."⁹ Basil's negligence cost him lose a number of jobs :

"In the intervals of neglect and independence, Basil had fended for himself and had successively held all the jobs which were open to young men of his qualifications. He had never had much difficulty in getting jobs; the trouble had always been in keeping them."¹⁰

Basil is the leader writer of the 'Daily Beast'. He sells champagne on commission. He engages himself in composing dialogues for cinema. He also gives a series of talks for the B.B.C. The narrator describes :

"From time to time he disappeared from the civilized area and returned with tales to which no one attached much credence."¹¹

Basil plays tricks in an orderly universe. He does not take the war seriously. Unlike his friends he enjoys it. He fearlessly wanders on the street, posing himself as the member of M.13. The members of M. 13. are allowed to go anywhere. Ambrose rightly points out Basil's hollowness :

"Basil is a Philistine and a crook; on occasions he can be a monumental bore; on occasions a grave embarrassment."¹²

Basil has an inclination to fight though he is not interested in the war, he realises that the war is an opportunity that has come his way :
"I want to be one of those people one heard about in 1919; the hard faced men who did well out of the war."¹³

The war transforms everything and keeps everybody busy. Alstair Trumpington, Peter Pastmaster, Freddy Sothill seem to be busy in the army. People seem to be wrapped up in the war. But it does not make much appeal to Basil. He tries to get a job but in vain.

Basil handles a racket. Though he buys, sells and rents out three evacuees, he considers his work as :

"Work of national importance",
I am the district billeting officer.
 I am looking for a suitable home
 for three evacuated children."¹⁴

Basil exactly behaves opposite to the ideals of three women. His mother notices that he has not become a hero. She remarks : "It's always been Basil's individuality that's been wrong... In war time individuality doesn't matter anymore. There are just men, aren't there?"¹⁵ Basil joins the Ministry of Information. There he plays a trick with Ambrose. Ambrose is a writer and man dedicated to the art of conversation. As an individual Ambrose hates the war :

"This is all that anyone
 talks about,Jobs and
 the kind of war it is going
 to be War in the air, war of
 attrition, tank war, war of
 nerves, war of propaganda,
 war of defence in depth,
 war of movement, people's
 war, ...all war is nonsense...."

I don't care about their war.
It's got nothing on me."¹⁶

His dislike for war is reflected in his belief in the ideal of Chinese kingdom in which a warrior is regarded inferior to a scholar. he says :

"To the Chinese scholar
the military hero was the
lowest of human types,
the subject for ribaldry.
We must return to
Chinese scholarship."¹⁷

Basil in order to get promotion, tricks Ambrose into writing a story. His story of fascist sympathies arouses suspicion. When Ambrose is going to be arrested, Basil helps him to run away to Ireland. Ambrose becomes a victim of civilian life. He also discovers that he does, in fact, yearn for the world of effort and action. Adam Piette comments :

"Ambrose is in a comic sense
worn out by bearing all these
'gross reflections and
caricatures of himself',
and finds himself incapable
of efficient action as a result."¹⁸

The bulk of the novel is concerned with Basil's tricks. He disturbs this universe with little injustice. The character of Basil is well defined by George Dangerfield :

"Thus Basil Seal, who is a predatory young man and a professional outcast, finds that it is one thing to be an out cast in a world of peace and quite another to be an outcast in a world at war. Seriousness is his greatest enemy, and from the moment that war breaks out, it begins to threaten him."¹⁹

The outbreak of the war forces these women to remember Basil. At the same time Ambrose, Poppet and their friends force to remember the two left wing writers. Parsnip and Pimpernell who have settled in America. Ambrose thinks that they have right to go and settle in America. In spite of the war Sonia and Alastair enjoy life. Alastair, marries Sonia but has an affair with Margot Metroland. Alastair joins the army but refuses to be the member of O.C.T.U. He feels it is safer to stay in the ranks. His snobbery and laziness prevent him to be the member of O.C.T.U. His wife Sonia explains :

"You see, he'd never done anything' for the country, and though we were always broke we had lots of money really and lots of fun. I believe he thought that perhaps if we hadn't had so much fun perhaps there wouldn't have been any war....she added. 'He went into the ranks as a kind of penance or whatever it is called that religious people are always supposed to do."²⁰

Angela Lyne, the mistress of Basil and wife of Cedric is a showy woman. She is a part of a glamorous society. Angela, who is staying alone in London, has been in love with Basil. Her relationship with Cedric is broken and it leads her to her addiction of wine. Her uncharacteristic behaviour is disclosed when she collapses at a cinema hall. She does not have a good opinion about Cedric :

"You never knew Cedric when I married him. He was most romantic genuinely. I'd never met anyone like him. Father's friends were all hard-boiled and rich-men like Metroland and Copper. They were the only people I ever saw And then I met Cedric, who was poor and very, very soft-boiled and tall and willowy and very unhappy in a boring smart regiment because he only cared about Russian ballet and baroque architecture."²¹

Although Cedric is suspicious he joins the army. Lonely and depressed Cedric becomes a hero. He is killed while carrying a message through enemy fire. He walks alone which is against the rule of military and is killed by a stray bullet. Cedric becomes the victim of military life. He enters the battle with a view that :

"The great weapons of modern war did not count in single lives... No one had anything against the individual;

as long as he was alone he
 was free and safe; there's
 danger in numbers; divided
 we stand, united we fall,
 thought Cedric, striding
 happily towards the enemy,
 shaking from his boots all the
 frustration of corporate life.
 He did not know it, but he
 was thinking exactly what
 Ambrose had thought when
 he announced that culture
 must cease to be conventual
 and become cenobitic."²²

Put Out More Flag is a satire pointing out the foibles of serving soldiers as bright young people. Waugh is interested in contemporary society and his observations of the society forces him to be a satirist. George Dangerfield comments : "He is writing about a society which has offered him a great deal of amusement and which he heartily dislikes. He is eminently a mature artist...he has always sought to discover the 'lacrimae rerum'... he makes his discovery with a flier."²³ In **Put Out More Flags** Waugh satirizes two poets, Christopher Isherwood, and Wystan Isherwood. They are named in the novel as Parsnip and Pimpernell. They go to America during the wartime and settle there. As Poppet comments sarcastically :

What I don't see is how
 these two can claim to be
 'contemporary' if they run
 away from the biggest event
 in contemporary history.
 They were contemporary
 enough about Spain when

no one threatened to
come and bomb 'them'"²⁴

Waugh satirizes another poet, Harold Action, in **Put Out More Flags**. Harold had spent many years in Peking and was attracted to Chinese poetry. Mr. Bentley like Harold Action is interested in Chinese poetry. Waugh uses the surname of the poet Cyril Connolly for three children. They are called Connollys. George Dangerfield comments, "In **Put Out More Flags**, however the apparently heartless jesting reveals a bitter attack upon the society which made Basil Seal possible in the first place; upon false internationalism, official pomposity, selfishness, blindness, greed, betrayal."²⁵ Waugh satirizes the post-war generation. **Put Out More Flags** is a "Sketch-book"²⁶ of England. Waugh makes his hero 'a rascal' and 'a man of action'. Waugh exposes the folly and stupidity of war time generation. As Jacqueline McDonnell remarks : "It nicely reflects the preliminary period when bravery could not be exercised, and all a military man could do was strut about and drink."²⁷

Put Out More Flag is comic and funny like Waugh's earlier novels. Basil keeps himself busy in tricking people while other characters create comic situations. Basil's trick and the farce of the other characters are placed side by side that add the comic situation. Ambrose and Basil are : "figures of life's comic anarchy; Seal's superior

power is that he can adopt to a world absolutely uninhabitable for anyone of civilized taste."²⁸

Waugh's symbols in **Put Out More Flags** stand opposite to those of the existing world. Chestnuts symbolize and stand in contrast to the world. Waugh's symbols denote his sensitivity for the past. The old Mill of Mrs. and Mr. Harkness, suggests order and peace. But Basil disturbs this old Mill when he keeps three evacuees there, Cedric and Ambrose stand for aesthetes and individuals in a rough world. But both become victims, as to say, one is of the civilian life, and the other is of military life. They are punished but treated sympathetically. Malcolm Bradbury comments : "War demanding recognition as a reality, reinforces the schoolboys and the cads, demotes the aesthetes and the outsiders, and suggests a new and uncomfortable principle of order in a breaking world."²⁹

Though the novel is located to a specific historical period Waugh returns to his own world and own characters. Waugh considers his characters "a race of ghost".³⁰ Waugh writes in his dedicatory letter to Randolph Churchill :

"These characters are no longer contemporary in sympathy; they were forgotten even before the war; but lived on delightfully in holes and corners and, like everyone else, they have been disturbed in their habits by the rough intrusion of current history."³¹

The specialty of **Put Out More Flags** is that the characters from earlier novels reappear here. Basil Seal, Alastair Trumpington and Margot are brought in a new circumstances. Alastair Trumpington of **Decline and Fall** is an aristocratic youth. In **Put Out More Flags** Alastair abandons his self indulgent habit and joins the army. Alastair joins the special corps when it is formed. Basil Seal in **Put Out More Flags** blackmails and plays tricks with the world unlike Basil Seal of **Black Mischief** (1932). Cedric Lyne in **Put Out More Flags** is left alone by his wife like Tony Last of **A Handful of Dust** (1934). But unlike Tony Last, Cedric Lyne dies in the war. Waugh modelled the character of Ambrose Silk on Brain Howard. Like Howard Ambrose is Jewish, Homosexual and Flamboyant in manner. Ambrose in **Put Out More Flags** changes his identity and runs away from the world of betrayal like Paul Pennyfeather of **Decline and Fall** (1928). They are victims of the world around them

The title of the novel is taken from a Chinese sage "a drunk military man should order gallons and **Put Out More Flags** in order to increase his military splendour." The novel **Put Out More Flags** is "a picture of English life painted with precision and brilliance"³² George Dangerfield feels that Waugh's society and characters will have no appeal to the readers in future :

" Put Out More Flags
comes less close to tragedy
than do some of his earlier
books, because the
characters are no longer
involved in a personal
dilemma. The joke was
always on them, but
now they have no answer;
they cease to be
persons. The world is
at war in this novel, and
wriggle as they will-they
can find no place for
themselves in it. They
are not persons anymore,
but just unhappy examples
of a bad and silly society.
They are out of date and
therefore dead."³³

But Waugh's portrayal of war time society and the characters involved thoroughly in life activities can not lose its stature. With great delicacy Waugh carries out his task of indicating the foibles in his own society. As Sean o faolain feels : "He (Waugh) was born with the natural gift for satire. His satires will probably live long as literature lasts. And he has written several of them."³⁵

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