



Scoop

Evelyn Waugh

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Lord Copper, newspaper magnate and proprietor of the "Daily Beast", has always prided himself on his intuitive flair for spotting ace reporters. That is not to say he has not made the odd blunder, however, and may in a moment of weakness make another. Acting on a dinner-party tip from Mrs Algernon Smith, he feels convinced that he has hit on just the chap to cover a promising little war in the African Republic of Ishmaelia. One of Waugh's most exuberant comedies, "Scoop" is a brilliantly irreverent satire of "Fleet Street" and its hectic pursuit of hot news.

Scoop Details

Date : Published 2003 by Penguin Books UK (first published 1937)

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Author : Evelyn Waugh

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Paula Bardell-Hedley says

“News is what a chap who doesn’t care much about anything wants to read.”

Scoop is a much-admired satirical novel by Evelyn Waugh, widely held to be a comedic literary classic. It was first published in 1938 and recounts the tale of British foreign correspondents reporting on a civil war from the fictional East African country of Ishmaelia.

Waugh had himself worked as a special correspondent in Ethiopia during the 1930s, reporting for the *Daily Mail* on Mussolini's invasion. His experience left him with a cynical view of the profession and the men behind the news: the powerful newspaper barons.

Scoop's farcical plot involves the hapless William Boot, a nature writer who is mistaken for the fashionable novelist John Boot, and is sent in error to cover the African conflict by Lord Copper's *Daily Beast*. It paints journalists as callous, corruptible buffoons, and was described by Christopher Hitchens in his introduction to my modern Penguin Classic as: “A novel of pitiless realism; the mirror of satire held up to catch the Caliban of the press corps.”

It therefore saddens me to report that I didn't entirely connect with *Scoop*. While there were parts, for instance the ridiculous muddle over a badger and a great-crested grebe, which made me chuckle, on the whole it failed to amuse or delight. Why? For several reasons, not least because Waugh's book felt excessively dated. This in itself wouldn't normally concern me unduly – in fact, I concede, in some novels it can be a pleasing aspect – but I found certain racist elements, for instance the revolting names used by characters to describe black people, sickening in the extreme. Yes, I fully appreciate it is satire and the terms merely reflect the era in which the story was written. The period is of course representative of pre-war British journalism, exactly as Waugh intended, but to this bleeding heart, lefty, postcolonial reader, large chunks of the narrative simply weren't funny.

Waugh himself, while being an immensely gifted writer (one of my favourite novels is *Brideshead Revisited*), was a controversial figure even during his lifetime, not least because of his openly fascist sympathies. However, *Scoop* remains one of his most popular works and is regarded by many as being one of the funniest pieces of fiction ever written about journalism. So there is little more I can write on the subject, except to assert, as someone deeply troubled by fake news, I was bitterly disappointed not to have enjoyed this novel.

You can read more of my reviews and other literary features at Book Jotter.

Panagiotis says

To *Scoop* είναι μια κωμωδία το Ιβλιν Βω, που σατιρίζει τον κόσμο της δημοσιογραφίας. Που ο τρέλος φέρει την ουσία της ιστορίας αυτής: είναι το λαβράκι, η καλή ερμηνεία, το κέλεπορι. Ορολογία των δημοσιογράφων που χαρακτηρίζει αυτή το ξέφρενο κυνήγι στο οποίο επιδίδονται εδώ οι χαρακτήρες, ρημιαία για την πρωτίτη της πρωτοσελίδης ερμηνείας.

Το μικρό αυτό μυθιστόρημα είναι εξαιρετικό. Φέρει όλα τα καλά στοιχεία της καλής λογοτεχνίας:

μνημει?δεις χαρακτ?ρες, περιπ?τεια, ?να ιστορικ? υπ?βαθρο που αναμειγμ?νο με τις επινο?σεις του Βω, θα ταξιδ?ψει τον αναγν?στη. Κι ακ?μα περισσ?τερο πνευματ?δεις διαλ?γους και σαρκασμ?. Ο αναγν?στης εδ? θα ?ρθει με το περιβ?ητο φλεγματικ?, Βρετανικ? χιο?μορ. Αντ?θετα απ? το θορυβ?δη, εκρηκτικ?, αλλ? πουριτανικ? χιο?μορ των Αμερικ?νων, εδ? η γλ?σσα ε?ναι κοφτερ? και πνευματ?δης. Μ?σα σε αυτ?ν την φ?ρσα του Βω, ?πως και στην εξαιρετικ? κωμωδ?α του Γκρ?χαμ Γκριν, "Ο ?νθρωπος μας στην Αβ?να", οι χαρακτ?ρες του Βω φα?νεται να ε?ναι ?ρμιαια ευτρ?πελων συγκυρι?ν. Ο πρωταγωνιστ?ς μ?σα απ? μια μνημει?δη γκ?φα συνωνυμ?ας προσλαμβ?νεται ως πολεμικ?ς ανταποκριτ?ς στον εμφ?λιο της επινοημ?νης Ισμα?λια. Η πρ?σληψη του αν?δρου απ? δημοσιογραφ?α γραφι?, αλλ? ακ?μα περισσ?τερο ο τρ?πος που συντ?σσονται οι αμφιλεγ?μενης πιστ?τητα ειδ?σεις, φ?ρνει στο νου π?λι τον τραγελαφικ? κατασκοπικ? β?ο του πωλητ? ηλεκτρικ?ν ειδ?ν στο ο ?νθρωπ?ς μας στην Αβ?να. Μ?νο που εδ? η χ?λκευση τυχα?ων περιστατικ?ν ε?ναι ο ακρογωνια?ος λ?θος, ?πως μαθα?νουμε, της σ?νταξης ειδ?σεων: ?να ολιγ?λο μ?νυμα μιας εξωφρενικ?ς ε?δησης, ταξιδε?ει στην σ?νταξη και το οπο?ο μεταμορφ?νεται σε ολ?κληρο κε?μενο, ικαν? να κλον?σει συθ?μελα την κοιν? ?ποψη. Οι συγκυρ?ες και, πολλ?ς φορ?ς, οι γκ?φες δημιουργο?ν ειδ?σεις τις οπο?ες ακολουθο?ν αγεληδ?ν οι δημοσιογρ?φοι, απεγνωσμ?νοι για ?να λαβρ?κι. Το οπο?ο οπο?α ?ταν αποδειχθε? κο?φιο, μ?σα σε μια αλληλεγγ?η που προστατε?ει το επ?γγελμα, ?λοι μαζ?, ανταγωνιστ?ς, προσπαθο?ν να το συγκαλ?ψουν. Και σε αυτ?ν τον ζωηρ? ρυθμ? κινε?ται η εξ?λιξη της ιστορ?ας. Το ?να φ?λτσο μετ? το ?λλο σε στιγμ?ς μεγαλοπρεπο?ς αστοχ?ας, διαγρ?φουν ?ναν μεγ?λο κ?κλο. Και το λ?θος ?τομο τιμ?ται με ?ναν τ?τλο για την προσφορ? του στην ενημ?ρωση. Και τελικ? ?ρχονται ?λα στην θ?ση τους. Ναι, ε?ναι μια κωμωδ?α αυτ? που γρ?φει ο Βω. Βρετανικ?, πνευματ?δης, ε?στοχη και εξ?χως διδακτικ? διακωμωδ?ντας τους λογε?ς μηχανισμο?ς που δημιουργο?ν και συντηρο?ν συστ?ματα και αξ?ες.

Η ραχοκοκαλι? του βιβλ?ου ε?ναι το ?φος, ο λ?γος, αυτ? που β?ζει τους ?ρωες του να λ?νε ο Βω, σχηματ?ζοντας μια διασκεδαστικ? πολυφων?α και πολυχρωμ?α. ?πως ο Βω λ?ει στο εισαγωγικ? σημε?ωμα του βιβλ?ου, η συγγραφ? για εκε?νον δεν ε?ναι ψυχογρ?φημα εις β?θος, αλλ? μια ?σκηση π?νω στην γλ?σσα, με την οπο?α ε?ναι ?μμονος. Αυτ? ακριβ?ς παραδ?δει εδ? στον αναγν?στη: ?να eye candy συγγραφικ? που με τον ρυθμ? του παρασ?ρει τον αναγν?στη εκε? ακριβ?ς που θ?λει ο Βω. Για το ?κρως σκωπτικ? ?φος του, ?μως, υπ?ρχουν πολλ?ς ενστ?σεις: πολλο? αναγν?στες κατηγορο?ν για ρατσισμ? και ?καρδα φυλετικ? σχ?λια τον συγγραφ?α. Ας πο?με για παρ?δειγμα το παρακ?τω κομμ?τι (σε δικ? μου απ?δοση), ?που οι αγανακτισμ?νοι δημοσιογρ?φοι αντ? για τον προορισμ? τους, καταλ?γουν στο σπ?τι εν?ς φ?λου τους απ? λ?θος του ιθαγεν? οδηγο?:

"Αυτ? δεν ε?ναι ο σταθμ?ς, μπαμπου?νε"

[...]

"Ε?παμε σε αυτ?ν τον π?θηκο να μας π?ει στον σταθμ?"

"Ναι, ?τσι συνηθ?ζεται. ?ταν μεταφ?ρουν ?ναν λευκ? πελ?τη που δεν καταλαβα?νουν, τον φ?ρνουν σε εμ?να. Κι εγ? τους εξηγ? [...]"

Αλλο? γ?νονται σχ?λια π?νω στις χαμερπε?ς συν?θειες των μα?ρων, αλλο? διακωμωδο?νται συν?θει?ς τους. Ωστ?σο, δε νομ?ζω πως καταλαμβ?νουν ?κταση σκανδαλωδ?ς μεγ?λη ο?τε αποτελο?ν τον στ?χο του Βω. Γιατ?, φερ' ειπε?ν, στο ?διο προκλητικ? για κ?ποιους ?φος, ?νας ?πειρος και αδ?ξιος καινο?ριος δημοσιογρ?φος, που η σ?ντομη παρους?α του κερδ?ζει την συμπ?θεια του αναγν?στη, χαρακτηρ?ζεται ως καθυστερημ?νος μεταξ? δ?ο συντακτ?ν, οι οπο?οι συμφωνο?ν να τον απολ?σουν για μια γκ?φα του. Εν? την ?δια στιγμ?, οι «επαγγέλματ?ες» και

φτασμένοι του συναφίου? έχουν υποπείσει σε κραυγαλέες γκρίφες. Σε ένα άλλο σημείο ο αστής συντηκτής, εργοδότης του απ? σπέντα ανταποκριτ? Μπούτ, αναγκασμένος να ταξιδέψει σε ένα τρένο στην βρετανική? παίθρο, βιώνει μια εφιαλτική εμπειρία, περιστοιχισμένος απ? μαν?λλη φυλή απ? εκείνον: τον κ?σμο της χαμηλής, επαρχιακής τ?ξης της Αγγλίας. Ένας εξαιρετικός, νομίζω, παραλληλισμός με τον Δυτικό που βρ?σκεται σε ένα εξωτικό, πρωτόγονο για εκείνον, περιβάλλον. Και τελικά, το βιβλίο για αυτό μιλάει: την πτ?ση της μεγαλοαστικής τ?ξης.

Αυτό που ενοχλεί, είναι αυτό που βάζει σε μπελάδες τον Γ?λλο Γουέλμπκ: ο καυστικός, πνευματώδης λόγος ενός συγγραφέα που ξέρει πώς να πυροδοτήσει με λόγους λ?ξεις αντιδράσεις στον αναγ?στη. Και αυτός ο καυτηριασμός του καθωσπρεπισμού, διασκεδάζει, ενώ την?δια στιγμή? λ?ει αλ?θειες. Και δημιουργεί? ξόχες αντιθ?σεις. Ήσως ενοχλεί? κ?ποιους, αν και αδυνατ? να μπω σε αυτόν την ε?θικτη ευρ?πεια που στην θ?α της λ?ξης "ν?γρος" πυροδοτείται? ένα μ?σος τυφλής, παραβλ?ποντας το πλαίσιο, το υπ?βαθρο το ιστορικό, αλλά? και τον τ?νο που σκηνοθετεί? ο συγγραφέας για?να τ?τοιο κείμενο.

Να διαβάσετε?; Ναι. Αποτελεί? ένα?ξοχο δείγμα ατ?φιας λογοτεχνικής γραφής. Θα προτρέψω τον αναγ?στη να διαβ?σει την αυθεντική, αγγλική? κδοση, αρκεί? να είναι ακονισμένες οι Αγγλικές του αναγ?σεις, καθώς η γλ?σσα του Βω είναι απαιτητική. Αλλι?ς κανείς? μπορεί? να δοκιμ?σει την ελληνική? μετάφραση απ? τις εκδόσεις Ερμεας (με τίτλο «Λαβρέκι»).

Υ.Γ. ?πως τα μυθιστορηματικά? ορ?ματα του Γκρίν στην Κο?βα προφ?τευαν τις εξελ?ξεις που?ρθαν λίγο μετά? σε εκείνο το μ?ρος, ?τσι και ο Βω μιλάει για μια ακροδεξι? ν?γρικη παρ?τάξη με λ?βαρο μια παραλλαγή?νη σβ?στικά. Εξωφρενική?; Αν τα δικ? μας χά?ρια φαντ?ζουν μακρι? απ? μια τ?τοια πρ?βλεψη, θα παραπ?μψω? ποιον ρουθούνζει? απαξιωτική? να ψ?ξει στο? ντερνέτ την αν?σταση του ναζισμού? στην Ινδονησία.

Laura says

From BBC Radio 4:

Dramatisation by Jeremy Front of Evelyn Waugh's satirical 1938 novel.

Episode 1:

Hapless journalist William Boot is mistakenly sent to report on a war in Africa.

Episode 2:

William finds life as a war correspondent somewhat tedious, but he does fall in love and find himself in the middle of a revolution.

Laura says

This was quite a ride! I started this when my brain felt a little fried but I was gripped from the beginning and couldn't stop reading it. I had no idea where this book was going to lead me.

I got into a good conversation with my roommate about the media and it was funny comparing the satiric depiction of journalists in the novel to news sources today as to how much of what is reported is factual. It is

all rather absurd. Not that it isn't a serious problem but it is so nice to be able to laugh about it sometimes.

Cheryl says

It is an old Penguin book, the orange and white one, a reprint from 1951. This book, these musty papers are 8 years older than i am!

It was a 50c find, among boxes of old books for sale at the school fair last month. Maybe it was even just a quarter. Cheap as anyway. And still in good enough condition for reading; the pages aren't falling out, there's no water damage etc. And it has that marvelous musty old book smell. Aaah.

And what a surprise of a treat to read. Having read only *Brideshead Revisited* many years ago, when i was too young to really appreciate it, but old enough to like it anyway, it felt like my introduction to the satire of Evelyn Waugh. It does make me wonder, where are these types of writers today?

The book has lively eccentric characters, you can see the old movie in your brain. Yet i am surprised that i can't find if a movie has been made of it. Some sassy comedy with fast talkers, smooth suave fraudsters, Claudette Colbert, or Cary Grant.....surely something must have been done on film with this....

(read several years ago, came across the jottings today)

Karl Steel says

Second time reading.

File this under guilty pleasures. I'm, well outraged isn't the right word, *made weary* by the dreariness of the other reviews of this book: plot summaries, gestures towards its transhistorical narratives (or towards its capturing that peculiar moment before the Nazis invaded Poland), and hamfisted comparisons to P. G. Wodehouse (different sort of writer entirely, although, hilariously, Wodehouse does get a shoutout as the plot winds down). And then, well, there's the fact that the book is *terribly racist*. It's not racist in a Mein Kampf or Turner Diaries kind of way; there's no particular program Waugh wants to push; but the novel nevertheless goes hand-in-thoughtless-hand with the postwar atrocities committed by Britain in Kenya. Is this attitude inevitable? Simply a record of its time?

Of course not. Don't be foolish.

That said, it's delightful. I'm of course reminded of A. J. Liebling's war journalism. The plot should be a model for plots everywhere. The odd mixture of affection and contempt is characteristic of the best humor writing (see, for example, *Diary of a Nobody* or *Cold Comfort Farm*). I'm going a bit too far here: it's clear that Waugh finds the expropriation of Africa's natural resources by European colonial powers distasteful. And that's something.

I'd suggest, however, starting with *The Loved One*.

George K. says

Βαθμολογία: 9/10

Προκειται για ένα απ' τα καλύτερα λαβράκια που πέτυχα σε κάποιο βιβλιοσάφρι πριν απ' δυο

χρ?νια, ?ναντι δυο ? τρι?ν ευρ? (να με συγχωρε?τε, δεν θυμ?μαι και πολ? καλ?). Καιρ? τ?ρα σκεφτ?μουν να το διαβ?σω, μιας και μου φαιν?ταν πολ? ενδιαφ?ρον και μ?λλον αστε?ο, εν? ε?ναι και κλασικο?ρα του κερατ?, ?λα ?μως που ?λο και κ?ποιο ?λλο βιβλ?ο ?παιρνε την θ?ση του (κλασικ?!). Τελικ? το δι?βασα επιτ?λους και ησ?χασα. Μιλ?με για ?να πολ? καλ? και κ?ργα Βρετανικ? μυθιστ?ρημα, με μπ?λικο φλεγματικ? χιο?μορ, αρκετ? σ?τιρα απ?ναντι σε δι?φορες καταστ?σεις, αλλ? ?σως και ?ναν υποβ?σκων ρατσισμ?. Ως προς το τελευτα?ο, θα πρ?πει να καταλ?βουμε ποιος και τι ?ταν ο ?βλιν Γου? (? ?πως αλλι?ς προφ?ρεται το ?νομ? του), αλλ? φυσικ? και το ?λο κλ?μα της εποχ?ς εκε?νης. Και, τ?λος, π?ντως, δεν ε?ναι αν?γκη να ε?μαστε π?ντα τ?σο ευα?σθητοι και μυγι?γιχτοι πια.

Που λ?τε, ?νας εμφ?λιος π?λεμος ε?ναι ?τοιμος να σκ?σει σε μια χ?ρα της Αφρικ?ς, την Ισμαηλ?α (μην ψ?ξετε τον χ?ρτη, δεν υπ?ρχει τ?τοια χ?ρα, ε?ναι δημιο?ρημα του συγγραφ?α - β?βαια υπ?ρχει μια π?λη με αυτ?ν την ονομασ?α στην Α?γυπτο) και ?λες οι μεγ?λες δημοσιογραφικ?ς εφημερ?δες στ?λνουν εκε? ανταποκριτ?ς για να καλ?ψουν τα γεγον?τα. ?νας απ? αυτο?ς θα ε?ναι ο Μπουτ, του "Θηρ?ου". Μ?νο που αυτ?ς ο Μπουτ δεν ε?ναι ο σωστ?ς Μπουτ. ?γινε παραν?ηση και αντ? να στε?λουν τον Μπουτ που γνωρ?ζει περ? εξωτερικ?ς πολιτικ?ς και μπορε? να πα?ξει στα δ?χτυλα τις διεθνε?ς ειδ?σεις, ?στειλαν κ?ποιον κακομο?ρη επαρχι?τη που γρ?φει αρθρ?κια για την φ?ση. Τ?λος π?ντων, κ?μποσα τραγελαφικ? θα συμβο?ν στην συν?χεια, ?μως ο Μπουτ (ο επαρχι?της) θα βγ?λει λαβρ?κια και θα σταθε? στο ?ψος των περιστ?σεων.

Με την μ?νι πλοκ? που σας ?δωσα, δεν μπορε?τε να καταλ?βατε την φλεγματικ?τητα, την ειρωνε?α και την σ?τιρα που χαρακτηρ?ζουν το παρ?ν βιβλ?ο. Ο Γου? σατιρ?ζει και καυτηρι?ζει τα ειδησεογραφικ? πρακτορε?α, τους δημοσιογρ?φους και τους ανταποκριτ?ς, με ?λες τις γκ?φες, το ατελε?ωτο και τρελ? κυν?γι που π?φτει για ?να καλ? δημοσιογραφικ? λαβρ?κι και, μερικ?ς φορ?ς, την αν?γκη τους για δημιουργ?α ψε?τικων ειδ?σεων που θα συγκλον?σουν τους αναγν?στες τους. Επ?σης σατιρ?ζει την ?λη εξωτερικ? πολιτικ? των μεγ?λων κρατ?ν απ?ναντι στα κρ?τη του λεγ?μενου Τρ?του Κ?σμου, αλλ? συν?μα και αυτ? τα ?δια τα κρ?τη και τις συν?θειες που επικρατο?ν στην πολιτικ?, την οικονομ?α και την κοινωνι?α τους.

Το βιβλ?ο απ? την μια προσφ?ρει πλοκ? με αρχ?, μ?ση και τ?λος, αρκετ? δρ?ση και μπ?λικους αξιοπερ?εργους και συμπαθητικο?ς χαρακτ?ρες, εν? απ? την ?λλη προσφ?ρει γ?λιο. Εντ?ξει, δεν ξεκαρδ?ζεσαι κι?λας, αλλ? ?να χαμ?γελο θα σχηματιστε? πολλ?ς φορ?ς στα χε?λη του αναγν?στη. Η γραφ? ε?ναι π?ρα μα π?ρα πολ? καλ?, αιχμηρ?, ειρωνικ? και σκωπτικ?, χωρ?ς περιττολογ?ες και φιοριτο?ρες, οι περιγραφ?ς των τοπ?ων, των καταστ?σεων και των χαρακτ?ρων ε?ναι οι πλ?ον απαρα?τητες, εν? και οι δι?λογοι ε?ναι εξαιρετικο?. Με το "Λαβρ?κι" π?τυχα... λαβρ?κι, γιαντ? ε?ναι ?να βιβλ?ο που με ?φησε π?ρα για π?ρα ευχαριστημ?νο. Δι?βασα την ελληνικ? μετ?φραση, που μου φ?νηκε αρκετ? γλαφυρ? και ικανοποιητικ? για τα χρ?νια της, αλλ? ε?μαι σ?γουρος ?τι η ?λη αναγνωστικ? απ?λαυση θα ε?ναι κλ?σεις αν?τερη αν κ?ποιος διαβ?σει το βιβλ?ο στ'αγγλικ? (αρκε?, π?ντα, να ?χει σχετικ? αναγνωστικ? εμπειρ?α).

Anastasia Fitzgerald-Beaumont says

There is a story that has long since entered into the mythology of journalism. It concerns William Randolph

Hearst, among the most unscrupulous of the press barons, for whom newspapers were not so much a source of information but an expression of his personal power. After the beginning of the Cuban struggle for independence against Spain in the mid 1890s he was active among those pushing for American intervention, seeing war as a way of selling even more newspapers.

The artist Frederick Remington was sent to the island to provide Hearst's New York Journal with illustrations. When he arrived in Cuba he cabled back, saying that all was quiet, that there was no war in sight. Hearst's response was "You supply the pictures, I'll supply the war."

True or not it's a story about the power of the press and the ability of unscrupulous publishers to 'manufacture' news. I was reminded of it immediately on reading Evelyn Waugh's novel *Scoop*, a satire centring on the pursuit of a non-existent story about a non-existent war.

To begin with I should say that I have not read an awful lot of Waugh. The truth is I've never really warmed to him as a novelist and a story teller. As a writer he shows tremendous technical proficiency, and *Scoop* is probably as good as he gets. But I find his style, the way he approaches his subject, tiresomely superficial. I quite liked *Brideshead Revisited* for all its snobbishness but I found the comedy in *Decline and Fall* unfunny and forced, so much so that I gave up reading after a few dozen pages.

Scoop is also a comedy, one that worked much better for me than *Decline and Fall*. It's a reasonably effective expose of the absurdity of the press and the arrogance of newspaper owners. Lord Copper, owner of *The Daily Beast*, serves here in the role of a fictional Hearst. Hearing rumours of war in the fictional African republic of Ismaelia naturally he wants *The Beast* to get the scoop. Having been told that there is a man by the name of Boot ideal for this kind of assignment he arranges to have him sent to Africa. The problem is he and Slater, the foreign news editor, send the wrong Boot! They send the *Beast's* nature correspondent William, a man more used to voles and lush places.

William is hopelessly out of his comfort zone but by a mixture of good fortune and good contacts he manages to get the story that isn't a story, a scoop that isn't a scoop. Yes, the press can work like that, spinning something out of nothing, though more in the days of Beaverbrook and Northcliffe, the British equivalents of Hearst and most probably the models for the frightful Lord Copper.

So, that's it, part satire, part comedy of errors. It's light and easy to digest, a book probably more for its time than ours. Some smiles, a few laughs, some interesting comic situations, a satire without any real bite. It's quickly read and just as quickly forgotten. According to the Wikipedia article it was included in *The Observer's* list of the hundred greatest novels of all time. So, it's one of the hundred greatest novels of all time; really? Well, if *The Observer's* readers say so who am I to argue.

Petra X says

Evelyn Waugh was a snob, a racist, an anti-semitic and a fascist sympathiser whose attitude was, in the words of his biographer David Wykes, "[Waugh's racism was] *"an illogical extension of his views on the naturalness and rightness of hierarchy as the (main) principle of social organisation"*.

He was also jealous, personally nasty and malicious, had been a bully at school, and as James Lees-Milne said, *"the nastiest-tempered man in England"*.

Waugh was, however, absolutely devoted to his adopted religion, Catholicism, and generally friendly, welcoming and generous to other Catholics. Nancy Mitford asked him how he reconciled his often

objectionable conduct and attitude with being a Christian, said he replied that *"were he not a Christian he would be even more horrible"*.

All of this is on display in this absolutely hilarious farce of a book, and right at the beginning the tone is set,

"That's Mrs. Cohen," said Effie. "You see how it is. They're Yids."

"Oh dear," said William, "I was told to come here by the Passport Office."

"Sure it isn't the nigger downstairs you want?"

Scoop is a satire on journalism and the newspaper industry in general based on his own experiences or rather that of a fellow war correspondent for the Daily Mail covering the Abyssinian-Italian war. Although the characters are so utterly defined by the mythical racial characteristics assigned to them by an unkind world, it is still easy to laugh. The snobbery which the non-ethnic characters displayed was equally harsh and that is perhaps the key as to why such an ostensibly nasty book by such an unpleasant man is so funny, he must have seen himself in all of this, *"He was gifted with the sly, sharp instinct for self-preservation that passes for wisdom among the rich,"* and so it's a bit of a send-up, and that's something we can all appreciate.

The writing is wonderful, just as it was in his opus magnum, Brideshead Revisited, the humour extravagant, the denouement ridiculous. All in all, recommended to everyone who likes period pieces that aren't quite. nor ever will be, classics.

Phrynnne says

Delightful, old fashioned, smart , funny, not at all politically correct. In fact Evelyn Waugh at his best. It is a very short book but I enjoyed every minute of it. The main character fumbles his way through outrageous situations but always has the fates on his side and he always comes up a winner. I loved it!

BrokenTune says

Review was first posted on BookLikes:
<http://brokentune.booklikes.com/post/...>

For nearly two weeks now, the bent and creased copy of Scoop sitting on my desk has been staring at me. Patiently. Waiting whether I was going to write a review or not.

On finishing the book I had exactly two feelings about it:

1. As far as satire of the press goes, Waugh created the most delicious and entertaining spoof I could have imagined. However,
2. This book contained so many openly racist and chauvinist remarks that even Fleming's Live and Let Die (which I had finished just before Scoop) looks like an enlightened and unbiased work promoting intercultural understanding.

For the best part of the last two weeks, I have looked at my old copy of Scoop and wondered whether to

chuck it onto the charity shop pile or straight into the bin. It's not a book I would recommend unreservedly. Even looking at Waugh as a representative of a time when sentiments of racial or cultural stereotyping were common and widely accepted, I wonder whether there was a need for it in Scoop because this was not a part of the book that was satirical. Or, if it was, this did not come across well.

So, while I am glad that I have read Scoop, I expected more. Much more.

Elizabeth says

Journalists seem to love this guy. He's awfully snarky for a writer from the 1930s--but oh so good.

A quick read, "Scoop" is about a man "named" John Boot gets accidentally sent to Ishmaila as a foreign correspondent. The fellow manages to report some news after blazing through his budget and falling in love with a married gold digger named Katchen. Meanwhile Waugh paints a hilarious portrait of foreign correspondent idiots creating fake news and running around chasing ridiculous leads. It's not the nicest picture of journalists, but pretty funny. And Waugh creates the most ridiculous situations in his novels.

Ensiform says

Due to a case of mistaken identity, a mild-mannered columnist on country life, William Boot, is sent as a war correspondent to Ishmaelia, an independent African nation where dissent is brewing between long-time ruling family the Jacksons and anarcho-communist upstarts prompted by German and Russian interests. Boot, though utterly stymied by the lackadaisical and corrupt Ishmaleian government (as well as his fellow journalists), and through no merit of his own, scoops everyone and returns to an unwelcome hero's welcome.

The first time I read this was seventeen years ago. I think I may have appreciated it a bit more this time around – it recalls Wodehouse in its muddled plot and tortuous misadventures of its characters, as well as the brilliant characterization through dialogue. But Waugh is much more scathing: of the fatuous, ant-brained upper classes, of the bumptious but ultimately useless journalistic set, of the oafish and self-centered country dwellers. More than a satire of what was then modern journalism, it's a witty, often hilarious look at the caprices of human nature.

[read twice: 9/1/93, 6/18/10]

Daniel says

This book made me laugh out loud, something that books rarely do. Then again, I don't read comical fiction. Still, I suspect that, were I to look into the genre, Waugh would stand out in the crowd.

This is the third book that I've read from Waugh's work, and of the three it is the clear favorite. Along with his usual talent for razzing British societal mannerisms, Waugh adds his satirical take on foreign policy in a small, developing country that is, ostensibly, under threat of civil war. What starts as a jab against hyperbolic journalism and a total lack of understanding amongst policy makers turns into an absurd spectacle that even includes a measure of swashbuckling.

It feels like Waugh had fun writing this tale, and his powers of description are so apt that the feeling is catching. Here, for example, Waugh sketches the front yard of a woman who rents out rooms on her property:

"The Pension Dressler stood in a side street and had, at first glance, the air rather of a farm than of a hotel. Frau Dressler's pig, tethered by one hind trotter to the jamb of the front door, roamed the yard and disputed the kitchen scraps with the poultry. He was a prodigious beast. Frau Dressler's guests prodded him appreciatively on their way to the dining-room, speculating on how soon he would be ripe for killing. The milch-goat was allowed a narrower radius; those who kept strictly to the causeway were safe, but she never reconciled herself to this limitation and, day in, day out, essayed a series of meteoric onslaughts on the passers-by, ending, at the end of her rope, with a jerk which would have been death to an animal of any other species. One day the rope would break; she knew it and so did Frau Dressler's guests." (156)

Phrases such as "meteoric onslaught" are an excellent example of the skillful hand that Waugh brings to language.

Only one aspect of this book did not work, whatsoever, and that is the rampant racism that Waugh shows for black people. It is a sad and foolish shortcoming, much like the racism that Robert Howard succumbed to in his adventure stories. It is possible that Waugh is going for more humor when he tosses around slurs and epithets, but if this is the case, he goes too far and employs them with a discomfiting fluency.

Otherwise, I very much enjoyed this book. I trust Waugh to make me laugh, and I am sure that I will turn to his work again in the future.

Chris Chapman says

Orwell said Waugh was almost as good a novelist as it is possible to be while holding untenable opinions. "Outside the owls hunted maternal rodents and their furry brood"; funny how he mercilessly speared sentimentality, given that it's such a fundamental part of the fascism that he seemed quite partial to. But then internal logic was never the strong suit of bigots.

Howard Olsen says

Waugh followed the near-perfect "Handful of Dust," with "Scoop," an absolutely perfect "Newspaper Adventure" that satirizes journalism, especially as practiced by foreign correspondents. This was the perfect topic for Waugh; not only did he work throughout a career as a foreign correspondent, journalists are a recurring stock character in his fiction. Inevitably, Waugh portrays journalists as drunk, fast talking adventurers, who are not above making up a story in their pursuit of fame and fortune.

the basic story finds young gentleman William Boot-who writes a gardening column-is mistakenly sent to the african nation of Ishmaelia to cover the civil war that is supposed to be raging there. Instead of finding a civil war, Boot finds the mix of journalists, freebooters, marxists, fascists, and ex-pats who were a regular feature of life in the Third World throughout the 20th century. In fact, if you have read PJ O'Rourke's "Holidays In Hell," you'll be amazed how these characters survived 50 years after Waugh was writing. Ishmaelia is a Liberia-style nation which is being fought over by successive groups of communist subversives (including a college educated boxer from Alabama!), sinister fascists, and assorted plunderers.

Boot manages to run into everybody, and inadvertently becomes a famous writer. Waugh's knowledge of Africa, and the people fighting over its spoils, gives this book a verisimilitude that is rare in the world of satire.

Some grippers, I see, have declared this book to be fatally flawed because it is racist. They are absolutely right. The relentless mockery of white anglo-saxons in this book is absolutely merciless. No one is spared. The landed class is portrayed as impoverished bores living in drafty manors. Newspaper publishers are portrayed as pompous starched shirts who live to make windy speeches at awards banquets. African explorers are portrayed as amoral profiteers stealing the natural resources from African natives. Journalists are not heroic Dan Rathers who Speak Truth To Power; they are drunk ignorant rascals who are little better than fiction writers. Waugh even manages to take some gratuitous whacks at such sacrosanct elements of British life like gardeners and WW1 vets. Still, I was able to "read through" all of this cruelty, and I would urge sensitive types to do the same; or, at least, get a grip.

This is Waughian satire at its best. It's tightly plotted, filled with detail, and very funny. In fact, The quality of his craftsmanship is at a very high level. His ability to set a scene - whether at a manor house, a newspaper office, a colonial outpost, or a stuffy banquet - gives this book a grounding in reality that makes the humor even more biting. if you just want to read one satire by Waugh, this would be the place to start (with "Dust" as the best of his "serious" books).

Travis says

Waugh is a realist. His voice in Scoop is flippant, nonchalant, and gregarious. Yet, between the lines, in the subtext, in implication—or whatever way is best to put it—the book is a hard-nosed spoof, at points verging on satire proper. I'd be embarrassed to be a journalist, were I one, after reading Scoop; the book is a caricaturization of the occupation itself. It's funny in points, and ridiculously so (e.g., the description of the goat head-butting the officer). It's borderline touching and metaphorical at others (recall the description of Boot in love). Scoop is inundated throughout with Waugh's dry humor. The book is well-worth the read.

That said, the narrative itself is also dry. So while some sub-stories were fascinating, others were a bit of a bore. The author's flowery prose could use, occasionally, some Hemingway-esque minimalization. The book's frequent racial slurs are also distracting. Yet: Waugh, in Scoop, is a master of prose. The story is absurdist, yet realist. There is clear exaggeration involved in Waugh's description of journalism, but how much of it does Waugh consider hyperbolic? (Not much, I'd wager.) And William Boot—not Uncle Boot and not John Boot—is a memorable and charming protagonist with whom the reader bonds over the length of his journey, while simultaneously pitying the poor fellow. I began the book by thinking that Boot was the tragic hero, but he is certainly not. If anything, Boot is Waugh's inversion of the tragic hero. But in the end, I think Boot is no hero at all; he's a wonderful countryman, concerned only with his Lush Places.

Melaszka says

Rereading this after many years, I'm less impressed than I was with it when I first read it - mainly because the racism jars more than it did then, but also because at times the plot seems too slight and to hinge too much on an improbable deus ex machina.

The character of William Boot is a delight, however, and the naif-thrown-into-a-bearpit scenario works very

well. Boot Magna is drawn in an endearingly dotty fashion and the romance with the manipulative Katchen, though underwritten, is compelling. Larger-than-life characters, such as Lord Copper and Boot's mysterious rescuer leap off the page.

There's a few too many journalistic in-jokes for my taste, though, and the crowd of journalists in Jacksonburg are too indistinguishable from one another. Some of the details of political intrigue and mineral rights went over my head. Ishmaelia itself is drawn with rather too heavy a hand - I can't escape from the conclusion that Waugh views non-whites as sub-human and, even making allowances for 1930s attitudes, the past being another country, and all that, it still leaves a nasty taste in the mouth.

Paul says

2.5 stars

I've read little Waugh apart from *Brideshead Revisited*, which I loved; Waugh is writing there about the decline of the upper classes and writing about people he knew.

This is a comic novel about Journalism and the newspaper industry and is a very effective satire. Lord Copper, the tyrannical and megalomaniac newspaper boss was said to be based on Lord Northcliffe, but was probably also part Beaverbrook and Hearst. The story is based on Waugh's experiences working for the Daily Mail as a foreign correspondent covering Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. Ethiopia is changed to the imaginary state of Ishmaelia. Lord Copper owner of the Daily Beast has learnt that something is going on in Ishmaelia. As his best correspondent has recently transferred to the Daily Brute, he is in need of a new one. A certain Mr John Boot, a writer, is recommended. As it happens William Boot writes an obscure countryside column for the paper. He is mistakenly called to London and given the job. Boot is sent to Ishmaelia with large amounts of useless luggage, where he meets lots of other journalists, including Americans and French. They look for communists and fascists and for the promised civil war. Of course little is going on so the journalists make it up. William has adventures, falls briefly in love. William also has his moment when something actually does happen. There is a good cast of supporting characters; many of whom are based on people Waugh knew. The character of William Boot is said to be loosely based on Bill Deedes who had been with Waugh covering the situation in Abyssinia. Deedes was 22 at the time and his newspaper had sent him out with a quarter of a ton of baggage. Deedes spent the next 65 years denying this! This is a funny and well written novel and was in the Observer list of the one hundred greatest novels of all time. The satire of the newspaper industry still has relevance today and is very pertinent.

However there are problems for me with the whole. This was written in 1938 and one would expect with a robust writer like Waugh some issues with language. That is an understatement; Waugh is anti-Semitic and racist and his approach to other races is execrable. He was a clear believer in hierarchy and very misanthropic. Cyril Connolly referred to him as a permanent adolescent. Christopher Hitchens has argued that Waugh's many faults, dislikes and contempt for other human beings makes his cruelty funny as a novelist and writer. I remain unconvinced and Orwell (who was an exact contemporary) made a more thoughtful comment in some notes for an unwritten essay on Waugh; Waugh was "almost as good a novelist as it is possible to be . . . while holding untenable opinions"

Waugh's satire of tabloid journalism and its complacent corruption is still prescient, but his attitudes and opinions are awful

Nooilforpacifists says

Add me to the list: hilarious. Sort of a British "salt-of-the-earth" comedy, where the common man is wiser

than his supposed betters.
