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"Revenge or Tribute": Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* and Evelyn Waugh

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> . . . 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 transplantation. It is there that I find the experiences vivid enough to demand translation into literary form.
>
> Evelyn Waugh, *Ninety-Two Days* 11

> . . . this ground of accommodation, this art of creative coexistence—pointing away from apartheid and ghetto fixations—is of the utmost importance and native to the Caribbean.
>
> Wilson Harris, "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas" 158

The English novelist Evelyn Waugh refers to "the borderlands of conflicting cultures" in his travelogue detailing the ninety-two days he spent in 1933 in what was then British Guiana. The Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris proposes an "art of creative coexistence" that is "native" and particular to the Caribbean and the Guianas in his essay on history, fable and myth in the region. If there is a "ground of accommodation" between writers as apparently antithetical as Evelyn Waugh and Wilson Harris, that ground may be Guyana, the South American and Caribbean country that provides the creative impetus of Harris's many novels and is the setting for the latter stages of Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*.[1]

Widely recognized as Waugh's finest novel, *A Handful of Dust* has also been criticized for its "broken" structure, for the abrupt transition in the fifth chapter from London and the English shires to the equatorial rainforests of South America. "What a snare this travelling business is to the young writer," complained P.G. Wodehouse, "[h]e goes to some blasted jungle or other and imagines that everyone will be interested in it" (qtd. in Donaldson, ed. *P.G. Wodehouse* 155). In the opinion of Henry Yorke (better known as the novelist Henry Green), "the end is so fantastic that it throws the rest out of proportion"—a point that Waugh conceded, explaining that the conclusion

should be read as a "conceit" (*Letters* 88). Yet Waugh's hero Tony Last's expedition into the rainforest may not be wholly reducible to what the author called his novel's "justifiable symbolism" in that the hallucinations Tony experiences when he contracts fever allow the author to explore the "borderland" between the novel's dominant mode of English satirical realism and what may be termed a Guyanese hyper-realism. Tony's hallucinatory redaction of the people and plot of the English sections of the novel is after all like his malaria determined by local conditions, by the environment in which he finds and expresses himself—that of Guyana.[2] As D.H. Lawrence asserted of the writer abroad, "[t]he place where he writes becomes a part of what he writes" (qtd. in Fussell, *Abroad* 143).

A decade after Evelyn Waugh's sojourn there, the radical implications for fiction latent in the Guyanese interior were registered by Wilson Harris, who states that his dissatisfaction with the traditional novel "became profound when I became a topographical and hydrographic surveyor and began my work in the interior [of Guyana]" (*Selected Essays* 2). In Guyana, Harris argues,

> . . . "realism" becomes, in itself, a dead-end and the need begins to dawn for a drama of consciousness which reads back through the shock of place and time for omens of capacity, for thresholds of capacity that were latent, unrealised, within the clash of cultures and movements of people into the South Americas and the West Indies. ("The Amerindian Legacy" 171)

Guyana is "a landscape of the imagination" that elicits its own "form of reality" (Harris, "The Amerindian Legacy" 174-75). Harris's rendering of that "reality" in his novels is generically related to fiction that elsewhere in the Caribbean and on the South American continent is called magical realism. Tendentious as it would be to suggest that his travels in the region make Evelyn Waugh a magical realist, it is nonetheless valid to argue that in the latter, South American, stages of *A Handful of Dust*, realist narrative is equated with frustration, limit, imprisonment. Tony Last must, it seems, spend the rest of his days reading aloud from the works of Charles Dickens to Mr. Todd, the man who saves his life only to act as his jailer.[3]

In *A Handful of Dust* and in "The Man Who Liked Dickens" (the short story, composed in South America, from which the novel emerged), Dickens represents patriarchal authority exercised to a lunatic degree. Dickens, for Waugh, was associated with "old men" (Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh* 329), and Mr. Todd's father, like Waugh's, had read to his son from Dickens. Indeed, Dickens was integral to the livelihood of Arthur Waugh, who for many years directed the publishing company, Chapman and Hall, which held the Dickens copyrights. Mr. Todd's patrimony is likewise bound up with Dickens, in that he inherits his father's books. Reading Dickens in the tropics is, ironically, a

redemptive activity in *Ninety-Two Days*, Waugh's Guyanese travelogue, delivering the reader from the travails and the tedium of travel: here, Waugh reads Dickens to himself, and shares Dickens in a material manner when he divides the pages of his copy of *Martin Chuzzlewit* with a Mr. Winter, "who was out of all reading matter" (153).[4] In the fictionalized versions of the South American experience, however, reading Dickens aloud is to share the work with Mr. Todd, whose passion for Dickens encourages us to judge the man according to his name, and in whose name lurks the German word for death (*Tod*).[5] Tony, Waugh's long-suffering surrogate, must serve a life-sentence in the prison house of Dickens's language.

In another Guyanese fiction, Pauline Melville's 1997 novel *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, it is not his hapless protagonist but Waugh himself who reads Dickens aloud and with pleasure: "Mr. Waugh asked Danny if he would like to hear him read some Dickens. He had brought a copy of *Dombey and Son* with him" (288). Danny, we are told, "listened patiently for as long as Mr. Waugh cared to read" (288).[6] Elements of *A Handful of Dust* other than Englishmen reading Dickens, such as doomed love stories and transatlantic separations, are reprised and reappropriated in Melville's novel, which like Waugh's is structured according to repetitions and parallels: a son dies in both novels, epitomizing in each instance—as, indeed, in *Dombey and Son*—a way of life under threat, Tony Last's by the social changes of the 1930s and Chofy McKinnon's by the contemporary predations of the Hawk Oil Company. For the most part, however, Melville engages *A Handful of Dust* by implication, focusing instead upon the figure of its author and upon the diary that Waugh kept of his experiences in Guyana. His diary for 22 January 1933 mentions in passing intimate particulars of family history to which Waugh had been made privy by his hostess at Hart's Ranch in the Rupununi district regarding her "dotty bastard nephew," the offspring of an incestuous brother-sister union (Waugh, *Diaries* 367). This is the tale that is told some sixty years later in all its fullness and complexity in Pauline Melville's novel, where the "dotty bastard" is Sonny, the child of Beatrice McKinnon and her brother, the Danny who listens as Waugh reads to him from Dickens. Their story is framed by a contemporary story of exogamous love and loss—that of a later McKinnon, Chofy, and Rosa Mendelson, a white European woman who has come to the Guyanese capital, Georgetown, to research Evelyn Waugh's visit to the country.

Waugh himself is an incidental yet ominous character in *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, who appears out of nowhere demanding a haircut. It is Waugh to whom Wifreda, Sonny's aunt and guardian, recounts the story of her sister and brother's incestuous relationship, breaking her solemn promise to Beatrice never to tell of it on pain of being struck blind. It is Waugh who brings Rosa Mendelson to Guyana to research her article "Evelyn Waugh—a Post-colonial Perspective" (351), and so, albeit indirectly, it is he who threatens

the integrity of Chofy McKinnon's family. The very mention of Evelyn Waugh leaves Wifreda "fretting" at the memory of his "pushed-up face and little pebble eyes" (71, 72). Indeed, Rosa's questions about Waugh precipitate the psychological or supernatural fulfillment of Beatrice's curse in Wifreda's "hysterical blindness" (297), and her injury compounds the earlier insult of Waugh's dismissive response to what she has confessed at such personal cost.

Notwithstanding that Waugh's *Ninety-Two Days* would be described by the manager of the Rupununi Development Company as "the only honest thing that's ever been written about the Rupununi" (qtd. in Swan, *Marches of El Dorado* 167), Pauline Melville's fictional version of events may tell a more profound truth than the bare facts of Waugh's diary and travelogue. Her novel is, however, a matter of biography or "parabiography" as well as of fiction: it is a Melville family matter, in that the McKinnons of *The Ventriloquist's Tale* are based upon the Melvilles of the Rupununi district of Guyana.[7] In turn, these historical Melvilles are rendered as "characters" in more than one sense in the accounts of the personalities of the Rupununi by Waugh and subsequent travel writers such as V. S. Naipaul, and have become as much the stuff of myths and texts as Pauline Melville's fictional versions of them.[8]

Issues of fact and fiction, history and myth, and the notion that these categories are unstable and may even be transposed, are foregrounded in the Prologue to *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, in which the narrator concedes that in the current literary climate "fiction has to disguise itself as fact and I must bow to the trend and become a realist" (9). This entails putting away "everything fantastical that my nature and the South American continent describe," and foregoing such magical realist staples as "men with members the size of zeppelins" (9). Where *A Handful of Dust* critiques realist narrative as out of step with the times, as an antiquated, "Dickensian" discourse, *The Ventriloquist's Tale* suggests that the grotesqueries of magical realism have been superannuated as the mode of the minute by a new realism. The magical realist writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez has, however, insisted that "I am a realist writer because I believe that in Latin-America everything is possible, everything is real" (qtd. in Harris, *Selected Essays* 174), and Melville's narrator, the putative exponent of realism, is himself the "immoral trickster" who is the eponymous hero of a foundational work of magical realist fiction, Mario de Andrade's *Macunaima* (Andrade, *Macunaima* 65).[9] If it is indeed the case, as the narrator's grandmother insists, that "all writing is fiction" (2), then the subgeneric boundaries between realism and its magical variant, between (auto)biographical fact and imaginative fiction, and between genealogy and myth are reconfigured as a fertile contact zone. The relationship between Beatrice and Danny McKinnon, for instance, has its mythic counterpart in the lunar and solar creation stories of the Wapisiana, Macusi, and other Amerindian peoples, since "one of the most widespread, indigenous myths concerns the eclipse, which represents brother-and-sister incest in the form of a copulating

sun and moon" (Melville, *Ventriloquist's Tale* 82).[10] The relationship between Beatrice and Danny, too, culminates during the solar eclipse of 1919. A variant version is found in another pre-Columbian Amerindian legend, according to which on July 16 in the year 789 AD, the god Quetzalcoatl "had to leave Mexico because he had made love to his sister. He is supposed to have risen up in the sky to become the evening star" (147).[11]

In his essay on the Quetzalcoatl myth, Wilson Harris suggests that the act of incest is a metaphor for the creative crossing of prescriptive frontiers. The legend of Quetzalcoatl is associated in Harris's syncretic mythopoeia with "the mystery of Christ the tiger which springs in the New Year (if I may adapt a line from T.S. Eliot)" ("Quetzalcoatl" 189). Both are animal riddles, and animal riddles, like incest, involve miscegenation and the production of the "variables" that animate Harris's cross-cultural and hybrid aesthetics: again, "[a]nimal beings associated with divinities or divine heroes or god-men is a crossing of frontiers that seem absolute in their own right" ("Quetzalcoatl" 189). Indeed, "Makunaima made man and animal all of one speech" (Roth, *Inquiry* 199). Animal lore structures Pauline Melville's novel, as chapter titles such as "A Tapir for a Wife" suggest: the tapir, an animal "too lazy to mate outside its own family," is "the animal symbol for incest" (176, 83). One of the manifestations of Wilson Harris's theory of creative "crossings," a theory that derives in part at least from "pre-Columbian traditions of fluid identity," is ventriloquism, the ability to speak through "plural masks" ("Quetzalcoatl" 185, 201).

Pauline Melville, who has acknowledged the influence of Wilson Harris on her writing, also pays tribute to the Amerindian "talent for mimicry and ventriloquism" (185). Her novel is itself a ventriloquist's tale from the outset, when the narrator introduces himself as a transhistorical and metamorphic trickster. As the ethnographer Walter E. Roth notes in his *An Inquiry Into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians*, a source book for Melville's novel, in the Guianas, Amerindian animal lore merges with folk tales such as the Brer Rabbit stories of the ex-slave population which are African in origin and which subsist "modified more or less by local condition" (372). Melville's trickster-narrator acts as a conduit for "an incessant chattering from the past" (5) and has ". . . a genius for ventriloquism. […] I can do any voice: jaguar, London hoodlum, bell-bird, nineteenth-century novelist, ant-eater, epic poet, a chorus of howler monkeys, urban brutalist, a tapir" (8).[12]

Evelyn Waugh, of course, demonstrates his own facility for literary ventriloquism in *A Handful of Dust*, a novel that flagrantly reveals and sardonically revises its major intertexts in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.[13] Eliot had planned to title the first three parts of his relentlessly allusive poem with a quotation from Dickens's novel *Our Mutual Friend*, "He Do the Police in Different Voices."[14] We don't know if Tony Last does the police in different voices when he reads aloud from Dickens

to Mr. Todd (Todd tells him that he reads well), but from its epigraph and very title onward, *A Handful of Dust* ventriloquizes *The Waste Land*. Waugh's novel is like Eliot's poem an example of what Paul Fussell has termed the interwar "'travel' imagination" (*Abroad* 52), and is a lament for the decline of Western civilization, an elegy for the spiritual values that have been discarded in the world of the modern wasteland. Hetton, the Last country seat, is like its child-heir John Andrew sacrificed for a London that, as in Eliot's poem, is rendered as a hellish, sterile place where love is casually replaced by a predatory lust personified in the likes of "Mr. Beaver." Tony Last is more than nominally the "last" man, the representative of the end of the English squirearchy so beloved of Waugh. Like the quester-figure in *The Waste Land*, he rejects the sordid society of London in search of another and ideal "City," a quest which in the novel as in the poem involves a death by water, that of Dr Messinger. This quest also entails Tony's living death, which is Waugh's version of the epigraph from the *Satyricon* and its futile death-wish with which *The Waste Land* opens. Archetypal figures from Eliot's poem, such as the Sybil, the Lady of Situations, the drowned sailor and the clairvoyant, duly reappear in Waugh's novel.

A Handful of Dust rewrites *The Waste Land* with a satirical difference, however, parodying its modernist precursor while appropriating Eliot's diagnosis of godless modern decline to indict Waugh's own "post" modernist age. Where the turn to the East near the end of Eliot's poem offers a potentially redemptive alternative to the spiritual bankruptcy of the Western world, the transition to South America in the fifth chapter of *A Handful of Dust* merely evokes a New World wasteland. Part V of *The Waste Land* offers glimpses of Christ on the road to Emmaus that are simultaneously the delusions of Shackleton's Antarctic explorers—redemption may, or may not, be a mirage, but Tony Last's malarial hallucinations, the apparition of his wife, and the vision of his own "Unreal City," are fragments of belief too fragile to shore against his ruins.[15] *The Waste Land* ends in ambivalence as a grail quest without a grail but with the compensatory benediction of the closing "Shantih. Shantih. Shantih," a borrowing from the Upanishads that Eliot glosses as "[t]he Peace which passeth understanding" (75, 80). Tony's quest for new life concludes less equivocally in the person of Waugh's South American Kurtz, the ludicrous but deathly Mr. Todd.

Waugh's explanation that his penultimate chapter, "Du Côté de Chez Todd," "is a 'conceit' in the Webster manner" (*Letters* 88) again invokes *The Waste Land* and Eliot's allusions to a Webster whose lurid conceits are reduced in *A Handful of Dust* to the sinister but domestic dimensions of a Beatrix Potter story, to Waugh's own "Tale of Mr. Tod."[16] Waugh had previously used children's literature as an instrument of satire in his African writings: in his 1931 travel book *Remote People*, for instance, Waugh suggests that the coronation of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, in its "peculiar flavour of

galvanized and translated reality," would not be out of place in *Alice in Wonderland* (23). Indeed, the coronation is subsequently rendered as high farce in the novel *Black Mischief*, published the following year. *Ninety-Two Days* was published in April, 1934 just as Waugh was completing *A Handful of Dust*, yet his definition of the South American jungle as London's mirror image encourages his reader to assume that his novel has little to do with the place in which it was conceived: "I wanted to discover how the prisoner got there, and eventually the thing grew into a study of other sorts of savages at home and the civilized man's helpless plight among them" (*Essays* 303). London is an urban jungle, harboring among its denizens such social climbers and new Barbarians as the Polly Cockpurse who, one of the novel's many apes of god, "looks like a monkey" (45). This equivalence between sites of savagery allows the author further to satirize the barbarous quality of English "civilisation" and is one of the several ways in which *A Handful of Dust* engages, and revises, *Heart of Darkness*. Where Conrad's novella suggests a parallel between Africa and London as "dark places of the earth" (18), Waugh looks instead to South America for London's hellish equivalent.[17] Africa has a very different function in Waugh's work; when it is not an *Alice*-like wonderland, Africa is a terrestrial paradise that offers refuge to a civilized and traditional way of life that, as Tony Last's predicament demonstrates, has had its day in modern England. English expatriates in Kenya

> . . . wish to transplant and perpetuate a habit of life traditional to them, which England has ceased to accommodate—the traditional life of the English squirearchy, which, while it was still dominant, formed the natural target for satirists of every shade of opinion, but to which now that it has become a rare and exotic survival, deprived of the normality which was one of its determining characteristics, we can as a race look back with unaffected esteem and regret. (Waugh, *Remote People* 140-141)

Waugh goes further, eulogizing Kenya as an "equatorial Barsetshire" (147), and thus inadvertently admitting that, since it can only be conceived in terms of fiction, the survival of the English squirearchy in Africa is less a viable reality than it is an imaginative projection. Waugh, however, finds no idyll comparable to a Kenyan Barsetshire in South America. On his 1859 tour of the West Indies the creator of Barsetshire, Anthony Trollope, praised Guyana in extravagant terms as "the Elysium of the tropics—the West Indian happy valley of Rasselas—the one true and actual Utopia of the Caribbean Seas—the Transatlantic Eden" (*West Indies* 162). In contrast, Waugh's Guyanese travels are a matter of endurance and of mere duration, as the disenchanted title of his travelogue, *Ninety-Two Days*, confirms. Waugh's version of the Grail quest, the "radiant sanctuary" (164) of Tony Last's hallucinated city and its dark

translation into "chez Todd," is characteristically dystopic.

The Grail myth is, as Wilson Harris has argued, a lament "for the death of King Arthur and with the death the closure of mythogenic England-Albion" (*Selected Essays* 264). However, Harris posits that "the Grail legend continues in South America in the legend of El Dorado," but now as an "open myth" that "involving men of all races, past and present conditions, has begun to acquire a residual pattern of illuminating correspondences" (264, 266).[18] There are, indeed, "correspondences" between El Dorado as an extension of the Grail quest and Waugh's Tony Last, the would-be Arthurian defender of old Albion, who searches for his "Shining" City in the borderland between Brazil and the Rupununi savannahs of Guyana, the very region where such earlier *doradistas* as Walter Ralegh believed the legendary city of gold to lie.[19] For Waugh, mythic archetypes merely emphasize modern decline, and so in *A Handful of Dust*, El Dorado is nothing more than "a transfigured Hetton" (164).[20] As Edwina Melville would note in her 1956 Government Information Services booklet *This is the Rupununi*, here "all the actual castles belong to the ants" (1). Tony's City subsequently shrinks to the mean dimensions of Todd's hut, in which he is doomed to what George McCartney calls "the Sisyphean task of reading the entire works of Dickens over and over again" (154). This suggests that if we read the novel as "Guyanese fiction," *A Handful of Dust* has a greater affinity with what has been termed the pessimistic *sisyphus* tradition in Anglophone Caribbean writing, represented by Naipaul and others, than with the optimistic *dorado* tradition of "Harris, Hispanic Caribbean and Latin American writers who practice Magical Realism" (Brathwaite, *conVERSations* 31).[21] Practitioners of magical realism are, in other words, sensitive to the literary potential of the metamorphic and magical properties of the real and differ in this regard from more skeptical writers such as Naipaul. Waugh, although he registers the "sense of unreality" he experienced in Guyana (*Ninety-Two Days* 28), and even gives it tentative fictional form in the hallucinatory episodes of *A Handful of Dust*, is willfully ignorant of indigenous folk culture and of the Amerindian relationship between reality and myth and thus ignores or ridicules the mythical and magical dimensions of South American "unreality."[22] Waugh is incredulous, for instance, of the stories told by the Rupununi District Commissioner of "a horse which swam under water and a guide who employed a parrot to bring him information" (31-2), and in this he is like the early colonists who also experienced what Pauline Melville describes as "a loss of grip on reality" (*The Ventriloquist's Tale* 35):

> [t]here was a whole plane that they failed to take into account, a dimension which they did not fully understand. The non-Euclidean waters which in some rivers ran backwards were as incomprehensible to them as the fish discovered in the south of the country which, apparently, walked on land. (36)

The *piai* woman whom Waugh meets at the St. Ignatius mission in the Rupununi and who "had been through earlier in the day and announced my coming" only "[p]retends to fly," according to Waugh's diary entry (*Diaries* 375).[23] In contrast, Pauline Melville's *piai* woman, Koko Lupi, dispenses a practical magic that enables Beatrice McKinnon to take revenge upon Father Napier, the priest who put an end to her sexual relationship with her brother.

Melville's narrator insists that "[a]ll stories are told for revenge or tribute" (9). The fate of Father Napier, who descends into insanity and sets fire to the churches he himself has established in the Guyanese interior, is perhaps Melville's own act of literary revenge upon the recent Catholic convert Evelyn Waugh, who painted a saintly portrait in *Ninety-Two Days* of Father Mather, the Jesuit priest with whom he stayed at the St. Ignatius mission, but who wrote briefly and with distaste of the "son of John Melville by his three-quarter sister" (Waugh, *Diaries* 367).[24] Danny, certainly, makes a comparison between Waugh and Father Napier: as Waugh reads to him, Danny "remembered the occasion, long ago in his childhood, when another white man had come and played Mozart sonatas on a violin" (288). Father Napier is like many of the characters in *The Ventriloquist's Tale* a composite. His recurring bouts of fever identify him not only with Father Mather but also with Waugh's Tony Last, and with another priest, Father Carey-Elwes, the uncle of Waugh's friend the painter Simon Elwes, who had also proselytized in the Rupununi. Carey-Elwes, "the priest who had first penetrated into the Indian villages of the border and hill country" (*Ninety-Two Days* 72) kept a diary of his exploits which ended when he suffered a mental breakdown. The resemblance he bears to Pauline Melville's Father Napier, a pioneer priest, a diarist, and an eventual lunatic, is striking.[25]

Waugh's Mr. Todd is also a composite of the author's father; Beatrix Potter's fox; the eccentric Mr. Christie whom Waugh encountered in the Rupununi; and H.P.C. Melville, the paterfamilias of the Melville clan, who exercised a "patriarchal authority" comparable to Todd's. Like Mr. Todd, Mr. Melville could boast that "most of the men and women living in this savannah are my children" (*Ninety-Two Days* 24; *A Handful of Dust* 212), and like Mr. Melville, Todd owns "a single-barrelled, breech-loading shotgun" which is "unique in the neighbourhood" (*A Handful of Dust* 209). Todd's savannah house is modeled upon Mr. Christie's home and upon Hart's Ranch at Pirara, the home of one of Melville's daughters, Amy, who appears as Wifreda in *The Ventriloquist's Tale*.[26] This is the place in which Waugh is told of the relationship between John Melville and his sister, but "[f]or all that he was looking for material, he missed one story that was under his nose" (*The Ventriloquist's Tale* 49). In any case, as Rosa says, Evelyn Waugh (the incestuous subtext of *Brideshead Revisited* notwithstanding) didn't write "stories like that" (301).

The story inspired by the "curious library" at Hart's Ranch, "much ravaged by ants" (*Ninety-Two Days* 72) that Waugh did write is a fable of the entropy of the English novel *entre deux guerres*, in which the experimental modernism of his immediate predecessors is paid a "parodic tribute" (McCartney 6).[27] Realist narrative, for its part, is represented in the terms in which Wilson Harris would later define it, as a dead-end, "bounded on all sides by forest" (Waugh, *A Handful of Dust* 209). Like Wilson Harris, Pauline Melville finds some "ground of accommodation" with Waugh. Both Melville and Waugh write novels that, while querying the adequacy of realism, are at least in part based in fact; intensely aware of their precursors, both write ventriloquist's tales.

Notes

1. Although clearly based on Waugh's travels in what was then British Guiana, the stated location of the South American episodes in *A Handful of Dust* is Brazil. Waugh's travels in the Guyanese interior brought him to the border with Brazil, which he crossed to visit the town of Boa Vista where he wrote "The Man Who Liked Dickens." As he notes in *Ninety-Two Days: The Account of a Tropical Journey through British Guiana and Part of Brazil*, national boundaries in this region "remained vague" (71). Another explanation for the "Brazil" of *A Handful of Dust* may be Peter Fleming's *Brazilian Adventure*, a popular and much reprinted travelogue published in 1933. Waugh reviewed this self-styled "Jungle Lampoon" (408), and adapted elements of Fleming's "intensely self-conscious book" ("Mr. Fleming in Brazil" 195) for his own "Brazilian" adventure which, like Fleming's, features a quest for a lost city in the South American rainforest. Fleming's book is the account of his 1932 expedition to Brazil, the purpose of which was to search for a Colonel Fawcett, an English explorer, soldier, and Buddhist who, together with his son and another man, the aptly named Raleigh Rimell, had vanished some seven years previously searching for an Incan city of the kind that Walter Ralegh had also believed were constructed in the period of Incan migration following the Spanish conquest; Fawcett, it appeared, had been held as a prisoner in an Indian village, where he had subsequently died.
2. Wilson Harris argues that imperialist works of fiction are often undermined by intuition or dream: "[t]he implications for literary modes and forms are profound, indicating a surface realism creatively fractured by the intrusive irrational, by dreams and madness" (qtd. in Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back* 153).
3. If Dickens represents the limits of realism for Waugh, Mr. Todd personifies the reductive reader of realist fiction: Todd's sole interest is in Dickens's characters, not in context or language, and in this he is the antithesis of

Waugh, who regarded writing not as an investigation of character but as an exercise in the use of language.

4. *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens's New World novel, offers a happy ending to a story that in other respects resembles Tony Last's: like Tony, Martin goes to the New World in search of an "Eden," and like Tony contracts a near-fatal fever.
5. In "The Man Who Liked Dickens," the Todd-character is given the equally ominous name of "McMaster."
6. Waugh reread *Dombey and Son* in Guyana: his diary for 27 February 1933 notes that he has "spent agreeable time resting, reading *Dombey and Son* at the St Ignatius mission" (*Diaries* 374).
7. Tobias Doring coins the term "parabiography" to describe the postcolonial rewriting of the genre of autobiography. *The Ventriloquist's Tale* is something of a collaborative family venture in parabiography, in that the Amerindian pictographs or *timehri* that decorate the title page and chapter headings are adapted "by Charlo Melville from traditional designs" (n. pag). Despite her novel's biographical element, however, Pauline Melville has consistently declined to discuss her background or family: in a letter to the author (November 1 2002), Melville suggests that Sonny is a figure of the artist, and points to her own desire, "[i]n an era of discovery, revelation and the examination of every aspect of life" for "concealment, secrecy and silence" (*Ventriloquist's Tale* 285). In the novel, Sonny's disappearance is attributed both to his need for "solitude" and to his identity as a "turn-tiger," someone who is "able to transform himself into a jaguar" (290). Like the novel's narrator and its author (Melville is an accomplished actress as well as a writer), Sonny's metamorphic identity as a "turn-tiger" (290) and his consummate skill as a mimic confound the "meticulous" Macusi hunter (a figure for the critic), who attempts to track him down (291).
8. Naipaul, who visited Guyana in 1960, nearly thirty years after Waugh's visit, derives much of his information about the by then legendary Melvilles from Michael Swan's 1958 travelogue *The Marches of El Dorado*, a book that is in turn intensely aware of its own predecessor, Waugh's *Ninety-Two Days*.
9. Mario de Andrade (1893-1945) was a leading representative of Brazilian*modernismo* (Blaise Cendrars, a model for the Brazilian *modernistas*, includes Andrade as one of the dedicatees of his *Travel Notes*) and his *Macunaima* (1928) is a forerunner and early example of the techniques of magical realism. E.A. Goodland's translation of Andrade's novel is dedicated to Edwina Melville, a poet and member by marriage of the Rupununi Melville clan.
10. In his *Inquiry Into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians*, Walter E. Roth relates the Indian legend of "How the Moon Got His Dirty Face," a variant of which is replayed in *The Ventriloquist's Tale*. According

to the legend, a brother, living with his sister, makes love to her under the cover of night; curious to discover the identity of her lover, the sister blackens her hands and smears the face of the man whom the next day she discovers is her brother. Shunned by the community, the brother, Roth tells us, "is now the Moon, and the marks which can still be recognized on his face are those which his sister imprinted with the soot (or blue paint) years ago" (256).

11. The first epigraph to *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, taken from Claude Lévi-Strauss, who first visited Guyana in 1935, tells us that "[t]here is a myth which is known throughout the whole of the Americas from southern Brazil to the Bering Strait via Amazonia and Guiana and which establishes a direct equivalence between eclipses and incest" (*Raw and the Cooked* 296). The chapter in *The Ventriloquist's Tale* titled "A Tapir for a Wife" adapts the "tapir-as-seducer" motif in Amerindian myth noted by Lévi-Strauss.
12. In his *The Marches of El Dorado*, Michael Swan notes that "Indians are superb mimics of the voices of animals, birds—and men" (88). Swan's book, like Naipaul's account of Guyana in *The Middle Passage*, comments on and contributes to what Swan describes as the textual "palimpsest" of the region (271). For instance, Swan reads the terrain of Mount Roraima as "that lost world of Conan Doyle's imagination realised in fact" (189). Conan Doyle's *Lost World*, based on Everard im Thurn's lectures on Mount Roraima subsequently published in 1883 as *Among the Indians of Guiana*, is itself one of Waugh's several pre-texts for *A Handful of Dust*. In both stories, the South American quest is prompted on behalf of a lady of questionable character; both quester-figures, Tony Last and Doyle's Malone, meet with their mentors in London gentlemen's clubs; the fear in Doyle's story that "we are condemned to spend our whole lives in this strange, inaccessible place" (66) is realized in Waugh's; and in both novels, the South American "Other" is co-opted in the service of satire. Doyle's Indians are a "degraded race, with mental powers hardly superior to the average Londoner" (20-21), while Malone says of the "ape-man" that "I had seen his first cousin in Kensington" (107). Swan is, also, intensely aware of his more recent literary predecessor Evelyn Waugh and the intratextual quality of Waugh's Guyanese writing, telling us rather knowingly that in the Guyanese interior, he "read my nightly chapter of *Our Mutual Friend*" (66). In turn, Swan's book is a likely source for *The Ventriloquist's Tale*.
13. Conrad's novella, of course, informs the manuscript version of Eliot's poem, even supplying its original epigraph, which ends with Kurtz's "cry" "The horror! The horror!" (*The Waste Land: A Facsimile* 3).
14. As Adrian Poole argues in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens's novel meditates on

> . . . what it means to recycle old matter [...] not only in the dust-heaps and corpses, the scavengers and cannibals that dominate the foreground, but also in the repetition of stories and forms derived from old scripture and prayer-book, new science, fairy-tale, nursery rhyme, popular ballad, theatre, newspaper, education. (xi)

15. The false promise of Tony's City derives from Waugh's experience of the dismal Brazilian border town of Boa Vista. More than twenty years later, Naipaul found the place much as Waugh had done, a sordid haven for smuggling, although now, "Boa Vista blazed with electric lights": a Shining City indeed, but its streets "connect nothing to nothing through red Brazilian dirt" (*Middle Passage* 117). Indeed, Naipaul, like Waugh before him, describes the region as a "burning wasteland" (*Middle Passage* 106).
16. Beatrix Potter published her *The Tale of Mr. Tod* in 1912, in which we are told that Mr. Tod's house "was something between a cave, a prison, and a tumble-down pig-sty" (33).
17. Tony's journey to the "uttermost parts of the earth" in *A Handful of Dust* echoes Marlow's travels to the "uttermost ends of the earth" in *Heart of Darkness*, but Waugh observes that "[a]ll the time I was in Guiana I found myself remarking on the contrast it offered to Africa" (*Ninety-Two Days* 74). Jerome Meckier has argued that "[o]ne of Waugh's subsidiary aims in *A Handful of Dust* is to separate Eliot, whom he accepts as a religious writer, from Conrad, whom he dislikes as a humanist" ("Why the Man" 180n). Tony's hallucinations, then, offer a parodic version of Marlow's "dream-sensation" and "fever" in *Heart of Darkness* (71); and his endless recitation of Dickens suggests a comic counterpart to Kurtz's "voice" and "monologues" (79, 96).
18. Claude Lévi-Strauss posits ancient contact between the Celtic grail cycle and Indian myths in his *Tristes Tropiques* (244).
19. Like Ralegh, whose "Empyre of Guiana" lay in the savannahs of the upper Essequibo and Rupununi, Waugh's Dr. Messinger believes that "the City got there" as "the result of a migration from Peru" (*A Handful of Dust* 163). El Dorado may have refused to yield up its gold, but it has been exploited for raw materials of other kinds since the days of Ralegh, as the rich blend of travel writing and make-believe in his *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana*, first published in 1596, demonstrates. As Naipaul argues, "El Dorado, which had begun as a search for gold, was becoming something more. It was becoming a New World romance, a dream of Shangri-la" (*The Loss of El Dorado* 17). In her autobiographical short story "Eat Labba and Drink Creek Water," Pauline Melville parallels her own and her family's experience with that of Ralegh and his son, Wat.

Where Ralegh loses a son to Guyana, the Melville family loses children to England through the colonization in reverse of West Indian immigration. The British-Guyanese poet and novelist David Dabydeen has suggested, as Melville's story also suggests, that to the prospective Guyanese immigrant it is England that appears to be the El Dorado that Ralegh had sought in Guyana: now, as Dabydeen observes, "'England' is our Utopia, an ironic reversal" (*Slave Song* 9).

20. Hetton is a gothic simulacrum, Pecksniffiana rather than the New Jerusalem or Camelot, and Tony Last is a reduced Arthur, sitting at his diminutive round table, alone. *Heart of Darkness*, too, describes debased versions of the round table (69) and of El Dorado, in the reverses of "the Eldorado Exploring Expedition" (54).
21. Timothy J. Reiss's recent *Sisyphus and Eldorado* expands on these terms, quoting Kamau Brathwaite's definition of "Sisyphus" as "a mainly or characteristic (?) anglophone Caribbean expression that sees the task of liberation (material, metaphysical, cultural/cosmological) as in the myth of that name, a surely pessimistic toil towards constantly manipulated destinations of success/achievement/liberation." "Eldorado," on the other hand, "remains close to the hope? the dream of a ? New World & chooses a procedure—magical realism—that relates to this & resides mainly in Hispanic & Hispanic Caribbean writers" (v). Brathwaite elaborates on his suggestive if idiosyncratic definitions in his two-volume *Magical Realism*.
22. Waugh's response to Amerindian folk practices might have been differently inflected had he, like Wilson Harris or Michael Swan, read Walter Roth's seminal *An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians* or had he made Roth, as he briefly intended, his traveling companion to the Guyanese interior. Making no mention of Roth's pioneering ethnography despite his own avowed interest in "Aboriginal Indian life" (qtd. in Gallagher, "Bibliographical and Diary Notes" 8), Waugh would subsequently dismiss the Roth who is the model for Dr. Messinger in *A Handful of Dust* as "an opinionated and rather disagreeable old man" (qtd. in Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh* 314).
23. According to Walter Roth, Pia, the brother of Macunaima, is the forebear of the *piai* men and women.
24. Freud discusses the Roman Catholic proscription of incest in his *Totem and Taboo* (10-11). Evelyn Waugh was received into the Roman Catholic Church in September 1930. *The Ventriloquist's Tale* defines his Guyanese journey as "self-inflicted penance" (289), as a modern version of Ralegh's "painful pilgrimage" in Guyana (qtd. in Nichol, *The Creature in the* Map 313). One of the most remarkable passages in Melville's novel describes the McKinnon family, together with Evelyn Waugh, "reciting Sorrowful Mysteries aloud" in the moonlight (287), an incident also rendered in *Ninety-Two Days* (119).

25. In *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, Wifreda opens a tin trunk containing "Father Napier's diaries, mouldy but protected from wood ants by the metal container. The trunk also contained a copy of *Dombey and Son* that Evelyn Waugh had left with her at Pirara" (349). Wifreda burns the priest's diaries but keeps the copy of Dickens to donate to the local school.
26. In Chofy McKinnon's recollection of it in *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, the "books on the shelf" in Father Mather's library are not by Charles Dickens, but by T.S. Eliot and Evelyn Waugh (41).
27. As McCartney suggests in his study of Waugh and modernism, "[i]n his official pose [Waugh] was the curmudgeon who despised innovation, but the anarchic artist in him frequently delighted in its formal and thematic possibilities" (3); indeed, like Wyndham Lewis, Waugh "developed an alternate modernism" (6). Lewis's theories of the art of satire and of the External approach in art offer a suggestive analogue to Waugh's rejections of humanism and realism. According to Lewis, "*tellers-from-the-inside*"—writers who do not adopt the External approach—are "Columbuses who set sail towards the El Dorados of the Unconscious," whereas realists produce "Arthuriads" which "convert the grail into a *pot de chambre*" (*Men Without Art* 105, 112).

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