Dr. Robert Hickson 7 March 2018
Saint Thomas Aquinas (d.1274)

Evelyn Waugh's Comic Muse in *Scoop*:

A Novel About Journalists and Eccentric Rural Aristocrats

Epigraphs

"To even the Comic Muse [named "Thalia" by the Greeks], the gadabout, the adventurous one of those [nine] heavenly maidens, to whom so little that is human comes amiss, who can mix in almost any company and find a welcome at almost any door—even to her there are forbidden places." (Evelyn Waugh, *Scott-King's Modern Europe* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1949, p.86)

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"**Mr. Salter** [while then visiting William Boot at home as the current Foreign Editor of Lord Copper's *Beast* Newspaper in London] was **not in fighting form** [not even in England's own aristocratic rural habitations] **and he knew it**. The strength was gone out of him. He was dirty and blistered and aching in every limb, cold sober and unsuitably dressed. **He was in a strange country**. **These people** [the extended multi-generational William Boot family] **were not his people nor their laws [nor their customs] his**. He felt like a Roman legionary, heavily armed, weighted down with the steel and cast brass of civilization, tramping through forests beyond the Roman pale, harassed by silent, illusive savages, **the vanguard on an advance** that had pushed too far and lost touch with the base...or was he **the abandoned rearguard of a retreat**; had the legions sailed?" (Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938), p.304—my emphasis added)

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"'This is a case for personal contact [with the *Beast* journalist William Boot]...Salter, old man, what's come over you?' [said the unnamed overall Managing Editor of the *Beast*, which is itself an essential part of "the Megalapolitan Newspaper Company"].

'It's nothing. It's only...**travelling...always upsets me**.' He [the now already bedraggled Mr. Salter who had earlier been "**tossed into the editorial chair of the Imperial and Foreign News**"] had a cup of strong tea and **later** rang up [the *Beast*'s] **Foreign Contacts Adviser** to find how he could best get to Boot Magna [the Boot family's ample Estate in the somewhat distant **English** countryside] (Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop*, pp. 279-280, and 44—my emphasis added)

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"His [Mr. Salter's] heart bled for William [Boot], but he was true to the austere traditions of his [15 year] service [at the *Beast*]." (Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop*, p. 44)

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Two years before he was to die in early April of 1966 on Easter Sunday after Mass, Evelyn Waugh wrote a new Preface to his pre-War 1938 novel, *Scoop*.[1] In that brief 1964 Preface and retrospect, he recalls the atmosphere and forebodings of that time leading up to World War II:

> This light-hearted tale was the fruit of a time of general anxiety and distress but, for its author, one of peculiar personal happiness.
>
> Its early editions bore the subtitle: "A novel about journalists." This now seems superfluous. Foreign correspondents, at the time this story was written, enjoyed an unprecedented and undeserved fame. Other minor themes, then topical [in 1937-1938], are out of date [now in 1964], in particular the "ideological war," although some parallels to it might still be found in the Far East [*e.g.*, in Vietnam and Laos].
>
> At the time of writing public interest had just been **diverted from Abyssinia** [the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, 3 October 1935-5 May 1936] **to Spain** [then already in its 1936-1939 Civil War]. **I tried to arrange a combination of these two wars**. Of the later [sic—instead of "latter"] I knew nothing at first hand. In Abyssinia I had served as the foreign correspondent of an English daily newspaper [from late 1935 to early 1936]. **I had no talent for this work but I joyfully studied the eccentricities and excesses of my colleagues**. The geographical position of [the fictional] Ishmaelia, though not its political constitution, is identical with that of Abyssinia and the description of life among the journalists in Jacksonburg [the fictional capital city of Ishmaelia] is very close to Addis Ababa in 1935.
>
> The most anachronistic part is **the domestic scene of Boot Magna**. There are [still] today [in 1964] **pale ghosts** of Lord Copper, Lady Metroland and Mrs. Stitch. **Nothing survives of the Boots**. Younger readers must accept my assurance that such people and their servants did exist quite lately [as of 1964] and are not pure fantasy. (The 1964 Chapman & Hall Edition of *Scoop*, page 9, *Preface*—my emphasis added)

Such candid words are a worthy introduction and framing for the especially comic presentation of one extended passage from *Scoop*, a passage which is to be found and savored near the end of the novel. This very passage will also provide the main focus of this appreciative essay, which proposes thereby even to enhance our own warm-hearted and generous comic sensibilities.

Let us now closely consider Evelyn Waugh's sympathetic and richly comic presentation of Mr. Salter's visit to the English countryside with the intent to invite William Boot to a banquet in London, after first proposing and achieving, if possible, a new *Beast* contract with the all-too-reluctant Boot.

Waugh's 1938 satirical novel, *Scoop*,[2] will also show the reader some brilliant interventions of

1 Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1964), p. 9 (Preface)—"A New Edition: First Published in 1938"). Evelyn Waugh died in England on 10 April 1966.

2 Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938), 321 pages. Waugh's novel is dedicated "For Laura,"

Thalia, the Comic Muse herself, as was later also to be achieved in his 1945 novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, for example in the depiction of Charles Ryder's hesitant visit with his own learned (and quite eccentric) father at home.[3] When we know that *Scoop*'s protagonist, William Boot, and the Imperial and Foreign Editor of the *Beast*, Mr. Salter, are both sympathetic, sometimes pathetic characters — and often very innocent — we may then even better savor Waugh's comic depictions of them when they are together. Indeed, for the full effects of his artistry, Waugh's whole narrative and its interspersed dialogues should be read aloud, as in the case of Book One, Chapter Three, of *Brideshead Revisted*. It is my intent to convey a little of the nuanced comedy as it was first deftly presented on the written page.

We now meet the slightly haughty (or somewhat condescending) Mr. Salter — with his bowler hat and umbrella — on the train *en route* to the journalist William Boot's home estate, Boot Magna, which was to be found somewhere in the distant Somerset countryside southwest of London:[4]

> That evening, sometime after the advertised hour [6:00 P.M.], Mr. Salter alighted at Boot Magna Halt. An hour earlier, at Taunton [in Somerset, England], he had left the express [from London], and changed into a train such as he did not know existed outside the imagination of his Balkan correspondents; a single tram-like, one-class coach, which had pottered in a desultory fashion through a system of narrow, under-populated valleys. It had stopped eight times, and at every station there had been a bustle of passengers succeeded by a long silent pause, before it started again; men had entered who, instead of slinking and shuffling and wriggling themselves into corners and decently screening themselves behind newspapers, as civilized people should when they travelled by train, had sat down squarely quite close to Mr. Salter, rested their hands on their knees, stared at him fixedly and uncritically and suddenly addressed him on the subject of the weather in barely intelligible accents; there had been very old, unhygenic men and women, such as you never saw in the Underground [in London], who ought long ago to have been put away in some public institution; there had been women carrying a multitude of atrocious little baskets and parcels which they piled on the seats; one of them had put a hamper containing a live turkey under Mr. Salter's feet. It had been a horrible journey. (284-285)

And things will now get worse for him.

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his wife, the former Laura Herbert. They were married on 17 April 1937. Indeed, 1937-1938 was an especially joyful and grateful time of his life. Thus, in his 1964 Preface to the novel, Waugh could refer to *Scoop* as a "light-hearted tale."

3 Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (New York: Penguin Books, 1945 and 1959), 331 pages. See especially Book One ("*Et in Arcadia Ego*"), Chapter Three ("My Father at Home"), pages 60-70. Charles Ryder's entire visit home should be read aloud—for the visit is not only diversely and expressively **comic**, but at times it also full of **sad pathos**, too, especially in the remote relationship of a Widower Father and his only Son. That combination of Comedy and Pathos is, I believe, Waugh's special genius.

4 All further pages references will be to the 1938 edition, as published in Boston by Little, Brown and Company. The page references, especially from pages 285-310, will be placed above in the main body of the essay, and within parentheses.

We return now to a description of his hope-filled arrival at the station of "Boot Magna Halt":

> At last, with relief, Mr. Salter alighted. He lifted his suitcase from **among the sinister bundles on the rack** and carried it to the centre of the platform. There was no one else for boot Magna. Mr. Salter had hoped to find William [Boot] waiting to meet him, but the little station was empty except for a single porter who was leaning against the cab of the engine [of the train] engaged in a kind of mute, telepathic converse with the driver, and **a cretinous native youth** who stood on the farther side of the paling, leant against it and picked at the dry paint-bubbles with a toelike thumb nail. When Mr. Salter looked at him, he **glanced away and grinned wickedly at his boots**.
>
> **The train observed its customary two minutes' silence and then steamed slowly away**. The porter shuffled across the line and disappeared into a hut labelled "Lamps." Mr. Salter turned towards the palings; the youth was still leaning there, gazing; **his eye dropped; he grinned**. Three times, shuttlecock fashion, they alternatively glanced up and down **till Mr. Salter with urban impatience tired of the flirtation** and spoke up. (285—my emphasis added)

Now comes a protracted exchange of dialogue, part of it in the hardly intelligible local dialect. Mr. Salter first said: "I say....Do you happen to know whether Mr. Boot has sent a car for me?" (285-286) After hearing some monosyllabic grunt-like and unintelligible replies from the youth — such as "Ur" and "Noa. She've [William's sister, Priscilla, a horsewoman, has] a taken of the horse" — Mr. Salter speaks in reply in somewhat more lucid English prose:

> "I'm afraid your misunderstand me." Mr. Salter's voice [now] sounded curiously flutey and querulous in contrast to the deep tones of the moron. "I'm coming to visit Mr. Boot. I wonder if he had sent a motor-car for me."
>
> "He've a sent me." [*i.e.*, "He has sent me," said the deep-toned youth.] (286)

The exchange gradually reveals that Priscilla took her horse over to Lady Calicote's estate with the Boot family's car and trailer. The youth has therefore come to retrieve Mr. Salter with a truck — partly also because Mr. Boot was still at home playing cards with his formidable and domineering, bed-ridden Aunt!

Moreover, Mr. Salter soon discovers that he is to ride (with his suitcase) to Boot Magna in the back of a slag-filled lorry — the Boot family's Farm Truck! The youth was to be the driver, but he was a largely disqualified "beginning driver" who needed to have a companion (Bert Tylor) with a certified license, although Bert was, admittedly, almost blind himself. (At first, when Mr. Salter heard from the youth — "So you'm to ride along of we" — he said "Ride?" and, then, "A hideous vision rose before

Mr. Salter," for he seems to have thought he would now even have to travel on horseback to Boot Magna. (286-287)

> Mr. Salter was **suffused with relief**. "You mean that you have some kind of **vehicle** outside full of slag?"
>
> "Ur."
>
> Mr. Salter descended the steps [of the station] into the yard where, out of sight from the platform, **an open lorry** was standing; an old man **next to** the driving seat touched his cap; the truck was loaded high with sacks [and slag]; bonnet and back [of the lorry] bore **battered learner plates**. The youth took Mr. Salter's suitcase and **heaved it up among the slag**. "You'm to ride behind [in the truck], " he said. (286-287)....
>
> "Bert Tyler have to ride along[side] of me, for **because of the testers**....Police don't allow me to drive except along of Bert Tyler. Bert Tyler he've a-had a license for twenty years. There wasn't no testers for Bert Tyler. But police they took and tested I over to Taunton."
>
> "And you failed?"
>
> A great grin spread over the young man's face. "I busted tester's leg for he," he said proudly. "**Ran he bang into the wall going a fair lick**."
>
> "Oh, dear. Wouldn't it be better for your friend Tyler to drive us?"
>
> "**Noa. He can't see for to drive**, Bert Tyler can't. Don't e be **afeared**. I can see right. It be the corners do for I."
>
> "And are there many corners between here and the house?"
>
> "Tidy few."
>
> **Mr. Salter**, who had had his foot on the hub of the wheel preparatory to mounting, **now drew back. His nerve, never strong, had been severely tried that afternoon; now it failed him**.
>
> "I'll walk, " he said. "How far is it?"
>
> "Well, it's all according as you know the way. We do call it **three mile over the fields**. It's a tidy step by the road."
>
> "Perhaps you'll be good enough **to show me the field path**."
>
> "**Tain't exactly what you could call a path**. E just keeps straight."
>
> "Well I daresay I shall find it." (286-288—my emphasis added)

Although Mr. Salter asked the youth if he would, if possible, tell William Boot that he (Salter) "wanted a little exercise after the journey," (288) but the youth did not take that simple request well:

> The **learner-driver** looked at Mr. Salter with undisguised disgust. "I'll tell e as you were **afeared to ride along of me and Bert Tyler**," he said.
>
> Mr. Salter stepped back into the station porch **to avoid the dust as the lorry drove away**. It was well he did so, for as he mounted the incline, the driver [the "learner-driver"] **mistakenly changed into reverse** and the machine charged **precipitately** back in its tracks, and came noisily to rest against the wall where Mr. Salter had been standing. The **second** attempt was **more** successful and it [the lorry] reached the lane with no worse damage than a mudguard crushed against the near gatepost.
>
> Then **with rapid, uncertain steps**, Mr. Salter [with bowler hat and umbrella] set out on his walk to the distant house. (288-289—my emphasis added)

After this depiction of Mr. Salter's arrival at the train station and his reasons for setting out afoot (without his luggage) to walk to Boot Magna, Waugh will show us just in what condition Mr. Salter more-or-less then successfully arrived at the Boot mansion:

> It was **eight o'clock** when Mr. Salter arrived at the front door. He had covered **a good six miles tacking** from field to field under the setting sun; he had **scrambled** through fences and ditches; in one enormous pasture **a herd of cattle had closed silently in on him** and followed at his heels—the nearest not a yard away—with lowered heads and heavy breath; **Mr. Salter had broken into a run** and they had trotted after him; when he **gained a stile and turned to face them**, they began gently grazing in his tracks; **dogs had flown at him in three farmyards where he had stopped to ask the way and to be misdirected**; at last when **he felt he could go no farther** but must lie down and perish from exposure under the open sky, he had **tumbled** through an **overgrown** stile to find himself in the main road with **the lodge gates** straight ahead; **the last mile up the drive had been the bitterest of all**. (289-290—my emphasis added)

We may well imagine the condition and spirit of Mr. Salter as he walked that final mile up to the entrance of the Boot mansion:

> And now he stood under the porch, sweating, blistered, nettle-stung, breathless, parched, dizzy, dead-beat and dishevelled, with his bowler hat in one hand and umbrella in the other, leaning against a stucco pillar waiting for someone to open the door. Nobody came. He pulled again at the bell; there was no answering spring, no echo in the hall beyond. No sound broke the peace of the evening save, in the elms that stood cumbrously on every side, the crying of the rooks and, not unlike it but nearer at hand, directly it seemed over Mr. Salter's head, a strong baritone **decanting irregular snatches of sacred music**. (290—my emphasis added)

Now we are to meet Uncle Theodore, who will later be William Boot's substitute at Lord Copper's banquet in London, which William had resolutely and persistently declined to attend:

> "In Thy courts no more are needed, moon by day nor sun by night," sang Uncle Theodore **blithely**, stepping into his evening trousers; he remembered it as a treble solo rising to the dim vaults of the school chapel, **touching the toughest adolescent hearts; he remembered it imperfectly but with deep emotion**.
>
> **Mr. Salter listened, unmoved. In despair he began to pound the front door with his umbrella**. The singing ceased, and the voice in fruity, more prosaic tones demanded: "**What ho, without there?**"
>
> Mr. Salter **hobbled down** the steps of the porch and saw framed in the ivy of the first-floor window, a ruddy, Hannoverian face and plump, bare torso. "Good evening," he said politely.
>
> "Good evening." **Uncle Theodore leaned out as far as he safely could and stared at Mr. Salter through a monocle**.... "No doubt you are the friend my nephew William is expecting."
>
> "Yes...I've been **ringing** the bell."
>
> "It sounded to me," said Uncle Theodore severely, "**as though you were hammering the door with a stick**."
>
> "Yes, I was. You see..."
>
> "**You'll be late for dinner, you know, if you stand out there kicking up a rumpus**. And so shall I if I stay talking to you. We will meet again shortly in more conventional circumstances. For the moment—*a riverderci*." (290-291—my emphasis added)

While still impatiently awaiting Uncle Theodore's possible opening of the front door, he decided to take another initiative:

> Mr. Salter tried the handle of the door. It opened easily. **Never in his life had he made his own way into anyone else's house**. Now he did so and found himself in a lobby **cluttered** with implements of sport, overcoats, rugs, a bicycle or two and a stuffed bear. Beyond it, glass doors led into the hall....**Quite near the glass doors stood a little armchair where no one ever sat; there Mr. Salter sank** and there he was found twenty minutes later by William's mother. **His last action before he lapsed into coma had been to remove his shoes**. (291-292—my emphasis added)

After "Mrs. Boot [William's mother] surveyed the figure with some distaste," she called James, one of their servants and said to him:

"Mr. William's friend has arrived. I think perhaps he would like to wash."

"Very good madam."

Mr. Salter was not really asleep; **he had been aware, remotely and impersonally, of Mrs. Boot's scrutiny**; he was aware, now, of James' slow passing across the hall.

"Dinner will be in directly, sir. May I take you to your room?"

For a moment Mr. Salter thought he would be unable ever to move again; then, painfully, he rose to his feet. **He observed his discarded shoes; so did James**. Neither of them felt disposed to stoop; **each respected the other's feeling**; Mr. Salter **padded** upstairs beside the footman.

"I regret to say, sir, that your luggage is not yet available. Three of **the outside men** are **delving** for it at the moment." (292-293—my emphasis added)

Mr. Salter, despite his fatigue, also noticed, in this context, the nuances of the word "**delving**":

"Delving?"

"**Assiduously**, sir. It was **inundated** with slag at the time of the accident."

"Accident?"

"Yes, sir, there has been **a misadventure to the farm lorry** that was conveying it [your luggage] from the station; we attribute it to the driver's **inexperience**. He **overturned** the vehicle in the back drive [of Boot Magna]."

"Was he hurt?"

"Oh, yes, sir; **gravely**. Here is your room, sir." (293—my emphasis added)

In the diction and accented tones of James the servant's language, we can easily feel his pretentiousness, shallowness and indifference. (Waugh is again very artful in his implicitness.)

When Mr. Salter was first introduced to his bedroom, he unexpectedly heard a "low, bronchial growl [that] came from under the bed." (293) It was Anabel, the dog of Priscilla, William Boot's equestrian sister, whose usual and rather ornate bedroom Mr. Salter himself was now to be occupying--just for that night, however. Moreover, said James:

" Miss Priscilla hoped you would not object to taking charge of Anabel for the night, sir. She's getting an old dog and doesn't like to be moved . You'll find her perfectly quiet and good. **If she barks in the night, it is best to feed her**." (294—my emphasis added)

Among other surprises, James returned to the bedroom at its partially opened door (because of its "long-standing" defective and broken latch) and he said: "I omitted to tell you, sir, the lavatory on this floor is out of order. The gentlemen use the one opening on the library." (294)

We cumulatively imagine how all of this affects Mr. Salter's spirit and resilience. And we are now to discover that, at the dinner meal, the Boot ladies and James will keep Mr. Salter entirely away from drinking any alcohol, even wine! For, they concluded from their observing of his wobbly step as he walked — outside on the path and inside the house itself — that he was already a little drunk! So they wanted to be protective of him!

> It was not until Lady Trilby ["Aunt Anne"] entered the room [for dinner] that she expressed her **forebodings**.
>
> "**The boys are late**," said Lady Trilby.
>
> "Aunt Anne," said Mrs. Boot [William's mother] **gravely**. "William's friend has arrived in a *most peculiar condition*."
>
> "I know. **I watched him** [Mr. Salter] **come up the drive. Reelin' all over the shop**."
>
> "**He let himself in** and went **straight off to sleep in the hall**."
>
> "Best thing for him."
>
> "You mean...You don't think he could have been...?"
>
> "**The man was squiffy**," said Aunt Anne. "It was written all over him."
>
> Nurse Granger uttered **a knowing cluck** of disapproval."....
>
> "The boys will see to him."
>
> "Here is [Uncle] Theodore. I will ask him at once. Theodore, William's friend from London has arrived and Aunt Anne and I very much fear he has taken too much."....
>
> "Now that you mention it, I shouldn't be at all surprised. I talked to the fellow out of my window. **He was pounding the front door fit to knock it in**."
>
> "What ought we to do?"....
>
> Uncle Roderick joined them. "I say Rod, what d'you think? That journalist friend of William's — **sozzled**."
>
> "Disgusting. Is he fit to come to dinner?"

"We'd better keep an eye on him to see he doesn't get any more."

"Yes. I'll tell James."

Uncle Bernard joined the family circle...."I'm nearly the last, I see....And I have something to tell you. I was sitting in the library not two minutes ago when a dirty little man came **prowling** in---**without any shoes on**."

"Was he tipsy?"

"I daresay...now you mention it, I think he was." (295-296—my emphasis added)

Afterwards we discover that William is still upstairs "playing dominoes with Nannie Bloggs. It was this custom of playing dominoes every evening which had prevented him from meeting Mr. Salter at the station." (297)

Now we see the visitor from London at the dinner table at last, and soon to be subtly denied any wine, and then to be offered only water:

Mr. Salter....sat between Mrs. Boot and Lady Trilby; never an exuberant man, he now felt subdued to extinction and took his place between the two formidable ladies; he might feel a little stronger, he hoped, after a glass of wine....

"Water, sir?" said a voice [James' voice] in Mr. Salter's ear.

"Well, I think perhaps I would sooner..."

William noticing a little shudder pass over his guest, leaned forward across the table. "I say, Salter, Haven't they given you anything to drink?"

"Well, as a matter of fact..."

"Mrs. Boot frowned at her son — a frown like a sudden spasm of pain. "Mr. Salter *prefers* water."...

"Both ladies addressed him.... "You're a great walker, Mr. Salter."..."It's quite a treat for you to get away from your work into the country."...**By the time that Mr. Salter had dealt civilly with these two misstatements, the subject of wine was closed**. (298—my emphasis added; italics in the original)

But, now that the drink was subtly "settled," what about the food and the table conversation?

Dinner was protracted for nearly an hour, but not because of any great profusion or variety of food....Mr. Salter found them [the dishes of food] correspondingly dull and unconscionably slow in coming. Conversation was general and intermittent.

> **Like Foreign News bulletins, Boot family tabletalk took the form of antithetical statement rather than of free discussion**. (299—my emphasis added)

Waugh then delightfully illustrates this "antithetical" conversation at the Boot table, and "[p]resently Mr. Salter got the hang of it" (309) and even joined in! For example:

> "It is a long way from the station," he [Salter] ventured.
>
> "You stopped on the way."
>
> "Yes, to ask...I was lost."
>
> "You stopped several times." (300)

After the meal was over, however, and the attendants dispersed variously, we finally see the kind and polite William and Mr. Salter together in private and in a personal conversation:

> In the library William for the first time had the chance of apologizing for the neglect of his guest.
>
> "Of course, of course. I quite understand that living where you do you are **naturally distracted**...I would not have intruded on you for the world. But it was a matter of first-rate importance—Lord Copper's personal wishes, you understand." (301-302)

The first thing Mr. Salter wanted to ascertain was that William was not going to leave the *Beast* and transfer to the *Brute*, the rival newspaper. "First, your contract with us. Boot," said Mr. Salter earnestly, "you won't desert the ship?" After his prompt promise not to go elsewhere, William signed a very generous "life contract" (302) allowing him thereby still to write for *Beast* his once regular columns "devoted to Nature, *Lush Places*," as they were "edited by William Boot, Countryman." (18)

Nonetheless, after signing the new contract, William was inflexible about "the question of the banquet" (302) designed to honor him in London. William irreformably declined to attend that banquet:

> "Really, Boot, I can't understand you at all."
>
> "Well," said William, "I should feel an ass."..."I've felt an ass for weeks. Ever since I went to London [from the countryside]. I've been treated like an ass."
>
> "Yes," said Mr. Salter sadly. "That's what we are paid for."
>
> "It's one thing to be an ass in Africa [in Ishmaelia]. But if I go to this banquet they may learn about it down here [embarrassingly, even out here in the Somerset countryside at Boot Magna!]....Nannie Bloggs and Nannie Price and everyone." (303)

This last part of the conversation hit Mr. Salter hard, even after his already difficult visit altogether at Boot Magna. We come to understand Mr. Salter now more profoundly, and the pathos:

> **Mr. Salter was not in fighting form and he knew it. The strength was gone out of him. He was dirty and blistered and aching in every limb, cold sober and unsuitably dressed. He was in a strange country. These people were not his people nor their laws his. He felt like a Roman legionary, heavily armed, weighted with the steel and cast brass of civilization, tramping through forests beyond the Roman pale, harassed by silent, illusive savages, the vanguard of an advance that had pushed too far and lost touch with the base...or was he the abandoned rearguard of a retreat; had the legions sailed?** (304—my emphasis added)

We have again come to realize that there are places where even the Comic Muse should not go, must not go. There are also other kinds of tears at the heart of things, tears that are not the tears of joy.

After all the comic depictions and satire we have savored, we fittingly deepen our respect for Mr. Salter and what is much more inexpressibly present in his own heart. So much has transpired during his brief visit to the Somerset countryside. We may imagine what he will tell his wife.

CODA

Aware as he was in 1938 of the gathering storm in Europe and the colonies, Waugh had a subtle way of conveying on the last two pages of *Scoop* the force of Nature without Grace. He showed William Boot in the radiant countryside writing late at night his pastoral column called *Lush Places* and saying: "the waggons lumber in the lane under their golden glory of harvested sheaves, …; **maternal rodents pilot their furry brood through the stubble**." (320—my emphasis added) Then, before he went upstairs to rest for the night in his countryside home at Boot Magna, he sought for a little light:

> William took the last candle from the table....Before getting into bed he drew the curtain and threw open the window. Moonlight streamed into the room.
>
> Outside the owls **hunted** maternal rodents and their furry broods. (321-my emphasis added)

Thalia, the Comic Muse, may likewise not enter there. But her fitting festive comedy is nevertheless precious to us and deeply nourishing to the attentive and receptive human heart. And Evelyn Waugh knew that too. --Finis--