

Holy Fools in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and *Helena*

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There is, in the Orthodox Christian East—first in the East-Roman Empire, and later in the East-Slavic lands of what we today know as Ukraine and Russia—a mysterious type of Christian figure unique to that part of the world whose life is “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma” (to use Churchill’s famous phrase about Soviet Russia in 1939). These are Christians who feign (and perhaps, in some cases, actually undergo) a period of madness in which they act in ways utterly at odds with all social and religious conventions and cultural expectations of “respectable” behavior. The behavior is so erratic and disturbing, so at odds with what is assumed to be properly “pious” and “appropriate” conduct, that these Christians utterly blur the line between eccentricity and insanity, and do so quite deliberately for reasons presently to be discussed.

The behavior of these Christians is such a body-blow to conventional categories that even coming up with adequate terminology to describe them is a challenge.¹ These figures, who have no directly comparable Western analogues,² are usually referred to in Russian as *iurodivyi*, for which we do not have an entirely satisfactory translation into English, but which we, nonetheless, usually render as “holy fools.” There are multiple examples of such fools in well-known Russian works of the last two centuries: Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov*, Tolstoy’s *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth*, and above all Dostoevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*.³

These *iurodivyi* are Christians who take quite literally the Pauline notion of being, in a very real sense, “fools for Christ’s sake” (I Cor. 4:10) who are “a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men” (I Cor. 4:9): “we are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we are in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless . . . ; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the off-scouring of all things” (I Cor. 4:10b–13). The figure of the *iurodivyi* has increasingly come in for scholarly scrutiny in the last few

decades, though their behavior has been a topos in hagiographic literature for 1,400 years, and their existence was widely known in Russia for at least the last 500 years. They have not, however, been well understood in the West. In what follows, I do five things. In the first three rather brief and descriptive sections, I (i) sketch out scriptural notions of holy foolishness; (ii) describe the earliest examples of holy fools in the East-Roman Empire; and (iii) look at a few more recent East Slavic examples of holy fools. In the fourth section I synthesize this data to determine the common characteristics of holy fools; and then, finally, I put this all together into a hermeneutic lens to examine two of the most puzzling characters in *Brideshead Revisited* and *Helena*, two of the major “mature” novels of the great English Catholic writer Evelyn Waugh. I argue that these characters can be better understood than they have been hitherto by seeing them as, in their own way, *iurodivyi*. Waugh’s *iurodivyi*, so I argue, manifest a pedagogical and apophatic foolishness that teaches others that the mystery of life in Christ cannot be captured by the categories of modern rationality or reduced to the conventions of bourgeois respectability. Rather, the very nature of the God revealed in Christ is one who defies all expectations and who exceeds all boundaries in an “absurd” super-abundance of unfathomable love, which is often incomprehensible to most except those regarded as mental and even moral defectives. In the final analysis, we shall see that the *iurodivyi* are to be understood “not as psychologically deranged but as an embodiment of Mystery.”⁴

HOLY FOOLISHNESS IN SCRIPTURE

The Bible has a number of figures who act in shocking ways that upset expectations for those considered “prophets” or “holy.” The earliest examples are from Old Testament (OT) prophets.⁵ The greatest of these, Isaiah, is told by God to start “walking naked and barefoot . . . for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia” (Isa. 20:2–3). Ezekiel’s instructions are just as infelicitous but in a different way. First God tells him to recline for 390 days on left side (Ez. 4:4–6), but as God moves from bedroom to kitchen things get worse for poor Ezekiel, who is told to eat the scroll (Ez. 3:1–3) and then, even more alarmingly, instructed “you shall eat . . . a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human dung.” When Ezekiel objects, the Lord says, “See, I will let you have cow’s dung instead of human dung, on which you may prepare your bread” (Ez. 4:12–15).

There are numerous other examples of God doing, or instructing others to do, things that seem risible and absurd in human terms but have a pedagogical purpose in God’s plan, usually to instruct or correct the people of Israel, or their enemies, or both. Such examples include the clearly postmenopausal Sarah being told by God she will conceive a child, in response to which both she and Abraham laugh in God’s face (Gen. 17:15–21 and 18:9–15); Hosea taking a whore, Gomer, for a wife (Hos. 1:2ff); Jeremiah being instructed to go about with “thongs and yoke-bars . . . on your neck” (Jer. 27:2); Zedekiah being told to wear horns of iron (3

Kings 22:11). Not surprisingly, a true prophet is hard to discern from a false one (Deut. 18:20) and could be thought quite foolish. Fools, in the OT, are generally those who do not or will not recognize God, and will not obey Him: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 52:1 [LXX]), a common lament throughout the psalter.

In the New Testament, the theme of foolishness finds even more direct expression, though its expression is very carefully teleological and pedagogical in nature. As John Saward has aptly remarked, the New Testament (NT) "never beatifies wisdom or folly *in general*, but only wisdom or folly under a certain description."⁶ In the gospels, we find Jesus thanking His Father for having "hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes" (Matt. 11:25). Luke picks this up in the same words but expands the declaration to include the story of the good Samaritan whose behavior is so far beyond the call of duty as to be absurd (Luke 10:21ff). The good Samaritan is an example, as Saward notes, of those ridiculed by the world because of their "self-oblation, the renunciation of self-protection."⁷

Paul is the one who gives us several descriptions of holy foolery and absurd conduct. He is himself accused of being a madman (Acts 26:24ff) for preaching about Christ. It is he who gives us the famous hymn to Christ's absurd self-abnegation, His *kenosis* (Phil. 2:5–11). And, of course, as noted above already, it is Paul whose first letter to the church at Corinth puts before us the language of holy folly several times: "the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (1:25), and the "folly" of "the wisdom of this world" must be scorned by "a fool that he may become wise" (I Cor. 3:18). The "message about the cross is foolishness" (*mwr...a*) (I Cor. 1:18; cf. 1:25, 27; 2:14; 3:18–19; 4:10). Finally, and more fully, he describes in detail a "fool for Christ's sake" (*'mej muroi di' CristŌn*) (4:10).⁸ For Paul, the *mwr...a toà khrŪgmatoj* is not merely a rhetorical trope, polemical device, or theatrical allusion. As L. L. Welborn's careful and insightful word study has shown, "[W]hen Paul described the message of the crucified Christ as 'foolishness,' he was reflecting the harsh experience of his missionary preaching and the response that the gospel elicited, particularly from Greeks and Romans."⁹

EARLIEST (GREEK) EXAMPLES

This Pauline notion was taken very seriously in the Greek-speaking eastern half of the Roman Empire. As forms of Christian sanctity begin to take shape, especially with the development of monasticism and other forms of asceticism,¹⁰ we find in the East a category of sanctity unique to this part of the Christian world—the holy fool.¹¹ In the Middle Byzantine period, we find the foundational example of holy foolery, the paradigm to which all successors look back, viz., the one variously known as Abba Symeon the Fool or Saint Simeon Salos (from the Greek *ſĕloj*, possibly a calque from Syrian *sakla*, which is usually translated as "stupid" or "fool").¹² Simeon's vita was already written by the middle of the seventh century in a famous

hagiographic text composed by Leontius of Neapolis on Cyprus (modern Limassol) in the 640s.¹³ About Symeon¹⁴ we are told, *inter alia*, that he:

took nuts with him to church to pelt people with¹⁵ and on other Sundays wore a string of sausages about his neck like a diaconal *orarion* (“stole”) and dipped them in a pot of mustard to eat—when everyone else would have been observing the pre-Eucharistic fast;¹⁶
 accepted a job selling lupines—a legume known to induce “ostentatious flatulence”—only to give them away and consume the rest himself;¹⁷
 defecated in public;¹⁸
 deliberately “rushed willingly” into the public baths clearly designated for women;¹⁹
 pretended to fondle female slaves and even allowed himself to be falsely blamed for raping and impregnating one of them.²⁰

This and other Greek examples²¹ would come, in turn, to live on long after the eastern empire began its slow collapse in the first few centuries of the second millennium prior to its complete destruction and domination by the Ottoman Turks in May of 1453. With the Christianization of Rus’ in 988,²² these earlier examples would be introduced to the East Slavs, where they would take very deep root both culturally and spiritually down to the present day.

EAST SLAVIC EXAMPLES

In many examples of *Byzance après Byzance*, we find the life of the holy fool more culturally prominent in Russia than anywhere else, even today.²³ Holy folly is, in some ways, at the very heart of Russia (and, to a lesser extent, Ukraine²⁴) not merely in her literature and hagiography but also in her self-presentation to the world in that instantly and universally recognizable image of St. Basil’s Cathedral in the Kremlin, an image that has appeared on countless tourist brochures and websites for decades now. That cathedral, at the heart of Moscow, is dedicated not, as some might expect, to St. Basil the Great, the outstanding fourth-century Cappadocian father and bishop of Caesarea, but to St. Basil the Fool, about whom we are told that he was born in the 1460s (some sources say 1464, others 1468 or 1469) outside Moscow, died in 1557, and was glorified as a saint in 1588 by the patriarch of Moscow.

In the burning summer heat and in the winter’s harsh frost, he walked about barefoot through the streets of Moscow. His actions were strange: here he would upset a stand with *kalachi*, and there he would spill a jug with *kvas*. Angry merchants throttled the blessed one, but he endured the beatings with joy and he thanked God for them. Then it was discovered that the *kalachi* were poorly cooked, and the *kvas* was badly prepared. The reputation of St Basil quickly grew, and people saw him as a holy fool, a man of God, and a denouncer of wrong.²⁵

Other stories abound about him, many apocryphal. One says that Basil was fearless and God-protected in challenging Tsar Ivan IV ("the Terrible") by telling the latter that it mattered not whether he ate meat during Great Lent because he had already shed so much blood. The tsar was so awed by Basil he left him alone and, reportedly, served as pallbearer for him at his death. This points to a common characteristic of fools: they are "marginal figures . . . [who] cannot be entirely appropriated by any social or ecclesiastical structure. It is precisely this independence and impartiality that underpins the holy fool's capacity to help reconcile all disparities and to act as a point of contact between man and God."²⁶

There would, in time, be many examples of holy fools in what we today know as Ukraine and Russia.²⁷ Most of these fools are men, though one rather recent and notable woman²⁸ is that of St. Xenia of St. Petersburg, c.1730–c.1803; she was glorified as a saint in 1988. Hers is a fascinating example for transgressing the boundaries of sexual roles. Having married Andrei, a cavalry officer, they enjoyed marriage until his sudden death, which worried his wife greatly because he had not received the sacraments of the Church. She would give away all her possessions, and go about dressed in her dead husband's military uniform, telling everyone to call her by his name. She is described as wandering all over the capital thus disguised doing good for people in her husband's name, so that if his soul were suffering from the sins he had not repented at the time of his death, her deeds and prayers would help him.²⁹

There are more recent examples of holy fools in Russia in the twentieth century, but rather than look at individual cases I want to draw out from the literature some of the common features of the fools, both ancient³⁰ and modern.³¹ In seeking to analyze these figures, it is important to bear in mind that they often evade full analysis, especially perhaps psychoanalysis. As George Fedotov argued in his study of them, "the life of a holy fool is a perpetual oscillation between moral acts of saving men and immoral acts of insulting them."³² There is a fundamental instability in the life of most fools that prevents us ever from knowing with complete certainty whether their madness and outrageous antics are merely pedagogical postures designed to encourage the virtues of faith, hope, and love, and to discourage vice, or whether they are something else.³³ In the end, sorting out these questions may not even be that important: "The 'fool for Christ's sake' . . . behaves 'incorrectly' from the layman's point of view and one may even say 'not correctly' from the monk's; nevertheless he preserves his sanctity on some higher level, where these opposites evidently lose their generally accepted meaning."³⁴ As Syrkin goes on to say a little later, most holy fools witness to "the neutralization of the 'purity'–'dirtiness' opposition" as well as similar oppositions between "clothed" and "naked" and between men and women.³⁵ In so doing, they are so devoted to witnessing to Christ that they scarcely see, and still less suffer, the social insults and hostility that so often attend those who transgress these boundaries: "How blest are you when you suffer insults and persecution and every kind of calumny for my sake" (Luke 6:22). The fools seem to combine these seemingly irreconcilable antinomies "as though the 'fool' were serving as a particular

instance of *coincidentia oppositorum*" by being, as the hymnody so often phrases it, "bodiless in body" and "surpassing all wisdom by folly."³⁶

It is, then, generally accepted that it is impossible ever firmly and finally to fully differentiate between the *iurodivyi* and the insane; as Pavel Florensky has put it, "It might be insanity or it might be a special and as yet incomprehensible wisdom."³⁷ As Kallistos Ware has succinctly put it, "the fool is equivocal, enigmatic, always a disturbing question mark."³⁸ This is deliberate and intentional insofar as the fool seeks to disrupt those who "have identified faith and truth with the secularized concept of moral uprightness and conventional decorum."³⁹ This ambiguity is important to keep in mind, especially when it comes to the psychological status of Lord Sebastian Flyte in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*.

IURODIVYI IN WAUGH'S NOVELS

I want now to consider examples of holy fools in the writings of Evelyn Waugh, widely regarded as the greatest English Catholic novelist of the twentieth century, and certainly one of the funniest. Waugh was born in England in 1903 and died there on Easter Sunday in 1966. In between, he went to Oxford, married twice, raised seven children, and wrote eighteen novels,⁴⁰ three biographies,⁴¹ seven travel books,⁴² many newspaper and magazine articles,⁴³ and one volume of autobiography.⁴⁴ In addition, he was one of the funniest and most prolific letter writers of his day⁴⁵ and also an amusing, if often searingly blunt, diarist.⁴⁶ His novels have worn extremely well, and almost all of them, together with many of his other writings, remain widely in print. Penguin is bringing out another edition of them this year or next, and Waugh's grandson, Alexander, told me last year that he is under contract with Oxford University Press for a complete collected works, projected to run to fifty or more volumes. Waugh's novels have also attracted the attention of filmmakers, who have attempted productions of *Scoop*, *Bright Young People*, and of course the brilliant and utterly enchanting 1981 adaptation for British TV of *Brideshead Revisited* with such great actors as John Gielgud, Lawrence Olivier, and Jeremy Irons.

Before applying the model of the holy fool to the writings of Evelyn Waugh (1903–1966), several cautions are in order. First, there are no characters in any of Waugh's novels who perfectly embody all the characteristics of the fool, especially in the more "extreme" manifestations in the classical Greek forms. There are, moreover, some actual fools who are *not* portrayed as having redeeming qualities: their foolery is *not* pedagogical or teleological and not of providential design⁴⁷ but is simple stupidity, iniquity, or actual organic madness or psychosis.⁴⁸ In such cases, Waugh's portrayal of these characters is explicit and simple, his disdain obvious—whereas, in cases of holy fools, their true nature is hidden and must be teased out, as we shall see.

Second, I do not wish to force Waugh's characters into forms he himself never conceived of, and of whose Eastern Orthodox provenance he most likely would have disapproved.⁴⁹ Waugh was, of course, a staunch Roman Catholic, having converted

in late September 1930, a uniquely unpropitious period for ecumenical relations between Eastern and Western Christians thanks to Pope Pius XI.⁵⁰ Days after his conversion, he was on his way to Abyssinia under contract for at least one London newspaper to cover the coronation of the emperor in an Oriental Orthodox country he had heard described as “nominally Christian: the Abyssinians are deplorably lax in their morals.”⁵¹ In one article resulting from this trip, he partially mocks the prolixity and complexity of Orthodox liturgics (in this case, the imperial coronation celebrated according to the Alexandrian rite in its Abyssinian/Ethiopian recension) in his “A Coronation in 1930,”⁵² later comparing unfavorably Eastern liturgies (of which Waugh was almost completely ignorant in every respect, just as he was, *a fortiori*, about Eastern Christianity in general) to the supposedly superior openness, light, and reason of the Latin liturgical tradition to which Waugh was fiercely attached.⁵³

Nonetheless, I believe there are at least two major characters that very much embody key aspects of the fool in such a noticeable way that they can be profitably understood by analyzing them through this hermeneutic of holy fools.⁵⁴ These two characters, Sebastian and Helena, are at the heart of his two major mature novels—*Brideshead Revisited* (*BR*) and *Helena* (*H*) respectively—and these two characters are among the most misunderstood of his characters.⁵⁵ I think my analysis of them helps us to understand more deeply than we have hitherto what Waugh was attempting to do in portraying them as he did. Waugh not only uses—without, of course, casting them terminologically thus—*iurodivyi* to guard real faith⁵⁶ but he regularly and openly mocks what he regards as bogus Christianity practiced by people far too certain of their own sanctity and smug superiority, people who prize nothing so much as bourgeois conventionality and social respectability.⁵⁷ Contrary to many of the received “myths”⁵⁸ about Waugh—which, as I have shown elsewhere,⁵⁹ incorrectly portray him as a man desperately insecure in his social station, and desperately sucking up to, and trying to imitate, the upper classes—it is precisely those “aristocratic” figures here who most clearly play the role of the fool.⁶⁰ Sebastian is the younger son of the Marquis of Marchmain, one of the wealthiest Catholic aristocratic families in England, while Helena, of course, is at the very pinnacle of the Roman social hierarchy as the dowager empress. Waugh does not romanticize them at all in the way we would expect from a genuine social sycophant. He knew too much theological anthropology⁶¹ to fall into the traps of romanticizing either the poor or the rich, or denigrating either.⁶²

Both *Brideshead* and *Helena* have been categorized too quickly and simply by critics as “conversion stories,” as Catholic propaganda, or as encomia to wealth and power.⁶³ While Waugh himself later in life seemed inclined to agree somewhat that the conversion of Lord Marchmain in *BR* may have been too explicit—as a result of which he hid Helena’s conversion⁶⁴—he rejected the idea that it was merely propaganda, and even more strongly scorned the idea it was about praising the rich, a common criticism at the time and since. Referring, in a letter to one critic, to Rex Mottram and Lady Celia Ryder—both wealthy and at least somewhat glamorous—Waugh asks, “Why did my reverence for money and rank not sanctify these two?”⁶⁵

Waugh equally resists the temptation to portray Helena, dowager empress of Rome, in an unambiguous light. In the first part of the novel, she emerges as a pagan and an intellectual lightweight; later on she is portrayed as a reclusive divorcée whom events have passed by and who is indeed quite content to be left alone (chapter 5 of the novel, titled “The Post of Honour Is a Private Station,” makes this very clear). In neither of these novels—nor elsewhere—do wealth and power emerge as intrinsic goods. In neither novel—nor elsewhere—are the rich and powerful uncritically flattered. In neither novel are all the “religious” characters portrayed as sensible and saintly; this holds true for all of Waugh’s corpus.⁶⁶ Indeed, one clear characteristic the fools in Waugh’s novels—Sebastian and Helena, above all—share with Eastern Christian fools is the fact that neither of them is a reformer or leader; both are loners, and both, to some significant extent, are regarded by others as “losers” notwithstanding their impressive social stations.⁶⁷

Let us turn now to consider the holy folly of Lord Sebastian Flyte in *BR* and the dowager empress Helena herself in her eponymous novel.

DIVERSITY OF EXAMPLES: TOWARDS A TYPOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC

To guide our exploration of the complex characters of Sebastian and Helena, I have found John Saward’s ninefold typology of holy fools helpful in noting a number of common elements in both East and West.⁶⁸ Saward is right to stress that there is no one type: “folly for Christ’s sake is itself a homogeneous phenomenon. The Communion of Saints is a mystery of unity-in-diversity, not of regimented uniformity.”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, his framework offers us a way to understand Sebastian and Helena in a fresh way. In what follows, it becomes clear that both Sebastian and Helena fulfill enough of Saward’s criteria to be legitimately called examples of holy fools.

Christocentricity

Saward has argued that “the first and most important of these elements is the *Christocentricity* of the fools: the inspiration of all their actions is identity with Christ crucified, participation in the Lord’s poverty, mockery, humiliation, nakedness, and self-emptying.”⁷⁰

Sebastian: Christ is *not* the inspiration of all his actions, at least initially; it is never clear what is, for much of the early novel.⁷¹ Only later does he come, especially by others like his sister Cordelia, to be seen in a Christocentric light as one who suffers, is humiliated, and so is close to God—as Bridey also recognizes, and later, partially, Charles. Of him, Cordelia says in various places in *BR*: “He’s still loved, you see, wherever he goes, whatever condition he’s in. It’s a thing about him he’ll never lose.” Later, speaking of those who suffer in general, she says, “I believe that they are very near and dear to God.” With particular reference to Sebastian’s rather unique and, in some ways self-inflicted, suffering, she says: “[O]ne can have no idea what the suf-

fering may be, to be maimed as he is—no dignity, no power of will. No one is ever holy without suffering.”

Waugh himself confirms Sebastian as near to Christ and radiating the light of Christ: “In 1955 Evelyn responded to a letter about *Brideshead* . . . : ‘I am glad you find Sebastian an interesting character. I don’t think he had any egotism. He was a contemplative without the necessary grace of fortitude.’”⁷² “With his outer beauty goes an inner purity.”⁷³

Helena: Her resemblance to Christ is, in part, through her lack of guile: She poses questions to people that discombobulate them and can only be answered with simplicity and truth. Her resemblance is also similar insofar as she who *was* regal and powerful refuses to play the part, just as Jesus, king of kings, refused to play the part in earthly political terms; Helena “was a golden legend. They expected someone very old and very luxurious; and they rather hoped, gentle. Instead they met a crank; and more than a crank, a saint. It was altogether too much. They were prepared to meet demands for delicacies of the table and elaborate furniture. They had secured quite a passable orchestra⁷⁴ from Alexandria. What Helena wanted was something of quite another order. She wanted the True Cross” (*H*, 137).

Folly as Charisma

Second, Saward has argued that “folly for Christ’s sake is a *charisma*, a vocation and gift from God; it is therefore distinguished sharply from simple eccentricity or pathological madness.”⁷⁵ I think here Saward is betraying a Western bias because, as noted earlier, on the part of many Byzantine and Russian fools, it is all but impossible to distinguish “pathological madness” from holy folly. Nonetheless, it can be agreed that holy folly, if genuine, is and must be in response to a call from God.

Sebastian: If he has a call, to which he and others allude on some occasions, it is hidden and develops late. Some, like Cordelia, seem to think he might once have had a vocation but ran from it, only to have it catch him “like a twitch upon a thread” late in life when he spends his later years in a desert monastery.

Helena: Clearly she has a vocation, as Waugh makes clear in the novel and his letters. In fact, Waugh uses Helena to some extent as a cipher to put forward his notions of vocation:

I liked Helena’s sanctity because it is in contrast to all that moderns think of as sanctity. She wasn’t thrown to the lions, she wasn’t a contemplative, she wasn’t poor & hungry, she didn’t look like an El Greco. She just discovered what it was God had chosen for her to do and did it. And she snubbed Aldous Huxley with his perennial fog by going straight to the essential physical historical fact of the redemption.⁷⁶

Folly as Simulation

Saward has argued that “holy folly is *simulated*; the holy fools *play* at being mad. The fool for Christ is a sacred jester, clown, or mimic. He leads a double life: ‘on stage’ (in the streets, by day) he is imbecile; ‘in private’ (in church, at night) he is a

man of prayer.”⁷⁷ I think that here Saward betrays his Western bias: Many fools in the West do indeed seem to be jesters and players leading a double life, but that is far less clear in the East. The lines in the East are, as we have seen, generally much more blurred, making it much more difficult to tell whether the fool is playing at being mad or is in fact genuinely insane. And, in fact, this is precisely the case with Sebastian: his early antics—playing with a teddy bear, insisting on “red pillow box pyjamas,” and other antics are all done for reasons that are never entirely clear.

For her part, Helena seems to feign at least silliness, if not madness, on several occasions—perhaps playing the dunce a bit in view of political dangers? Her life in danger at one point, she is bundled off to Trèves and there meets the Christian Lactantius who introduces her to some of the basic facts of the historical life of Christ, facts which she finds “all most interesting” (*H*, 130–31).

Folly as Eschatological

Saward argues that “Folly for Christ’s sake is always *eschatological*.”⁷⁸ In both cases, it seems that Sebastian and Helena were acting eschatologically.

Sebastian: It is very difficult, and for some almost impossible, to understand why his earthly life seems to be so ruined. What good could he accomplish, what happiness will he experience, except in the age to come? Note, too, that Charles’s relationship with Sebastian is eschatological in some sense: Sebastian is the “forerunner” leading to Julia—and beyond Julia to God.

Helena: Hers is something of a “realized eschatology” insofar as “her work was finished. She had done what only the saints succeed in doing; what indeed constitutes their patent of sanctity. She had completely conformed to the will of God” (*H*, 156). Her life points beyond, to the age to come: “Above all the babble of her age and ours, she makes one blunt assertion. And there alone lies Hope” (*H*, 159).

Fool as Pilgrim

Saward argues that the eschatological nature of holy folly is most often expressed by means of *pilgrimage*. Both Helena and Sebastian end up on extended pilgrimages in which they discover in fact their vocation and the culmination of their life’s work.

Sebastian: Not for nothing is his patronymic Flyte. He is a perpetual peregrinator, if not exactly a pilgrim, flitting from London to Oxford to Brideshead to Venice and ultimately to North Africa, and several places there.

Helena: Clearly the latter half of the novel is taken up with her pilgrimage to Jerusalem to discover the true cross.

Stable Sociopolitical Context

Saward argues that a fool’s instability and strangeness is generally dependent on the surrounding polity being rather stable, harmonious, close-knit: “[T]he holy fool

appears most commonly at a time of political tranquility.”⁷⁹ In both cases, this is true: Sebastian's life takes place in the tranquility of the interwar period in a family that is protected, by virtue of its enormous wealth, from social and economic instability. Helena's life is lived at the pinnacle of Roman power and the *tranquillitatis ordinis* that was its trademark.

Discernment of Spirits

Saward says it is important to discern the spirits in order to get beneath layers of self-deception and so discover whether someone is a genuinely holy fool or not. Many people attempt this about Sebastian, never quite sure how to understand him. For her part, Helena herself seems to recognize the importance of testing spirits to know whether her desire to find the cross is legitimate or not. In her case this emerges with her dreams: “[Y]ou can't always trust dreams, you know. Some are sent by the devil.” To which she responds: “My dream was alright” (*H*, 153).

Extreme *Apatheia*

Our English word “apathy” is usually understood quite differently and given a negative connotation. This differs considerably from what is meant, in Greek patristic and monastic literature, especially from Evagrius of Pontus onward, by *apatheia* (ἀπάθεια). *Apatheia* is the state of being “without passion,” which—for the Greek Fathers—was one of the highest states to which the human soul could aspire. The soul without passion was unbothered by any inordinate desire, by any vice or sin. Neither lust, nor avarice, nor gluttony, nor anger, nor pride, nor any of the eight evil *logismoi* or disordered thoughts and desires (condensed in the West to the seven deadly sins) could disturb or exercise the one who was truly *apatheia*. According to Saward, holy fools are *ascetics* whose “asceticism is of a particular kind—that of an extreme *apatheia*.” This protects him from, for example, temptation with prostitutes (cf. St. Andrew Salos), but does “not destroy warm and loving relationships.”⁸⁰ Neither Helena nor Sebastian could be said to practice extreme *apatheia*, but both clearly have strongly ascetical tendencies at least at points. (There are early hints from Sebastian of the ascetical difficulties of being a Catholic in his dialogue with Charles the first summer at Brideshead [*BR*, 83–84], but this will only emerge a little more clearly late in Sebastian's life.)

Helena, for example, is portrayed at one point as having lost weight and living very ascetically in a convent, vastly simplified from the spacious palatial splendors to which, as dowager empress, she would have been accustomed: She “settled in a single small room among the nuns of Mount Zion where she did her own housework and took her turn in waiting at table” (*H*, 138). She is indifferent to her own comfort and indifferent to those, like the nuns, who beg her to consider her age and health (*H*, 146): “Helena was exempt by her age from all obligation. Nevertheless she decided to fast. It seemed to her a matter of practical expediency. . . . She had exhausted all the

natural means of finding what she sought. ‘Very well,’ she said, ‘I’ll see what fasting will do.’” Fasting here, following Eastern custom,⁸¹ means, as Waugh explains a little earlier to “quite simply ‘starve.’ . . . In Jerusalem if a man wished to attain the rewards of fasting he lived on water and thin gruel and nothing else” (*H*, 146).

Finally, in addition to *apatheia* and asceticism, Saward has noted that, in the East, “holy folly is nearly always in close historical relation to monasticism.”⁸² As noted previously, both Sebastian and Helena become quasi-monastics later in life.

Childlikeness

Saward notes that the fool is protected “above all by his *childlikeness*, his purity and simplicity of heart. Spiritual infancy cannot be equated with holy folly but is its constant companion.”⁸³

There are many examples of behavior in Sebastian that could be considered child-like, though some might view them as simply childish. These examples abound in the early part of the novel, especially in the first several encounters of Charles and Sebastian at Oxford: After Sebastian is sick in Charles’s ground-floor rooms, the former sends the latter a “note . . . written in *conté* crayon on a whole sheet of my choice Whatman H. P. drawing paper: *I am very contrite. Aloysius won’t speak to me until he sees I am forgiven, so please come to luncheon today. Sebastian Flyte*” (*BR*, 32). Other examples—the infamous teddy bear and its disciplinary hairbrush, red pillow box pyjamas, and so forth—have already been mentioned. Others note this childlike character about Sebastian as well. Anthony Blanche remarks of him that “He never seemed to get into trouble” (*BR*, 51). “He was the only boy in my house who was never beaten at all. I can see him now at the age of fifteen. He never had spots you know. . . . He used to spend *such* a time in the confessional, I used to wonder what he had to say because he never did anything wrong; never *quite*; at least, he never got punished. Perhaps he was just being charming through the grille” (*BR*, 52).

For her part, Helena seems to embody some qualities we associate with children: a stubborn single-minded determination to do what she thinks she must do, to ask the questions she feels she must. As Douglas Lane Patey puts it, “Princess Helena is a practical, common-sensical girl always asking questions, questions that seem *childlike* to the worldly folk around her. . . . The novel’s other characters serve to contrast with Helena’s inspired simplicity.”⁸⁴

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Consider some of the other characteristics of fools as noted by other scholars: The fool “does not recruit imitators and followers; indeed, he actively repels them. Nor is the holy fool a mystic for he makes no attempt . . . to share with others his unique experience of communion with God.”⁸⁵ This is as true of Helena as it is of Sebastian. Though both start off with large retinues of friends and followers, by late in life they



Et in Arcadia Ego: Sebastian and Charles in a world of make-believe - a happy delayed childhood before an unhappy adulthood. From the 1981 British miniseries *Brideshead Revisited*, directed by Charles Sturridge, starring Anthony Andrews (left) as Sebastian, holding his favorite teddy, Aloysius, and Jeremy Irons (right) as Charles.
Photo courtesy of ITV.

lead very quiet lives with a tiny handful of people around, none of them really close, especially in spiritual matters.

If they seek no followers, neither are they interested in politics, which Waugh famously scorned.⁸⁶ Indeed, social reformers and politicians—and their frequent ally, journalists⁸⁷—are invariably figures of mockery in Waugh's corpus.⁸⁸ By chasing after the world's wisdom and welfare, Waugh suggests, all such people make themselves into fatuous and wholly obnoxious busybodies, seeking improvement in social structures and economic conditions without first and foremost attending to the transformation of the human heart, whose corrupt nature can never be entirely overcome.⁸⁹ Neither Sebastian nor Helena is interested in widespread social reform or in leading movements of moral improvement. Indeed, to make the point explicit, Waugh titles chapter 5 of *Helena* "A Post of Honour Is a Private Station," referring to Helena's middle age in which she has retired to the Dalmatian coast and takes no interest in imperial politics. Neither Helena nor Sebastian—especially ironic, for the former—has any interest in politics. This, too, is characteristic of classical fools, who are "conspicuous in lacking even the slightest interest in political engagement."⁹⁰ Helena refuses to concern herself with politics, repeatedly saying the danger of politics is "power without grace" (*H*, 122) and even going so far as to tell her son, the Emperor Constantine, to try to "keep out of history" (*H*, 75). He retorts that "You don't understand modern politics, momma. There are no private lives nowadays" (*H*, 74). Among Byzantine fools "the closest a holy fool came to political boldness was merely to be impervious to the authorities,"⁹¹ and Helena gives abundant evidence of this at every stage of her life, refusing to do what various authorities—father, husband, and political courtiers—all counseled her to do.

We have seen, then, that both Helena and Sebastian are clear examples of holy fools—both different from each other, different from earlier models, and different in that neither conforms to any previous type, which is entirely normal in the case of fools—they are each *sui generis*. In the end, Waugh offers us these foolish characters to teach us that the mystery of life in Christ cannot be captured by the categories of rationality or reduced to the conventions of bourgeois respectability. In the final analysis, *iurodivyi* are to be understood "not as psychologically deranged but as an embodiment of Mystery."⁹²

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NOTES

1. When English translators have been confronted with the *iurodivyi* in Dostoevsky, they have often stumbled around trying to latch onto appropriate translations, as Sergey Ivanov has noted in his *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond* (2006): in *Brothers Karamazov*, "eight characters in different contexts are referred to as *iurodivye*. The English translator [Constance Garnett] of the novel had to render them in very different ways depending on the context: 'idiot,' 'religious idiot,' 'pious ecstatic,' 'saintly fool,' 'crazy,' 'fanatic'" (vi).
2. As Sergey Ivanov has noted, "although medieval Catholicism produced an approximation of the paradigm of holy foolery [e.g., Francis of Assisi, and later Thomas More and Philip Neri], it could not recreate it fully within the parameters established in Byzantium. . . . As Jean-Marie Fritz observed, 'The fool for Christ has never become acclimatized in the West: he was never accepted'" (*Holy Fools*, 398).
3. The literature on Dostoevsky is of course immense and cannot be entertained here. A few titles, however, help to illustrate his theological agenda in general, including Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction*; for more particular study on the figure of the *iurodivyi* in his writings, see Frances Hernandez, "Dostoevskij's Prince Myshkin as a 'Jurodivij'" More generally, see Philip Gorski, "The Holy Fool in Russian Fiction" and Natalie Challis and Horace W. Dewey, "Byzantine Models for Russia's Literature of Divine Folly (*Jurodstvo*)."
4. Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 402.
5. On them, see Svitlana Kobets, "The Paradigm of the Hebrew Prophet and Russian Tradition of *Jurodstvo*."
6. Saward, *Perfect Fools: Folly for Christ's Sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality*, 3.
7. Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 6.
8. Already in Paul we see clearly that he wants to distinguish forms of folly, perhaps anticipating the offhand remark of Reinhold Niebuhr that "it makes all the difference in the world whether one is a fool for Christ or simply a fool."
9. L. L. Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1–4 in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition*, 20–21.
10. A good overview of the development of these forms may be found in many of the articles in Sergei Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*.
11. As noted earlier, the fool, as this type develops in the East, knows no direct analogue in the West. Some Western Christians have, however, been attempting recently to learn from

this model anew—and not merely Catholics but Protestants also. For an interesting example of the latter, see Mathew Woodley, *Holy Fools: Following Jesus with Reckless Abandon*.

12. Simeon is paradigmatic, but not the earliest. Lennart Rydén tells us of a nun in early fifth-century Egypt who pretended to be demonically possessed and who was beaten and scorned as a *seġloj*. See “The Holy Fool” in Hackel, *The Byzantine Saint*, 106.

13. The critical edition of the Greek text is by Lennart Rydén in *Leontios de Néapolis: Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre*, ed. A. J. Festuigère (Paris: Geuthner, 1974), 55–104. A translation has been made by Derek Krueger and is available at <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft6k4007sx/>. See also “The Life of Symeon the Fool and the Cynic Tradition,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993): 423–42.

14. Further details on Symeon are also recounted in Alexander Syrkin, “On the Behavior of the ‘Fool for Christ’s Sake’”

15. Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius’s Life and the Late Antique City* iv.

16. Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*, iv.

17. Derek Krueger, “The Life of Symeon the Fool and the Cynic Tradition,” 432.

18. Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*, iv.

19. Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*, iv.

20. Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*, iv.

21. A later Greek fool, Andrew (c. 880–946), copies many of Symeon’s exploits. Details about Andrew are told in Alexander Syrkin, “On the Behavior of the ‘Fool for Christ’s Sake,’” 157–58.

22. On which see, inter alia, Jonathan Shepard, “The Coming of Christianity to Rus: Authorized and Unauthorized Versions,” 185–222; see also *The Expansion of Orthodox Europe* (Ashgate, 2007).

23. Some of the connections between Byzantine fools and their advent in Russia are told in Natalie Challis and Horace Dewey, “Byzantine Models for Russia’s Literature of Divine Folly (*Jurodstvo*).”

24. See, for example., Natalie Challis and Horace Dewey, “Divine Folly in Old Kievan Literature: The Tale of Isaac the Cave Dweller,” 255–64. For a more detailed portrait, see Vladimir Znosko, *Hieroschemamonk Feofil Fool-for-Christ’s-Sake: Ascetic and Visionary of the Kiev-Pecherskaya Lavra*, trans. Lev Puhalo and Vassili Novakshonoff (Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery Press, 1970).

25. <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp?FSID=102185>.

26. Alina Birzache, “In Search of Cinematic Holy Foolishness as a Form of Orthodox Peacemaking,” 157.

27. See George P. Fedotov, “The Holy Fools,” in *The Russian Religious Mind*, vol. 2, 2–17. See also Svitlana Kobets, “The Russian Paradigm of *Jurodstvo* and its Genesis in Novgorod,” 337–64.

28. Another is that of St. Pelagia, on whom see Peter M. Antoci, “Scandal and Marginality in the Vitae of Holy Fools,” 278–80.

29. For more on her, see Jeanne Kormina and Sergey Shtyrkov, “St. Xenia as a Patron of Female Social Suffering: An Essay on Anthropological Hagiology.”

30. See Richard W. F. Pope, “Fools and Folly in Old Russia,” 476–81.

31. For a contemporary analysis of the increasingly renewed and widespread practice of *yurodiviy* in the post-Soviet period, see Per-Arne Bodin, *Language, Canonization, and Holy Foolishness: Studies in Post-Soviet Russian Culture and the Orthodox Tradition*, 191–253. For shorter and more general sketches of several fools, see Deborah Corbett, “Wisdom Crieth

in the Streets: A Compendium of Fools for Christ's Sake," *Epiphany Journal* 9 (1989): 57–66

32. George P. Fedotov, "The Holy Fools," 5. Fedotov's study is useful for its many early modern examples of holy fools, whom he describes in some detail.

33. As Syrkin puts it, "to affect people, the 'fool' imbues his didactics with paradoxical situations, leading, consequently, not to laughter alone . . . but also to therapeutic, 'cathartic' results." Syrkin, "On the Behavior of the 'Fool for Christ's Sake,'" 168

34. Syrkin, "On the Behavior of the 'Fool for Christ's Sake,'" 163. See also Kallistos Ware, who asks "Must the madness of the fool in Christ be always feigned and deliberate, or may it be sometimes a genuine instance of mental illness? The question assumes that there is a clear differentiation between sanity and insanity; but is this always the case?" See "The Fool in Christ as Prophet and Apostle," *Sobornost* 6 (1984): 24.

35. Syrkin, "On the Behavior of the 'Fool for Christ's Sake,'" 164.

36. Syrkin, "On the Behavior of the 'Fool for Christ's Sake,'" 167.

37. Cited in Per-Arne Bodin, *Language, Canonization, and Holy Foolishness*, 199–200.

38. "The Fool in Christ as Prophet and Apostle," 7.

39. Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, 74. The entire chapter is a very perceptive study of the fool.

40. *Decline and Fall*, Waugh's first novel, was published in 1928 followed in 1930 by *Vile Bodies*; *Black Mischief* (1932); *A Handful of Dust* (1934); *Mr. Loveday's Little Outing* (a short-story collection published in 1936); *Scoop* (1938); *Put Out More Flags* and *Work Suspended* (1942); *Brideshead Revisited* (1945); *Scott-King's Modern Europe* (1947); *The Loved One* (1948); *Helena* (1950); *Men at Arms* (the first volume in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, published in 1952); *Love among the Ruins* (1953); *Officers and Gentlemen* (second volume in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, published in 1955); *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957); *Unconditional Surrender* (1961; concludes the *Sword of Honour* trilogy); *Basil Seal Rides Again* (1963).

41. 1928: *Rossetti: His Life and Works*; 1935: *Edmund Campion* ("historical fiction/biography"); 1959: *Life of Ronald Knox* (official authorized biography).

42. 1929: *Labels*; 1931: *Remote People*; 1934: *Ninety-Two Days*; 1939: *Robbery under Law*; 1936: *Waugh in Abyssinia*; 1946: *When the Going Was Good*; 1960: *A Tourist in Africa*.

43. Some, but by no means all, of these articles and reviews are gathered in *A Little Order: Selected Journalism* (Penguin, 2000) and still others in *Essays, Articles, and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh* (1984).

44. In 1964 *A Little Learning*, the first of projected three volumes of autobiography, was published. Waugh's heart seems not to have been in this venture, and he never wrote another volume. As for biographies, there are at least four of Waugh—by Christopher Sykes, Martin Stannard, and Selma Hastings—but far and away the best study of him remains Douglas Lane Patey's *The Life of Evelyn Waugh*. Also not to be missed are several secondary studies of some part of Waugh's life or corpus, including especially the recent work of Paula Byrne, *Mad World: Evelyn Waugh and the Secrets of Brideshead* (Harper, 2011). Additionally, see the work of Waugh's grandson: Alexander Waugh, *Fathers and Sons* (2004). On its website, the Evelyn Waugh Society tells us that a fifth biography is being released this year by Duncan McLaren, *Evelyn!: Rhapsody for an Obsessive Love*.

45. See *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh and Diana Cooper* (1992); *Letters of Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh* (1997); and more generally see Mark Amory, ed., *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh* (Penguin, 1982).

46. Michael Davie, ed., *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh* (Penguin, 1979).

47. As Saward notes, "the Christian tradition of holy folly does not condone every form of madness on the specious grounds that the world's judgments are always wrong; it is not a license irrationality and abnormal behavior" (*Perfect Fools*, 26).

48. In this third category of actual psychosis—or, more properly, "bromide psychosis"—I have in mind here principally Gilbert Pinfold, Waugh's explicitly autobiographical character in *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (*OGP*). Pinfold suffers a real if temporary mental breakdown—a descent into psychosis—as Waugh cheerfully admitted to experiencing in his own life while on a sea voyage after having long taken pharmacologically primitive sleeping draughts with liberal doses of liquor. For a medical analysis of both novel and author, see Daniel Hurst and Mary Jane Hurst, "Bromide Psychosis: A Literary Case," *Clinical Neuropharmacology* 7 (1984): 259–64. Douglas Lane Patey is helpful here in setting the context to this breakdown and its resulting fictionalization: *The Life of Evelyn Waugh*, 338–41. Patey notes that *OGP* is neither autobiography nor a novel "but a kind of mock-novel: a sly invitation to a game" (Patey, *The Life of Evelyn Waugh*, 339). For that reason it is best not taken up here. For further study, see also James J. Lynch, "Evelyn Waugh during the Pinfold Years," *Modern Fiction Studies* 32 (1986): 543–59.

49. In *Decline and Fall* he had alluded to the dubious "Apostolic Claims of the Church of Abyssinia" (Waugh, *Decline and Fall*, 89). In *Black Mischief* Waugh very loosely tosses around the epithet "Nestorian," portraying one such Christian "metropolitan" as a drunkard (130) and a "Nestorian patriarch" as rather dim-witted and intransigent (189–90). In his letters defending *Black Mischief*, he refers to the so-called Nestorian Church (today better known as the Assyrian Church of the East, on which see Christoph Baumer, *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity*), as "a notoriously superstitious heretical Church": *Letters*, 74.

50. In 1928, Pope Pius XI, in his *Mortalium Animos*, rubbished the infant ecumenical movement and made it clear that all non-Catholic Christians were in contumacious error from which they must repent by "returning" to Roman obedience. Peter Galadza and I show the damage this attitude did in one particular case; see *Unité en division: Les lettres de Lev Gillet ("Un moine de l'Eglise d'Orient") à Andreï Cheptytsky—1921–1929* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2009).

51. Waugh, *Remote People*, 14.

52. Waugh, *When the Going Was Good*, 100–104.

53. See Waugh, *Remote People*, 88–89. More generally, for Waugh's ferocious reaction to Western liturgical reform following the Second Vatican Council, see Scott M. P. Reid, ed., *A Bitter Trial*.

54. There is value, too, in understanding Waugh himself as relishing the role of the jokester and "fool" in a certain sense. As his son Auberon said shortly after his father's death, "the main point about my father . . . is simply that he was the funniest man of his generation. He scarcely opened his mouth but to say something extremely funny. His house and life revolved around jokes. It was his wit . . . which endeared him to everybody." Cited in Paula Byrne, *Mad World*, 349. A fuller reflection on Evelyn is supplied by his son Auberon in the latter's *Will This Do? An Autobiography* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1991).

55. *BR*, of course, was hugely misunderstood at the time of publication and subsequent to it—so much so that Waugh was moved, for the 1960 edition, to make changes to it and something of an introductory apology for its "grosser passages." Many seemed to expect that if it was something of a "conversion story" then it should have a happy ending. For Sebastian and others to convert—including Charles Ryder—but still end up with the wreckage of their

lives unchanged seemed very odd indeed. Douglas Lane Patey notes of *Helena* that most reviews—apart from the Catholic press—“ranged from the tepid to the vitriolic” (*Life of Evelyn Waugh*, 290).

56. Patey’s discussion of Waugh’s *Decline and Fall* notes—with reference to one of its characters, Prendergast—that “Waugh delighted in putting unexpected wisdom into the mouths of children, drunkards, and madmen” (*Life of Evelyn Waugh*, 65).

57. Consider in passing some other examples of superficially “faithful,” “respectable,” or “spiritual” people whose shallowness and vulgarity Waugh ends up mocking, beginning perhaps most notably with Lady Marchmain in *BR* (about whom see more in the notes below). In addition, the satirical novel *The Loved One* is replete with such characters, and Waugh is utterly merciless in mocking this bogus form of pseudo-Christian piety. In *Vile Bodies* we have Mrs. Melrose Ape and Fr. Rothschild; the former is some kind of “evangelist” and the latter a Jesuit priest, but both are portrayed—Ape especially—as unctuous and shiftless incompetents whose piety and devotion are bogus. (But cf. Gene Phillips, who argues that Rothschild is not as problematic as Ape, and conforms to type as a “wily Jesuit” of popular tradition”; Phillips, *Evelyn Waugh’s Officers, Gentlemen, and Rogues: The Fact behind His Fiction* [Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1975], 17.) In *Decline and Fall* we see Prendy, a “Modern Churchman” ordained in the Church of England, ripped to shreds for his smugly certain heterodoxy and rank hypocrisy. In *Black Mischief* aristocratic Europeans—supposedly more powerful, cultured, and civilized—are in fact much more savagely mocked than the supposedly inferior Azanians.

58. The clearest and one of the most influential examples of myth-making began in 1946 with the hostile review of *BR* by Edmund Wilson in the *New Yorker*. There Wilson decried the unchecked “snobbery” of Waugh in the novel, and his “rapturous and solemn” sucking up to the “high nobility.” In Ireland, Conor Cruise O’Brien decried Waugh’s “almost mystical veneration for the upper classes.” Both Wilson and O’Brien are cited in Patey’s *Life of Evelyn Waugh*, 262–63.

59. See my “In Defence of Christian ‘Snobbery’: The Case of Evelyn Waugh Reconsidered,” *Latin Mass: A Journal of Catholic Culture* 13 (Spring 2004): 72–77.

60. Waugh was not at all a stranger to the foibles and failings of the upper classes. One of his closest friendships was with the Lygon family, which endured many severe crises—not least the exile of the father for homosexuality, still illegal in England in the first half of the twentieth century—and was far from perfect. His relationship with them is recounted in a delightful new book, Paula Byrne’s *Mad World*.

61. Waugh’s “theological anthropology” is perhaps most succinctly stated in the introduction to *Robbery under Law* (discussed below). Moreover, in a July 1949 letter to George Orwell, of whose writings Waugh was generally quite fond, he essayed a critical note by saying to Orwell that his book *1984* “failed to make my flesh creep as presumably you intended. For one thing I think your metaphysics are wrong. You deny the soul’s existence (at least Winston does) and can only contrast matter with reason & will” (Amory, *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, 302). For a wider—and not entirely convincing—treatment of these two writers, see David Lebedoff, *The Same Man: George Orwell and Evelyn Waugh* (New York: Random House, 2008).

62. See my “The Rich, the Poor, and Evelyn Waugh,” *Catholic Insight* 8 (October 1999): 27–28.

63. To portray Waugh as a heavy-handed apologist for Catholicism is to forget just how much trouble some of his novels generated precisely from Catholics who faulted Waugh for not portraying Catholics and the Catholic Church in a *better* light than he did in some of his novels. His *Black Mischief*, in fact, attracted savage criticism from the Catholic editor of

England's Catholic newspaper, the *Tablet*, whose editor said that *Black Mischief*, Waugh's "latest novel would be a disgrace to anybody professing the Catholic name." (Patey discusses the controversy and Waugh's response—flippant, hostile, and determinedly *unapologetic* in most places—in *Life of Evelyn Waugh*, 107–11.)

64. Patey suggests that "Waugh pushed Helena's conversion so far offstage . . . to avoid a scene like Marchmain's deathbed, for which *Brideshead* had been so criticized" (Patey, *Life of Evelyn Waugh*, 292).

65. Cited in Patey, *Life of Evelyn Waugh*, 264.

66. One of the most difficult characters—difficult in her personality, and in the ability to understand and "categorize" her—remains Lady Marchmain, but in the end I think her major failing is her superficiality: Her piety is skin-deep, and her real, deeper concern is with appearances and social approval. On the surface she appears to be the very model of aristocratic decorum and pious Catholic behavior. Anthony Blanche captures part of her when he says that she is "very, very beautiful; no artifice; . . . a voice as quiet as a prayer and as powerful" (*BR*, 54). But in the same paragraph a little later he derides her as a "Reinhardt nun" who has destroyed her adulterous husband by convincing "the world that Lord Marchmain is a monster." When confronted with Sebastian being drunk, she replies: "I wish I had not *seen* him. . . . That was cruel. I do not mind the *idea* of his being drunk. . . . I am used to the *idea* of it. . . . What hurt last night was that there was nothing *happy* about him" (*BR* 131, emphasis all in the original). This concern about appearing happy seems precisely to have driven Sebastian to drink so destructively as Charles says: "He's ashamed of being unhappy" (*BR*, 131). Her concern about appearances is clear in her withdrawing Sebastian from Oxford and sending him abroad for a time with Mr. Samgrass (*BR*, 142–48), in her keeping alcohol away from Sebastian by means of the footmen (*BR*, 150), and in her thoughts on hunting (*BR*, 157). Cordelia, after her mother's death: "I got on best with her of any of us, but I don't believe I ever really loved her. Not as she wanted or deserved. It's odd I didn't because I'm full of natural affections" (*BR*, 212). "I sometimes think when people wanted to hate God they hated mummy. . . . She was saintly, but she wasn't a saint . . . I've thought about it a lot. It seems to explain poor mummy" (*BR*, 213).

67. "The holy fool is an unconditional loner. He has neither allies nor followers. He lives among people, but has no personal attachments" (Kobets, "The Russian Paradigm of Iurodstvo," 347).

68. For a similar but shorter study, see the article of Svitlana Kobets, "Foolishness in Christ: East vs. West," 337–63.

69. Saward, *Perfect Fools*, ix.

70. Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 25.

71. "Sebastian is the most intriguing and lovable character in *Brideshead Revisited*, and perhaps this is why so many critics have tried to find his model" (Byrne, *Mad World*, 305).

72. Byrne, *Mad World*, 306.

73. Byrne, *Mad World*, 306.

74. This is one of the many deliberate anachronisms and buried jokes Waugh weaves into Helena's discourses, making her, at times, sound like a Cockney charwoman of the twentieth century.

75. Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 25.

76. *Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, 338–39.

77. Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 26.

78. Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 27.

79. Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 28.

80. Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 29–30.

81. On Eastern understandings of fasting, see my “Catechesis of Fasting,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 104 (February 2004): 6–12; and “Life in the Fast Lane: How to Fight for the Body while Forgetting about Ourselves,” *Touchstone* 18 (March 2005): 24–28.

82. Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 12.

83. Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 30.

84. Patey, *Life of Evelyn Waugh*, 291; emphasis mine.

85. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 9.

86. Waugh entertained “politics” only once, in his 1939 book *Robbery under Law*, which is not well known, attracted little attention in his life, and, unlike all his other works, was never reprinted while he was alive. It was a journalistic essay based on extensive trip to Mexico as a result of which he claimed that “politics, every where destructive, have here dried up the place, frozen it, cracked it and powdered it to dust . . . ; today we are plague-stricken by politics.” This book merely confirmed Waugh in his loathing of politics, which he thereafter avoided at all costs, at one point writing in a brief preelection essay in *The Spectator*: “I have never voted in a parliamentary election. . . . I do not aspire to advise my Sovereign in her choice of servants” (*A Little Order*, 139–40). He claimed he never would vote in any election “unless a moral or religious issue is involved” (Waugh, “Aspirations of a Mugwump,” *Essays, Articles, and Reviews*, 537).

87. One of Waugh’s funniest but also, startlingly, truest-to-life novels, *Scoop*, is entirely devoted to mocking the pretensions and the egregious dishonesty and deception of journalists, whose trade he plied on several occasions, including in 1935 when, again in Abyssinia, he covered the war there with Italy. For more on this period, see W. F. Deedes, *At War with Waugh: The Real Story of Scoop*.

88. Rex Mottram is one such fatuous politician who is endlessly mocked in *Brideshead*, as is the Emperor Constantine himself to some extent in *Helena*; but perhaps the most fully developed and fully mocked politician is Emperor Seth in *Black Mischief* together with his ministers, Basil Seal and Krikor Youkoumian of the “Ministry of Modernization,” which seeks “progress” and social improvement through such absurd stunts as a “Birth-Control Gala.”

89. In *Robbery under Law*, Waugh sounds a very Augustinian note at the outset: “I believe that man is, by nature, an exile and will never be self-sufficient or complete on this earth; that his chances of happiness and virtue, here, remain more or less constant through the centuries and, generally speaking, are not much affected by the political and economic conditions in which he lives. . . . I believe that inequalities of wealth and position are inevitable and that it is therefore meaningless to discuss the advantages of their elimination” (16–17).

He ends the book even more starkly, and any reader of Augustine’s *The City of God* will recognize certain common themes here: “Civilization has no force of its own beyond what is given it from within. It is under constant assault and it takes most of the energies of civilized man to keep going at all. There are criminal ideas and a criminal class in every nation and the first action of every revolution, figuratively and literally, is to open the prisons. Barbarism is never finally defeated; given propitious circumstances, men and women who seem quite orderly will commit every conceivable atrocity. The danger does not come merely from habitual hooligans; we are all potential recruits for anarchy. Unremitting effort is needed to keep men living together at peace; there is only a margin of energy left over for experiment however beneficent. Once the prisons of the mind have been opened, the orgy is on” (278–79).

90. Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 216.

91. Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 217.

92. Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 402.