

LANCING

The gratitude with which any speaker here must accept your kind and flattering invitation to speak is not blown away or, at least not completely shot, by a mystery, a mystery which demands, if not a solution, at least a full enquiry. Of course, it is fine to see one's own name associated with the greatest English novelist of the Georgian age, blazoned above a lecture carrying his name, but the curiosity is this: no title, still less any subject, is given for the lecture. Now this, you must admit, is unusual, if not unprecedented. Perhaps you thought that the Headmaster, usually so fine in his courtesy, so percipient in his care, had asked me... what are you going to speak about? What is the title, the heading, in short, what is your headline? But I must tell you, believe it or not, I was not asked. I am, I must confess, when I am asked to speak...usually, I fear at legal dinners, used to being asked at a time when the appointed date is lost in the mists of the future for a title ...and in the days when I was a judge, like many of my colleagues, I would think of something which might attract a more than desultory bunch. The trick to encourage lawyers was, not surprisingly, to put something about sex in the title... sex lies and corporation tax, sex lies and the doctrine of equitable redemption, you know the sort of thing, which bore no relation to what I would speak about months later.

Perhaps the HM was being generous to me and certainly to such audience he hoped to muster in expectation of a jolly dinner, by believing that the subject would be obvious to you, And I suppose, up to a point, even if not shod with a boot, and heralded with a cleft stick he was right, it is obvious. For how better to celebrate an author who so well knew and understood the intoxicating lure of the journalists' chase for a story in a free press and who focussed one of his greatest novels on that unrestrained and exuberant pursuit, than to ask someone who has tiptoed gingerly into the minefield of press regulation, that is to ask...the chairman of IPSO, the first attempt to constrain the freedom of the press by a system of regulation.

In Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*, published in 1938, lies the heart of the conundrum with which daily IPSO grapples : the conflict between reality and the public's endless appetite for a good story. It is presumptuous I know, in this place and at this lecture, to invite you to recall the tale which Waugh tells in *Scoop*. So old readers must let your minds wander for a few minutes and new readers begin here.

Scoop is a story of the mistaken identity of three Boots: William Boot, the hero lives with his relatives, amongst whom are a number of uncles, the eldest most exuberant and seediest of whom is, Uncle Theodore: they live in Boot Magna Hall miles from the sophisticated London of a namesake John Boot, although Uncle Theodore has been known to make an occasional *disastrous visit* there. William writes a weekly article for the Daily Beast about the countryside called *Lush Places*; who can forget this Saturday feature? *Feather footed through the plushy fen passes the questing vole,.... the wagons lumber in the lane under their golden glory of harvested sheaves...maternal rodents pilot their furry brood through the stubble*. William Boot never goes to London, still less visits the magnificent new ultra modern offices of the Megalopolitan building, numbers 700-853 Fleet Street....*the Byzantine vestibule and Sassanian lounge of Copper House*. It is still there. You do not really need Waugh's description, you probably have all seen the Daily Express building from the outside, although sadly you cannot even look inside now since the Sassanian lounge is veiled with blinds and the whole thing now belongs to some hedge fund or other, peddling no doubt much the same fantasies as its former occupant.

William Boot is summoned on behalf of the proprietor of the Daily Beast, Lord Copper, to go to Ishmaelia as special correspondant to cover what is expected to be a civil war with implications for all European powers. That summons is the result of a confusion between William Boot and his namesake the novelist John Boot, no relation. John Boot is an admirer of the political and society hostess the lovely Mrs Algernon Stitch. Mrs Stitch suggests that John Boot should be a war correspondant in Ishmaelia and at Lady Metroland's lunch party suggests to Lord Copper that the Prime Minister, is far more discerning than the Daily Beast would have the public believe, because he always sleeps with a John Boot novel

by his bed. Mrs Stitch persuades Lord Copper that Boot, the brilliant writer, is just the man for special war correspondent.

Lord Copper commands the Foreign Editor to employ Boot. The Foreign Editor, is Mr Salter, who had previously chosen the jokes for one of Lord Copper's comic weeklies and whose ultimate ambition was to take charge of Competitions. Boot the novelist, Lord Copper tells Salter, *has the most remarkable style and...the Prime Minister keeps his books by his bed. Do you read him?* And you won't need me to remind you all of what Salter, who had never even heard of Boot, let alone read one of his novels replied....*Up to a Point, Lord Copper.*

Salter then discovers that there *is* a man called Boot on the staff of the Daily Beast, and is surprised Lord Copper had not mentioned that Boot was on the staff. But it is the wrong Boot. The man on the staff is William Boot author of Lush Places. Thus it is that William and not John Boot is sent to Ishmaelia where Lord Copper believes *there will be a very promising little war. A microcosm as you might say of world drama to which the Daily Beast proposes to give its fullest publicity.*

There in Ishmaelia Waugh describes the pack of foreign correspondants' fruitless hunt for the one story which will escape the attention of their rivals, particularly the doyen of foreign correspondants, Sir Jocelyn Hitchcock of the Daily Beast's biggest rival, the Daily Brute.

Amongst the hardened correspondants, Corker, Shumble, Whelper and Pigge, William Boot is of course a helpless ingénue. He cannot even begin to understand the telegrams which are cabled between head office and Ishmaelia throughout the novel. They are the Tweets of an age when the telegram was the speediest form of communication and in comparison with the Twitter no less alarming, and where they are comprehensible, no less banal. Boot is constantly in trouble for missing the stories from Ishmaelia which the other correspondants peddle: or as the Beast's telegram puts it *CONFIDENTIAL AND URGENT STOP LORD COPPER HIMSELF GRAVELY DISSATISFIED STOP LORD COPPER PERSONALLY REQUIRES VICTORIES STOP CONTINUE CABLING VICTORIES UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE STOP LORD COPPER'S CONFIDENTIAL SECRETARY.*

Boot is sacked and remains in the capital, Jacksonville. There, whilst the other correspondants are travelling up-country, following the Daily Brute's Sir Jocelyn Hitchcock's lead, he beats all the other newspaper's to the one sensational scoop: the civil war in Ishmaelia is over, and the ousted regime restored because Boot's friend and saviour Mr Baldwin has bribed the President and bought the valuable gold concessions in the teeth of competition from the German and Russian governments ...as the telegram Baldwin drafts back to the Daily Beast to provide his friend William Boot with the story no other newspaper has obtained puts it: MYSTERY FINANCIER TODAY SECURING VAST EAST AFRICAN CONCESSION BRITISH INTERESTS IN TEETH ARMED OPPOSITION BOLSHEVIST SPIES

Baldwin says to Boot : *It will make five full columns. From my experience of newspapers I think I can safely say they will print it in full.* And so Boot of the Beast scoops all the others, even Sir Joceyln and returns to London in triumph, to a reception as national hero, an annual contract and a banquet to be hosted by Lord Copper. Copper tells the Prime Minster to give Boot a knight hood, but identity confusion persists and John Boot receives the knighthood and William returns to the country to continue writing Lush Places....there remains the problem of the banquet to be hosted by Lord Copper; William refuses to come up to London to attend so old Uncle Theodore is roped in to the banquet, much to his delight and Copper's confusion...Theodore does not somehow fit Lord Copper's image of the young ingénue foreign correspondant.

Scoop is Waugh's revenge on the journalists, concealing his envy of their success and his own failure when sent to Abyssinia by the Daily Mail. Mussolini, Italy's dictator since 1922, wanted to build an empire and invaded Abyssinia in October 1935, exposing the weakness of the League of Nations to which both Italy and Abyssinia belonged. Mussolini believed that Britain and its allies would not go to war to protect Abyssinia and he was right: they never called Mussolini's bluff.

Waugh had been to Abyssinia before; he went to Hailie Selassie's coronation paid as special correspondant by the Daily Mail in 1930. He returned, again as a special correspondant for the Daily Mail, in 1935 and the reality was that he himself missed the opportunity for the true scoop.

He was travelling on a ship via Port Said on the Suez Canal where it was joined by someone Waugh thought fishy, a man called Rickett. Waugh, made enquiries and learnt that Rickett was master of a pack of hounds and said he was taking funds to the Abyssinian patriarch of the Coptic church. Rickett had declared that the lengthy cables he had been receiving were sent by his huntsman. Waugh thought he was one of the many arms salesmen on their way to Abyssinia. Thus he missed a huge story, which as the *Telegraph* *splashed* caused a stir throughout the world.

On arrival at Addis Abbaba, Rickett disappeared and no more was heard of him until Sir Percival Phillips the *Daily Telegraph's* special correspondant splashed the news, which had escaped every other newspaper *Abyssinia's £10,000,000 Deal with British and US interests*. Waugh had failed to discover that Rickett was an envoy from the African Exploitation and Development Corporation. He had gone to Addis Ababa and obtained on behalf that corporation the sole rights to oil, minerals and other resources over half the Empire for 75 years.

This was a terrible blow to the *Daily Mail* which had employed Sir Percival as a special correspondant until the year before when he defected to the *Telegraph*. And the bitterness of the *Mail* was compounded by the fact that Waugh was not even in Addis Ababa when the story broke...he was 200 miles up country. He was in fact in pursuit of a good spy story: the French Consul calling himself Count Drogafoi was in fact Count Maurice de Roquefeuil de Bousquet, who had been caught smuggling film of local defences out of the area. But when Waugh cabled his story on return 4 days later to the capital he received no congratulations but merely, by return from the *Daily Mail* *What do you know Anglo-American oil concession?* By this time the Rickett story was stale and dead. The *Mail* was of course furious with him and terminated his job as special correspondant. Thus the story in *Scoop* was a fundamental reversal of what had in fact happened. In *Scoop* the young inexperienced correspondant Boot of the Beast got the story and the pack of journalists including Sir Jocelyn Hitchcock of the *Daily Brute* missed it.

We cannot be surprised at the hostile reaction to the Waugh version ...Beaverbrook never forgave him for his portrayal as Lord Copper. By the time of *Scoop* the Express's circulation was 2,329 000 a day, 740, 000 more than its rival the Daily Brute or Daily Mail, owned by Lord Rothermere (the Sun is now about 1.6 million and the Mail 1.5, a day). What we would now call tabloids were nowhere near as successful as the Express or Mail, the Times or the Telegraph. Nor as influential politically. Beaverbrook /Copper had paid vast sums for the ultra modern metallic black building to show up the staid columns of the Daily Telegraph opposite. Waugh had worked for the Express, as his first exercise in journalism but the relationship ended in tears. In the mid 1950s Beaverbrook sought to gain a long postponed revenge for his portrait as Lord Copper by publishing two articles, one in which Rebecca West accused him, with Graham Greene, of *having created a climate of crackbrained confusion between virtues and vices....a climate in which the traitor flourishes* and an article by Nancy Spain in which she inaccurately compared Evelyn's earnings with those of his brother Alec . The Express lost the Nancy Spain case and then settled the action involving, so it was said, an accusation of treason...EW got £5000 in all ...Waugh said the judge was a buffoon and regarded the conclusion of the jury as victory over Lord Beaverbrook.

As for the Daily Telegraph whose correspondent, unlike Hitchcock, had triumphed, its reception, when *Scoop* was published, was decidedly snooty and short ; it could not resist reminding its readers that *Phillips's famous message from Addis Ababa to the Daily Telegraph revealing the Rickett concession was not only the war's biggest scoop but one of the greatest in modern journalism.*

Scoop was Waugh's fourth book and second novel based on his experience as a journalist in Abyssinia; ...but despite his scorn and what he called a light satire on modern journalism...he needed journalism to finance his novel writing and to commission non-fiction writing. He wanted to make as much use as he could of gossip columnists and interviewers and of the fees popular newspapers such as the Express would pay to well-known authors...he believed that to achieve

success as a novelist *the most important thing is to make people talk about him*. He wanted to do interesting things and make sure the newspapers reported them...he wanted the author to seem interesting to potential book-buyers.

He needed to use journalists and journalism, but he despised them. In 1937, the year before *Scoop* was published, he wrote in his review of the liberal politician JA Spender's book *There is almost every reason why JA Spender should be a disillusioned and bitter man...he has given his life to daily journalism...the daily press has sunk to a condition when it is a profession not only unsuitable to a gentleman but to an Englishman*.

And in an article in the *New Statesman* in 1943 he wrote : *I was not brought up to regard the evasion of the police as the prime aim of education, nor has my subsequent observation of the world given me any reason to think that the wickedest men or even the worst citizens are to found in prison. The real enemies of society are sitting snug behind typewriters and microphones pursuing their work of destruction and popular applause*.

He had witnessed, when reporting on Hailie Selassie's coronation in Addis Ababa journalists, fearful of the slow means of communication, filing hopelessly inaccurate copy before the ceremony had taken place. Of these correspondents he said: *it seemed to me that we had been witnesses of a quite different series of events*.

Waugh's view of journalism is expressed early in *Scoop* in his description of the famous American journalist he calls Wenlock Jakes, who is in Ishmaelia, when William Boot arrives.. In the novel, Wenlock Jakes (a parody of the American author John Gunther) is introduced as the legendary reporter who had scooped the world with an eyewitness story of the sinking of the *Lusitania* four hours before she was hit. Says Boot's friend Corker:

When he turns up in a place you can bet your life that as long as he's there it'll be the news centre of the world...Why once Jakes went out to cover a revolution in one of the Balkan capitals. He overslept in his carriage, woke up at the wrong station, didn't know any different, got out, went straight to a hotel and cabled off a thousand word story about barricades in the streets, flaming churches, machine

guns answering the rattle of his typewriter as he wrote ,Well they were pretty surprised at his office getting a story like that from the wrong country, but they trusted Jakes and splashed it in six national newspapers. That day every special in Europe got orders to rush to the new revolution. They arrived in shoals. Everything seemed quiet enough but it was as much as their jobs were worth to say so with Jakes filing a thousand words of blood and thunder a day. So they chimed in too. Government stocks dropped, financial panic state of emergency declared , army mobilized, famine mutiny and in less than a week there WAS an honest to God revolution underway, just as Jakes had said. There's the power of the press for you...They gave Jakes the Nobel Peace prize for his harrowing descriptions of the carnage.

Waugh understood how fake news becomes the news.

In *Remote People*, in describing reports of Hailie Selassie's coronation, Waugh provides an explanation which is fundamental to any consideration of the press : *Getting in first with the news and giving the public what it wants, the two dominating principles of Fleet Street are not always reconcilable.*

And it is with those two dominating principles recognised by Waugh that IPSO must grapple, even though Fleet Street now has long since ceased to rumble to the sound of the turning presses.

IPSO is the first ever regulator of the press. It superceded the PCC nearly 3 years ago; the PCC handled complaints but had no enforceable power. IPSO regulates 95%, in terms of readership, of the national press, and almost all local and regional newspapers.

IPSO polices the Editors' Code. This is a Code, written by Editors with which they have agreed in a contract to comply. It sets out 15 standards which those newspapers who have signed up to IPSO must obey. They require accuracy, forbid intrusion into privacy, or grief, control reporting about children and suicide and discrimination. IPSO with a staff of 22, considers over a year some 15,000 complaints. The complaints assert breaches of the Editors' Code... Each complaint not resolved within maximum of 28 days between newspaper and complainant is considered by staff,

sent round to each of 12 members of the complaints committee each week for written comment and, in cases where the committee are not all agreed, considered at meetings held ten times a year. It produces written decisions of its conclusions and its reasons.

The revolutionary nature of what IPSO does, turns on the fact that, unlike any previous scheme, it has legal powers and can impose legal duties which it can enforce a court. Where IPSO decides a newspaper must correct a story and makes a decision, it requires a newspaper, or its online version, to publish the correction and adjudication. The newspaper must use the words IPSO dictates on a page in the paper it dictates (15 on the front page so far) and in the font size it dictates. Never before has anyone had the enforceable power to tell a newspaper editor what he must put in his paper. That legal power is derived from a legally binding contractual agreement between IPSO and the newspapers who have agreed to be bound.

Our Standards Unit receives annual reports from all newspapers as to their internal systems for handling complaints and how they have acted to ensure breaches are avoided or not repeated. They meet the groups whose concern is not so much focused on a particular story but as to the way newspapers handle issues such as trans-gender, suicide, youth justice social media and produce reports designed to provide guidance to editors journalists and the public.

If you are fearful of intrusion, of journalists camped outside on your lawn, we will issue Private Advisory Notices, some 45 last year, which successfully warned journalists that their target did not wish to be approached or to speak to them and which were all obeyed.

And yet and yet..... IPSO cannot avoid the driving imperative of a newspaper of which Waugh was so well aware...to get a story and to give the public what the newspaper believes it wants.

Waugh's first work as a journalist had been for the Daily Express, at the time in October 1928 when he had published, to a warm reception, his first novel, *Decline and Fall*. It was an article about literary censorship ... he advocated a jury to sit in perpetual session to decide one question *Can this book do harm?* By such a system he wrote, *the public conscience would be at rest. They would know that the best was being done for them: they would still be under no obligation to read what they did not want to, and no-one need feel that there was a slur upon either national purity or national freedom*

How simple the life of IPSO and for that matter of its chairman would be were it possible to apply that short test....can this or that article do harm? Apply that test and you will be not merely able to deal with those harms identified in the Editors' Code but the harm which no-one has ever devised a system to prevent, the harm of bullying and of cruelty, the harm of prurience, and the harm of prejudice, playing to the pre-conceived myths peddled by those in power and accepted by the public. But it is not so simple and I should explain why.

As Waugh was only too aware journalism is not a profession. Regulating a profession, for example lawyers, is, by comparison, easy where the purposes of regulation are so clear, so plainly for the protection of the public from the schyster, the fraud and the snake-oil salesman, and the sanctions are straightforward, if you break the rules or are not fit you can be thrown out. But the issue as to what the purpose of regulating the press might be, and the impossibility of identifying journalism or the editing of a newspaper as a profession preclude any such obvious sanction.

Nor is there ever agreement about harm. We can, perhaps, all agree that there should be no freedom to harm our fellow citizens, to incite racial hatred, or violence, to pervert justice by assuming guilt, to hack in to a communication but those are matters for which a properly enforced criminal justice system should provide. Regulating freedom of expression runs the risk of denying the very freedom it seeks to preserve. What does, what should a controlled freedom look like if it is to remain a freedom at all? After all, the thirst of the public for a story is never quenched, the craving to peek through the bedroom keyhole is never satisfied. Prurience becomes a public right. It was not Lord Copper of the Daily Beast but a real newspaper proprietor in 1910 who was asked the secret of his success and who replied *I give the public someone to hate every day*.

You could, I suppose, have a system of licensing, similar to that which controls broadcasting with I suppose criminal sanction and imprisonment for those like the editor of Private Eye or the Guardian who do not choose to submit to any system of regulation at all. You could even, I suppose, cut off the ears of the editor of the Daily Mail but the last time a system of licensing was

tried was in 1640, and Milton described the attempt as like putting up a gate to stop crows flying over your land.

But the press at least contains journalism, it is edited and that I believe, paradoxically, is its saving grace. Most receive their news from social media with little or no regard for its source, their interest triggered not by the author or editor but by the titillating nature of the story.

IPSO, any press regulation, is therefore said to become increasingly irrelevant whilst other forms of media breeze flatulently across the ether. Not so..the need for the public to know that some of the sources are the product of journalism, have been edited and that those journalists and editors have submitted themselves to regulation becomes ever greater.

It is difficult, at this point, to resist the temptation to preach. You cannot blame me in *this* school if it is a temptation I shall not resist. After all even the foreign news editor Salter, towards the end of *Scoop*, remembers *the treble solo rising to the dim vaults of the school chapel, touching the toughest adolescent hearts*.

Fake news, as Waugh has Corker teach William Boot,, is hardly recent and becomes news by repetition. After all, we know, have seen and heard that endless repetition makes fiction plausible. Waugh could not have foreseen the power of *instant* fakery, a time when if news is not instant, if it is not breaking news, new news, it is no news at all. And it is the task not just of the regulator but of each of us to learn to resist that power. The importance of IPSO and of the type of media it regulates is that it can be and, I suggest should be read and not scrolled that it requires time to write and time to read, it cannot and should not always be flipped with a finger and pinged to a friend.

But Waugh would have understood the danger, the danger that tyranny thrives on fake news, that *to abandon facts is to abandon freedom, that if nothing is true then no-one can criticize power*. But I might not have persuaded Waugh that there are journalists *who adhere to journalistic ethics* and that *their work is of a different quality than the work of those who do not*. We all must teach and learn how to distinguish one from the other. As we approach the election we should recall a former Supreme court justice, David Souter *Democracy cannot survive too much ignorance...when problems are not addressed, people will not know who is*

responsible...That is the way democracy dies.. Democracy will decline in step with a decline in the quality of information the public receives, a decline in the quality of media threatens the democratic process itself. That is IPSO's challenge and the challenge for us all .

But before we succumb to despair, let us find comfort in the warning Waugh wrote for the dust-jacket of the first edition of *Brideshead Revisited* ..he asked *Whom Can I hope to please?* He said he had given *to those who look to the future with black forebodings and need more solid comfort than rosy memories....a hope, not indeed that anything but disaster lies ahead but that the human spirit, redeemed, can survive all disasters.*

I am conscious, headmaster, that I have come to an end with my quest for a title, for a headline, unfulfilled. I had no need of a title because I had no need to prepare a speech. *You* knew that I would find the answer at the end of *Scoop*. At the end of the book, Waugh describes the preparations for the banquet Lord Copper is to give to welcome the return of the successful young *Daily Beast* correspondent from *Ishmaelia*. The Foreign Editor, Salter, is sent by Lord Copper to Boot Magna Hall to summon the reluctant William Boot to the banquet. He says: *my dear Boot...you need have no worry about your speech. That is being written for you by Lord Copper's social secretary. It will be quite simple. Five minutes or so in praise of Lord Copper.*

Headmaster, ladies and gentleman, I am sorry I have not been able to oblige.

Note

The lecture has extensively and heavily borrowed from

The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh edited by Donat Gallagher (Methuen 1983)

Evelyn Waugh The Early Years 1903-1939 Martin Stannard Dent 1986

Evelyn Waugh A Biography Selina Hastings Sinclair Stevenson 1994

At War With Waugh: The Real story of Scoop William Deedes Macmillan 2003