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"Up to a Point": Onomastic Devices and Satire in Evelyn Waugh's Scoop

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Evelyn Waugh’s *Scoop*

Leonard R. N. Ashley

I saye that you bee a sorte of knaves, yea,
and a man might say worse than knaves;
and why I shall show you (Merrie Tales of Skelton, vii).

Ezra Pound defined literature as “news that stays news,” and this study of names in a work of fiction that, though minor in its author’s œuvre, is important in modern literature deals with news reporting in mass-communication newspapers, the area of what John Carey has called “the greatest change in human consciousness that has taken place in recorded history.”

The novel is *Scoop*. It offers especially rich material for the student of how satirical names function in literature to score intellectual points, to set a tone, to banter and to be profound, to assist the writer with his classical aim of “teaching delightfully” and his personal aim of “tearing a strip” off his selected targets.

*Scoop* is an hilarious novel set against the real-life background of a rather farcical clash in far-off Ethiopia of the great political forces of Fascism and Communism that were very soon to engulf the world in war. *Scoop* transmuted the base metal of fact, by a catalyst of bias, into the gold of literature. And the essentials are so finely perceived that as I write, at the end of the summer of 1987, the satire still is relevant; for Ethiopia, now on the verge of setting up a shengo (one-party parliament) of a People’s Democratic Republic to end the rule of a military dictatorship that followed the collapse of “The Power of The Trinity,” Haile Selassie, is still strife-torn, its Colonel Mengistu still a figure of farce, and the rebellions in Tigré and Eritrea, involving comic-opera People’s Liberation Armies and confused government troops as well as the border skirmishes (with Somalia, etc.), still both bloody and bloody silly. The names change, but the foolishness they mock remains in the news.

It is because of that and one other fact that I have chosen *Scoop* for onomastic investigation. The other reason is related to something Evelyn Waugh told an interviewer from *The Paris Review* a few years (1962) before his death. Waugh said:

I regard writing not as an investigation of character but as an exercise in the use of language, and with this I am obsessed. I have no technical psychological interest. It is drama, speech, and events that interest me.

A lot of literary onomastic research has concentrated on fiction that is clumsily written and concentrating its appeal on the soft-scientific (trendy sociology, pop psychology) rather than the æsthetic and artistic. *Scoop* is a novel closely connected with language, a novel in which the onomastic effects are especially significant and deliberate, a novel in which we can see a worthy exemplum of how “drama, speech and events” are created and colored by names. It is because names are so brilliantly handled in the novel by the writer our best literary critic (Edmund Wilson) called Britain’s best comic novelist of his
time ("the only first-rate comic genius that has appeared in England since Bernard Shaw") that Scoop is chosen.

Scoop is from the early period of Waugh's work. It is more mean even than meaningful, if less nasty than some of the later work. In Enemies of Promise, shrewd critic Cyril Connolly explained why Waugh was, in fact, so nasty:

The satire of Evelyn Waugh in his early books was derived from his ignorance of life. He found cruel things funny because he did not understand them and he was able to communicate that fun.

This seems to be borne out by Waugh's autobiography, A Little Learning, which covered the period from his birth to the time in his twenties when he tried suicide—and was prevented from drowning himself by the painful stings of jellyfish. Later he found religion and grew up (unless George Orwell was right in asserting that "one cannot be a Roman Catholic and grown-up," which was snotty). He understood more and also disliked more. He became a snob and a more vicious satirist and he seemed to take a positive pleasure in the negative, to be driven by Schadenfreud and a certain sadism toward the average yobbo. But, as with Swift, such feelings made him a more powerful writer if a less happy man.

One of Waugh's friends was politician Tom Driberg, the man Churchill said gave "buggery a bad name." Waugh could easily have trained his barrage of insults on Driberg, but did not. Indeed, Waugh once said to Driberg, "You don't know how much nastier I would be if I hadn't become a Catholic." However, becoming a Catholic in Britain is a sure way to gain qualifications as an Outsider, and that position is always a good one for a satirist, who can neither afford to understand all nor to forgive all.

From 1928 until 1937 (the year before Scoop appeared), Waugh was also an Outsider in other ways. He traveled: "I had no fixed home and no possessions which would not go conveniently on a porter's barrow." In those days between the wars, "great British aberrants" rushed off to distant lands, the more exotic the better. One went to The Empty Quarter. Another, with a tiny allowance and a rucksack, walked across Europe to Constantinople. Another tried to reach Tarudant, a Moroccan city forbidden to Christians. Another went through 3000 miles of jungle in Brazil in search of a lost explorer (Colonel P. H. Fawcett) not so much because he wanted to find him as because he was intrigued by the recruiting advertisement in the London Times that was placed to hire "Two More Guns." These were but a few of the many adventurers who went on wacky safaris, and wrote about them. Robert Graves explains why the age seemed to call for that:

Old period pieces were "vandalised", as the antique dealers called it, by being converted to modern uses: a William-and-Mary commode would be gutted to house a gramophone and records

and the ancient art of travel writing was raided to satisfy a new "growing taste in the semi-literate public for vicarious locomotion."
Waugh traveled and wrote of the Mediterranean (Labels, 1930), Africa (Remote People, 1931), British Guiana (Ninety-two Days, 1934), Ethiopia (Waugh in Abyssinia, 1936), and Mexico (Robbery Under Law, 1939), etc. The setting of Scoop (1938) was well known to him. In the winter of 1930–1931 he attended the coronation of the emperor, Haile Selassie, describing it for the London Times with his usual “disgusto” (the opposite of “gusto”) and comic touches. Late in 1935 he returned to what was then Abyssinia to report the Italian–Ethiopian conflict for London’s Daily Mail, though he left before the war really got underway. He got the history right in the opening chapter of Waugh in Abyssinia and distorted the facts for Black Mischief (1932) and Scoop. Described by Graves as “the Oxford and Mayfair arch-playboy and most gifted novelist of the new Disillusion,” Waugh was able to use his foreign experiences for English satire, and Scoop has names in it from both the exotic backwaters and the British capital, whether echoed or invented in parodic mood.

The plot of Scoop begins in London. Its society is created with such names as Algernon Stritch (the name of an official in the Imperial Ministry of Defence). Stritch’s wife is a dizzy society matron who is always getting her name in the papers by such capers as driving her car into a Gentleman’s Convenience. (She was in hot pursuit of someone she recognized, who ducked in there.) She also devotes herself to the “Stritch Service” of getting friends favors from press magnate Lord Copper or even the Prime Minister. The fact that one of the PM’s minor secretaries addresses him as “Uncle Mervin” neatly establishes that he is guilty of nepotism as well as influence peddling among people with whom he is on a first-name basis.

Mrs. Stritch’s cohorts include Lady Greenidge (close enough to the placename Greenwich), Miss Montesquieu, Lady Cockpurse, and the powerful Lady Metroland, the society hostess at whose parties much of what is considered important is somehow arranged. As we meet Mrs. Stritch, she is dealing with her social secretary (a Miss Holloway, the name being taken from a prison) and her maid (Brittling, a surname H. G. Wells invented for the common man in Mr. Brittling Sees it Through). There is also an effete young man, addressed familiarly only as Arthur, who is engaged in painting ruined castles on Mrs. Stritch’s bedroom ceiling, rather in the style of Rex Whistler or a character in Waugh’s own Brideshead Revisited. The bedroom is the command post from which Mrs. Stritch conducts her battles of gossip and forays into social engineering. She also dabbles in charities, like her friends: she has to attend Viola Chasm’s Distressed Area if Viola visits her Model Madhouse.

These fictitious persons (or real persons under fictitious names, if this is a roman à clef, as it sometimes seems to be) are put into a real London suggested by the names of famous architects (Hawksmoor and Nash, one of the latter’s buildings being demolished in the name of Progress), gentlemen’s clubs (Brooks), expensive automobiles (Daimler), famous locations (Curzon Street, Piccadilly and Hyde Park Corner). These are obvious historical names, as obvious as fictive ones such as the Duchess of Stayle. But they do require some knowledge of British culture (and reward those who have such a knowledge with a cozy feeling of being of the “in group”). Without such a knowledge, many of the points made in the novel fall on stony ground, as is true in all such works.
The journalists of *Scoop* sometimes use cablese: *splash* and *flash* are verbs and other odd words include *unarrived, fuller,* and *up-follows,* while *one et six* stands for “one shilling and sixpence,” the cost per word for cabling from Ishmaelia (and the reason why someone might employ *urgent* as a verb). The novelist, while mocking that language, in his own text asks us to grasp the special British meaning of such terms as *battered learner plates, slots of deer, loofah, squiffy,* and *birthdays* (meaning the monarch’s Birthday Honours List, in which new orders and peerages are announced by the Prime Minister). Similarly, slang used in the Thirties in the UK appears in *the bin* (lunatic asylum), *jump at it* (welcome it avidly), and *floater* (gaffe). Reading requires identifying referents, and satire extends the task to knowing the real-life equivalents of newspapers such as the *Daily Tuppence* and *Clean Fun.* The surname of the journalist Whelper easily yields its secret, but it takes some knowledge of forenames in UK classes to appreciate why *Madge* is telling as the name of Corker’s wife (a woman who likes “large and very artistic” ornaments, such as a bakelite elephant). We must know that a *corker* is something or someone excellent, that bakelite was an early and cheap artificial material rather like plastic, that schoolboy nicknames are retained in later life in some classes. Therefore we hear of “Pussy” Gresham, “Sprat” Larkin. That’s why William Boot and the British vice-consul in Jacksonburg greet each other as “Beastly” and “Moke.” How far we are to take the latter nicknames as revealing the nature of their schoolboy relationship is, as is all interpretation in literature, a matter of ingenuity governed by probability and taste.

Names are, of course, useful clues to authorial intent, sometimes puzzles for the ingenious and sometimes traps for the over-ingenious.

Inevitably the novel, set in both Britain and Africa, has plenty of names related to travel: *Messageries Maritimes, Blue Train, Air Line* (oddly so called), *P & O* (a famous shipping line), *Francmaçon,* etc. But there are comparatively few placenames once our hero (one Boot) arrives in the “Heart of The Dark Continent,” Ishmaelia. The name of that upset republic recalls that of an outcast (“Call me Ishmael,” as Melville’s hero puts it) in the Bible. In Ishmaelia we hear only four placenames: Popo (a forest), Chip (a waterfall), Laku (very important in the plot, though nonexistent as a place) and Jacksonburg (the capital). In Jacksonburg, which in its form recalls *Johannesburg* and in its American origin makes us think of *Monrovia,* live President Jackson (grandson of the founder of the country), the first President Jackson) and all his Jackson relatives. There also are Jackson College and all the other institutions that can be traced back to “a pious old darky named Mr Samuel Smiles Jackson from Alabama.” Connections with Alabama persist: a secret service man who attempts to put our hero Boot out of action is a graduate of “Adventist University in Alabama.”

The government pursues a policy of “Jacksonism,” and nepotism among Jacksons. The Hotel Liberty (an important focus of action for the journalists there) is run by Mrs. Earl Russell Jackson. With a crack at a London publisher, Waugh puts “national defence and inland revenue” under the control of General Gollancz Jackson. The first president was (as noted) a Jackson named for the Victorian Samuel Smiles (famous in his day for *Self-Help*). The current president is Rathbone Jackson (whose name manages to suggest both the British actor and the minstrel-stage name *Hambone*) and “the chief posts of state,” Waugh tells us, “were held by Messrs Garnett Jackson, Mander Jackson, etc.”
Huxley Jackson, his uncle and brothers, and by Mrs Athol (nee Jackson), his aunt.” The government opposition, Fascists led by Smiles Soum, has a leader who is “one-quarter Jackson (being grandson in the female line of President Samuel Smiles Jackson).” Waugh thus uses the forenames to mock pretension and the surname Jackson makes fun of nepotism of the sort that in real life gave us “Papa Doc” and “Baby Doc” and other despicable dictators. Actually none of this relates well to the Ethiopian empire which stretched back two thousand years and a ruling house that claimed not only high titles (Power of The Trinity, Conquering Lion of Judah, Light of the World) but descent from a black Queen of Sheba, not an ex-slave from an American plantation, descent also from King Solomon and not an ambitious man who had applied “self help” to helping himself to an African dominion. However, Waugh manages to kid both black countries like Liberia (and the one in Eugene O’Neill’s play over which a retired Pullman porter gains sway) and Abyssinia, while making Jacksonburg—the name is more suitable for a really hick-town capital than Jacksontown on the Capetown model or the familiar Jacksonville, which would better reflect the French influence there—less identifiable as Addis Abbaba.

The basic interests of the Jacksons are reflected in the names of some of the organizations they head: the Mule Taxgathering Force, the Rifle Excisemen, and the Artillery Death Duties Corps. It is also to be noted that in government Public Morals, Foreign Affairs and Propaganda are combined in one ministry of that name.

Jacksonburg may be dinky, but it is nothing if not cosmopolitan. French names grace some of the businesses (Café de la Bourse, Ciné-Parlant, the latter underlining the fact that “talkies” are of recent vintage there), British others (Café Wilberforce, named for the Briton who led the movement to free slaves, changes its name on Day One of the new order to Café Lenin), American others (including Carnegie Library). Some of the novel’s most significant action is set in the latest of an enterprising Greek’s attempts to set up a truly popular establishment: Popotaki’s Ping-Pong Parlour.

We scarcely hear anything about Ishmaelia that does not send up (or put down) the black man even more than Scoop mocks the herd of correspondents gathered in its capital because (as one of Waugh’s newspapermen crudely puts it) “a lot of niggers are having a war.” Anyone who used such a phrase today, even to describe the antics of an Idi Amin or one of the other African leaders who have brought massacre and hilarity perilously close together, would be denounced as a racist. Waugh belonged to a time when an author could use Negro and Jew himself as narrator but get away with having his characters refer to a nigger or a yid, or a blackamoor and queer-coloured children. But in his own voice Waugh uses coon, etc.

Had we more space, we might profitably discuss in detail how name-calling can make works of fiction (or other literature) attractive to bigots, unfashionable with critics, outrageous, outdated. To some extent both Black Mischief and Scoop are neglected today because they have shared the fate of other works (I think of the Little Black Sambo I loved as a child) that were bold enough to suggest that some non-whites were, in point of fact, ridiculous. Though Scoop’s subtitle asserts it is “A Novel about Journalists,” it is inescapably a satire on some touchy subjects which today we, in our reverse bias or “affirmative action,” have put beyond the polite pale and which we find, Literary Onomastics Studies
more from lingering prejudice than from liberal principles (I think), extremely awkward
to face, embarrassing, discomforting. In our age in which satirists can get away with little
more than making fun of themselves, Waugh’s frank fun makes many people whose
sense of other people’s feelings has done much to weaken or kill their own sense of the
absurd very, very uneasy. Personally, I believe in Equal Opportunity satirists and
laughing at whatever is ridiculous, without regard to race, creed, color, or national
origin. But I do understand why Waugh’s names and name-calling make some readers
blush or get irate.

Let us get back to less sensitive targets of satire. One of the leading journalists is
Wenlock Jakes. His name vaguely recalls the backward-sounding, anticlimactic name
Lowell Thomas. The somewhat pompous toponymic surname—as—forename is followed
by a let-down: in Jakes’ case a word meaning “outside toilet.” Other war
 correspondents are satirized but this American’s name well illustrates onomastic
technique. Corker’s name suggests low origins. 15 That of super—journalist Sir Jocelyn
Hitchcock is more impressive. Least impressive of all is the surname of the hero, Boot, a
poor soul caught up in the machinery of Fleet Street (the UK equivalent of “the world
of newspapers,” as The West End is Britain’s Broadway Theatre). Fleet Street largely
caters to the prole public who delight in what today the Brits call stunnas (strikingly
“sexy” models shown in bathing suits, etc., on the slightest pretext), the sob stories of
beauty queens who die destitute or the sensational tales of vicars who get involved in sex
scandals, and headlines such as Waugh cites: Zoo Mercy Slaying. 16

Presiding over Fleet Street’s big business in little news stories are the press lords in the
style of Lord Beaverbrook (a Canadian named Aitken) or Lord Thompson of Fleet or
perhaps Australian Rupert Murdoch. One is Lord Zinc (of the Daily Brute) and the
other Lord Copper (of the Daily Beast). 17 Viscount Copper (not an earl—a nice touch)
is at the center of Scoop’s world of tabloids struggling to get or make news first, to
“report victories” for whichever side they favor in little wars in benighted places. These
wars may be as much created by the press presence (and machinations) as reported by
them, rather in the style of the American newspaper owner William Randolph Hearst, 18
and in Fleet Street they seem to be welcomed as “copy” and also for their political
value: they can be used as “leaders” (US “editorials”) to berate the government of the
day.

Foreign wars give scope for scoops and sell papers to readers jaded by home-grown
scandals, by features such as “Pip and Pop, the Bedtime Pets,” recipes for such dishes as
“Waffle Scramble,” the sports pages, and nature notes. It is the mild author of the latter
(“Lush Places”) who happens to have the same surname (Boot) as a reporter Lord
Copper is determined to send to Ishmaelia. The confusion of this pair of Boots leads to
a most unsuitable writer being sent off to become war correspondent for the Daily
Beast. Thereby hangs the tale.

Our Boot is thrown in with the reporters from other papers and the representative of
Universal News, etc. These “specials” feed the giant egos of the press barons and cable
copy for their readers, whether about an African war or an all—woman expedition to the
South Pole. (Waugh seems to have hit on two of the richest sources of the absurd in our
Their papers “all have different policies, so of course, they have to give different views,” file different “facts.”

When a bumbler aptly named Shumble files a false report, for instance, the others try to make it look correct. As the man from Universal News explains:

They don’t like printing denials — naturally —. Shakes public confidence in the Press. Besides, it looks as if we weren’t doing our job properly. It would be too easy if every time a chap got a scoop the rest of the bunch denied it. And I will hand it to Shumble, it was a pretty idea.

The papers use the reports “that come in first”; later reports must try to work within the parameters of earlier errors. The great reporters strive to get there fustest with the mostest, like Wenlock Jakes, “highest-paid journalist of the United States,” who scooped the world with an eye-witness account of the sinking of the Lusitania “four hours before she was hit.” Hitchcock, “the English Jakes,” was famous too: “straddling over his desk in London, [he] had chronicled day by day the horrors of the Messina earthquake.” At least Lowell Thomas first found “Lawrence of Arabia” and only then wrote him up as a legend. Such reporters were worth Jakes’ “thousand dollars a week.” His associate Corker reported of Jakes:

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 an hotel, and cabled off a thousand-word story about barricades in the streets, flaming churches, machine-guns answering his typewriter as he wrote, a dead child, like a broken doll, spreadeagled in the deserted roadway below his window — you know.

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.

So Jakes was “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 under way, just as Jakes had said. There’s the power of the press for you.
This exaggerated or unjust satire of the gentlemen of the press amuses, as does denigration of the journalists under such names as Shumble and Pigge, or such bits of dialogue as this:

“You at least might get other employment,” said the managing editor. “You’ve been educated. There’s nothing in the world I’m fit to do except edit the Beast.”

Credibility of plot is strained by some of the foolishness portrayed, including the famous “sixth sense...real genius” of Lord Copper, which is nothing more than sheer blind luck coming to an idiot who cannot even doodle a convincing cow on the blotter on his pretentious desk. However, exaggeration is one of the charms of this kind of farcical attack and in it everything, including the onomastic effects, can be done with a very broad brush.

It is worth noting, though, that this surface fun has an underlying seriousness and that (as the cliché has it) many a true word is spoken in jest. Bernard Shaw would contend that only in jest can some very touchy subjects be commented upon at all. The way in which comedy puts a sugar coating on a bitter pill of message, the way in which a cortex of entertainment encloses in good literature a nucleus of truth, is important to consider. Satire makes pearls of truth, starting with the irritation of the reader.19

The only really “with it” person in Scoop (“Mr Baldwin,” whom we shall soon get to) says of newspapers in general something related to this shell/nutmeat theory:

It is seldom that they are absolutely, point-blank wrong. That is the popular belief, but those who are in the know can usually discern an embryo truth, a little grit of fact, like the core of a pearl, round which have been deposited the delicate layers of ornament.

Evaluating the onomastic devices of a work of fiction involves just that: appreciating the “delicate layers of ornament” and finding the “little grit of fact,” the “embryo truth.”

So we must note that at the time Waugh was writing Scoop Stanley Baldwin (1867–1947) resigned as Prime Minister and was created Earl Baldwin. It is for literary onomastics to judge the extent to which a detail like that is relevant to the fact that in Scoop there is a mystery man who turns up in various disguises (once with a Costa Rican passport) and arrives to settle the whole problem in Jacksonburg, where he explains his pseudonym:

It is a convenient name.... Non-committal, British and above all easily memorable. I am often obliged to pursue my business interests under an alias. My man Cuthbert chooses them for me.... He has a sense of what is fitting, but he sometimes luxuriates a little. There have been times when his more fanciful inventions have entirely slipped my memory, at important moments. So now I am plain Mr Baldwin. I beg you to respect my confidence.
Scoop involves “Mr Baldwin” and others in a struggle in Darkest Africa between German and Soviet plotters for the gold mines of a backward republic, and who is who (as well as what’s really going on) is always of importance. Aliases are used; names are changed; names are confused. The protagonist is precipitated into the story because of a mistake about names and leaves Boot Magna (a crumbling English country house, where the Boot clan and their dotty servants live in a state best suggested by the hymn eccentric Uncle Theodore cheerfully sings all the time: “Change and decay all around I see”) for incredible Ishmaelia.20

Through a confusion of names, it is not the popular novelist John Courteney Boot (whom Mrs. Stritch recommends to Lord Copper) but William Boot (whose nature column for the Beast runs to sentences like this: “Feather-footed through the plashy fens passes the questing vole”) who is summoned to Megalopolitan House in Fleet Street and sent off to report the Ishmaelian clashes of the White Shirts and the Black Shirts or the Blacks and the Reds or the Patriots and Non-Patriots. It is difficult for satire to exceed the absurdity of common political terminology—in which, for instance, your guerrillas are “terrorists” and my guerrillas are “freedom fighters,” your government is a “repressive regime” and one I favor is the “authorities,” and so on—but Waugh does his best and has reality to make his wildest inventions sound more or less plausible.21

In Scoop names both turn the plot and set the tone. As soon as novelist John Courteney Boot appears, a child (Josephine) kicks him because of his name:

“Boot,” she said savagely, “Boot,” catching him first on one kneecap, then on the other. It was a joke of long standing.

Names don’t fit into Mrs. Stritch’s crossword puzzle: she wants to put in Hottentot but “No h, madam.” Another novelist’s work is mentioned: the book is entitled A Waste of Time. We get the names of the family of William Boot in detail and those of the retainers at Boot Magna, including the butler (Bentinck, suggesting hoteliers) and the first footman (named, as tradition dictates, James). Names really come into their own in the satire when William Boot gets accidentally named to be a war correspondent in Ishmaelia.

“Well, there is one thing. You see, I don’t read the papers very much. Can you tell me who is fighting who in Ishmaelia?”
“I think it’s the Patriots and the Traitors.”
“Yes, but which is which?”
“Oh, I don’t know that. That’s Policy, you see. It’s nothing to do with me. You should have asked Lord Copper.”
“I gather it’s between the Reds and the Blacks.”
“Yes, but it’s not quite as easy as that. You see, they are all Negroes. And the Fascists won’t be called black because of their racial pride, so they are called White, after the White Russians. And the Bolshevists want to be called black because of their racial pride. So when you say black you mean red, and when you mean red you say white and when the party who call themselves blacks
say traitors they mean what we call blacks, but what we mean when we say traitors I really couldn’t tell you. But from your point of view it will be quite simple. Lord Copper only wants Patriot victories and both sides call themselves patriots, and of course both sides will claim all the victories. But, of course, it’s really a war between Russia and Germany and Italy and Japan who are all against one another on the patriot side. I hope I make myself plain?”

“Up to a point,” said William, falling easily into the habit.

So our Boot goes off to get kitted for foreign climes. He runs into difficulties trying to include “cleft sticks” (for carrying messages, he has heard) and annoys the retired general who serves him in the shop. Names again. General Cruttwell was an imposing man: Cruttwell Glacier in Spitsbergen, Cruttwell Falls in Venezuela, Mount Cruttwell in the Pamirs, Cruttwell’s Leap in Cumberland marked his travels; Cruttwell’s Folly, a waterless and indefensible camp near Salonika, was notorious to all who had served with him in the war.

Names confuse the business of getting a passport for Ishmaelia (actually, two, because there are rival Ishmaelite legations in London).

“I is this the Ishmaelite Legation?” he asked.
“No, it’s Doctor Cohen’s and he’s out.”
“Oh...I wanted an Ishmaelite visa.”
“Well, you’d better call again. I daresay Doctor Cohen will have one, only he doesn’t come here not often except sometimes to sleep.”

The lower half of another woman appeared on the landing overhead. William could see her bedroom slippers and a length of flannel dressing-gown.
“What is it, Effie?”
“Man at the door.”
“Tell him whatever it is we don’t want it.”
“He says will the Doctor give him something or other?”
“Not without an appointment.”

The legs disappeared and a door slammed.
“That’s Mrs Cohen,” said Effie. “You see how it is; they’re Yids.”

Eventually Boot finds on a door between two dustbins the sign

REPUBLIC OF ISHMAELIA
LEGATION AND CONSULATE-GENERAL
If away leave letters with tobacconist at No. 162b

and obtains a passport (from “a graduate of the Baptist College of Antigua”) and a second passport from “the rival legation” (where the consul “was brought up in Sierra
Leone” and refers to “the present so-called government” in Ishmaelia). Soon he is on
his way, to adventures involving French dialogue, fake Scotch (“Edouard VIII: Very Old
Genuine Scotch Whisky: André Bloc et Cie, Saigon”), a wire service that uses the
codename UNNATURAL, Mr. Pappenheimer of The Twopence and a gaggle of other
journalists of various nationalities and locales equally diverse (Frau Dressler at the
pension, a mysterious girl named Kätchen who is German but born in Budapest of
Russian and Polish parents, a Swede named Erik Olafsen, and more).23 Identities are
often mysterious and games are played with the names. Witness:

A man rose from the armchair, clicked his heels and made a
gutteral sound....
“Is beg your pardon?” said William.
The man clicked his heels again and made the same throaty sound,
adding “That is my name.”

Or the way the Swede fails to address Sir Jocelyn correctly (using his surname) or
produces a counter-revolution by a speech that harps on the name Jackson, or the way
the Boots get confused again and John Courteney Boot gets a knighthood from the
Prime Minister (“Another name for the K.C.B.s,” he said petulantly, “Boot—gratis”)
that Lord Copper intended for William Boot, or the confusion due to the young man
from the Aircastle Correspondence Course in journalism or to Salter (“Uncle Theodore
said, ’I knew a chap called Salter once, but I don’t suppose it’s the same one’”), a nasty
dog named Amabel (“If she barks in the night, it is best to feed her”) and all the
characters at Boot Magna and at one of Lord Copper’s famously dreary banquets as the
story reaches its comedy-of-errors conclusion. By the bye, Uncle Theodore gets a good
job at the Beast by accident and William goes on writing “Lush Places”: “maternal
rodents pilot their furry brood through the stubble....”24

Some of the onomastic effects are of the sort John Richardson once called “vulgar”—he
was referring to Lady Dudd Cooper in Truman Capote’s Answered Prayers—as when a
journalist is dubbed Whelper. But some are helpful in setting the period tone (a woman
who does not speak is “the Garbo”) or the bantering tone (gendarmérie is defined as a
“sissy word for cops”). The good old days of British diplomacy are referred to as those
of “Pam or Dizzy” (Palmerston lived 1784–1865 and Disraeli 1804–1881), Dr Gabriel
Benito is mocked by “the Star of Ishmaelia, fourth class,” Lord Copper shows his
ignorance by saying that Yokohama is the capital of Japan, and names score many subtle
as well as obvious points in this satire sometimes adding a bit of sweetening treacle to
the sulphur of Waugh’s caustic style.25

In 1936 in “The Novel Addict’s Cupboard,” Cyril Connolly hailed Waugh as the “most
naturally-gifted novelist” of the “round-about-thirty” crowd:

He has a fresh, crisp style, a gift for creating character, a mastery of
dialogue, a melancholy and dramatic sense of life—but his
development has taken him steadily from the Left towards the
Right, and Right Wing Satire is always weak—and he is a satirist.
The anarchist charm of his books (of which Black Mischief is the
best example) was altered in A Handful of Dust to a savage attack
on Mayfair from a Tory angle. And though there on safe ground, it is going to be difficult for him to continue, since Tory satire, directed at people on a moving staircase from a stationary one, is doomed to ultimate peevishness. A Handful of Dust is a very fine novel but it is the first of Evelyn Waugh's to have a bore for a hero.

Scoop came soon enough after Connolly's estimate not to be too Tory for tolerance, and it can be said to be nasty in parts without even getting really peevish. Its satire is both comic and cruel but it has enough salt in it to remain fresh. Moreover, the hero is one of those who have greatness thrust upon them, a quite charming bumbler to whom no one could take exception, and the events are farcical but often no sillier than history itself (which Churchill told us is nothing but the story of "War") and thus the novel is still educational as well as remarkably entertaining.

Times and tastes change. Evelyn Waugh guffawed at the very idea of a drinkable Australian wine. Today his son (Auberon Waugh) touts Australian wines all the time in The Spectator. Some of the things Evelyn Waugh laughed at in Scoop are still with us. We may even flinch with embarrassment at passages like these:

"Who built the Pyramids?" cried the Ishmaelite orator. "A Negro. Who invented the circulation of the blood? A Negro. Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you as impartial members of the great British public, who discovered America?"

"Africa for the African worker; Europe for the African worker; Asia, Oceania, America, Arctic, and Antarctic for the African worker.... Who won the Great War?"

We may have to stretch to see that siting Lord Copper's great house in East Finchley was terribly funny. We may not notice even the broadest jokes at some times, or the fizz may have gone out of satire left open too long, as is always a danger.

Nonetheless, cynical as it may sometimes be, embarrassingly near the bone as it may sometimes be, Scoop is, for me, a great Waugh novel and an improvement over Decline and Fall (1928) and Vile Bodies (1930), more fair-minded and less artificial than his attack on American values in The Loved One (1948), more biting than his Sword of Honour trilogy (revised 1965), more likely to make one roar with laughter than anything in Brideshead Revisited.

I especially like the way that onomastic devices accomplish artistic tasks in Scoop. I believe that names in Scoop are a notable example of what novelist Jean Rhys—whom Waugh would have considered half the wrong color and certainly all from the wrong place—bitterly called "the bloody, bloody humour" of the English, a sort that is at once both more whimsical and more wounding than American humor.
NOTES

1 Introduction to John Carey (ed.)'s The Faber Book of Reportage (1987).

2 Almost as soon as Ras Tafari Makkonen became Emperor Haile Selassie (1930), Italy (still stinging from their defeat in Ethiopia at Aduwa, when they invaded Ethiopia in the hope of making it a protectorate) began threats which led to their invasion of Ethiopia early in October 1935. The Hoare–Laval plan of the British and French to arrange a settlement of the dispute failed by December 1935. Marshal Pietro Badoglio and Gen. Emilio de Bono soon crushed native resistance. It was said that the Ethiopians were trying to fight tanks and aircraft with spears, and Il Duce's son-in-law (Count Ciano) spoke of bombing large huddled masses of natives as making large red "roses" bloom in the desert. By May 1936 the emperor fled Ethiopia and pleaded eloquently for his country before the League of Nations, but sanctions voted against Italy "civilizing" Ethiopia were soon abandoned and by 1938 the League members were released from their commitment not to recognize Italy's conquest. Haile Selassie was returned to power in World War II. See A. M. H. Jones and Elizabeth Monroe's History of Ethiopia (rev. 1960).

3 The Waugh interview is reprinted in the Third Series (George Plimpton and Alfred Kazin, eds.) of Writers at Werk, published by Penguin.

4 The best study of Waugh's early work is Martin Stannard's Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years: 1903–1939 (1987), the first volume of a two-volume literary biography.

5 Cyril Connolly's Enemies of Promise was reprinted with other essays by Anchor Books in 1960. It had a little verse that is relevant to the communist uprising in Scoop which "haunted" him, and me:

M is for Marx
and Movement of Masses
and Massing of Arses
and Clashing of Classes.

6 Wilfred Thesiger was perhaps the most impressive of these adventurers. It was Patrick Leigh Fermor (A time of Gifts and Between the Woods and Water) who relived his adventures more than 40 years later in print, including the hike to Constantinople. R. B. Cunningham–Graham in Mogreb–el–Achsa never quite got to Tarudant but wrote of it beautifully. It was Peter Fleming (Brazilian Adventure) who answered the Times advertisement for a soldier of fortune, incidentally giving Waugh material for a short story "about a man trapped in the jungle, reading Dickens aloud" and later A Handful of Dust. Waugh's travel pieces were collected under the title When the Going Was Good.

7 Quoted in Frederick J. Stopp, Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist (1958), p. 22.
Lady Metroland’s forename is Margot (as in Margot Asquith). She appears in Decline and Fall and Vile Bodies, beginning as Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde and marries Sir Humphrey Maltravers (Minister of Transportation, later Home Secretary), later Viscount Metroland.

Nicknames in Waugh’s works are attached to such people as the two daughters of Dr. Augustus Fagan (Florence and Diana are “Florrie” and “Dingy”), Lord Brideshead (“Bridey”), James Pendennis Corner (“Chatty”), “Chick” Philbrick, etc. They help to characterize and reflect society’s customs.

“Beastly” suggests homosexual practices in his youth, while “Moke” is the name for a donkey (think of British slang donkey-rigged) or a person named (or nicknamed) Margaret.

“The map’s a complete joke,” Bannister explained. 'The country has never been surveyed at all; half of it’s unexplored. Why look here,' he took down a map from his shelves and opened it. 'See this place, Laku. It’s marked down as a town of some five thousand inhabitants, fifty miles north of Jacksonburg. Well, there never has been such a place. Laku is the Ishmaelite for 'I don't know.' When the boundary commission were trying to get through to the Sudan in 1898 they made a camp there and asked one of their boys the name of the hill, so as to record it in their log. He said 'Laku,' and they’ve copied it from map to map ever since. President Jackson likes the country to look important in the atlases, so when this edition was printed he had Laku marked good and large. The French once appointed a Consul to Laku when they were getting active in this part of the World."

It is Laku “to which almost all his colleagues are decoyed by the scheming Dr Benito” (Stopp, p. 86), and this is what permits William Boot to be in the capital when the balloon goes up and to cable: “NOTHING MUCH HAS HAPPENED EXCEPT TO THE PRESIDENT WHO HAS BEEN IMPRISONED IN HIS OWN PALACE BY REVOLUTIONARY JUNTA HEADED BY SUPERIOR BLACK CALLED BENITO AND RUSSIAN JEW WHO BANNISTER SAYS IS UP TO NO GOOD THEY SAY HE IS DRUNK WHEN HIS CHILDREN TRY TO SEE HIM BUT GOVERNNESS SAYS MOST UNUSUAL LOVELY SPRING WEATHER BUBONIC PLAGUE RAGING.” This was (Waugh comments) “a moment of history...of legend, to be handed down among the great traditions of his trade, told and retold over the milk-bars of Fleet Street, quoted in books of reminiscence, held up as a model to aspiring pupils of Correspondence Schools of Profitable Writing, perennially fresh in the jaded memories of a hundred editors; the moment when Boot began to make good.”

The “I don’t know” error is credible: similar circumstances lie behind a number of placenames and (it is said) the name kangaroo. The unexplored nature of the country is credible also. Take the real northeastern Ethiopian province of Wallo, famous for rock churches in the Lasta district and infamous as the site of one of the eight major Ethiopian famines of the Twentieth Century (the one in 1973 that did much to dethrone Haile Selassie). Wallo was described by the nineteenth-century traveler Johann Krapf as having terrain resembling “a raging and stormy sea, presenting numerous hills of wave with large space between each wave” and by James McCann in From Poverty to
Famine in Northeast Ethiopia: A Rural History 1900–1935 as “often dismembered in the struggle for personal power among Ethiopia’s oligarchs” which the emperor s futilely attempted to stop permanently. The Italian “commercial agents” and spies in Wollo (after a treaty was signed by the Emperor Menelik in 1906) knew more about what was going on in Wollo than did the Ethiopian government. McCann: “In effect, the succession of political agents, doctors, telegraphers, and trade specialists constituted a comprehensive and well-informed espionage network that reported to officials of the Ministero delle Colonie on a regular, sometimes daily, basis between 1906 and 1935.”

12 Self-Help (1857) was edited in modern times by Asa Briggs (1958). It was a School Prize favorite, a book that inspired children to emulate the great who had risen by their own bootstraps. Smiles is a fine name for the founder of Waugh’s fictional Ishmaelia and is taken from life, as is (in Scoop) the surname Cruttwell (which also occurs for denigrated characters in other Waugh books: the bone-setter in A Handful of Dust and Toby Crutwell, safe-breaker and later major, VC and MP, in Black Mischief). Waugh presumably disliked the Victorian optimism of the real Dr. Samuel Smiles (1812–1904). He certainly disliked a real C. M. R. F. Cruttwell (see his A Little Learning, first published in 1964). Waugh had personal dislike for certain forenames as well: witness Arthur in Scoop and Arthur Atwater in Work Suspended, Arthur Box-Bender MP in Men at Arms and Officers and Gentlemen. When he made up names it led to Parsnip and Pimpernell (W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender), Lord Monomark of the Daily Excess (Waugh says he was fired from the Daily Express, which never printed a word he filed as a correspondent, 1927), Lady Circumference, The Dreamer and Thanatogenos (in The Loved One), Trimmer, Flyte, Last, Silk, Bertie Wodehouse–Bonner, and so on. In modern satire such names are not “weird.” For instance, in Eric Linklater’s The Merry Muse (1959) there is a suicidal Gaelic poet named Yacky Doo. In the film Wall Street (1987) the nasty protagonist is named Gekko, the name of a lizard who can cling to polished surfaces. Scriptor ludens making points.

13 Eugene O’Neill’s The Emperor Jones was seen in London in 1925.

14 The minister is one Dr. Benito, a black. His surname, however, clearly derives from Mussolini’s forename.

15 But Corker is also flattering. In Black Mischief, Waugh wrote of Basil Seals: “My word, he is a corker,” remarked one of the girls.” It is worth noting that some academic critics miss some points made with slang, of which Waugh was a master. Alec Waugh in My Brother Evelyn Waugh and Other Profiles (1967, p. 195) wrote:

When I read the MS. [of Vile Bodies], I asked if the slang of ‘drunk-making’ and ‘shy-making’ was his own invention, No, he said, the young Guinness set was all using it. A month later, a few days before the publication of the book, I noticed that its use had spread beyond the narrow radius of that set. In another two months it would have reached [did reach] the far fringes of the fashionable world. Within six months it would have been ‘old hat.’ Evelyn caught the tide at its flood...Evelyn had set a vogue.
The immediate advantages and long-term disadvantages of slang in character names or expressions are both sufficiently obvious. Of sick-making, for instance, Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (8th edn., 1984, ed. Paul Beale) has nothing *per se* but of shy-making notes that W. Somerset Maugham called it a "popular adjective" in *Cakes and Ale* (1930) and Beale corrects Partridge's "ob. by 1934": "the term has persisted at least until 1982--perhaps influenced by the popularity of E.W.'s novels...." Sheridan's famous *Lady Teazle* the critics have missed, presumably because of the vulgarity and unfamiliarity of *teazle* (which Partridge and Beale date wrongly from only the last century).

16 Someone ought to collect the most mindless newspaper headlines. In fiction, my favorites are two. Robert Graves confected *PITH BATH DEATH MYTH*. A competition to create the most foolish headline about *World War I* (when reality offered immense competition) produced: *FRANZ FERDINAND FOUND ALIVE: GREAT WAR IN VAIN.*

17 I am indebted to Prof. Fred Burelbach for pointing out the fact that copper and zinc are components of a battery (UK: accumulator).

18 Hearst invented the banner headline and "yellow journalism." When a reporter during the early stages of *The Spanish American War* complained there was no action to photograph, Hearst cabled him to take pictures and "we will furnish the war."

For real-life "sharp description and shallow analysis" (*TLS's* judgment) of the war in Angola by a reporter who "may hold the world record for witnessing revolutions: at the last count, he had been present at twenty-seven of them," read Ryszard Kapuściński's *Another Day in the Life*. First published (in Polish) in 1976, a decade later it is available (in English) translated by William R. Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand (1987), Oddly, the doings in Angola sometimes eerily recall those in Ishmaelia, as fact imitates fiction. Things like this keep satires like this alive. Incidentally, the Pole made his English-language name with a translation of his *The Emperor*, which dealt with the fall of Haile Selassie.

19 Philosopher of laughter Henri Bergson played down humor as "froth with a saline base." He added:

> Like froth, it sparkles. It is gaiety itself. But the philosopher who gathers a handful to taste may find that the substance is scanty, and the after-taste bitter.

Those who would denigrate satire often call it frothy, or too mordant. However, to refer to an even wiser Frenchman, Waugh occasionally achieves what Flaubert aimed at: "comedy taken to extremes, comedy that doesn't make you laugh." That kind of work critics must admire, even when it is brilliant (a quality which usually arouses their jealousy more than their approbation).

20 One minor turning point in the plot comes from two men both happening to know a certain Bertie Wodehouse–Bonner, just as a major point depends on a confusion of...
people named Boot. "There are those who wear their names as a punishment," wrote Unamuno—and those whose names invite confusion.

21 The modern novel (with the exception of certain specialties such as science fiction) is pretty much expected to be in the realistic mode, credible in incident. Satire has always danced on the boundaries of the credible and the fantastic. A satire such as Scoop (or Catch—22) has to fudge things to make fighting funny. As Kurt Vonnegut has said, war silences us: "there is nothing to say after a massacre." Funny names make the discussion of revolution, potential bloodbath, possible and show up the banality of power politics, the absurdity of war. Moreover, "lack of concern for naturalistic plausibility" (a phrase which one of his critics threw at Strindberg) is a touchstone of the modern, and so is an appreciation of the absurd.

22 Yes—men have been trained to say “definitely” to Lord Copper when they mean “yes,” and rather than say no to him have developed the habit of replying “up to a point, Lord Copper.” This became a kind of catch phrase after the publication of Scoop.

23 Waugh seems to have slipped: Olafsen looks Danish rather than Swedish. The pernoda—drinking Swedish missionary plays a crucial part in the story, though Sir Jocelyn Hitchcock slips and calls him Erikson and he calls Sir Jocelyn “Sir Hitchcock” (a Swede, like an American, thinking the use of a forename too familiar with a knight: my university students might refer to Sir Walter Raleigh as “Sir Raleigh” in this country where visiting Elizabeth II was hailed as “Hey, Queen!” by photographers). Names can be used to show people know or do not know other people—or people’s customs.

24 Aircastle goes an onomastic step beyond Goldsmith’s Hardcastle and suggests that anyone trying to enter journalism by taking a correspondence course is building “castles in the air.” Amabel is ironic for an unamiable beast. As for Salter:

“Common little fellow,” said Uncle Roderick.

“It’s a perfectly good name,” said Uncle Bernard. “An early corruption of saltire, which no doubt he bears on his coat [of arms]. But of course it may have been assumed irregularly... I always understood that the true Salters became extinct in the fifteenth century....”

25 In Menippean satire, the characters are usually caricatures. To some extent all comic characters must be less than full portraits: “to understand all is to forgive all,” and we do not laugh best when we sympathize. Caricature suits Waugh’s general approach, to humor and to humorous names. We may say of Scoop what Alastair Fowler in his History of English Literature (1987, p. 333) says of Decline and Fall, that “the satire is informed by little in the way of implied positive virtues—its impulse seeming to be something very like hatred of mankind.” That served Swift well enough, but Waugh may be innovative: “In modernist fashion his neutral presentation” involves “an apparent nihilism” which “forces the reader to ask if there is anywhere to stand.” Perhaps in Scoop a cranky author has given us what Thomas Nashe would call “no deep stream for you to angle in,” but I contend that the onomastic critic can find in the book not only
amusement but instruction, a fine fiction in which we see the wisdom of Camus’ observation that “to lie is to say more than is true” in a very interesting sense.

26 Enemies of Promise and Other Essays (1960), p. 295. Satire deals more than some novels in meaning, and names convey meaning in novel ways. That novels must mean, Picasso underlined when a woman asked him to explain one of his paintings. “My dear woman,” said Picasso, “if I could do that I’d be a novelist.”

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