

A PENGUIN BOOK

**Evelyn  
Waugh**

**The  
Ordeal  
of  
Gilbert  
Pinfold**



THE ORDEAL OF GILBERT PINFOLD  
TACTICAL EXERCISE  
LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

Evelyn Waugh was born in Hampstead in 1903, second son of the late Arthur Waugh, publisher and literary critic, and brother of Alec Waugh, the popular novelist. He was educated at Lancing and Hertford College, Oxford, where he read Modern History. In 1927 he published his first work, a life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and in 1928 his first novel, *Decline and Fall*, which was soon followed by *Vile Bodies* (1930), *Black Mischief* (1932), *A Handful of Dust* (1934), and *Scoop* (1938). During these years he travelled extensively in most parts of Europe, the Near East, Africa, and tropical America. In 1939 he was commissioned in the Royal Marines and later transferred to the Royal Horse Guards, serving in the Middle East and in Yugoslavia. In 1942 he published *Put Out More Flags* and then in 1945 *Brideshead Revisited*. *When the Going was Good* and *The Loved One* were followed by *Helena* (1950), his historical novel. *Men at Arms*, which came out in 1952, was the first volume in *The Sword of Honour* trilogy, which won the James Tait Black Prize. The other volumes, *Officers and Gentlemen* and *Unconditional Surrender*, were published in 1955 and 1961. Evelyn Waugh was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1930 and his earlier biography of the Elizabethan Jesuit martyr, *Edmund Campion*, was awarded the Hawthornden Prize in 1936. In 1959 he published the 'Life of Ronald Knox'. He was married and had six children. From 1937 he and his family lived in the West Country. He died in 1966.



EVELYN WAUGH

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*Love Among the Ruins*



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# *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*

A CONVERSATION PIECE

TO DAPHNE  
IN THE CONFIDENCE  
THAT HER ABOUNDING SYMPATHY  
WILL EXTEND EVEN TO  
POOR PINFOLD



# I

## PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST IN MIDDLE-AGE

It may happen in the next hundred years that the English novelists of the present day will come to be valued as we now value the artists and craftsmen of the late eighteenth century. The originators, the exuberant men, are extinct and in their place subsists and modestly flourishes a generation notable for elegance and variety of contrivance. It may well happen that there are lean years ahead in which our posterity will look back hungrily to this period, when there was so much will and so much ability to please.

Among these novelists Mr Gilbert Pinfold stood quite high. At the time of his adventure, at the age of fifty, he had written a dozen books all of which were still bought and read. They were translated into most languages and in the United States of America enjoyed intermittent but lucrative seasons of favour. Foreign students often chose them as the subject for theses, but those who sought to detect cosmic significance in Mr Pinfold's work, to relate it to fashions in philosophy, social predicaments, or psychological tensions, were baffled by his frank, curt replies to their questionnaires; their fellows in the English Literature School, who chose more egotistical writers, often found their theses more than half composed for them. Mr Pinfold gave nothing away. Not that he was secretive or grudging by nature; he had nothing to give these students. He regarded his books as objects which he had made, things quite external to himself to be used and judged by others. He thought them well made, better than many reputed works of

genius, but he was not vain of his accomplishment, still less of his reputation. He had no wish to obliterate anything he had written, but he would dearly have liked to revise it, envying painters, who are allowed to return to the same theme time and time again, clarifying and enriching until they have done all they can with it. A novelist is condemned to produce a succession of novelties, new names for characters, new incidents for his plots, new scenery; but, Mr Pinfold maintained, most men harbour the germs of one or two books only; all else is professional trickery of which the most daemonic of the masters – Dickens and Balzac even – were flagrantly guilty.

At the beginning of this fifty-first year of his life Mr Pinfold presented to the world most of the attributes of well-being. Affectionate, high-spirited, and busy in childhood; dissipated and often despairing in youth; sturdy and prosperous in early manhood; he had in middle-age degenerated less than many of his contemporaries. He attributed this superiority to his long, lonely, tranquil days at Lychpole, a secluded village some hundred miles from London.

He was devoted to a wife many years younger than himself, who actively farmed the small property. Their children were numerous, healthy, good-looking, and good-mannered, and his income just sufficed for their education. Once he had travelled widely; now he spent most of the year in the shabby old house which, over the years, he had filled with pictures and books and furniture of the kind he relished. As a soldier he had sustained, in good heart, much discomfort and some danger. Since the end of the war his life had been strictly private. In his own village he took very lightly the duties which he might have thought incumbent on him. He contributed adequate sums to local causes but he had no interest in sport or in local government, no ambition to lead or to

command. He had never voted in a parliamentary election, maintaining an idiosyncratic toryism which was quite unrepresented in the political parties of his time and was regarded by his neighbours as being almost as sinister as socialism.

These neighbours were typical of the English countryside of the period. A few rich men farmed commercially on a large scale; a few had business elsewhere and came home merely to hunt; the majority were elderly and in reduced circumstances; people who, when the Pinfolds settled at Lychpole, lived comfortably with servants and horses, and now lived in much smaller houses and met at the fishmonger's. Many of these were related to one another, and formed a compact little clan. Colonel and Mrs Bagnold, Mr and Mrs Graves, Mrs and Miss Fawdle, Colonel and Miss Garbett, Lady Fawdle-Upton, and Miss Clarissa Bagnold all lived in a radius of ten miles from Lychpole. All were in some way related. In the first years of their marriage Mr and Mrs Pinfold had dined in all these households and had entertained them in return. But after the war the decline of fortune, less sharp in the Pinfolds' case than their neighbours', made their meetings less frequent. The Pinfolds were addicted to nicknames and each of these surrounding families had its own private, unsuspected appellation at Lychpole, not malicious but mildly derisive, taking its origin in most cases from some half-forgotten incident in the past. The nearest neighbour whom they saw most often was Reginald Graves-Upton, an uncle of the Graves-Uptons ten miles distant at Upper Mewling; a gentle, bee-keeping old bachelor who inhabited a thatched cottage up the lane less than a mile from the Manor. It was his habit on Sunday mornings to walk to church across the Pinfolds' fields and leave his Cairn terrier in the Pinfolds' stables while he attended Matins. He called for quarter of an hour when he came to fetch his dog,

drank a small glass of sherry, and described the wireless programmes he had heard during the preceding week. This refined, fastidious old gentleman went by the recondite name of 'the Bruiser', sometimes varied to 'Pug', 'Basher', and 'Old Fisticuffs', all of which sobriquets derived from 'Boxer'; for in recent years he had added to his few interests an object which he reverently referred to as 'The Box'.

This Box was one of many operating in various parts of the country. It was installed under the sceptical noses of Reginald Graves-Upton's nephew and niece, at Upper Mewling. Mrs Pinfold, who had been taken to see it, said it looked like a makeshift wireless-set. According to the Bruiser and other devotees The Box exercised diagnostic and therapeutic powers. Some part of a sick man or animal – a hair, a drop of blood preferably – was brought to The Box, whose guardian would then 'tune in' to the 'life-waves' of the patient, discern the origin of the malady and prescribe treatment.

Mr Pinfold was as sceptical as the younger Graves-Uptons. Mrs Pinfold thought there must be something in it, because it had been tried, without her knowledge, on Lady Fawdle-Upton's nettle-rash and immediate relief had followed.

'It's all suggestion,' said young Mrs Graves-Upton.

'It can't be suggestion, if she didn't know it was being done,' said Mr Pinfold.

'No. It's simply a matter of measuring the Life-Waves,' said Mrs Pinfold.

'An extremely dangerous device in the wrong hands,' said Mr Pinfold.

'No, no. That is the beauty of it. It can't do any harm. You see it only transmits *Life Forces*. Fanny Graves tried it on her spaniel for worms, but they simply grew enormous with all the Life Force going into them. Like serpents, Fanny said.'

'I should have thought this Box counted as sorcery,' Mr

Pinfold said to his wife when they were alone. 'You ought to confess it.'

'D'you really think so?'

'No, not really. It's just a lot of harmless nonsense.'

The Pinfolds' religion made a slight but perceptible barrier between them and these neighbours, a large part of whose activities centred round their parish churches. The Pinfolds were Roman Catholics, Mrs Pinfold by upbringing, Mr Pinfold by a later development. He had been received into the Church - 'conversion' suggests an event more sudden and emotional than his calm acceptance of the propositions of his faith - in early manhood, at the time when many Englishmen of humane education were falling into communism. Unlike them Mr Pinfold remained steadfast. But he was reputed bigoted rather than pious. His trade by its nature is liable to the condemnation of the clergy as, at the best, frivolous; at the worst, corrupting. Moreover by the narrow standards of the age his habits of life were self-indulgent and his utterances lacked prudence. And at the very time when the leaders of his Church were exhorting their people to emerge from the catacombs into the forum, to make their influence felt in democratic politics and to regard worship as a corporate rather than a private act, Mr Pinfold burrowed ever deeper into the rock. Away from his parish he sought the least frequented Mass; at home he held aloof from the multifarious organizations which have sprung into being at the summons of the hierarchy to redeem the times.

But Mr Pinfold was far from friendless and he set great store by his friends. They were the men and women who were growing old with him, whom in the nineteen-twenties and thirties he had seen constantly; who in the diaspora of the forties and fifties kept more tenuous touch with one another,

the men at Bellamy's Club, the women at the half-dozen poky, pretty houses of Westminster and Belgravia to which had descended the larger hospitality of a happier age.

He had made no new friends in late years. Sometimes he thought he detected a slight coldness among his old cronies. It was always he, it seemed to him, who proposed a meeting. It was always they who first rose to leave. In particular there was one, Roger Stillingfleet, who had once been an intimate but now seemed to avoid him. Roger Stillingfleet was a writer, one of the few Mr Pinfold really liked. He knew of no reason for their estrangement and, inquiring, was told that Roger had grown very odd lately. He never came to Bellamy's now, it was said, except to collect his letters or to entertain a visiting American.

It sometimes occurred to Mr Pinfold that he must be growing into a bore. His opinions certainly were easily predictable.

His strongest tastes were negative. He abhorred plastics, Picasso, sunbathing, and jazz – everything in fact that had happened in his own lifetime. The tiny kindling of charity which came to him through his religion sufficed only to temper his disgust and change it to boredom. There was a phrase in the thirties: 'It is later than you think', which was designed to cause uneasiness. It was never later than Mr Pinfold thought. At intervals during the day and night he would look at his watch and learn always with disappointment how little of his life was past, how much there was still ahead of him. He wished no one ill, but he looked at the world *sub specie aeternitatis* and he found it flat as a map; except when, rather often, personal annoyance intruded. Then he would come tumbling from his exalted point of observation. Shocked by a bad bottle of wine, an impertinent stranger, or a fault in syntax, his mind like a cinema camera trucked furiously for-

ward to confront the offending object close-up with glaring lens; with the eyes of a drill sergeant inspecting an awkward squad, bulging with wrath that was half-facetious, and with half-simulated incredulity; like a drill sergeant he was absurd to many but to some rather formidable.

Once upon a time all this had been thought diverting. People quoted his pungent judgements and invented anecdotes of his audacity, which were recounted as 'typical Pinfolds'. Now, he realized his singularity had lost some of its attraction for others, but he was too old a dog to learn new tricks.

As a boy, at the age of puberty when most of his school-fellows coarsened, he had been as fastidious as the Bruiser and in his early years of success diffidence had lent him charm. Prolonged prosperity had wrought the change. He had seen sensitive men make themselves a protective disguise against the rebuffs and injustices of manhood. Mr Pinfold had suffered little in these ways; he had been tenderly reared and, as a writer, welcomed and over-rewarded early. It was his modesty which needed protection and for this purpose, but without design, he gradually assumed this character of burlesque. He was neither a scholar nor a regular soldier; the part for which he cast himself was a combination of eccentric don and testy colonel and he acted it strenuously, before his children at Lychpole and his cronies in London, until it came to dominate his whole outward personality. When he ceased to be alone, when he swung into his club or stumped up the nursery stairs, he left half of himself behind, and the other half swelled to fill its place. He offered the world a front of pomposity mitigated by indiscretion, that was as hard, bright, and antiquated as a cuirass.

Mr Pinfold's nanny used to say: 'Don't care went to the gallows'; also: 'Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me'. Mr Pinfold did not care what the

village or his neighbours said of him. As a little boy he had been acutely sensitive to ridicule. His adult shell seemed impervious. He had long held himself inaccessible to interviewers and the young men and women who were employed to write 'profiles' collected material where they could. Every week his press-cutting agents brought to his breakfast-table two or three rather offensive allusions. He accepted without much resentment the world's estimate of himself. It was part of the price he paid for privacy. There were also letters from strangers, some abusive, some adulatory. Mr Pinfold was unable to discover any particular superiority of taste or expression in the writers of either sort. To both he sent printed acknowledgements.

His days passed in writing, reading, and managing his own small affairs. He had never employed a secretary and for the last two years he had been without a manservant. But Mr Pinfold did not repine. He was perfectly competent to answer his own letters, pay his bills, tie his parcels, and fold his clothes. At night his most frequent recurring dream was of doing *The Times* crossword puzzle; his most disagreeable that he was reading a tedious book aloud to his family.

Physically, in his late forties, he had become lazy. Time was, he rode to hounds, went for long walks, dug his garden, felled small trees. Now he spent most of the day in an armchair. He ate less, drank more, and grew corpulent. He was very seldom so ill as to spend a day in bed. He suffered intermittently from various twinges and brief bouts of pain in his joints and muscles – arthritis, gout, rheumatism, fibrositis; they were not dignified by any scientific name. Mr Pinfold seldom consulted his doctor. When he did so it was as a 'private patient'. His children availed themselves of the National Health Act but Mr Pinfold was reluctant to disturb a relationship which had been formed in his first years at Lychpole. Dr Drake,