

The Circular World of Non-Development:
Evelyn Waugh's Rendering of Bildungsroman in *Decline and Fall*

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Abstract

Evelyn Waugh's first published novel *Decline and Fall* presents a satire on the interwar British society by producing an atmosphere of futility and the absence of value then overhanging society. This effect results not only from satirical descriptions of social phenomena but also from a subversive treatment of the narrative form of Bildungsroman novels. Waugh's novel makes a parody of Bildungsroman novels in both structural and thematic ways. The novel denies the progressive linearity of that narrative form by giving itself the structure of meaningless circularity. The mocking treatment of other elements of Bildungsroman, especially of gentlemanship and public school, also produces the same satirical effect. Through performing a parody of Bildungsroman novels, *Decline and Fall* asserts that the narrative form which was dominant in the Victorian era was no longer acceptable after the First World War.

I

Evelyn Waugh's first published novel *Decline and Fall* (1928) is generally appraised to be an excellent specimen of satiric novels on the interwar British society. The novel not only contains many satirical references to the phenomena of the day, but also succeeds in producing an atmosphere of futility and the absence of value which pervaded society, the lingering aftermath of the unprecedented disaster the First World War. That effect results from a structural characteristic of the novel as well as the depictions of frivolous and farcical behaviour of people. The novel apparently does not have a clear and tight plot. Instead, the events occurring in the story are only loosely connected with one another. As the novel unfolds, one incident succeeds the last one, a situation in which the protagonist is placed shifts to another, and characters appear, disappear and appear again, but among these events happening in the story there

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is no strong causality. As one critic remarks on the novel, its “most extraordinary quality . . . is that in the world [Waugh] depicts nothing has any meaning at all, for cause has only the most irrational relation to effect and the greatest disparity exists between action and consequence” (Carens 11). The novel does nothing more than depict the protagonist tossed about in such randomness of events, or “an amazing cohesiveness” (190) if it is couched in a phrase one character utters.

The most conspicuous case of a structural characteristic which creates futility and the absence of value is that after going through various experiences the protagonist vainly returns to the same situation in which he was placed at the beginning. Because this development of *Decline and Fall* is a subversion of the typical pattern of Bildungsroman, the novel has been regarded to be a parody of this narrative form. While many critics casually point this out, they have not given enough treatment to the novel’s rendering of Bildungsroman so far.¹ It should not be left untreated, however, because in addition to the subversive structure, the novel involves the theme of Bildungsroman in many respects, especially gentlemanship and public school, which are important elements of the narrative form.

The present paper analyses the structural characteristic and the representation of public school in *Decline and Fall* and considers the significance of the parodical rendering of Bildungsroman. In the following argument, the present paper examines how futility and the absence of value is produced through the satiric representation of society. Then, the analysis of the elements of Bildungsroman follows, with the satiric representations of gentlemanship and public school focused on. In this section, Alec Waugh’s novel, *The Loom of Youth* (1917) is referred to, because the two novels share a common topic and contain quite similar passages though until now this fact has not

¹ For example, Beaty does not think the use of Bildungsroman in *Decline and Fall* has much significance, saying “The novel as a whole may . . . be viewed as an ironic parody of the Bildungsroman—one which, neither debasing the genre nor treating it seriously, merely plays with it in unexpected ways” (32). Only a few critics are much interested in the elements of Bildungsroman in *Decline and Fall*: Meckier treats fully the theme of Bildungsroman insisting that “Throughout *Decline and Fall*, Waugh specifically subverts the Bildungsroman and challenges the salvific renewal” (53); Leo also focuses on the Bildungsroman theme.

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been recognised.

II

Although Evelyn Waugh is not usually regarded as a master of symbol and metaphor, a striking evidence against such a judgment is found soon after the novel starts.² After Paul Pennyfeather is sent down from his university, his guardian gives him a notice that he will be forsaken and allowed no more inheritance money. During the interview, breaking through the quietness, the music of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera flows out from the upper floor as if playing an overture to the story of Paul. Because the title of the music is not revealed, its reference to the story is no more than a matter of speculation, but since the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan are slapstick farces full of social satire, the music can suggest some similarities between their works and Waugh's novel. Because Waugh did not appreciate Gilbert and Sullivan operas,³ he possibly intended to make a contrast between their works and his novel. Besides, the phonograph, the musical device on which the music is played, has a more important significance. The function of the phonograph to repeat the same music again and again is a metaphor for the structure of *Decline and Fall*.

While the comical tone provided by the descriptions in *Decline and Fall* serves to portray British society as confused and unstable, the noisy sounds also contribute to producing the same effect. Reading *Decline and Fall* means experiencing incessant clamors as the novel is so full of noisy scenes. The beginning of the novel describes the members of Bollinger Club wandering drunkenly around the premises of the university, making "a confused roaring and breaking of glass" (7). At Llanabba Castle, school masters have great trouble making the boisterous students silent, and "Now and then there rose from below the shrill voices of the servants scolding each other . . ." (38). When a sports festival takes place, the students' parents start a row, feeling class-conscious hostility towards each other. A peculiar music band continues to play the same music throughout the festival, and even several days after, they "were still sitting with their heads together discussing the division of their earnings" (99). At

² Exceptionally, Meckier insists that Evelyn Waugh frequently uses symbols and metaphors, saying that "Symbols are always the key to Waugh's art" (51).

³ Waugh described a famous opera of Gilbert and Sullivan *The Mikado* as "a detestable pantomime" (Carpenter 151).

King's Thursday, many guests come up for a party and do not become quiet after late midnight. Even at the penal institution where order and tranquility must be maintained, a murder case creates a great confusion. After Paul's return to the university, a Bollinger Club's night party is again held and he also hears "a confused roaring and breaking of glass" (197). As above, Paul is not freed from clamor wherever he goes, and his adventure finishes with the replay of the same sound as he hears at the beginning. Like a phonograph repeatedly playing the same music, *Decline and Fall* continues to make clamors endlessly. Evelyn Waugh, who is so interested in new media technologies such as the phonograph, telegraph and telephone that he quite often describes in his novels, uses the phonograph here as an important metaphor for the novel's fundamental structure.

In *Decline and Fall* not only sounds and music but also the same characters and similar situations are used more than once. As the story unfolds, the protagonist goes from one place to another, and some characters disappear from the scene only to reappear later and make another scene similar to one which has already occurred. For example, at first Dr Fagan is a headmaster of a pretentious public school but when he appears next, he runs a nursing home and helps Paul to feign being dead in order to deliver him from the penal institution. Paul works with Grimes, Philbrick and Prendergast at Llanabba and in the later part of the novel he meets them again as a prisoner or prison staff. The structure of the novel consists of this kind of repetition of characters and situations which are loosely connected with one another. Alvin Kernan's influential thesis which deals with Waugh's first four satiric novels considers their structures to be significant and insists that "What in fact happens in Waugh's novels is that all the running produces only circular movement" (208). In his argument, the circularity implies the sterility of the society because the circle has been, "as it is in Dante's *Inferno*, the figure of empty, meaningless movement" (208) rather than the symbol of perfection. Then, the circular structure of meaningless movement in *Decline and Fall* suggests a barren society so as to satirise the interwar British society which had lost hope and stability.

What draws the largest circle of meaninglessness in *Decline and Fall* is the track of the protagonist's adventure. Paul Pennyfeather, a shy and withdrawn young man with a fair education at a public school, spends secluded uneventful days reading theology at Oxford University. After he is unjustly sent down for indecency from university, he

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experiences being a schoolmaster at a pretentious public school, then the private tutor and lover of the mistress at a country house, followed by a luxurious life at London Mayfair as her fiancé, then a prisoner at an experimental penal institution and deliverance from there via a faked death, and after all returns to his college again, resuming his studies for taking orders as before. Thus, the plot summary of Paul's adventure, returning in vain at the original starting point after many ups and downs without acquiring meaningful knowledge or achieving happiness, presents no more than a circular pattern of meaninglessness.

While *Decline and Fall* succeeded in representing the barrenness of life by describing Paul going through meaningless adventures, conveying the impression of sterility is reinforced by the use of a striking metaphor. Otto Friedrich Silenus, a peculiar modernist architect, gives Paul an explanation of life when his story is coming to an end, using the analogy of a recreational apparatus in the amusement park:

You pay five francs and go into a room with tiers of seats all round, and in the centre the floor is made of a great disc of polished wood that revolves quickly. At first you sit down and watch the others. They are all trying to sit in the wheel, and they keep getting flung off, and that makes them laugh, and you laugh too. It's great fun.'

'I don't think that sounds very much like life,' said Paul rather sadly.

'Oh, but it is, though. You see, the nearer you can get to the hub of the wheel the slower it is moving and the easier it is to stay on. There's generally someone in the centre who stands up and sometimes does a sort of dance. Often he's paid by the management, though, or, at any rate, he's allowed in free. Of course at the very centre there's a point completely at rest, if one could only find it. I'm not sure I am not very near that point myself. Of course the professional men get in the way. Lots of people just enjoy scrambling on and being whisked off and scrambling on again. How they all shriek and giggle! Then there are others, like Margot, who sit as far out as they can and hold on for dear life and enjoy that. But the whole point about the wheel is that you needn't get on it at all, if you don't want to. (193)

In the world which *Decline and Fall* represents, the condition of life is no more than slap-stick actions which people play boisterously on the revolving circle. They climb on the stage of life, struggle to keep a hold on it and are flung out from it. Then, they

repeat the same process again and again. “[Y]ou needn’t get on [the wheel] at all, if you don’t want to” (193), but in that case, a person can do nothing but watch the spectacles that other people make. As many critics interpret, this analogy can be thought to imply frivolity and the absence of value in society after the First World War. It shows that people merely enjoy the thrill of this kind of action on the stage of life without gaining anything or going anywhere.

Using the same analogy, Silenus moves to make a clarification on Paul’s adventure: “Now you’re a person who was clearly meant to stay in the seats and sit still and if you get bored watch the others. Somehow you got on to the wheel, and you got thrown off again at once with a hard bump” (194). Silenus proposes to classify people depending on whether they are “dynamic” or “static,” that is, whether they are a person who is able to enjoy shaky transitions of life or not, and he puts Paul into the latter category. Silenus’s judgment that Paul is “static” would not be irrefutable, since he never acts on his own initiative on any occasion.

The futility of life is accentuated again in the last part of the novel. Paul comes back to Scone College, disguising himself with a moustache and assuming the identity of a distant cousin of Paul Pennyfeather. Though he loses his original identity, he can resume his study for the ministry. He spends an uneventful residence as before, and in his third year the Bollinger Club’s annual night party takes place again. When he is sitting relaxed in his chair in his room, Peter, now a university student, very drunk, comes into the room and speaks to Paul in a slightly reproachful tone:

‘. . . You know, Paul, I think it was a mistake you ever got mixed up with us; don’t you? We’re different somehow. Don’t quite know how. Don’t think that’s rude, do you, Paul?’

‘No, I know exactly what you mean. You’re dynamic, and I’m static.’

‘Is that it? Expect you’re right. Funny thing you used to teach me once; d’you remember? Llanabba—Latin sentences, Quominus and Quin, and the organ; d’you remember?’

‘Yes, I remember,’ said Paul.

‘Funny how things happen. You used to teach me the organ; d’you remember?’

‘Yes, I remember,’ said Paul.

‘And then Margot Metroland wanted to marry you; d’you remember?’

‘Yes,’ said Paul.

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'And then you went to prison, and Alastair—that's Margot Metroland's young man—and Metroland—that's her husband—got you out; d'you remember?'

'Yes,' said Paul, 'I remember.'

'And here we are talking to one another like this, up here, after all that! Funny, isn't it?'

'Yes, it is rather.'

'Paul, do you remember a thing you said once at the Ritz—Alastair was there—that's Margot Metroland's young man, you know—d'you remember? I was rather tight then too. You said, "Fortune, a much-maligned lady". D'you remember that?'

'Yes,' said Paul, 'I remember.'

'Good old Paul! I knew you would. Let's drink to that now; shall we? How did it go? Damn, I've forgotten it. Never mind. I wish I didn't feel so ill.'

'You drink too much, Peter.'

'Oh, damn, what else is there to do? You going to be a clergyman, Paul?'

'Yes.'

'Damned funny that. You know you ought never to have got mixed up with me and Metroland. May I have another drink?' (198-99)

This dialogue appears to be no more than a simple comic scene in which a drunken person unreasonably annoys someone. The mechanical repetition of questions and answers in the same manner produces a monotonous tone which also adds a ridiculous impression. However, this conversation possesses the importance of emphasizing the futility of life. Peter recites the events in which he and Paul were involved one after another and asks Paul if he remembers them or not. At the beginning and the end of the passage cited above, Peter mockingly comments that Paul ought not to have been involved with Peter and the people of his class. In this way, the interlocution emphasises the fact that Paul remembers every event in which he was involved but it made no change in him and he has returned to the same route to become a clergyman. That the protagonist goes through the vicissitudes of life without gaining anything only to return to the same situation is subversive to the plot of typical Bildungsroman. In contrast to typical Bildungsroman novels in the Victorian era which presented people with a model of life in which a person achieves mental and social development, *Decline and Fall* thus suggests a picture of life in which a person gains nothing from

experiences in society. Although Paul is apparently ridiculed, seen from a different angle, it becomes clear that the society is the true object of mockery. As the novel represents, the society is now so frivolous and futile that it is impossible for anyone to grow up in it.

III

As the present paper has examined so far, *Decline and Fall* satirises the futility of the interwar British society through rendering a parody of the fundamental structure of Bildungsroman. The novel represents a person's life comprised of repetitions and circularity which produce nothing. This is not the only measure to make a parody of Bildungsroman, as the novel mockingly treats other elements of the narrative form as well. Paul's biographical background, for example, explains that he has grown up to be a person like a hero in a Bildungsroman novel. Paul lives on the inheritance money from his parents with the support of his guardian, finishes prep school and public school, achieves fair results, reads theology and spends a moderate life aided by two scholarships at Oxford University. This information is enough for readers to encourage an expectation that he will get over the sorrow of his parents' death, and acquire enough knowledge and education to become a creditable gentleman. The fact that Paul steps into the world from the secluded academic life is also an ordeal which a protagonist of Bildungsroman has to experience in the process of growing, as his insincere guardian tells him that "It will do you the world of good to face facts for a bit—look at life in the raw, you know. See things steadily and see them whole, eh?" (15-6). However, unlike in the case of a typical Bildungsroman where the protagonist goes out voluntarily from the provincial environment,⁴ since Paul is expelled from university for an absurd reason, his encounter with the reality of the world is less likely to cultivate his personality. *Decline and Fall* thus bears characteristics of Bildungsroman and makes fun of them at the same time.

The story of *Decline and Fall* contains the subjects of social mobility and the test of woman. In the second part of the novel, he comes to King's Thursday to become a private tutor and eventually gets engaged with Mrs Margot Beste-Chetwynde, the mistress of the estate. Their engagement awakes an expectation that Paul would

⁴ For simple definitions of British Bildungsroman, see Buckley 17-8.

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acquire fortune and status through the marriage. Before it becomes clear whether Paul would do so or not, a character who indeed entertains such an expectation appears at a weekend party at King's Thursday. Sir Humphrey Maltravers, Minister of Transportation, who was born into a family of poverty and the lower-class and acquired wealth and status after strenuous efforts, tells Paul "of his early life history: of a family of nine living in two rooms, of a father who drank and a mother who had fits, of a sister who went on the streets, of a brother who went to prison, of another brother who was born deaf-mute. He told of scholarships and polytechnics, of rebuffs and encouragements, of a University career of brilliant success and unexampled privations" (122). The background of Maltravers is a type, if grossly caricatured, of the social pragmatic Bildungsroman, a narrative pattern which shows a protagonist who gets himself involved in society and goes upward from a lower social status to a higher through his efforts. Now that he has attained certain wealth and status, he aims to take his place among aristocracy by means of contracting marriage to Margot so that he would become a member of the House of Lords. He cannot even catch a glimpse of Margot's figure at the party and leaves the King's Thursday disappointedly. Yet he later succeeds in attaining both the bride and the nomination of lord, while Paul is arrested and sent to prison with his marriage broken off. In *Decline and Fall* as a parody of Bildungsroman, a caricatured secondary character takes the place of the leading character.

While the fact that the text of *Decline and Fall* is full of reminders of Bildungsroman suggests that the author deliberately composed a parody of that narrative form, a working title of the novel also indicates that the narrative form was in the author's mind when he was writing. Before Waugh finally chose the title for the novel, he had changed its title a few times.⁵ "Only ten thousand words had been written under the title of *Picaresque: or the Making of an Englishman*" (Stannard 148), but this working title expresses well, probably more clearly, the final form of the novel. The main title *Picaresque* is a suitable nomination for its framework. The genre of picaresque is a traditional narrative structure where various phenomena, especially social or moral vices, are exposed through the eyes of the protagonist wandering around society. The subtitle *The Making of an Englishman* also expresses important elements

⁵ See Stannard, 148-49.

of the novel because it focuses on a process of Paul's development, though he actually never develops. Probably, this subtitle can be replaced with "the Making of an English Gentleman," and further as "Bildungsroman," because "The most significant expression of this English form of socially pragmatic Bildung is the narrative of becoming a gentleman" (Castle 19). This series of suppositions is not so arbitrary because it seems that, according to the conjecture Stannard gives through the investigation of the manuscript, "Waugh originally intended to write an amusing *éducation sentimentale* novel . . . in which Paul moved through experience to knowledge" (Stannard 164). Waugh's initial intention to write a kind of Bildungsroman vanished from the title finally adopted, but it remains as the basic structure of the final product.

Since Waugh, whose father was a literary critic and a managing director of Chapman and Hall, the publisher of the works of Charles Dickens, grew up so immersed in the world of literature, it is not surprising that he would ambitiously select such traditional narrative forms as picaresque and Bildungsroman for the subjects of his first published novel. Although the reason why he abandoned writing a more conventional kind of Bildungsroman cannot be known, the structure of *Decline and Fall*, a mixture of these two narrative forms, retains his original intent. The trace of his change of mind is possibly observed in a passage like this:

For an evening at least the shadow that has flitted about this narrative under the name of Paul Pennyfeather materialized into the solid figure of an intelligent, well-educated, well-conducted young man, a man who . . . might be expected to acquit himself with decision and decorum in all the emergencies of civilized life. This was the Paul Pennyfeather who had been developing in the placid years which preceded this story. In fact, the whole of this book is really an account of the mysterious disappearance of Paul Pennyfeather, so that readers must not complain if the shadow which took his name does not amply fill the important part of hero for which he was originally cast. (114)

In the above, different from other parts of the novel, the narrator comes up to the foreground of the story and makes a frank explanation of the nature of the protagonist. Paul was originally assigned a role of "solid figure," who had intelligence and education and would go through society by his own effort, but was deprived of it as the narrator adds: "Paul Pennyfeather would never have made a hero, and the only interest about him arises from the unusual series of events of which his shadow was witness" (115).

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The commentary on the protagonist's character which the narrator has intrusively given is so explicit that it should not be taken at face value. In those lines, however, the author's determination to give up writing what he first intended and switch to create a more comically parodied version of Bildungsroman can be recognised.

IV

Moreover, in *Decline and Fall* mockery of gentlemanship plays an important part in parodying Bildungsroman. Since the making of a gentleman is one of the recurrent themes of Bildungsroman especially in the Victorian era, it is natural that gentlemanship is chosen as a butt of mockery in order to make a travesty of Bildungsroman. The novel makes fun of Paul's pride of being a gentleman. When he is offered in a letter twenty pounds as a token of apology for the accident which has led him to be sent down, he is greatly troubled about whether he should accept it or not. He thinks that though there are reasonable reasons for justifying his acceptance, to receive "irregular perquisites" goes against his honour as a gentleman of the British bourgeoisie (44). He refuses the offer after a long hesitation, and then he is satisfied with confirming his "durability of [his] ideals" of a gentleman. However, "he felt a great wave of satisfaction surge up within him," when he hears later that on his behalf, one character had sent a reply to inform the acceptance without leave (44). This episode reveals that Paul cannot completely control his desire in spite of his pretention to be a gentleman. The surrender of his discipline as a gentleman would be further interpreted to call into question the consistency of gentlemen's morality in general. Thus, the public school education was successful with imprinting on Paul's mind the pride of having received it, but it failed to nurture the disciplinary strictness. Then, the public school is also a target of satire in this novel.

While the indecent image of public school men had already been expressed at the beginning of the novel by the exposure of the barbaric behaviour of Bollinger Club, the place which turned them out is thoroughly degraded in the following story. British public schools, especially from the mid nineteenth century to the mid twentieth, functioned as a particular institution to train gentlemen. As the system of public school was established, training gentlemen became its important role. Even today, which school a person graduated from "clings through later life . . . in everyday social life," and "'school' is still an emotive word in this [twentieth] century; less so than it

used to be but still able to raise a degree of nostalgia, interest, love, hatred and antagonism . . .” (Quigly 1-2). The genre of public school narratives, which was founded by the birth of Thomas Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857),⁶ has also led to create these sentiments among people. Then, the satiric descriptions of the public school in *Decline and Fall* break down such emotional vision.

The representation of Llanabba Castle serves to do so as well. The fact that it is dishonourably put on the lowest place in the school ranking of four divisions causes suspicion. Taking a look at it deepens mistrust for its real identity. The building of the school is originally a traditional country house which “looks very much like any other large country house” from its back side, but “from the front . . . it is formidably feudal . . . a model of medieval impregnability” (20). This incongruity between the front and rear of the building, which is derived from the strange history of Llanabba, implies its falsity as a public school.

Llanabba is full of suspicious staff: Dr Fagan, the head master who has a doubtful doctorate, a reminder of the master of boy thieves in Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*; Prendergust, an Anglican clergyman suffering from doubts about the reason why God made the world; Philbrick, a butler whose identity is very suspicious and who repeats false statements about his background. Moreover, there is a roguish and impudent person Grimes, who is often thought the most memorable staff among all the characters in the story. He is so indecent that he commits bigamy and pedophilia, so that he is the least conceivable creature for a public school teacher as he confesses “‘I don’t believe I was ever meant by Nature to be a schoolmaster’” (27). The boys are also naughty and boisterous, especially Peter, who is good at making a cocktail despite his young age. In Llanabba, thus, both schoolmasters and students are eccentric. As Sir Shane Leslie, an Etonian, in the preface to his biographical story *The Oppidan* (1922), “‘maintained, since ‘there could be nothing duller than a school novel true to life’ and ‘school life can be totally monotonous . . . [,] the school novelist finds it necessary to caricature the worthy masters and to exaggerate the unworthy boys’” (qtd. in Quigly 146-47), but Waugh’s exaggeration goes too far.

Grimes, a Harrovian, is so peculiar not only as schoolmaster but also as a public school man that he functions as a satire on the entire system of public school. In

⁶ See Quigly 42.

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England, public school men have created a kind of mutual aid system known as “the old school tie or the old boy network” (Quigly 2). Grimes rather mockingly comments on it: ““There’s a blessed equity in the English social system . . . that ensures the public school man against starvation. One goes through four or five years of perfect hell at an age when life is bound to be hell anyway, and after that the social system never lets one down”” (27-28). He says that every time he finds himself in a predicament, he is always rescued from it only because he is a public school man, though he did not finish the school in fact. Grimes enjoys much benefit from the system, but he is so indecent that he is not likely to be a gentleman, as his behaviour and self-narrated history make evident. Thus, the very existence of Grimes throws doubt on the rationality of the system.

V

Yet *Decline and Fall* was written so hilariously that a question might arise about to what extent these satirical representations concerning public school have any seriousness at all. Drawing on Waugh's diary and autobiography suggests that Grimes as a fictional character was created from the personality and background of Richard Young, a real person whom Waugh met when he was a schoolmaster.⁷ Then, as Stovel argues, Grimes might be just “an instance of how Waugh's imagination work[s]” when he shapes up people for his novels on the basis of people in the real world (14). However, it will become apparent that Grimes is not merely a funny character, when what is cited above is juxtaposed to a passage from *The Loom of Youth*, an autobiographical novel written by Evelyn's older brother Alec Waugh (1898-1981), as in the following:

[T]he Freemasonry of a Public School is amazing. No man who has been through a good school can be an outsider. He may hang round the Empire bar, he may cheat at business; but you can be certain of one thing, he will never let you down. Very few Public School men ever do a mean thing to their friends. And for a system that produces such a spirit there is something to be said after all. (90)

The tone and style of the text by Alec is significantly different from that of his younger

⁷ As to the association between Grimes and Richard Young, see Stannard 112: Waugh, Evelyn *A Little* 227-30; Stovel.

brother, but there are enormous similarities between the two passages, almost as if Evelyn had transplanted the text from Alec's novel.

The Loom of Youth is based on Alec Waugh's experiences in a public school Sherborn. He wrote it soon after he left the school when he was a soldier at a drill in England. The novel depicts the school life of the protagonist Gordon Caruthers from the day he enters a fictional public school Fernhurst to his graduation with a mixture of nostalgia and disapproval. *The Loom of Youth* was, as Evelyn commented on it, written "with a realism that was then unusual" (*A Little* 96), and it "seem[s] to cover most aspects of school life" (Quigly 199), even the homosexual relationship among the boys. The references for the homosexuality were so controversial in those days that the credit of the Waughs was impaired and consequently Evelyn could not go to Sherborn, where his brother and father went.⁸ Though *The Loom of Youth* is not an openly critical pamphlet for educational purpose but "is simply the story of a boy's life at school" (Gallagher 74), it contains a number of discourses critical for some elements of public school.

Much of the disapproval of public school is in reaction to their athleticism, or the excessive enthusiasm for athletic games.⁹ As the athletic games produce significant moments in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, athletic competitions have actually been of remarkable importance, to the point that athleticism was the dominant climate among both the students and teachers. Athleticism was particularly high especially "from the 1870s until the First World War," and "the public schools . . . worshipped games to a degree so remarkable that it is now hard to credit it" (Quigly 50). In the development of the novel, at first Gordon devotes himself completely to such sports as cricket and football like most boys. But as he becomes older, he gradually realizes the excessive devotion to sports is problematic, and he calls for the reformation of such attitude and gains some support. Thus, the novel attacks the prevailing climate of athleticism in public school. This attack was turned to the fact that athleticism would not be able to contribute to winning the First World War, which was in progress at that time. Gordon denounces it in his speech to the students and schoolmasters in Fernhurst, invoking a famous saying generally attributed to the first duke of Wellington: "'Some fool said 'the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing field of Eton' . . . Games don't win battles,

⁸ See Waugh, Evelyn *A Little* 96, 114; Quigly 209-11.

⁹ For the information of athleticism, see Quigly 50-54.

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but brains do, and brains aren't trained on the footer field'" (306). Thus, *The Loom of Youth* poses a question about athleticism of public school in a critical time and calls for reformation.

In *Decline and Fall*, Evelyn Waugh also treats the athletics in a hilarious way. The confusion in the annual sports competition at Llanabba is a very funny representation of athletic games in public school life. The sports festival has a series of unsuccessful precedents: a strange local band plays noisy music throughout the festival; racing rules are completely neglected; a boy is accidentally shot in his foot with a revolver used as signal gun; and it ends in a roaring conflict among the students' parents who bare their broad class consciousness. The treatments of public school in *Decline and Fall* thus bring about disillusionment of their ideal image which has been built up by both the real and fictional public school. While *The Loom of Youth* realistically describes a boy's school life and succeeds in expressing a critical attitude toward the elements of public schools, *Decline and Fall*, in an unrealistic and farcical manner, produces the same effect.

VI

As the present paper has examined, *Decline and Fall* is a deliberate parody of Bildungsroman novels in that it has subversive structure of that narrative form and mockingly renders the making of an English gentleman. The novel's repetition and circularity deny the progressive linearity of typical Bildungsroman novels which embodied the social climate of social mobility and optimistic progression when the British Empire was in full flourish in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the novel adds a striking effect to its satire on Bildungsroman, by the use of mockery of gentlemanship, the education of gentlemen, and public school.

The satiric treatment of Bildungsroman in *Decline and Fall* casts doubt on the durability and importance of the narrative form after the First World War. The novel describes a protagonist acquiring nothing of importance and achieving no development after various experiences, so that it suggests that such an optimistic structure of typical Bildungsroman novels was no longer acceptable. In this way, the novel indicates the decline of British society by means of presenting the decline of one narrative form. While the novels of typical Bildungsroman were still being written at the time, some

novelists, including Waugh, made a parody of that narrative form.¹⁰ It is possible that their practice was prompted by those authors' doubt on the future possibility of Bildungsroman as a worthwhile narrative form.

¹⁰ For example, Aldous Huxley's first published novel *Crome Yellow* (1921), a Peacockian novel of conversation, describes a protagonist living without self-confidence or positive expectation. The novel's protagonist, Denis Stone, a naïve and self-conscious young poet, visits Crome manor, spends time having conversation with rather peculiar people there, and ends up returning to London without any hope for the future. Elsewhere in the same novel, one character Mr Scogan contemptuously refers to a contemporary novel of typical Bildungsroman and expresses boredom with it. Bradshaw in the introduction to *Decline and Fall* suggests that Beverley Nichols's *Prelude* (1920) and Sherard Vines's *The Dark Way* (1919) are examples of such Bildungsroman novels and Waugh and Huxley made a spoof on them. (xxxiv n52)

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