AN EVELYN WAUGH CHRONOLOGY

AUTHOR CHRONOLOGIES

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General Editor's Preface

Most biographies are ill adapted to serve as works of reference – not surprisingly so, since the biographer is likely to regard his function as the devising of a continuous and readable narrative, with excursions into interpretation and speculation, rather than a bald recital of facts. There are times, however, when anyone reading for business or pleasure needs to check a point quickly or to obtain a rapid overview of part of an author's life or career; and at such moments turning over the pages of a biography can be a time-consuming and frustrating occupation. The present series of volumes aims at providing a means whereby the chronological facts of an author's life and career, rather than needing to be prised out of the narrative in which they are (if they appear at all) securely embedded, can be seen at a glance. Moreover, whereas biographies are often, and quite understandably, vague over matters of fact (since it makes for tediousness to be forever enumerating details of dates and places), a chronology can be precise whenever it is possible to be precise.

Thanks to the survival, sometimes in very large quantities, of letters, diaries, notebooks and other documents, as well as to thoroughly researched biographies and bibliographies, this material now exists in abundance for many major authors. In the case of, for example, Dickens, we can often ascertain what he was doing in each month and week, and almost on each day, of his prodigiously active working life; and the student of, say, *David Copperfield* is likely to find it fascinating as well as useful to know just when Dickens was at work on each part of that novel, what other literary enterprises he was engaged in at the same time, whom he was meeting, what places he was visiting, and what were the relevant circumstances of his personal and professional life. Such a chronology is not, of course, a substitute for a biography; but its arrangement, in combination with its index, makes it a much more convenient tool for this kind of purpose; and it may be acceptable as a form of 'alternative' biography, with its own distinctive advantages as well as its obvious limitations.

Since information relating to an author's early years is usually scanty and chronologically imprecise, the opening section of some

volumes in this series groups together the years of childhood and adolescence. Thereafter each year, and usually each month, is dealt with separately. Information not readily assignable to a specific month or day is given as a general note under the relevant year or month. The first entry for each month carries an indication of the day of the week, so that when necessary this can be readily calculated for other dates. Each volume also contains a bibliography of the principal sources of information. In the chronology itself, the sources of many of the more specific items, including quotations, are identified, in order that the reader who wishes to do so may consult the original contexts.

NORMAN PAGE

Introduction

The principal sources for an Evelyn Waugh chronology are the writer's own diaries and letters, and I have made extensive use of *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, edited by Michael Davie (1976) and *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, edited by Mark Amory (1980). The latter has been supplemented by *Mr Wu and Mrs Stitch: The Letters of Evelyn Waugh and Diana Cooper*, very helpfully edited by Artemis Cooper (1991). Though materials of this kind survive from all phases of Waugh's life, from childhood and youth to his last years, the record is inevitably far from complete: he kept a diary only intermittently (though at times regularly and fully), and it also seems likely that diaries kept during certain sensitive periods were subsequently destroyed, while the letters are as usual subject to the laws that determine the preservation, suppression or destruction of documents that pass from the writer's hands into those of other people. Inevitably, therefore, some parts of Waugh's eventful life are covered more fully than others by the existing evidence and, accordingly, in this chronology.

Another problem that arises for the chronologist is the repetitiveness inherent in certain aspects of the subject's life. Waugh's social life was an unusually full one, but a complete record of his luncheons and dinners, his visits to his clubs or to other people's houses, would be tedious and even pointless: and though Waugh himself regularly recorded the occasions on which he got drunk or had his hair cut, few readers will care to have this information set down in full. I have, therefore, made a selection from these items so as to convey the flavour of his existence at various times and at the same time to record both the shifting patterns of his friendships and any particularly notable encounters with individuals. In the same way, the complexity of his war-time activities and movements would demand an excessive proportion of space if they were to be noted with anything approaching completeness; as it is, even a selective record communicates a vivid impression of the muddles, inefficiencies and confusions, occasionally illuminated by high drama or broad farce, of his military experiences.

Waugh was not only a prolific novelist but a highly productive

journalist, and no attempt has been made to record every article or review he published, though a selection of the more significant items has been given. A substantial number of his shorter non-fictional pieces are reprinted in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, edited by Donat Gallagher (1983), which also contains as an appendix a useful 'Chronological List of Occasional Writings Not Printed in this Volume'. Again, Waugh's extensive travels were often intricate in their itineraries, and his movements are not always easy to date with precision; consequently the account of them given here, though reasonably full, leaves a few unavoidable gaps. Space has, however, been found to record many of the books he read, the films and plays he saw, and the exhibitions he attended.

Waugh has been fortunate in having as a biographer Martin Stannard, whose two volumes – *Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years 1903–1939* (1986) and *Evelyn Waugh: The Later Years 1939–1966* (1992) – are not only thoroughly researched and lucidly narrated, but possess a wit, shrewdness and stylishness worthy of their remarkable subject. My own debt to Martin Stannard's exemplary biography is considerable and gratefully acknowledged.

As is customary in this series, a few significant historical events have been included, as well as a few references to major writers who were Waugh's contemporaries or near-contemporaries. Information concerning the more important figures associated with him appears in the section 'The Evelyn Waugh Circle'; others who played a lesser part in his life are briefly identified when they appear. Throughout, 'EW' refers to Evelyn Waugh, and he must be understood to be the subject of verbs for which no other subject is given. 'Tells' usually indicates that the reference is to one of Waugh's letters.