

Labels

Evelyn Waugh

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Part of the fabulous new hardback library of 24 Evelyn Waugh books, publishing in chronological order over the coming year. The books have an elegant new jacket and text design. Evelyn Waugh chose the name Labels for his first travel book because, he said, the places he visited were already 'fully labelled'; in people's minds. Yet even the most seasoned traveller could not fail to be inspired by his quintessentially English attitude and by his eloquent and frequently outrageous wit. From Europe to the Middle East and North Africa, from Egyptian porters and Italian priests to Maltese sailors and Moroccan merchants - as he cruises around the Mediterranean his pen cuts through the local colour to give an entertaining portrait of the Englishman abroad.

Labels Details

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From Reader Review Labels for online ebook

Mike Clarke says

Waugh of the world: suitable light reading for a short trip to Italy, this slim volume of travelogue is early Evelyn, before Catholicism got him. He's content with a few shrewish observations on foreigners, English people abroad and the hatefulness of coy, cute, twee nostalgia in a way that would later be echoed by Julian Barnes: "The detestation of 'quaintness' and 'picturesque bits' which is felt by every decently constituted Englishman...has developed naturally in self-defence against arts and crafts...Tudor cottages....collection of pewter and oak...and Ye Olde Inne and the Kynde Dragon and Ye Cheshire Cheese, Broadway, Stratford-on-Avon, folk-dancing, nativity plays, reformed dress, free love in a cottage, glee singing, the Lyric Hammersmith, Belloc, Ditchling, Wessex-worship, village signs, local customs, heraldry, madrigals, wassail, regional cookery, Devonshire teas, letters to The Times about saving timbered almshouses from destruction, the preservation of the Welsh language, etc. It is inevitable that English taste, confronted with all these frightful menaces to its integrity, should have adopted an uncompromising attitude to anything the least tainted with ye oldeness." Solid, scarf-waving stuff.

John says

Entertaining description of travels through inter-war Europe.

Katherine says

*3.5 stars.

"...with his arrival begins the ignoble trade of manufacturing special trinkets for tourists, horrible paperweights of local wood or stone, ornaments of odious design, or bits of cheap jewellery for him to take back as souvenirs" (34-35).

"...he knows the exaltation of rising before daybreak and being overtaken by dawn many miles from where he slept..." (35).

"I still said no, and he went on to suggest other diversions rarely associated with Sunday morning" (44).

"I do not see how imitative ingenuity can go further; every line of face and body is clearly visible under the clinging marble drapery; the hands and feet alone are bare, and the change of texture between the marble which represents flesh and the marble which represents flesh closely covered with muslin is observed with a subtlety which defies analysis" (47).

"...and behind him, clutching their candles, like penitents in procession, this whole rag-tag and bobtail of self-improvement and uplift" (86).

"...though the warm darkness that smelled like tweed" (127).

"I do not think it is a ton where anyone except the most hardened water-colourist would want to stay for very long" (135).

"...it was then that his art, cautiously maturing, broke through all preconceived bounds of order and propriety, and coursed wantonly over the town, spattering its riches on all sides like mud" (144).

Jennifer Causey says

I enjoyed this book very much. Having visited most of the places he did during his 1929 Mediterranean travels (this book is essentially a journal of that trip), it was interesting to read how many things have not changed much. I also found myself chuckling often, his wry sense of humor is not unlike present day authors like Bill Bryson.

Adam says

Evelyn Waugh's trip around the Mediterranean. Feels somewhat staid now. There are some fine quips and bon-mots, but several other passages that have aged to the point they have become racist. Some nice reflections on small provisional villages that have now become holiday hot-spots.

Andrew Darling says

Evelyn Waugh was a young man, only twenty four and still apparently undecided on the direction his life should take, when his first book was published – a biographical study of the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Five months later came his first novel, the exquisite *Decline and Fall*. Both books were well received, *Decline and Fall* especially so. In the same year, 1928, Waugh married his first wife, also named Evelyn (thereafter known in the Waugh circle as 'She-Evelyn'). The public recognition he enjoyed as a result of his two successful books enabled him to persuade the owners of one of the most luxurious cruise ships then afloat, the *Stella Polaris*, to provide him and She-Evelyn with a cabin on a journey around the Mediterranean, in return for favourable publicity. *Labels: A Mediterranean Journal* was the result.

Although it is today not widely read, *Labels* is well worth seeking out. It seems (at least to this reader) remarkable that one so relatively young could possess the self-assurance, supported by such a very wide base of knowledge, to behave in the way he describes, to analyse and to contextualise the societies, places and people he encounters in such diverse environments as the nightclubs of Paris, the bars and brothels of Port Said, and the strait-laced colonial clubhouses of the Anglo-Egyptian ruling class. While *Labels* does not have the wild comedy of *Decline and Fall*, it is nevertheless extremely funny, although occasionally in a somewhat self-conscious way. I do not know how many of his observations have found their way into *Dictionaries of Quotations*, but there seems to me to be a candidate for inclusion on virtually every page. To cite some of those which particularly appealed to me is as good a way as any of giving a flavour of the book:

*There was one sight, however, which was unforgettable – Paris lying in a pool of stagnant smoke, looking, except for the Eiffel Tower, very much like High Wycombe.

*As a race the French tend to have strong heads, weak stomachs, and a rooted abhorrence of hospitality.

*Every Englishman abroad, until it is proved to the contrary, likes to consider himself a traveller and not a tourist.

*None of the servants spoke a word of any European language, but this was a negligible defect since they never answered the bell.

*On the decks there were no deckchairs except those the passengers provided for themselves; the three or four public seats were invariably occupied by mothers doing frightful things to their babies with jars of vaseline.

*[on the colour of the stone with which the Acropolis is constructed]: The nearest parallel to it in Nature that I can think of is that of the milder parts of a Stilton cheese into which port has been poured.

*The entertainment was confined to one pianist in Georgian peasant dress. We asked if there was to be no cabaret. 'Alas,' said the Manageress, 'not tonight. Last night there was a German gentleman here, and he bit the girls so terribly in the legs that tonight they say they will not dance.'

*The chief disability suffered by tortoises as racing animals is not their slowness so much as their confused sense of direction. I had exactly the same difficulty when I used to take part in sports at my school.

*I do not think I shall ever forget the sight of Etna at sunset; the mountain almost invisible in a blur of pastel grey, glowing on the top and then repeating its shape, as though reflected, in a wisp of grey smoke, with the whole horizon behind radiant with pink light, fading gently into a grey pastel sky. Nothing I have ever seen in Art or Nature was quite so revolting.

*There is very little to see or do in Malaga, though it is an agreeable, compact little town, smelling strongly of burnt olive oil and excrement.

*I will not say that I did not know any town could be so ugly as the town of Gibraltar; to say that would be to deny many bitter visits in the past to Colwyn Bay, Manchester, and Stratford on Avon.

Waugh sets out from the beginning of *Labels* to assure the reader of his honesty and plain-speaking; he cheerfully suggests that 'there are only two respectable reasons for reading a book written by someone else; one is that you are being paid to review it, and the other that you are continually meeting the author and it seems rude not to know about him.' Later, writing enviously of those wealthy enough to buy themselves homes on Corfu, he adds: 'Do let me urge you, gentle reader, if you have only borrowed this book from a library, to buy two or three copies instantly so that I can leave London and go and live peacefully on this island.'

As is often the case with Waugh, the whimsy is frequently accompanied by darker or bleaker sentiments. Sailing through the Dardanelles towards the Black Sea, a fellow-passenger asked him if he could perhaps envisage Masefield's quinquereemes from distant Ophir, with their cargoes of ivory, sandalwood, cedarwood and sweet white wine. 'I could not, but with a little more imagination I think I might easily have seen troopships, full of young Australians, going to their death with bare knees.'

Labels is a fine book, full of fine writing. I liked very much the lengthy portrait of Port Said; and will read again and again the account of a journey to the interior of Montenegro, and the description of Cetinje, the capital 'city' of its mountainous region, with its royal palace about the size of the rectory in an English village. 'Its largest room is occupied by a billiard table, which so far eclipsed the other concomitants of royalty in the eyes of the neighbouring highlanders that the palace became known, not as the house of the king, but as Billjarda, the house of the billiard table.' The party of tourists from the splendid motor yacht *Stella Polaris* received a suitably extravagant welcome from the Montenegrins. The city's only hotel had been destroyed by fire some time previously, so the official luncheon was served on trestle tables in the House of Parliament. 'It is only fair to say that this was no very serious degradation to the building, since even in the days of the kingdom it had combined a double office, being the legislature by day and the theatre

by night. Luncheon was very bad indeed, even though it was cooked in the office of the commissar of police; the wine was a dark-coloured local vintage, not red but not exactly black, the colour one's fountain pen makes when one dips it accidentally into the red inkpot; it was very sour and left a temporarily indelible stain on the tongue and teeth.'

Waugh's first biographer, his old friend Christopher Sykes, believes that there was still some uncertainty in Waugh's mind at this point as to what he would make of his life; he gives as corroboration a remark in *Labels* concerning an encounter in a Paris nightclub, where Evelyn is mistaken for his elder brother, Alec, who was at that time a far more widely-known author. Evelyn writes that he 'still regarded myself less as a writer than an out-of-work private schoolmaster.' This may be true, but it is equally true that, like all writers, Waugh was squirrelling away experiences for future exploitation in print. For instance, he notes in an aside in *Labels* that Montmartre contains many 'destitute Russians and Viennese, who are paid to sit there [in nightclubs] and look gay'. Two years later appeared his short story on the imagined origins of one of these Russian emigres, 'The Manager of the Kremlin.'

Douglas Dalrymple says

"I told him to drive me to the cathedral, but he took me instead to a house of evil character."

Waugh made a tour of the Mediterranean by ship in 1929 with noteworthy stops in Monaco, Naples, Sicily, Port Said, Cairo, Istanbul, Venice, Split, Algiers, Barcelona, and Gibraltar. All these places, or most of them at any rate, had been visited and visited, and written and written about, by just about every literate man, woman and child of the past hundred years. Everything, Waugh figured, had already been "labeled" (hence the title). And yet his travelogue is fresh, and funny, and full of unexpected glimpses. This is not one of his great novels. I doubt the young Waugh could have imagined anyone would be reading this travel book almost 90 years after its first publication, but *Labels* is a real pleasure.

trovateOrtensia says

Divertente e garbato resoconto di una crociera nel Mediterraneo, nel lontano 1928. Non amo in modo particolare lo humour inglese, ma Evelyn Waugh ne fornisce qui un esempio molto godibile e misurato, regalandoci un libro veramente piacevole di cui consiglio la lettura (anche in quanto testimonianza storica sugli albori del turismo organizzato).

"E io, girellando per quelle strade tranquille e assolate o dormicchiando all'ombra dei giardini del Casinò, riflettevo sul decreto del destino per cui i ricchi sono così rigidamente liturgici nei loro spostamenti da venire a Monte Carlo sotto la neve perché quello è il momento stabilito da rubriche e calendario per il loro arrivo, e da lasciarla appena essa diventa abitabile per riguadagnare le loro grandi, sporche e caotiche città nordiche; e su quanto poco i ricchi somiglino ai gigli dei campi, che non dividono il tempo con nessun sistema metrico, ma mettono lietamente i boccioli al primo accenno di primavera, e li perdono quasi subito al sopraggiungere del gelo."

Antonio Saras says

Algunas experiencias interesantes.

Mark Colenutt says

Not strictly a book on Spain as it touches other countries at the time. However, the great writer did visit Spain and left behind some surprisingly acute observation for such a short stint. For reason alone I recommend this publication to any Hispanophile keen to expand and compare their observations and learning of the country.

It is a gem of a book and its premise is masterly, namely to visit those countries in the Med that have already been 'labelled' as 'This' or 'That' and discover if such epithets are true or are in need of urgent revision. Make sure you get a copy of the original edition as the 1930s Art Deco styling adds beauty of design to what will inevitably be an equally pleasing experience lost in Waugh's use of language.

Amy says

Your fave is problematic. I adore Waugh - biting and bitchy, smart, funny, with quippy, agile prose. Having previously read only his fiction, where that peevish, acid eye is turned (mainly) on his peers, (and, obviously, with the remove of almost a century), I'd found his works delicious, or sad, or funny, but always impressive. Here, he achieves equally prodigious heights of dizzying racism, snobbery, and sexism. Paroxysms of bigotry! Classism of the highest order! Aside from the general repugnancy of those ways of thinking (of course, he's not alone in works of earlier periods), also damning is that his smug, too too bored tone comes off in the most affected, banal way. He's been outdone by hipsters. Almost in spite of himself, and his apparent effort to be blase in three continents, there are fascinating bits of travel detail.

Emmapettitt says

Amusing, interesting; has made me want to read more of his work.

Susan says

Published in 1930, "Labels" is Evelyn's Waugh first travel book, which was followed in 1931 by the more well known "Remote People." In both location and style, this is a more tentative – but certainly not a less enjoyable – book. Called "Labels" because all the places visited on his trip were fully labelled in travellers minds, it is obvious that Waugh is not off the beaten track. Indeed, he travels by train or on cruise ships, meets groups of tourists and often joins them on excursions. During this book he begins with a vague intention of visiting Russia, but never gets there. Instead he travels around Europe, the Middle East and

North Africa; going to Paris, Monte Carlo, Cairo, Cyprus, Malta and Barcelona, among other places.

These travels take place in 1929 and so this book is fascinating as an account of a long vanished world as much as being a record of Waugh's trips. He is a young man here, having published only one biography and one novel. At this time, his brother Alec was a far more successful writer than he was – indeed, he makes light of being mistaken for his brother by a woman he meets, but it surely rankled. His sharp humour is very much in evidence in this wonderful volume and he is full of sly observations. In Cairo, for instance, he is slightly overwhelmed by staying in a hotel so close to the pyramids. It is, he observes, “like having the Prince of Wales at the next table in a restaurant; one kept pretending not to notice, while all the time glancing furtively to see if they were still there.”

During this book, Waugh has a warm and chatty style; he is charming, charmed and open to new experiences. If you have enjoyed Waugh's more famous novels, then this will show you another side to the author as he just started out on his travels. Like all his books, it is a delight.

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

The only label I don't like/object to is the label “label”. Take the following For Instance ::

Radio DJ :: So tell us, What kind of music do you play?

Band Member :: We don't like to label our music. We just play what we feel.

Radio DJ :: But surely you can characterize your music. Is it Baroque or Romantic or Classical or Jazz or Be=Bop or Dixieland or Swing or Big Band or Soul or Blues or R&B or RockaBilly or Florida Death Metal or Gutenberg [sic!] Melodic Death Metal or Norwegian Black Metal or Cascadian Black Metal or Pirate Metal or Elevator Music or Punk or New Wave or Electronico or Industrial or WhatEverNewShitKidsHaveComeUpWithToday.

Band Member :: We just really don't like to label our music. We want everyone to make up their own mind.

Radio DJ :: But no one is going to give a fig about you if they don't have some preconception that you're even anywhere near to their ballpark of interests.

Band Member :: No but we just really don't believe in genre and labels and pigeonholes and things like that. I think when people hear what we play they'll all react in each their own unique way.

Radio DJ :: I've seen that happen. It's not pretty. You just might want to somehow characterize your music so that those folks who might potentially be interested in your shit might find it and folks who will *prima facie* hate it will avoid it and won't write a travesty of a review of it in the local Zines.

Band Member :: I see what you mean. Well, yeah, I guess you could say we play Primitivo=Industrio=Baroquo=Jazzified=Metalicalo=DubStep'd da gamba. Arranged for String Quartet.

Radio DJ :: You're an idiot .

Band Member :: No labels please .

B=side ::

"I listen to all=kinds/every=kind of music". "No you don't." ::

My C***'s on Fire. "That's not music." "Well, that's just your opinion." Etc.

Nigeyb says

Recently I have fully begun to appreciate the writing genius of Evelyn Waugh. I always realised he was good, but now I am starting to understand more fully his greatness. Throughout 2013 I have read, or reread, a number of his books, along with the splendid *Mad World: Evelyn Waugh and the Secrets of Brideshead* by Paula Byrne. Having read all of his fiction, bar *Sword of Honour*, which I am poised to start, I was keen to sample some of Evelyn Waugh's non-fiction.

I am delighted to report that "Labels" is every bit as good as his wonderful fiction. In "Labels", we join Evelyn Waugh on a trip around the Mediterranean in 1929: he travels from Europe to the middle east and north Africa. Waugh chose the name "Labels" for this, his first travel book, because he thought the places he visited were already "fully labelled" in people's minds. Despite this, he brings a fresh and entertaining perspective to all that he encounters. His pen captures the local colour and the amusing idiosyncrasies of being a tourist. The writing is a delight, and each page is full of fun, amusing anecdotes, and incident. Even when he is bored, he still manages to write about it entertainingly. I look forward to reading more of his travel books, and more of his non-fiction.

Three things particularly struck me about this book:

1. The style is very chatty, humorous and self-deprecating, which is completely as odds with his misanthropic reputation.
2. His innate snobbishness results in some outrageous humour. For example, the cruise ship on which Waugh travels, occasionally encounters another cruise ship favoured by German tourists. He describes this ship as "vulgar" with inhabitants who are all "unbelievably ugly Germans" albeit "dressed with great courage and enterprise e.g. One man wearing a morning coat, white trousers and a beret".
3. By focussing on various minor details of his travels, Waugh provides the modern reader with all kinds of fascinating insights into tourism and travel in 1929. For example, the book starts with Waugh taking a flight to Paris - he was one of only two passengers in a tiny plane, and this mode of transport was very new and unusual at the time. His detailed description of the experience is very informative about the early years of air passenger travel.

A very enjoyable read and, at a mere 174 pages, pleasingly quick and easy to read.

