

untraditional interpretation of classical philosophy given by Strauss. The only Western tradition that neoconservatives want to defend is the Enlightenment. In recent years, they have wanted to advance it in the rest of the world with the establishment of a kind of American empire. This is not a conservative project but a radical and revolutionary one.

The true defenders of the Western traditions will be the traditional conservatives. They are able to recognize that the central and crucial tradition of Western civilization is the Christian tradition, which has carried on the best elements of the classical tradition, while subordinating them to a higher Biblical truth. Christianity, in other words, kept the other Western traditions in balance. Perhaps in our time it is the calling of those few traditional conservatives found within the educated elite to reach out to the large numbers of Christians within the wider population, to help deepen their understanding of the major issues before us, and to give voice to their Christian — and Western — convictions.

The protagonists of the contemporary version of the Enlightenment may think that they will create a universal civilization, both abroad and at home, but the evidence is accumulating that they have instead opened the doors to the barbarians, both without (e.g., Islamic terrorists) and within (e.g., pagan disregard for human life).

The best defense against the new barbarians will be found in the Christian religion, for with it, Western civilization became the most creative, indeed the highest, civilization in human history. With a revival of the Christian tradition, Western civilization would not only prevail over the new barbarians, but it would become more truly civilized. ■

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The White House is facing criticism from Congress, Britain, and Pakistan for leaking the identity of al-Qaeda computer expert Mohammad Nur Khan.

Khan was co-operating with the Pakistanis and the CIA in secret sting operations against al-Qaeda until his name surfaced in the *New York Times*. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice's office is believed to be responsible for the leak, having inexplicably given Khan's name to a journalist as "background." Khan was immediately removed to a safe location to protect him from possible reprisals. Subsequent arrests in London appear to have been staged to protect the identity of a British-controlled al-Qaeda source in contact with Khan. The media exposure forced the British hand and disrupted a successful ongoing operation. New intelligence indicators suggest al-Qaeda has "gone to ground" as a result of the Pakistani arrests, the British roundups, and the widespread publicity surrounding potential targets in the United States.



The Bush administration is taking largely cosmetic steps to control the borders with Mexico and Canada.

Up until now, illegal immigrants have been able to appeal deportation to an immigration judge, a process that can take up to a year. The Department of Homeland Security has now given border patrol agents the power to deport the immigrants without any legal review. The new rules will apply to any illegal immigrants detected within 100 miles of the border and will permit deportation within a few days. Many critics in Congress have demanded that the borders be controlled and have wondered why little has been done so long after 9/11. But even the new rules have a huge loophole: Mexicans and Canadians will be exempt from the procedure and will still be able to use the immigration courts. As Mexicans constitute the majority of illegal immigrants, the new policy might be regarded as a carefully crafted attempt to lock the front door publicly while the back door stays wide open.



The appointment of Congressman Porter Goss as CIA Director is controversial because of his reputation as a partisan supporter of the president and his resistance to meaningful reform.

Goss served as a CIA Clandestine Services officer in Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic from 1962 until 1971. He was also involved in the Bay of Pigs Operation, working out of Miami with Cuban exiles. In 1970, he was posted to London where he became ill with a blood infection that he had acquired while in Haiti. He resigned from the agency in 1971 because of his health and began his political career in his adopted state, Florida. Goss's career in the agency and his service as chairman of the House Intelligence Committee for the past seven years give him a great body of experience to draw on but may also blind him to the cultural problems that have made the CIA ineffective. As he lacks any real political stature, it will be easy for the White House to manipulate him, which may be why he was selected. ■

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Arts & Letters

FILM

[Bright Young Things]

A Tale of Waugh

By Steve Sailer

ON PAPER, the English wit Stephen Fry's directorial debut "Bright Young Things"—his adaptation of *Vile Bodies*, Evelyn Waugh's grating satire of café society—sounded like one of the least promising films of the year.

While authors repetitively deplore the movie industry's philistinism, the reality is that decision-makers in the film business are suckers for prestigious literature, even though the best source novels for movies are clearly page-turning best-sellers that are longer on plot and character than aesthetic ambition, such as *Gone With the Wind* and *The Godfather*. In contrast, books renowned for their superb sentences usually flounder on screen because nobody knows how to film a prose style. Director John Huston, for instance, made numerous literary monuments such as *Moby Dick* and *The Red Badge of Courage* into forgettable movies, but his most enduring classics are based on the genre novels *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*, and *The African Queen*.

During his own lifetime, Waugh's reputation hardly exceeded that of Jay McInerney's today, but eventually the zeal of conservatives such as William F. Buckley, Tom Wolfe, and Tom Stoppard succeeded in "expanding the canon" to include Waugh. Over the last two years,

for example, Waugh has been mentioned in the *Atlantic Monthly* as often as Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald combined. (And how many good movies have been based on their books?)

Even more ominous than Waugh's deservedly high artistic standing, *Vile Bodies* gives me a pain every time I reread it. It's the prototypical second novel. A young novelist mines his entire quarter century or so of life for his successful first book (in Waugh's case, the delightful *Decline and Fall*). Then, when it's time to write another, he finds he doesn't have any new experiences to draw upon other than all those snazzy but soul-sapping parties he's attended since he first surfaced in the media.

Waugh's version is particularly sick-making, as the daft debutante Agatha Runcible would say in the argot that became a fad when *Vile Bodies* hit the 1930 bestseller list. Waugh's bride, the "She-Evelyn," cuckolded him while he was off writing the first draft. Then an agnostic, without the consolations of the Catholicism to which he would convert the following year, Waugh's rage embittered his revisions.

Vile Bodies is also Waugh's most experimental novel, an attempt to further the modernist trend toward showing rather than telling that he detected in the otherwise incommensurable works of the two-fisted Hemingway and the fey Ronald Firbank. With long swaths of dialogue separated by brief, uninflected narration, *Vile Bodies* reads like a screenplay, and nobody reads screenplays if he doesn't have to.

Nonetheless, the brilliance of Waugh's ear for spoken idioms has made *Vile Bodies* a steady seller for three quarters of a century. Those conversations help make watching "Bright Young Things"

far more satisfying than reading *Vile Bodies*. Although Fry's ensemble comedy (which opens Aug. 20 in New York) is rather slight, no film rendition of a major novelist's work has been this much more fun than the original book since Bogie and Bacall steamed up Hemingway's embarrassing *To Have and Have Not*.

For example, Peter O'Toole delivers a howlingly funny cameo performance as a passive-aggressive eccentric, one as striking as John Gielgud's similar role as Jeremy Irons's slyly mad father in the famous miniseries of Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. I went home sure that Fry had penned some new jokes because the character is so much funnier than I recalled. Upon checking the novel, however, I found that Mr. O'Toole, being a much better reader of dialogue than I am, had only drawn out hilarity that I'd never noticed.

Fry, though, is wisely unafraid to make substantial changes, even replacing Waugh's bleak conclusion with a complicated happy ending reminiscent of the contrivance the older and less distraught Waugh used in his 1938 masterpiece *Scoop*.

Fry apprenticed for this job by starring as P.G. Wodehouse's peerless butler in the early 1990s British TV series "Jeeves and Wooster," which may be the most gratifying adaptation of great prose I've ever seen. Screenwriter Clive Exton fearlessly rewrote Wodehouse's plots and the directors used vibrant music and editing to stand in for Wodehouse's unparalleled narration.

Similarly, Fry's film looks and sounds superb for a first-time director. Moreover, in contrast to the 11-hour "Brideshead" miniseries, Fry zips through the 320 pages of *Vile Bodies* in 106 often-dazzling minutes. ■