

Professor Bracy BERSNAK

Christendom College

The Conservative Sensibility of Evelyn Waugh

Alan Watkins famously said that the Young Fogey conservative is a “scholar of Evelyn Waugh,” who admires Waugh’s cranky, reactionary posture toward modern culture. But conservatives should read Waugh for matters of substance as well as style, for three reasons. First, Waugh’s depiction of the British country estate exemplifies oikophilia, the love of home. Protagonists in his novels who leave their homes for adventures abroad often suffer for it. Modernist architecture and urban development are shown to be the enemies of beauty, bringing sorrow to their inhabitants. Second, he satirized progressive criminal justice reforms and what later became known as the “culture of death.” Satire may be the best way to subvert contemporary wokeness. Third, Waugh’s writings show the limits of romanticism. Characters with romantic illusions almost always come to grief. His last novel suggests that conservatives who are ill at ease in the modern world can find redemption and peace by embracing the mundane pleasures of everyday life.

Keywords: oikophilia, aesthetics, satire, culture of death, romanticism