

journals and unpublished materials, and he is always agile in controlling the disparate sources. When he turns to the human consequences of his characters' decisions to stand apart, the book even manages an effect rarely associated with academic criticism these days: it becomes moving.

—James M. Morris

WILL THIS DO?:

An Autobiography.

By Auberon Waugh. Carroll & Graf. 288 pp. \$24

Each week in London's *Spectator* and *Sunday Telegraph*, 59-year-old Auberon Waugh writes battle dispatches from the losing side of the class war, praising such vanishing upper-class folkways as fox hunting, ethnic slurs, and drunk driving. The author of five novels, he appears frequently as a television pundit, edits the monthly *Literary Review*, and writes regularly on wine. But his own writing has not proved a vintage that travels well. While Waugh is among the best-known right-wing men of letters in Britain, foreigners know him, if at all, only as the eldest son of novelist Evelyn Waugh (1903–1966).

“Being the son of Evelyn Waugh was a considerable advantage in life,” Waugh notes, with some overstatement. For all of Evelyn's friends who helped Auberon (John Betjeman, Graham Greene), there were plenty of others who stood in his way (Anthony Powell, Cyril Connolly). Evelyn himself had little interest in family life, taking meals alone in the library when his children were home from boarding school, and, “with undisguised glee,” holding lavish parties to celebrate their departures. When rationing was lifted just after World War II, the government promised every child in Britain a banana—a legendary treat. Neither Auberon nor his two sisters had ever eaten one. On the evening the three bananas arrived, his mother placed all of them before Evelyn, who wolfed them down with cream and (heavily rationed) sugar. “From that moment,” Auberon writes, “I never treated anything he had to say on faith or morals very seriously.”

Other than the occasional adventure (serving with the Royal Horse Guards in Cyprus, he mishandled a machine gun and shot himself six times), this autobiography largely chronicles Waugh's free-lance

assignments in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. It is sometimes enlivened by blow-by-blow accounts of libel suits and literary feuds, and there are humorous moments. Invited to Senegal to speak on breast-feeding, Waugh discovers after weeks of research that the invitation had been misheard; the subject of his talk was to be not breast-feeding but press freedom. Because the speech was to be in French, Waugh could not even describe the misunderstanding to his audience, “since ‘*la liberté de la Presse*’ bears no resemblance to ‘*le nourrisson naturel des bébés.*’”

Slapped together out of the 1991 English edition, the book is full of anachronisms—not just dead people referred to in the present tense, but thematic anachronisms as well. Here, as in his columns, the British class system obsesses Waugh. *Will This Do?* catalogues, ad nauseam, his and his friends' houses and pedigrees, and laments the shiftiness of the working classes. The near-decade since the book first appeared has seen the rise of televised politics and the collapse of the Tory Party, changes that have corroded the class system in ways no workers' party could ever have dreamed of. The world Waugh lovingly chronicles here not only holds little appeal for the American reader; it's of waning relevance in Britain too.

—Christopher Caldwell

**THE DREAMS OUR STUFF IS
MADE OF: *How Science Fiction
Conquered the World.***

By Thomas M. Disch. Free Press.
272 pp. \$25

In the late 1960s, science fiction was divided into two warring camps. The Old Wave wanted the genre to continue following the traditions established by Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and Arthur C. Clarke, depicting scientific advances and their human consequences. The New Wave, by contrast, wanted SF (which they maintained stood for “speculative fiction”) to raise its standards and aspire to become avant-garde literature. The Old Wave stressed *science*; the New Wave stressed *fiction*.

Thirty years later, it's hard to tell who won. The best writers—such as Gregory Benford, Kim Stanley Robinson, and Stephen Baxter—produce high-quality fiction that's scientifically accurate, satisfying