



EVELYN  
WAUGH

# A Handful of Dust

"A vicious, witty novel." - New York Times

## Resumo de A Handful of Dust

"All over England people were waking up, queasy and despondent." Few writers have walked the line between farce and tragedy as nimbly as Evelyn Waugh, who employed the conventions of the comic novel to chip away at the already crumbling English class system.

His 1934 novel, *A Handful of Dust*, is a sublime example of his bleak satirical style: a mordantly funny exposé of aristocratic decadence and ennui in England between the wars.

Tony Last is an aristocrat whose attachment to an ideal feudal past is so profound that he is blind to his wife Brenda's boredom with the stately rhythms of country life.

While he earnestly plays the lord of the manor in his ghastly Victorian Gothic pile, she sets herself up in a London flat and pursues an affair with the social-climbing idler John Beaver.

In the first half of the novel Waugh fearlessly anatomizes the lifestyles of the rich and shameless. Everyone moves through an endless cycle of parties and country-house weekends, being scrupulously polite in public and utterly horrid in private.

Sex is something one does to relieve the boredom, and Brenda's affair provides a welcome subject for conversation: It had been an autumn of very sparse and meagre romance; only the most obvious people had parted or come together, and Brenda was filling a want long felt by those whose simple, vicarious pleasure it was to discuss the subject in bed over the telephone.

Tony's indifference and Brenda's selfishness give their relationship a sort of equilibrium until tragedy forces them to face facts. The collapse of their relationship accelerates, and in the famous final section of the book Tony seeks solace in a foolhardy search for El Dorado, throwing himself on the mercy of a jungle only slightly more savage than the one he leaves behind in England.

For all its biting wit, *A Handful of Dust* paints a bleak picture of the English upper classes, reaching beyond satire toward a very modern sense of despair. In Waugh's world, culture, breeding, and the trappings of civilization only provide more subtle means of destruction.

--Simon Leake

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