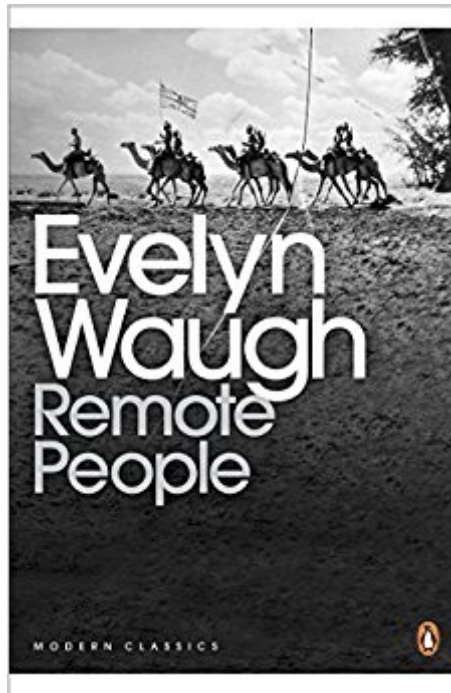




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# Modern Classics Remote People (Penguin Modern Classics)



## Synopsis

Perhaps the funniest travel book ever written, *Remote People* begins with a vivid account of the coronation of Emperor Ras Tafari - Haile Selassie I, King of Kings - an event covered by Evelyn Waugh in 1930 as special correspondent for *The Times*. It continues with subsequent travels throughout Africa, where natives rub shoulders with eccentric expatriates, settlers with Arab traders and dignitaries with monks. Interspersed with these colourful tales are three 'nightmares' which describe the vexations of travel, including returning home.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Evelyn Waugh was born in Hampstead in 1903 and educated at Hertford College, Oxford. In 1928 he published his first novel, *Decline and Fall*, which was soon followed by *Vile Bodies*, *Black Mischief* (1932), *A Handful of Dust* (1934) and *Scoop* (1938). During these years he also travelled extensively and converted to Catholicism. In 1939 Waugh was commissioned in the Royal Marines and later transferred to the Royal Horse Guards, experiences which informed his *Sword of Honour* trilogy (1952-61). His most famous novel, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), was written while on leave from the army. Waugh died in 1966.

These Penguin Classic Waugh are beautiful books. Nicely printed on excellent paper and well bound. They seem to contain most recent edits. Much preferred to my decaying 1970s paperbacks.

Evelyn Waugh compares his 1930 trip to Abyssinia to cover Haile Salessie's coronation to 'Alice in Wonderland', but there's something 'Brigadoon' about his whole journey to alien Africa, where intolerable heat, unreliable timetables and capricious inhabitants seem eminently preferable to the noisy social inanity back in England, so familiar to us from his classic comic novels. Waugh divides his African travel book into two sections (one dealing with the Abyssinian trip, the other with an extended tour through Zanzibar, Kenya, Uganda, the Congo and South Africa), and three nightmares, vividly detailing the various, accumulative problems that beset the traveller, such as unhelpful officials and lousy food. Waugh is a much more sympathetic voyager than the more heroic likes of Chatwin or Raban - his whining about lack of bath water or pesky mosquitos is more refreshing than some writers' spiritual journeys. Despite his attempts at objectivity, 'Remote people' is written, as we might expect, from a very jaundiced viewpoint. Waugh's experiences aren't really 'Alice' at all, simply a concatenation of minor mishaps, local eccentricities and cultural differences in very poor countries that only a very insulated Englishman would blow up and find surreal. Some of Waugh's ill-advised political theorising, especially his unconvincing defence of the notorious white settlers in Kenya's Happy Valley, make for distinctly uncomfortable reading, although one is grateful for Waugh's evident and lucid integrity to his own beliefs. It is surprising in a book of 1931 to see how many of the issues raised by post-colonial theory were already being painfully argued about. Of course, we don't read Waugh for politics or sympathy to foreigners. Although written in a more descriptive, less dialogue-driven style than the novels, we find the same account of bewildered, uprooted Modern Man faced with the problems (and comedy) of the simple fact of other people (American professors absurdly reverent of Ethiopian religious practice; Seventh Day Adventists prone to seasickness; colonial magnates encouraging staff and guests to climb life-threatening volcanos etc.). The travelogue is less interesting than the rich set-pieces - the Abyssinian coronation; the bathetic trip to an ancient monastery; a rooftop cinema where the audience wilt sleepily in the sun; the efforts of native scouts to light a fire; a berserk ship journey down river with the captain trying to shoot game from his cabin, his passengers leaping off to search for any hits.

This book is fantastic! It covers Waugh's journey to see the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie in the 1930s, then his long and tough trip to get back home to England afterwards. Evelyn describes the journey vividly and tells a range of amusing travel anecdotes. The only shame is that he did not visit more of Ethiopia..

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