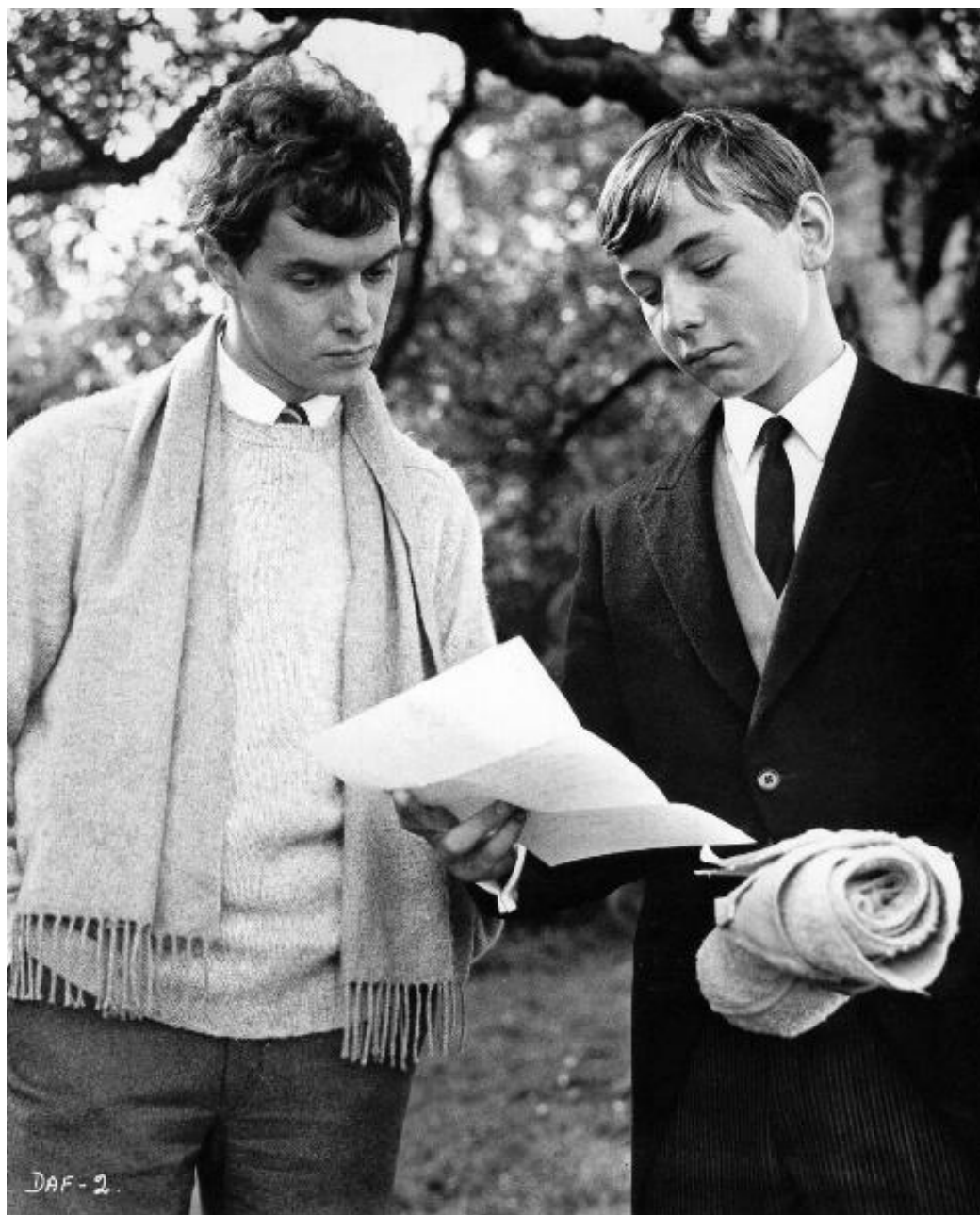


Decline and Fall... of a Birdwatcher!

UK : 1968 : dir. John Krish : 20th Century Fox : 113 min
prod: Ivan Foxwell : scr: Ivan Foxwell : dir.ph.: Desmond Dickinson
[David McAlister](#); [Michael Newport](#)
Robin Phillips; Felix Aylmer; Colin Blakely; Robert Harris; Griffith Jones; Patrick Magee;
Leo McKern; Genevieve Page; Paul Rogers; Donald Sinden; Donald Wolfitt; Patience Collier;
Joan Sterndale Bennett; Helen Christie; Jonathan Collins; Michael Elwyn; Clifton Jones;
Lee Menzies; Jack Watson

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ ≠ Z ∞	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
2375a	3½	10	1	1,227	- - - - -	No	Unseen



Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
1996 review:

"Uneven, often laboured satirical farce about a young man who joins the faculty of a strange boys' school and becomes involved with a manipulative older woman (Page). Adapted from Evelyn Waugh's novel. ** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review - identical to above, adding:

"Adapted from Evelyn Waugh's sharp novel about English morals and customs."

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"An innocent, accident-prone Oxford undergraduate is expelled and after various adventures in high and low society is convicted as a white slaver. Flabby, doomed attempt to film a satirical classic which lives only on the printed page. Odd moments amuse. Scr: Ivan Foxwell, from the novel by Evelyn Waugh."

"The British **"GRADUATE"**" - **New Yorker**

"Literate, lavishly furnished, tastefully faithful"
- **Observer**

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"Anyone who thinks that Evelyn Waugh's novel needs this new soubriquet probably deserves this travesty, now set in the swinging London of the '60s. The plot is followed faithfully enough but where in Waugh the odyssey of Paul Pennyfeather consists of the curious and unexpected, *Candide* in a dream, the movie is so bizarre that nothing surprises. It's not civilised irony but anything for a laugh.

And the characters have become grotesques: Donald Wolfit, Colin Blakely, Robert Harris, Leo McKern as the schoolmasters; Paul Rogers, Kenneth J Warren, Patrick Magee, Donald Sinden in the prison sequences; Patience Collier, Felix Aylmer, Griffith Jones and Kenneth Griffith elsewhere. Genevieve Page is miscast as Mrs Best-Chetwynde, and Robin Phillips, who played Paul, gave up acting for direction almost immediately afterwards."

Movies on TV (1987) review:

"This adaptation of one of Evelyn Waugh's biting satires on English manners and mores begins well as the callow hero (Phillips) gets a position at a weirdly run boys' school. Thereafter the fun runs downhill quickly. ** "

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"By avoiding doing Waugh's novel in its only possible setting, the twenties, John Krish has thrown away most of the chance to make this progress towards enlightenment work. What's left is a rather ordinary tale, not more than competently acted by Robin Phillips and Genevieve Page, and allowing too much indulgence to Donald Wolfit and Leo McKern. 7 "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Rather softened adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's first novel satirising the mores of decadent wealthy Britain, with Phillips as the innocent undergraduate being sent down from Oxford and suffering a sentimental education (while teaching in a seedy Welsh boarding school) at the hands of various darkly comic characters. Faithful to the letter if not quite the spirit of Waugh (it lacks the novel's bite, and is also unwisely updated), it's nevertheless endowed with strong performances all round and civilised, if literary, direction by Krish."

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"In spite of the general impossibility of transferring Evelyn Waugh from page to screen (remember **"THE LOVED ONE"**?), this starts out promisingly. However, despite a splendid supporting cast, which includes Donald Wolfit, things go downhill mainly because nobody had the faith or sense to leave a comedy classic as originally written. ** "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"This humorous and elegantly-confectioned adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's first (1928) literary success makes for a witty bundle of entertainment for discriminating audiences in

search of tongue-in-cheek entertainment. Writer-producer Ivan Foxwell has opted for a lightweight, spoofy approach to the Waugh story, with the result that everything is played one stop further out than normal.

Consequently, some of the story's absurdities become almost acceptable in the context. Pace is sprightly as we follow Paul Pennyfeather, the schoolboy who becomes teacher, then foil for a dazzling white slaver, then jailbird until his final rebirth as, literally, a different man. Robin Phillips, in his first pic role, is excellent as the scapegoat predestined to a bittersweet fate. Genevieve Page is elegant and alluring as ever¹ in another tailor-cast role as the source of most of Paul's troubles. John Krish's direction helps underline the spoofish plot elements."

The Films of 20th Century Fox - a Pictorial History review:

"A satire on British manners and mores, with a very misleading title, based on the book by Evelyn Waugh. The central character is an Oxford student (Robin Phillips), who is constantly shocked by the excesses of the titled and moneyed classes. He is later hired as a tutor by a lady (Genevieve Page) for her wayward son, but he falls in love with his employer, which leads to his being imprisoned because of her involvement in crime. She manages to get him out and the boy is left to continue life, having been exposed to all kinds of perversions and corruptions and temptations². The film is a high-styled farce, which requires some knowledge and interest in the level of English society it mercilessly lampoons."

Note on reverse of publicity still (DAF2) overleaf:

"Peter Beste-Chetwynde (David McAlister) tells Paul (Robin Phillips) that he has received a letter from his mother inviting Paul to their home for the holidays. The satirical comedy **"DECLINE AND FALL OF A BIRD-WATCHER"** is produced by Ivan Foxwell and directed by John Krish. It is based on Evelyn Waugh's classic novel "Decline and Fall". The film stars: Felix Aylmer, Colin Blakely, Robert Harris... and new comer Robin Phillips, It is filmed in De Luxe colour."

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

¹ *alluring to whom?*

² *where was he imprisoned? Conservative Party headquarters?*

1968 was the year of "**if...**", so perhaps it isn't surprising if this title sank without trace in the face of such competition. Lindsay Anderson's film, released coincidentally at the time of the Paris student uprising, seemed uncannily prophetic [at a premiere screening, Anderson told the audience "the rest is up to you.."], and another concurrent satire on British class manners, but with its teeth filed down, would have been, in Idi Amin's immortal phrase, "surplus to requirement". Michael Newport, here 16, was fortunate enough to appear in both films. The same year also saw him cast as Jim Hawkins in a BBC serialisation of "**Treasure Island**", but he retired from acting after "**MISCHIEF**" in 1969. Nothing further is known of David McAlister.

If anything, (despite the boarding school background) this title probably has more in common with Anderson's follow-up film to "**if...**" - "**O LUCKY MAN!**" (73), or with Peter O'Toole's "**THE RULING CLASS**" (72). Alas, the camp, over-ripe style of late-60s humour, which it seems afflicted this production, and such celluloid abortions as "**CAN HIERONYMOUS MERKIN EVER FORGET MERCY HUMPPE AND FIND TRUE HAPPINESS?**" (69), dated faster than Beatle haircuts, and only served to anaesthetise audiences against such darts as the film set out to fire. Savage irony is best *sotto voce*.

See subject index under **BOARDING SCHOOL / PUBLIC SCHOOL**.