

**Happiness Doesn't Seem to Have Much to Do With It**  
**– The Catholic Faith in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited***

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Tutkielmani aiheena on katolisuus Evelyn Waugh:n romaanissa *Brideshead Revisited* (1945, suom. Mennyt maailma). Lähtökohtana tutkimukselleni oli ihmetys siitä, että kyseistä teosta pidetään yleisesti katolista uskoa puolustavana ns. katolisena romaanina, kun taas oman tulkintani mukaan katolisuus esitetään tässä romaanissa enimmäkseen negatiivisena. Näkökulmani on agnostinen/evangelisluterilainen. Tarkoitukseni oli myös selvittää onko tässä romaanissa piirteitä muista kirjallisuuden lajityypeistä – esimerkkeinä "Künstlerroman" ja "gay literature". Analysoin myös muita romaanissa olevia teemoja kuten alkoholismia ja taiteilijuutta. Aluksi tarkastelen katolista romaania lajityyppinä. Erittelen myös joitakin roomalaiskatolisia opinkappaleita verraten niitä mm. luterilaisuuteen. Poikkeavuutta ilmenee mm. pyhimysopissa ja sakramenteissa.

Analysoin sitä millaisena katolisuus näyttäytyy nykylukijalle romaanihenkilöiden kautta työkaluinani käsitteet "negatiivinen" ja "positiivinen" katolisuus, joita Annette Wirth on käyttänyt *Brideshead Revisited* –tutkimuksessaan. Romaanihenkilöt Lady Marchmain ja hänen vanhin poikansa Lord Brideshead on usein tulkittu dogmaattisiksi ja tekopyhäksi katolisiksi. He vaikuttavatkin monin tavoin manipulatiivisesti muihin perheenjäseniinsä, jotka pyristelevät toisaalta maallisten intohimojensa ja toisaalta katolisen omatuntonsa vaatimusten välillä. Etenkin nuorin poika Sebastian kärsii äitinsä ankaruudesta ja ajautuu alkoholismiin. Yhden katolisen tulkinnan mukaan pahasti alkoholisoitunut Sebastian päätyy pyhäksi olennoksi luostarin porteille, toiset katoliset näkevät hänen saavan rangaistuksen synneistään. Maallisemman tulkinnan – ja myös oman tulkintani mukaan – hän päätyy sairaaksi ja rakkaudessa pettyneeksi ihmisraunioksi, joka olisi voinut olla onnellinen ilman äitinsä istuttamaa katolista syyllisyydentunnetta. Julia-tytär puolestaan kokee syyllisyyttä "syntisestä" avioliitostaan eronneen miehen kanssa. Positiivista katolisuutta – eli kristillisyyden henkeä – edustavat mielestäni nuorin tytär Cordelia sekä lähes perheenjäsen, iäkäs lastenhoitaja Nanny Hawkins.

Käsittelen myös kertojaminä Charles Ryderin taiteilijuutta ja hänen suhteitaan Sebastianiin ja tämän sisareen Juliaan. Rakkaus Charlesiin lisää Julian syyllisyyttä, ja suhde kariutuu Julian uudelleenkäyntymykseen isänsä kuolinvuoteen äärellä. Viimeistä voiteltua saava Lord Marchmain tekee voipuneen ristinmerkin, vaikka on aiemmin ollut kiihkeä katolisen kirkon vastustaja. Waugh itse tarkoitti kuolinvuodekohtauksen ihmeeksi, joka käännyttää agnostikko Charlesin. Mielestäni tämä tulkinta on yksipuolinen, ja sen vuoksi pohdin kirjallisuudessa esiintyvän uskonnollisen ihmeen problematiikkaa eri näkökulmilta.

Avainsanat: katolisuus, katolinen romaani, alkoholismi, gay literature, Künstlerroman, nostalgia

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## 1. Introduction

The main theme of Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* is theological.

According to Waugh, this novel attempts to trace the workings of the Divine purpose in a pagan world, in the lives of an English Catholic family, half-paganized themselves, in the world of 1923-1939.<sup>1</sup> The story is told by Captain Charles Ryder, the narrator of the novel, who begins as an agnostic but finally converts into Catholicism influenced by the charming Catholic Marchmain family.

*Brideshead Revisited* was first published in 1945. Originally a member of the Protestant Anglican church, Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966) had converted into Catholicism at the age of twenty-seven in 1930. *Brideshead Revisited* was his first novel with a distinctive Catholic theme, and that may be one of the reasons why it was received with mixed reviews. Many readers and critics were confused because Evelyn Waugh had been known as a satirist before the publication of this nostalgic and melancholic, some might say even pessimistic novel.

### 1.1. Catholicism as a Problem in *Brideshead Revisited*

Some critics, among them Edmund Wilson, abhorred and disbelieved the Catholic theme.<sup>2</sup> Waugh was accused of elitist Catholicism, restricting the salvation for the aristocratic members of the society and despising the 'common man'. Edmund Wilson's assaults against the novel set the tone and established the major issues for the following

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Murray Davis, *Brideshead Revisited: The Past Redeemed* (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1990) 13

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Hynes, "Two Affairs Revisited". *Twentieth Century Literature*. Vol. 33, No. 2, Summer 1987, p. 252

four decades of criticism.<sup>3</sup> Many secular critics deplored the introduction or intrusion of religion into a novel of contemporary life.<sup>4</sup> However, according to Martin Stannard, there were also positive critics, particularly among the “Catholic intelligentsia” that included among others Christopher Hollis, Douglas Woodruff, Christopher Sykes, F.J. Stopp, Graham Greene, Anthony Burgess and several literary priests. Stannard points out that these critics shared Waugh’s mystical approach which ultimately abjured rationalist argument, but they too sometimes found Waugh’s social prejudice after the Second World War too strong.<sup>5</sup> Waugh was generally known as distrusting everything modern.

When I first read *Brideshead Revisited* over twenty years ago, I thought the novel was against Catholicism - and indeed religion in all its forms. Many years later I was surprised to learn that Waugh had been a fervent Catholic and that the theme of *Brideshead Revisited* was religious, quite contrary to what I had concluded. I reread the novel in order to find positive attitude towards Catholicism, but despite being older, I still ended up with a feeling of resentment towards the effects of religion to the fate of the characters in the novel. I could not find the ending in the least hopeful, in my opinion Charles Ryder was left disappointed and disillusioned and his conversion was therefore not convincing; his faith seemed to have been a mere substitute for his lost youth, artistic inspiration and the loves of his life.

Because the novel is written in such an eloquent style and with a beauty of language that its motives remain somewhat hidden – at least for a non-Catholic like me – I decided to take a closer look into the different aspects of the Catholicism portrayed to the reader of this novel. Of course the society and moral values of the Britain of the 1940’s were very

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<sup>3</sup> Davis, 14

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>5</sup> Martin Stannard (Editor), Mid Twentieth Century Novelists : Evelyn Waugh (London: Routledge, 1997) 6

different from those of today's western world. This may be the reason why many contemporary readers tend to misunderstand the theme of the novel. Waugh himself assumed that Americans would not understand the religious intention behind his writing. His attitude towards Americans was somewhat condescending, apparently he did not have a very high opinion of their intelligence.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the novel was a huge success in the United States among readers of all ages and classes as well as in England.<sup>7</sup> Partly this may be due to the glamour and nostalgia that are not lacking in *Brideshead Revisited*. Some critics condemned the novel as superficial on the basis of this.

However, besides aristocratic charm and religion, *Brideshead Revisited* contains several other themes and opens up to other possible readings. It could be read as a social satire or as a Bildungsroman or a Künstlerroman<sup>8</sup> of Charles Ryder who is a lonely upper-middle-class boy growing up with his indifferent and cynical father, and later falls in love with a charming aristocratic family, becomes a painter, loses his inspiration and ends up a Captain in the war, trying to find some small consolation in an apparently unsatisfactory conversion to Catholicism. *Brideshead Revisited* could also be read as a bittersweet reminiscence of a (homosexual) friendship/love affair between Charles and Lord Sebastian Flyte which ends

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Sykes records Waugh's behaviour at a dinner party, where an American theatrical producer and his wife were present. The producer's wife says that she has just been reading Waugh's new book *Brideshead Revisited*, and she thinks it one of the best books she has ever read. To this Waugh replied: "I thought it was good myself, but now that I know that a vulgar, common American woman like yourself admires it, I am not so sure". (Paul Fussell Jr.: *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars*: Cary: Oxford University Press, 1982. p.185)

<sup>7</sup> Davis, 9

<sup>8</sup> Künstlerroman (German: "artist's novel") is a class of Bildungsroman or apprenticeship novel, that deals with the youth and development of an individual who becomes – or is about to become – a painter, musician or poet. The type originated in the period of German romanticism with Ludwig Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1798). Bildungsroman is a class of novel in German literature which deals with the formative years of an individual. The protagonist of a Bildungsroman usually dreams of becoming a great artist but settles for being a mere useful citizen, while a Künstlerroman usually ends on a note of arrogant rejection of the commonplace life. The most famous example of a Künstlerroman in English literature is James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) / "Künstlerroman." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2008. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. 30 March 2008 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9046445>.

in the desperation of Sebastian's alcoholism. This novel is also a tragic love story, in which the Catholic religion features as the obstacle to a happy ending of the romance between Charles Ryder and Lady Julia Flyte, Sebastian's sister. In this respect, *Brideshead Revisited* tells a story of a love triangle.

The novel is also a description of the social changes in Britain, which took place before and during the Second World War. These changes concerned most poignantly the upper classes, and Evelyn Waugh defended the traditional values of British aristocracy. As I pointed out before, he despised the advance of modernity in all fields of life, from architecture to the advance of the common man. Because of this, Waugh was accused of conservatism.<sup>9</sup>

The novel was written during the Second World War when Waugh's fears of the total loss of the values that he respected were even more pronounced than necessary, and he has later admitted that his worst fears were not realized after all, and consequently, his pessimistic attitude towards the advance of the lower classes softened a little in his later years. Although *Brideshead Revisited* has been criticized of snobbery, and Waugh condemned as a reactionary, I found the attitudes in the novel much more diverse. Certainly it would be an oversimplification to claim that Waugh admired the members of the upper classes unconditionally or that he offhandedly despised the lower ones. On the contrary, I found a great deal of satirical criticism and even hostile attitudes towards some upper-class characters in this novel, (which I assume were the attitudes of Waugh through the narration of Charles Ryder).

As I stated above, it is possible to find more than one interpretation of *Brideshead Revisited*. According to Susanna Itäkare, since the day of its publication, there has been an

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<sup>9</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel 1878-2001* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 235-236

ongoing argument among readers and scholars about the different interpretations, and the very value of the novel.<sup>10</sup> She states that today there are two roughly defined main genres into which *Brideshead Revisited* is categorized: either it is seen as a Great English Catholic Classic, or as a classic of gay literature<sup>11</sup>, where the emphasis is put on the homoerotic relationship between Charles and Sebastian. These two readings are suspicious of each other, and there have rarely been attempts to combine them.<sup>12</sup>

In this thesis, I will concentrate mainly on the Catholic theme:

- 1) I will try to find out what kind of faith the main characters practise and what motivates their actions. Are they simply being dogmatic and hypocritical, or do they appear to the reader as persons who practise Christianity which is traditionally seen as forgiving and expressing its love for humankind in charitable deeds? Does the Catholicism of *Brideshead Revisited* represent the exclusive, elitist or egoistical brand of religion? How important is it to avoid committing sin for the characters of this novel, or does the regular penitence give a person a right to go on sinning; furthermore, are there different rules for different characters of the novel? For example, the character of Sebastian is considered 'holy' by his sister Cordelia (and many researchers), although he seems to continue 'sinning' indefinitely. Also, how believable is the miracle of Lord Marchmain's death bed repentance as a proof of divine intervention?
- 2) I will also analyse the character of Charles Ryder and his agnosticism. Is this novel a *Künstlerroman*, that is, a kind of a portrait of an artist? What is really behind his subsequent conversion to Catholicism, and how believable is it as such? Is it not more

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<sup>10</sup> Susanna Itäkare, "Pala taivasta, pala maata – Englantilainen katolinen romaani 1900-luvulla". *Avain*. 1/2004, pp. 28-29

<sup>11</sup> Cf. E.M. Forster: *Maurice*, which depicts a love affair between men of different social classes. The novel was written during the 1910's but because of the legally delicate subject of homosexuality, it was published posthumously in 1971.

<sup>12</sup> Itäkare, 28-29



believable that the Charles Ryder of the Prologue and Epilogue is simply a middle-aged man who is deeply disappointed in life after losing the loves of his life? Or could it be that it is in fact the reader who is disappointed, because he/she, as a product of contemporary values, cannot accept the sacrifice of romantic love to something as abstract as faith?

3) Lastly, I will deal with the possible intentions of the author; was Waugh's intention to convert the reader? If it was, why is it that the Catholicism in *Brideshead Revisited* seems mostly to be so negatively portrayed? Furthermore, what is the point of becoming a Catholic, if the result is personal unhappiness? After all, Sebastian once pointed out to Charles that happiness does not seem to have much to do with being a Catholic. Still, the hold of the religion is strong on Sebastian too, although he fights it. Charles Ryder asks agnostic questions, and for me it was easy to identify with his agnosticism.

## **1.2. *Brideshead Revisited* as a Catholic Novel**

There are several ways to define a Catholic novel. Mark Bosco places the rise of this literary genre in the early twentieth century. According to him:

The Catholic novel in Europe originated in the neoromantic and decadent forms of French literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a reaction against the dominant discourse of Enlightenment and the antireligious doctrines of the French Revolution.<sup>13</sup>

Such French Catholic writers as Joris-Karl Huysmans, Charles Péguy, Francois Mauriac, and Paul Claudel made this genre an accomplished literary form that defended the spiritual reality of human life and was against positivist thought.<sup>14</sup> Positivists believed in purely scientific evidence, logic and mathematics. They did not/do not approve of metaphysics, that is, the speculation regarding the nature of reality that radically goes beyond any

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Bosco, *Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2005) 7

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

evidence that could support or refute such transcendent knowledge claims, and thus basically Positivism is a wordly, secular, antitheological, and antimetaphysical ideology.<sup>15</sup>

David Lodge defines the Catholic novel as belonging to a fictional tradition, and he too states that this genre goes back to the French Decadence<sup>16</sup>, and is characteristically concerned with the operation of God's grace in the world, with a conflict between secular and divine values in which the latter are usually allowed an ironic and unexpected triumph.<sup>17</sup> There certainly is a clear reference to the conflict between wordly and heavenly in *Brideshead Revisited*, after all the subtitle of the novel is "The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder". According to Patrick McCormick people tend to think authors as Catholic for at least two reasons: either they take Catholicism as their topic, or they approach their stories with a Catholic sensibility, some do both.<sup>18</sup>

In the United States, the Catholic novel has traditionally been seen as a religious novel whose worth was measured by the Catholic church by its literary fidelity to doctrine and dogma, and it was valued according to its evangelizing force.<sup>19</sup> However, this has changed after the end of the Second Vatican Council in 1965<sup>20</sup>: today the American Catholic novel

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<sup>15</sup> "Positivism." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2008. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. 17 March 2008 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9108682>.

<sup>16</sup> According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* the basis of Decadence was "bitter regret for the loss of a world of moral and political absolutes, and middle-class fears of supersession in a society where the power of the masses (as workers, voters, purchasers, and consumers) is slowly but inexorably on the increase". The period of French Decadence began approximately in 1880. ("French literature". *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2008. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. 15 Feb.2008 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-22571>>. )

<sup>17</sup> David Lodge, *Evelyn Waugh* (New York, London: Columbia University Press, 1971) 30

<sup>18</sup> Patrick McCormick, "Looking for Grace in All the Write Places", *U.S. Catholic*. November 1999, Vol. 64, Issue 11 p. 27

<sup>19</sup> Anita Gandolfo, *Testing the Faith: The New Catholic Fiction in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), xi

<sup>20</sup> The 2nd Vatican Council, also known as Vatican II (1962-1965), was initiated by Pope John XXIII in order to spiritually renew the church, to redefine the role of the bishops, to increase the lay participation everywhere, to find ways to reunite Christians separated from Rome, etc. Very important change brought about by the council was its *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, which was based on the philosophy of the dignity of the human person and the right to religious freedom. The council also expressed regret and reconciliation to the Jewish community for the anti-Semitism of the Christian past. ("Roman Catholicism". *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2008. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. 26 Feb. 2008 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-43764>.

does not necessarily teach or promote the institutional values of the Church, instead, the Catholic fiction mostly depicts the experiences of being a Catholic in the United States.<sup>21</sup> Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964) and Walker Percy (1916-1990) were among the most famous Catholic authors in the United States. Both of them came from the American South. Percy's theme was often death and "our pilgrimage" unto it.<sup>22</sup> O'Connor, in turn, opposed the common view that religious commitment limits a writer's freedom to portray life as it is by stating that "When people have told me that because I am a Catholic, I cannot be an artist, I have had to reply, that because I am a Catholic, I cannot afford to be less than an artist."<sup>23</sup> On the surface, her work is far removed from Catholicism as Catholic characters and settings are almost entirely absent, but according to Ronald Weber, there is a deeply serious Catholicism behind her often violent stories.<sup>24</sup>

However, even the possibility of the whole concept 'Catholic novel' has been questioned – for example by Graham Greene, no less. Ironically, many literary scholars categorize him to be the most typical writer of this genre.<sup>25</sup> Itäkare argues that the critical attitude towards the genre 'Catholic novel' partly derives from the postmodernist and poststructuralist suspicion of Christianity and its Great Narrative. Furthermore, the whole emergence of 'novel' is a part of a secularisation process of the western culture as literature has taken over many ideological tasks that used to belong to religion, which in turn has gradually lost its significance in the western world. Thus, the Catholic novel is a contradiction in terms to begin with.<sup>26</sup> Because of these difficulties of categorization, there

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<sup>21</sup> Gandolfo, xii

<sup>22</sup> John O'Callaghan, "Literature as Preparation for Death". *Catholic Dossier*. 5, no.4, July-August 1999, pp. 13-16

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Weber, "A Good Writer is Hard to Find". *Catholic Dossier*. 5, no.4, July-August 1999, pp. 30-32

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Itäkare, "Pala taivasta, pala maata – Englantilainen katolinen romaani 1900-luvulla". *Avain*. 1/2004, p. 25

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

have been several efforts to define the Catholic novel. According to Itäkare, most of these definitions are author-oriented, that is, they concentrate on the writer's sect, religion and intention. Also, they lean on the biographical method and a mimetic conception of art. Thus, a work of art is above all a self-expression of its author.<sup>27</sup>

In Britain, Catholicism had a revival of sorts in the nineteenth century. Inside the Anglican Church of England, there was the so-called Oxford Movement around 1830 onwards, which wanted to revive some of the Catholic theology and rituals. The members of this movement were called Anglo-Catholics. The cause for this movement were the changes in the relationship between the state and the Church of England.<sup>28</sup> Clergyman John Henry Newman (1801-90) was one of the leaders of this movement, and subsequently he and several other Anglo-Catholics converted to Roman Catholicism.<sup>29</sup> Also, many prominent intellectuals and artists converted to Catholicism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among these were literary figures like G.K. Chesterton, Ronald Knox, Muriel Spark, Graham Greene – and Evelyn Waugh.

Perhaps the most famous English writer labelled as Catholic novelist was Waugh's contemporary Graham Greene (1904-1991). Like Waugh, Greene too was born to an Anglican upper-middle-class family, he too studied at Oxford and converted to Catholicism as a young man, at the age of twenty-two in 1926. However, Paul O'Prey argues that Greene cannot be charged as being a narrowly "Catholic novelist" but that there is a broader humanism which is the real centre of his work, and is to be found especially in his

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<sup>27</sup> Itäkare, 27

<sup>28</sup> "Oxford movement." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2008. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. 15 Feb. 2008 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9057830>.

<sup>29</sup> In *Brideshead Revisited*, Charles' cousin Jasper who is in his fourth year at Oxford, warns the newcomer Charles: "...Beware of the Anglo-Catholics – they're all sodomites with unpleasant accents. In fact, steer clear of all the religious groups; they do nothing but harm". BR, 28 (BR=*Brideshead Revisited*)

later novels.<sup>30</sup>

O'Prey considers *Brighton Rock* (1938) to be the first of Greene's so-called Catholic novels to have a conscious and strongly defined "religious sense".<sup>31</sup> Among other novels by Greene with markedly religious themes are *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1947) and *The End of the Affair* (1951). The latter has often been compared to *Brideshead Revisited*. Indeed, the main theme of *The End of the Affair* is the impossibility to continue an adulterous love affair, because the demands of religious conscience – or the fear of hell – experienced by the female character force her to end the relationship. This is also one of the themes in *Brideshead Revisited*, when Julia ends her affair with Charles almost as a sacrifice. I will examine these thematic similarities later in section 4.2.

Allegedly, one of the reasons for writing a Catholic novel may be the conversion of the non-Catholic reader. This is by no means an easy goal to achieve, the writer has to use subtle tactics because moralist sermons are likely to irritate the secular reader. The non-believer has to be lured not to put down the novel until the end of the narrative. The most difficult thing for a secular reader as myself has always been to accept the supernatural elements in religious novels. I find depictions of religious miracles in fiction both tedious and ridiculous, and when these occur in a narrative, I tend to stop reading the story. Surely many other readers share this aversion of mine. Consequently, the writer has to be very subtle indeed when dealing with the supernatural. In *Brideshead Revisited*, however, Lord Marchmain's death bed scene was very brilliantly handled in my opinion, because the supposed miracle which happened there, could also be interpreted in another

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<sup>30</sup> Paul O'Prey, *A Reader's Guide to Graham Greene* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988) 8

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 67

way. I will deal with these interpretations later in my thesis in sections 4.2. and 5.

The difficulties to understand or accept the Catholic writer's intentions could also derive from the fundamentally different perceptions of the world as seen by Catholics and for example Protestants or non-believers. Andrew Greeley discusses these differences, and claims that there is a particular Catholic imagination, which can be called sacramental. Thus, Catholics – and particularly Catholic artists – see reality as a sacrament, an enchanted world, where everything is a revelation of the presence of God.<sup>32</sup> Theirs is an “analogical imagination”, whereas the Protestant artists have a “dialectical imagination”. Greeley uses these terms coined by theologian David Tracy, as he tells about the differences that Tracy had perceived in the classic works of theologians and artists: the Catholics emphasized the presence of God in the world, while the Protestants emphasized the absence of God. The Catholic writers stressed the nearness of God to His Creation, while the Protestants emphasized the distance. The Protestants were wary of superstition and idolatry, while the Catholics stressed the dangers of a creation in which God is only marginally present.<sup>33</sup>

### **1.3. Catholicism as a Doctrine**

Because *Brideshead Revisited* is a Catholic novel, it is appropriate to outline some of the chief principles of the Catholic doctrine. And, as the writer of this thesis was raised in a Protestant culture, I think it is natural to observe some of the differences in comparison with Protestant denominations. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to be exhaustive, and many – perhaps essential – dogmatic elements are therefore left out. The main goal is to illustrate some aspects of Catholicism which are more or less present in *Brideshead Revisited*.

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<sup>32</sup> Andrew Greeley, Catholic Imagination (Ewing, NJ: University of California Press, 2001) 1

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

The Roman Catholic church has always considered itself as the one and only worshipping community that can trace itself back to the group established by Jesus Christ. In a strict sense, Catholics believe that only baptized members of the Catholic church can be saved.<sup>34</sup> However, most Catholic theologians of today (post Vatican II, 1965) take a less rigorous view, but instead they try to find some way of affirming membership in the body of Christ (=the Church) that is, salvation for those who are members of other Christian denominations, for example, Protestants.<sup>35</sup> Of course, *Brideshead Revisited* was written before Vatican II when the attitudes towards non-Catholics were more intolerant. But, the inclusion of other Christian churches seems logical if we think of the meaning of the word ‘catholic’, which means ‘universal’. In *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* there is a statement that “the church is catholic because Christ is present in her.” Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church”. It goes on: “the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race”.<sup>36</sup> The Catholic church is known for its strict hierarchy. In *The Catholic Religion*, Monsignor J.H. Burbach states that The Pope of Rome is the visible head of the church, who in turn “is a direct successor in the Apostolic Office of St. Peter”.<sup>37</sup> It was Jesus Christ who made St. Peter the first visible Head of the church. The Bishops of the Church are the successors of the other Apostles, and the priests of the Church are the assistants of the Bishop.<sup>38</sup> The Church teaches with authority, it is infallible in matters of faith and morals. The Church is also indefectible, that is, “Her enemies cannot destroy Her and She will last to the end of

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<sup>34</sup> “Roman Catholicism.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2008. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. 15 Feb. 2008 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-43649>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (London: Geoffrey Chapman-Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 193

<sup>37</sup> Msgr. J.H.Burbach, *The Catholic Religion*. (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1929, republished 1993), 52

<sup>38</sup> Burbach, 53

time”.<sup>39</sup> All of the ordained ministers of the Catholic church (except permanent deacons) are chosen from men of faith who live celibate lives and also intend to remain celibate. This is a sign of their new life, where they give themselves entirely to God and to men.<sup>40</sup> Also, there have been men and women from the beginning of the Church, who “have renounced the great good of marriage to follow the Lamb wherever he goes”.<sup>41</sup> These people are better known to us as monks and nuns. Christ in his alleged virginity is a model for them and their chosen celibacy. Thus:

Virginity for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven is an unfolding of baptismal grace, a powerful sign of the supremacy of the bond with Christ and of the ardent expectation of his return, a sign which also recalls that marriage is a reality of this present age which is passing away.<sup>42</sup>

In *Brideshead Revisited*, the youngest daughter of the Marchmain family, Cordelia, wants to become a nun. But although she claims to have a vocation, does good deeds and stays celibate, she does not quite make it to the convent.

The chief truths of the Catholic religion (and also of Anglican and most Protestant religions) are to be found in the Apostles’ Creed. (The Eastern Orthodox churches have not officially recognized it). This statement of faith proclaims belief in the Holy Trinity; the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Christ; the coming judgement of Christ; the remission of sins; the church and eternal life.<sup>43</sup> Naturally, the Catholic religion, as every Christian religion, bases its doctrine on the Bible. However, there are some aspects of the Christian doctrine that are more pronounced or even different from for example the Protestant doctrines. Presumably these differences of opinion were partly responsible for

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<sup>39</sup> Burbach, 56

<sup>40</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 354

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 362

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 363

<sup>43</sup> “Roman Catholicism.” Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2008. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. 21 Feb. 2008 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-43684>>.



the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.

Despite the fact that Martin Luther initially accused the Catholic church of corruption and administrative abuses, he always insisted that the primary object of his critique was the doctrine of the Catholics and their distortion of the gospel.<sup>44</sup> In his view, the Pope had too much power, and had in fact become the Antichrist by representing and enforcing a substitute religion. Also, according to Luther, the cult of the Virgin Mary and of the saints diminished Christ's position as the sole mediator between God and human beings.<sup>45</sup>

Even today, the Virgin Mary and the saints continue to be extremely important to Catholics, who pray to them and see them as warriors or helpers of humans on earth. They do not see them as gods, though non-Catholics often see them as godlike false idols – especially since the Catholics make statues and pictures of their saints and seem to worship these.

In fact, Catholics believe that 1) *all living Christians* are saints. Also, 2) *souls still suffering for their sins in the “purifying fires of Purgatory”*<sup>46</sup> are saints; but, when Catholics refer to saints, they usually mean 3) *the canonized saints*. These are the ones prayed to, they were distinguished Christians who led holy lives, died, “successfully conquered all enemies” and the Church is convinced without doubt that these persons are in heaven “enjoying the fruits of their victories”. These three types of saints are called The Communion of Saints.<sup>47</sup>

The concept of purgatory is still very strong in Catholicism. Immediately after death, each person is judged by God in a “Particular Judgement”. In other words, God decides

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<sup>44</sup> “Roman Catholicism.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2008. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. 21Feb. 2008 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-43744>>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Burbach, 58

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 58

whether a person goes to “Heaven”, “Purgatory” or “Hell”.<sup>48</sup> Purgatory is defined as “the state in which those souls suffer for a time, who die in venial sin, or who have not satisfied for the temporal punishment due for sin”.<sup>49</sup> In other words, purgatory is a temporary hell, where sinners of lesser (venial i.e. forgivable) sins than mortal sins, assured of salvation and an eventual entrance to heaven, willingly undergo the purification (by fire) until God decides to forgive them at the Last Judgement (also known as the second coming of Jesus Christ). This is when: “Jesus Christ shall make known to the whole world the good and evil of every person”.<sup>50</sup> The temporal hell can be avoided before death if the sinner does good works (e.g. attendance at the Holy Sacrifice of the mass, indulgences, almsgiving, prayer, works of mercy). On the other hand, if a mortal sin (that is, a grave sin committed in full knowledge with the full consent of the sinners will<sup>51</sup>) is committed, there is almost no hope of salvation, but “a mortal sin deserves an eternal punishment”. Only the Sacrament of Penance remits the guilt of sin and the eternal punishment due for mortal sin.<sup>52</sup> When the Catholics pray for the dead, they pray for the salvation of the souls in Purgatory.<sup>53</sup>

Today, this imagery of hell seems quite medieval, naïve and absurd to most other Christian denominations – and even more so to the secularized western ‘common man’. Also, for the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century, the idea of hell and purgatory and its connection to the granting of indulgences in exchange for donations was yet again

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<sup>48</sup> Burbach, 46

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 48

<sup>51</sup> ”sin.” Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2008. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. 22 Feb. 2008 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9067887>.

<sup>52</sup> Burbach, 60

<sup>53</sup> According to *A Brief Catechism for Adults*, examples of mortal sins are adultery, getting drunk, stealing something expensive; examples of venial sins are impatience, ordinary anger, stealing something cheap, getting slightly drunk. /Fr. William J. Cogan, A Brief Catechism for Adults. (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers Inc. 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1951, this edition 1993), pp. 30-31

one proof of the corruption within the Catholic church.

Some of the Catholic sacraments play important roles in the narrative of *Brideshead Revisited*. Therefore, I shall take a brief look into them here.

There are seven sacraments in the Roman Catholic religion:<sup>54</sup>

1) Baptism, which takes away original sin (that is, the sin committed by Adam) and gives a person Sanctifying Grace for the first time. Sanctifying Grace is an essential prerequisite of getting to heaven. Baptism is given to converted adults and to infants whose godparents (sponsors) make the decision at the commission of the parents, to baptize the baby. The parents and godparents are responsible for the child's Christian upbringing. Although newborn babies have not had time to commit personal sins, they still have to be baptized, because they have inherited the original sin. If a baby dies before baptism, it cannot go to heaven. From the twelfth to the twentieth century, it was commonly believed that the souls of children who die unbaptized go to limbo<sup>55</sup> where the children neither suffer the torments of hell, nor enjoy the joys of heaven. Nowadays Catholics believe that unbaptized infants are entrusted to the mercy of God and Jesus.

2) Confirmation, which gives a person the Holy Ghost and makes one a strong Catholic.

3) Holy Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The reception of Holy Eucharist is called the Holy Communion. When it is given to the dying, it is called Viaticum. Catholics believe in transubstantiation (a change of substance) which means that the bread and wine

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<sup>54</sup> Christian churches are divided regarding the number and operation of the sacraments, but they are generally believed to have been instituted by Jesus Christ. Like most Protestant Churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has only two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Eucharist/Holy Communion.

<sup>55</sup> Limbo="The border place between heaven and hell where dwell those souls who, though not condemned to punishment, are deprived of the joy of eternal existence with God in heaven". Two kinds of limbo have been supposed to exist: 1) the one for unbaptized infants 2) a place where the Old Testament saints were thought to be confined until they were liberated by Christ in his "descent into hell". The concept of Limbo probably developed in Europe in the Middle Ages, but was never defined as a church dogma; reference to it was omitted from the official catechism of the church issued in 1992. ("limbo".*Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2008. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. 26 Feb. 2008 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9048285>.

are actually transformed into the body and blood of Jesus. Their appearance is not changed, but the reality is. This substantial, whole and entire presence of Christ raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments.

4) Penance (or Confession) takes away sins committed after baptism.

5) Extreme Unction prepares a person who is dying (*in extremis*) for death. This sacrament is also known as Anointing of the Sick or the Last Sacrament. A priest administers Extreme Unction by anointing the five senses with consecrated oil. The purpose of this anointing is to increase Sanctifying Grace, to strengthen the soul against temptations and for the struggle of death, to remit venial sins and the temporal punishment due to sin, to relieve the sufferings of the sick and also to restore health – if it be the will of God.

Extreme Unction can be administered even though the sick cannot confess or receive Viaticum.

6) Holy Orders gives a man the powers of priesthood.

7) Matrimony unites a man and a woman in Christian marriage and gives them graces needed to obey God's laws on marriage. Sins against marriage contain divorce, adultery, birth control, abortion or sterilization. (It is also a sin to refuse to have sex with your spouse whenever he/she wants it – with the exception of a few lawful excuses like drunkenness, insanity or sickness).<sup>56</sup>

In *Brideshead Revisited*, particularly the sacrament of Extreme Unction is given an ultimate importance. In fact, the death bed scene of Lord Marchmain is supposed to mark the end of the affair of Julia and Charles, but also to be the key to Charles' conversion. Also the sacraments of Penance and Matrimony have central roles in the novel. When Julia wants to rebel against the church, she ceases to go to Confession for a while, which is

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<sup>56</sup> On Sacraments, see e.g. Cogan, 65-120; Burbach, 142-168; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 309

considered a grave sin. The problem of divorce is one essential theme of *Brideshead Revisited* and has most tragic repercussions on the lives of several of the characters in the novel.

## 2. Negative Catholicism

For a Catholic novel, *Brideshead Revisited* gives a surprisingly negative impression of the religious custom and particularly its practitioners. Religion seems to make believers miserable, full of guilt and unhappiness. Religion also seems to be a powerful weapon of manipulation for some characters, especially Lady Marchmain, the saintly mother of Bridey, Sebastian, Julia and Cordelia. However, there are some positive aspects of Catholicism in *Brideshead Revisited*. Some characters, for example, Cordelia, Nanny Hawkins and Sebastian later in his life, show real Christian charity and this, I at least, consider one of the positive aspects of any religion.

In this thesis, I will use the terms “negative Catholicism” and “positive Catholicism” as I examine the impression that I had of the effects of the Catholic faith to the protagonists of *Brideshead Revisited* in my reading of this novel. I am aware that the use of these terms is not altogether without problems (of definition and objectivity); nevertheless, I think it is appropriate to use them here for lack of anything better. Anyway, the concepts of negative and positive Catholicism are not entirely mine, at least Annette Wirth has used them when discussing the characters of *Brideshead Revisited*. She states that for simplicity’s sake the members of the Flyte family could be classed into these two categories, and that Lady Marchmain and Bridey are representatives of “Negative Catholicism”, whereas Cordelia, Nanny Hawkins – and the reconverted Sebastian, Julia and Lord Marchmain form the group named “Positive Catholicism”.<sup>57</sup> Although I agree with Wirth about Lady Marchmain and Bridey (Negative), and Cordelia and Nanny Hawkins (mostly Positive), I disagree to a certain extent about the reconversions being entirely positive for the

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<sup>57</sup>Annette Wirth, *The Loss of Traditional Values and Continuance of Faith in Evelyn Waugh’s Novels: A Handful of Dust, Brideshead Revisited, and Sword of Honour* (Frankfurt am Mein, Bern, New York, Paris: Lang, 1990) 82

reconverted – or for the mankind. Consequently, the use of these terms is based on my personal conceptions, not Wirth's.

### **2.1. The Manipulative Mother: Lady Marchmain**

When asked whether Waugh was on Lady Marchmain's side, he replied: "No, I'm not on her side; but God is, who suffers fools gladly, and the book is about God".<sup>58</sup> This somewhat cryptic statement of the author is an indication that Teresa Marchmain is not an ideal Catholic to be identified with. But why is God on her side?

In the novel she is referred to many times before Charles and the reader meet her. At Oxford, the flamboyant homosexual Anthony Blanche warns Charles of Lady Marchmain's charm and her power of manipulation in his inimitable verbal style; he depicts her as a witch and a vampire who sucks the blood of those around her (BR, 54-56). Sebastian too seems to endow her mother with magical powers, for example, when he refers to the plovers' eggs that his mother has sent to him in Oxford: "Mother sends them from Brideshead. They always lay early for her" (BR, 33). Initially, Sebastian is reluctant to introduce Charles to his mother, because he is afraid that she will try to charm his friend from him and destroy their friendship. Of course, his mother proceeds to do just this from the day she meets Charles, when she visits Oxford during the second year of Sebastian's and Charles' studies. During her one week stay in Oxford, Charles becomes quite impressed by her charm, and by the end of that week, Sebastian says sourly: "You and mummy seem very thick" (BR, 107). Even Charles realizes "that in fact, I was being drawn into intimacy by swift, imperceptible stages, for she was impatient of any human relationship that fell short of it" (BR, 107).

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<sup>58</sup> Charlotte Mosley, The Letters of Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin co, 1996) 13

Wirth describes Lady Marchmain to embody the religious dogma demanded by the Catholic faith.<sup>59</sup> She lives according to this dogma herself and demands spiritual acquiescence and a commitment to faith from her family as well. Her husband has fled from her after the war (World War I) and moved to Venice to live with his mistress Cara. Lord Marchmain is said to hate his wife – whom he cannot divorce because of being Catholic – so much that he cannot set foot in England as long as she is alive. Cara describes Lord Marchmain’s hatred of his wife to Charles during a conversation in Venice:

‘He hates her; but you can have no conception how he hates her. You would think him so calm and English – the milord, rather blasé, all passion dead, wishing to be comfortable and not to be worried, following the sun, with me to look after that one thing that no man can do for himself. My friend, he is a volcano of hate. He cannot breathe the same air as she. He will not set foot in England because it is her home; he can scarcely be happy with Sebastian because he is her son. But Sebastian hates her too.’ (BR, 99)

Cara claims that when people hate with all that energy, it is something in themselves that they are hating. (BR, 99) Cara is also one of the rare characters in *Brideshead Revisited* who expresses sympathy towards Lady Marchmain: “And how has she deserved all this hate? She has done nothing except to be loved by someone who was not grown up”. (BR, 99) Jacqueline McDonnell claims that it is Lady Marchmain’s saintliness that has driven her husband away, and later does the same to Sebastian.<sup>60</sup> Douglas Lane Patey points out that in the portrayal of Lady Marchmain, Waugh captures the very human resentment that being loved and forgiven can cause.<sup>61</sup> Because she is almost a saint, the sinners around her feel inferior and therefore start to hate her. From this point of view, it is possible to see Lady Marchmain as Cara sees her: as an innocent and fervent Catholic who is not

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<sup>59</sup> Wirth, 83

<sup>60</sup> Jacqueline McDonnell, *Evelyn Waugh* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1988) 93

<sup>61</sup> Douglas Lane Patey, *The Life of Evelyn Waugh: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Limited, 1998,2001), 231-232



intentionally manipulative. Of course, Cara speaks from a safe distance, she does not know the lady personally. Through Charles' eyes, however, she is seen as a frustratingly destructive woman.

But it is only gradually that Lady Marchmain's destructiveness emerges.<sup>62</sup> At first she embodies much of the enchantment of Brideshead, and of the old and noble Catholic virtues. But she spreads unhappiness around her. Sebastian becomes an alcoholic and at first Lady Marchmain gives her son smiling pious disapproval.<sup>63</sup> Later she makes the classical mistake of trying to control his drinking by locking up the liquor whenever Sebastian is at home. She also controls Sebastian's allowance, and hires hideous guardians like the dubiously sly and opportunistic Oxford tutor Mr. Samgrass - yet again an unpleasant Catholic character - to watch over Sebastian in Oxford and during his travels. She tries very hard to win Charles on her side, to make him one of Sebastian's guards, and by doing this she destroys Charles' and Sebastian's friendship, although Charles does not give in to her. He does not think he is betraying his friend, but all the same she manages to seed destruction. It almost seems as if she wilfully drives Sebastian deeper into alcoholism. Alternately she must be stupid not to realise how her controlling and meddling is the surest way to make Sebastian drink even more. Charles says this aloud:

‘Lady Marchmain, if you want to make him a drunkard that’s the way to do it. Don’t you see that any idea of his being watched would be fatal?’ (BR, 138-139)

But Lady Marchmain refuses to see this and goes on being the martyr who makes her children feel enormously guilty. She says to Charles: “Any failure in my children is my failure”. (BR, 163) This sounds like a phrase that she is not uttering for the first time, her children must have heard these words of a divine martyr mother too. No wonder they are

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<sup>62</sup> McDonnell, 1988, 92

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

guilt-ridden. Christopher Hollis states that Lady Marchmain has an instinct to possess, and therefore practises her Catholicism in a possessive way.<sup>64</sup> Donald Greene, in turn, suggests that the emotional tyranny over her children is a form of consolation because her husband has left her.<sup>65</sup> I do not completely agree, I tend to think that Lady Marchmain is tyrannical by nature. Furthermore, she too has had a firm Catholic upbringing, and is simply passing on the beliefs of her ancestors.

Sebastian suffers from her manipulation more than the other children. Mostly because of her mother, he loses his friendship with Charles – although Charles is not entirely without blame either. Charles tries to convince that he is on Sebastian’s side “contra mundum”, but Sebastian is almost paranoid in believing that his mother has stolen Charles; he hates “mother’s little talks”, which Charles shares with her. Charles in turn is worried about his friend’s deepening depression and alcoholism, and he does not know how to help him. There are some painfully emotional battles of will inside the deceptively serene Brideshead Castle. Finally, neither Sebastian nor Lady Marchmain end up winning. Charles is thrown out of Brideshead by a chilly Lady Marchmain after Charles has “betrayed her” by giving Sebastian money for drink. She says she does not understand how anyone can be so “callously wicked” and “wantonly cruel” and the last words she ever says to Charles are: “I don’t understand how we all liked you so much. Did you hate us all the time? I don’t understand how we deserved it?”(BR, 163)

Some readers might defend Lady Marchmain, and claim her to be a worried and loving mother who is desperately trying to help his alcoholic son; she means well but does not

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<sup>64</sup> Christopher Hollis, *Evelyn Waugh* (London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1954) 20

<sup>65</sup> Donald Greene, “A Partiality for Lords: Evelyn Waugh and Snobbery”. *American Scholar*. Summer 1989, Vol. 58, Issue 3, p. 454

understand the psychology of an alcoholic and therefore fails in her good intentions.

However, there is at least one clear incident in the novel which proves the opposite: when Sebastian causes a scandal with his drunken driving and the public trial which follows it, the first thing she is concerned about is what her relatives will think about it all. Although outwardly “humorously resigned”, she says:

‘How am I going to explain it to all the family? They will be so shocked to find that they’re more upset about it than I am. Do you know my sister-in-law, Fanny Rosscommon? She has always thought I brought the children up badly. Now I am beginning to think she must be right.’ (BR, 118)

In addition to this attitude of ‘keeping up appearances’, Lady Marchmain has a hypocritical attitude towards her wealth in relation to God. She claims that despite being indecently rich, she is approved by God. In my opinion, this justification seems hypocritical and, particularly the part about envying the “privileges of the poor”, is downright disgusting. The following statement, which the Lady makes to Charles during one of their “little talks” is a sheer expression of ignorance and stupidity, and it removes all the little sympathy this reader may have previously had for her:

‘When I was a girl we were comparatively poor, but still much richer than most of the world, and when I married I became very rich. It used to worry me, and I thought it wrong to have so many beautiful things when others had nothing. Now I realize that it is possible for the rich to sin by coveting the privileges of the poor. The poor have always been the favourites of God and his saints, but I believe that it is one of the special achievements of Grace to sanctify the whole of life, riches included. Wealth in pagan Rome was necessarily something cruel; it’s not so any more.’ (BR, 122)

In response, Charles says “something about a camel and the eye of a needle”, and Lady Marchmain continues happily:

‘But of *course* it’s very unexpected for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, but the gospel is simply a catalogue of unexpected things. It’s not to be *expected* that an ox and an ass should worship at the crib. Animals are always doing the oddest things in the lives of the saints. It’s all part of the poetry, the Alice-in-Wonderland side, of religion.’ (BR, 122-123)

Patey states that Waugh managed to make Lady Marchmain's remarks both provocative (to the defenders of Marxism), and also orthodox theologically. Waugh had claimed earlier that it was "the old, simple belief of Christianity that differences of wealth and learning cannot affect the reality and ultimate importance of the individual".<sup>66</sup> Still, I am not convinced, I think that Lady Marchmain is simply making excuses for herself, and her remarks are not provocative, but simply a proof of her coldness, lack of charity and inability (or refusal) to understand the plight of poverty.

Waugh also uses Lady Marchmain to introduce the most important thematic metaphor of *Brideshead Revisited*, namely "The twitch upon the thread". This metaphor is to be found in G.K. Chesterton's book *The Wisdom of Father Brown*.<sup>67</sup> "A twitch upon the thread" is also the title of Book Three of *Brideshead Revisited*.<sup>68</sup> Lady Marchmain is reading to his family a passage from *Father Brown* the evening when Sebastian is drunk and comes to the room and causes a scene. Years later, right after Lady Marchmain's death, Cordelia reminds Charles of the story, when she discusses how her father, Sebastian and Julia have deserted their faith. She states that "God won't let them go for long":

'...I wonder if you remember the story mummy read us the evening Sebastian first got drunk – I mean the *bad* evening. 'Father Brown' said something like 'I caught him' (the thief) 'with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread'. (BR, 212)

In the story, Father Brown, who is a priest and at the same time an amateur sleuth, catches a

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<sup>66</sup> Patey, 207

<sup>67</sup> Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936), was yet another English Catholic writer. His writings included journalism, poetry, philosophy, biography, fantasy, Christian apologetics and detective fiction, of which *The Wisdom of Father Brown* is an example. It was a collection of short stories where Father Brown acted as a detective. It was first published in 1914. These detective stories are unique for their themes of sin and guilt./W.W. Robson, *Modern English Literature*. (Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 18-22

<sup>68</sup> The 1945 edition: Prologue - Book One (Et in Arcadia Ego) - Book Two (A Twitch upon the Thread) – Epilogue  
The 1960 edition: Prologue – Book One (Et in Arcadia Ego) – Book Two (Brideshead Deserted) – Book Three (A Twitch upon the Thread) – Epilogue. The 1960 edition is the source of the current thesis.

thief as a fisher catches a fish. Cordelia means that God is a same kind of a fisher of human souls. Wirth states that Lady Marchmain, too, acts in the same way as she lets her children wander, but at the end, with the twitch of the thread, pulls them back into the realm of the Catholic church.<sup>69</sup> Thus, this allegory is used to express the reconversion of Sebastian, Julia and Lord Marchmain: all three of them try to escape their vocation – or obsession caused by brainwashing – but God forces them, like a fisher twitching the thread, to return to him. Many religious people consider this metaphor a positive one, but to a non-believer, this image is by no means positive. On the contrary, it is terrifying in that it threatens a person's independence. Who wants to be a fish on a hook? This metaphor is also humiliating; at first a person is under the impression that he or she is a free spirit, but the sneering fisherman-God keeps on piling obstacles in front you, so that finally you are too exhausted to fight against the twitch of God's thread. What an unfairly easy task it is for God. And the important question is: why does God want to humiliate people, since he/she could easily make people into believers without all the torment? Consequently, if there is a God, he/she is a sadistic and vindictive god. I agree with McDonnell when she points out: "The non-religious reader may regret that a set of interesting characters with wills of their own are, in the end, orchestrated to Waugh's chosen conclusion".<sup>70</sup> If Waugh's intention was to convert the non-Catholic readers or to lure the lapsed Catholics back to the Church, then God portrayed as a fisher (and people as fish to be later gutted and eaten by a voracious God) is an untempting image to introduce to them.

Sebastian leaves Oxford and disappears to Northern Africa. Years later when Lady Marchmain is dying of cancer, Julia asks Charles to try to find Sebastian and bring him

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<sup>69</sup> Wirth, 84

<sup>70</sup> McDonnell, 1988, 91

back to see his mother before she dies. Charles finds Sebastian in a hospital almost dying himself of pneumonia. Although Sebastian recovers from his illness, he refuses to return to England. He does not want to see his mother, but laconically comments: "Poor mummy. She really was a *femme fatale*, wasn't she? She killed at a touch." (BR, 206)

## **2.2. The Speaker of Blunt Truths: Bridey**

The eldest son, Lord Brideshead alias Bridey – his first name is never given - is the other member of the Marchmain family who is a fierce believer in the dogma of the Catholic faith. First, we hear from Charles' cousin Jasper about Brideshead being a very sound fellow - which Sebastian is not, and therefore Charles should avoid him. (BR, 42) Later in the narrative, the cosmopolitan Anthony Blanche describes Bridey to Charles:

‘There's Brideshead who's something archaic, out of a cave that's been sealed for centuries..., he's a learned bigot, a ceremonious barbarian, a snowbound lama...' (BR, 54)

Bridey is almost pitiable in his lack of imagination and he has no sense of humour. He obeys his mother faithfully, and follows her to the chapel whenever she decides to go there. He is described to be charmless and wooden while Sebastian and Julia are charming and beautiful and Cordelia is happy and lively with a playful sense of humour. Earlier Sebastian has told Charles that Bridey wanted to become a priest, but gave up the idea partly because his mother did not want the heir of the title and the house not to have offspring. Ironically, in the end Bridey does not inherit, because Lord Marchmain decides to give the house to Julia. He does not have children either, because his wife-to-be is already forty-five when they marry.

Bridey is a stickler to conventional rules. In the narrative, he has the role of the speaker of unpleasant and blunt truths; he is the one who finds out that Julia's husband-to-be, the

vulgar businessman and a member of Parliament Rex Mottram, has in his youth in Canada been married and divorced. Of course, divorce is not accepted by the Catholic church, and therefore Julia is unable to marry him in the church. The possibility of an annulment is discussed, but it would take too long. Julia wants to marry Rex immediately because she is afraid that Rex would return to his mistress for sexual services if he has to wait too long. In the end, against her mother's wishes, Julia decides to marry him in the Protestant church, and this is the beginning of her rebellion which later leads her to grave feelings of guilt and eventually back to the Catholic faith beside her father's death bed. Before this happens, however, Julia has a romantic relationship with Charles, while still being married to Mottram. Once again Bridey "drops a bomb" by bluntly telling Julia that he cannot introduce her to his own Catholic bride, the pompously bourgeois Mrs Muspratt, to whom Bridey is engaged; because Julia is "living in sin". This matter-of-fact statement causes Julia immense pain; she runs to the garden followed by Charles, there she hysterically bursts out all the feelings of repressed guilt and sorrow over her stillborn baby, and sobs about her fears of the war coming and world coming to an end (cf. section 4.1.). This is an essential turning-point in Julia's and Charles' relationship, a beginning of the end. Therefore Bridey's role in the narrative is very significant in a dramatic sense.

Bridey could be interpreted either to be a humanised force of Catholic rules, the will of God, which the humans do not always find agreeable; or from an agnostic or atheist point of view, a brainwashed part of a conventional religious morality who goes on brainwashing Julia, and at the same time judging her from the pompous heights of an un-lived life. There is something decidedly inhuman in Bridey's perfect flawlessness. And from a non-Catholic point of view, Julia has made a simple human mistake by marrying the wrong kind of man as a young girl in love, why should she feel guilty about it?

Wirth uses the term “Negative Catholicism” to describe Bridey, because he shows an indifference to the world which, although making him a staunch and pious Catholic, excludes him from being a sympathetic and caring member of the human race.<sup>71</sup> Charles has many conversations with Bridey about religion, and in these Charles expresses his hostility against Catholicism the most. The hypocrisy of Bridey’s words and the common sense which Charles shows are crucial in misleading the less enlightened reader into believing that *Brideshead Revisited* is a novel written against religion. For example when discussing Sebastian’s alcoholism with Bridey, Charles says: “It seems to me that without your religion Sebastian would have the chance to be a happy and healthy man”. (BR, 140) On the other hand, Wirth argues that Charles does not understand that Sebastian does have a religious vocation and is all the more unhappy for it, for he lacks the responsibility to live up to the demands of his faith.<sup>72</sup>

Another time Charles bursts out:

‘D’you know, Bridey, if I ever felt for a moment like becoming a Catholic, I should only have to talk to you for five minutes to be cured. You manage to reduce what seem quite sensible propositions to stark nonsense.’  
(BR, 158-159)

Bridey is not offended by this remark, he is never upset, and this also makes him seem inhuman. His answer is simply:

‘It’s odd you should say that. I’ve heard it before from other people. It’s one of the many reasons why I don’t think I should make a good priest. It’s something in the way my mind works, I suppose.’ (BR, 159)

Supposedly, it was Waugh’s intension to show through Bridey that there are hypocrites among Catholics as well. Or, as Patey puts it, “Bridey is a fool sent to shame the

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<sup>71</sup> Wirth, 86

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 79



wise”.<sup>73</sup> However, because of the crucial role Bridey has in the events, his character perhaps only strengthens the reader’s aversion towards religion – and Catholic aristocracy.

### **2.3. The Fight Against Vocation: Sebastian**

Charles meets Sebastian Flyte for the first time at Oxford, and seems to fall in love not only with him but with everything this aristocratic and beautiful boy stands for. Charles’ life has been drab so far, and Sebastian brings glamour and mystery to it. As the older narrator Charles describes Sebastian as “entrancing, with that epicene beauty which in extreme youth sings aloud for love and withers at the first cold wind”. (BR, 33) This sentence has a hint of the forthcoming doom in it. In fact, the whole narration of Charles’ and Sebastian’s first year together has a bittersweet nostalgic sense, and a presage of threat to it. Sebastian has mysterious mood swings as he first takes Charles to see his home Brideshead, and these mood changes create a sense of ‘trouble in paradise’ in the reader. Also, in his room at Oxford, Charles has as a chief decoration of his table a human skull which bears the motto *Et in Arcadia ego* inscribed on its forehead. (BR, 43) This is a classical phrase, and it is also found as titles of two paintings by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). These pastoral paintings show shepherds clustering around a tomb, on which the text is written.

Paul Fussell discusses the two different ways this text has been interpreted: he states that Erwin Panofsky discovered in his essay that ever since the eighteenth century the English have taken the phrase to mean “Even in Arcadia, I, Death, hold sway”, rather than the common Continental interpretation of a dead person stating that “And I have dwelt in Arcadia too”.<sup>74</sup> The former interpretation retains the idea of a *memento mori*, a reminder of

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<sup>73</sup> Patey, 230

mortality, which of course is a much more sinister idea than the latter interpretation. I think that in connection with *Brideshead Revisited* this inscription could be understood in both ways: in the *memento mori* sense it is yet again a presage of doom, whereas the other sense holds a highly romantic and nostalgic idea of longing for past youth and happiness.

According to Patey, the skull with its motto “hints that the soul is never alone, that youth is called upon to mature, to die into adult responsibility”.<sup>75</sup>

Throughout the narrative, Sebastian<sup>76</sup> is seen through the loving eyes of Charles. Thus, it is natural that the reader feels sympathy towards him too. However, some characteristics of Sebastian are downright irritating to a contemporary reader. On several occasions, his behaviour is childish and self-centered. In Oxford he even carries a beloved teddy-bear, Aloysius, around. Especially after having seen caricatures of this type of person on countless television parodies, it could be easy to judge Sebastian as an idle and spoilt aristocrat ‘fairy’, with nothing better to do than to drink his life away. Even in the novel, there is one extremely hostile description of Sebastian - yet again uttered by Anthony Blanche. At the same dinner at Thame where Blanche tells about the other members of the Marchmain/Flyte family (which Charles has yet to meet), he speaks about their mutual friend’s past and personality: “I was at school with him. You wouldn’t believe it, but in those days people used to say he was a little *bitch*; just a few unkind boys who knew him well”. (BR, 51) Blanche goes on to describe Sebastian as someone who never got into

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<sup>74</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975, 2000) 245-246

<sup>75</sup> Patey, 226

<sup>76</sup> Patey states that “As Blanche makes clear, Sebastian is named for the Roman aristocrat who gave up his position and life for the faith (and became the subject of centuries of homoerotic art)”. Here Patey refers to Anthony Blanche’s remark to Sebastian; ‘My dear, I should like to stick you full of barbed arrows like a p-p-pin-cushion’ (BR, 35; Patey, 392) This is obviously a reference to the paintings named *St. Sebastian* by the Renaissance master Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506). In these paintings St. Sebastian’s body is full of arrows, and he has been killed by them.

trouble at school, who was never beaten by the masters, insinuating that Sebastian was by no means a saint, but was never punished because of his charm and beauty, “he never had spots you know; all the other boys were spotty”. (BR, 52) Blanche tells how Sebastian spent a lot of time in the confessional and wondered what he had to confess; he never did anything wrong; never *quite* because he was not punished. “Perhaps he was just being charming through the grille”. He also hints that Sebastian was untrustworthy; Blanche had to leave school “under a cloud” or rather under “a glare of unwelcome light” and that his tutor knew “*things*” about Anthony that only Sebastian was supposed to know.<sup>77</sup> Blanche goes on to state that Sebastian is tedious and unintellectual: “those that have charm don’t really need brains”.(BR, 53) After he has eloquently described the other members of Sebastian’s family he concludes:

‘So you see we mustn’t blame Sebastian if at times he seems a little insipid – but then you don’t blame him, do you, Charles? With that very murky background, what could he do except set up as being simple and charming, particularly as he isn’t very well endowed on the Top Storey. We couldn’t claim *that* for him, could we, much as we love him?’ (BR, 56)

Charles resents Blanche’s description, although he senses some truth in his words, because after the dinner he spends a sleepless night, restless, hot and cold by turns hearing Blanche’s words all over again in his mind. Perhaps Charles suspects that Blanche is jealous, that in fact he is interested in Charles sexually. During the conversation Blanche certainly flattered Charles and himself by stating that judging by his drawings, Charles is a true artist, and he (Blanche) a connoisseur of art, a man of the world who knows people like Cocteau. Clearly Blanche tried to say they would make a perfect couple.

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<sup>77</sup> Hekanaho states that by “leaving under a cloud” Blanche hints that because he broke some rules of sexual convention, he was expelled from Eton./ Hekanaho, Pia Livia: ””Minä en ole minä, sinä et ole hän, he eivät ole heitä.” Mieheyden representaatiot Evelyn Waugh’n romaanissa *Mennytt Maailma*” . KTS: Ruumiillisuus. 2002, p. 28

Donald Greene states that this kind of break-in of an dissentient voice like Anthony Blanche's, perhaps saves *Brideshead Revisited* from being grossly sentimental.<sup>78</sup> However, Blanche's critical words are put to shame, and seem cruel and superficial at the end of the narrative, when the whole picture of Sebastian's suffering is laid out in front of the reader. Gradually, Sebastian grows into a painfully tragic figure who gains a special dignity through suffering; his deepening alcoholism is depicted with great accuracy. The only thing that remains vague, is the real reason for his illness – and there rarely is one particular cause for alcoholism. In any case, I think Sebastian's alcoholism is depicted very realistically. Furthermore, the attitudes and actions of those nearest the drunkard are true to life.<sup>79</sup> Charles describes the painful feelings of those who witness the loved one lapsing after a period of sobriety:

A blow, expected, repeated, falling on a bruise, with no smart or shock of surprise, only a dull and sickening pain and the doubt whether another like it could be borne – that was how it felt, sitting opposite Sebastian at dinner that night, seeing his clouded eye and groping movements, hearing his thickened voice breaking in, ineptly, after long brutish silences.(BR, 161)

One possible cause for Sebastian's alcoholism is, as stated before, Lady Marchmain and her saintlike martyrdom. The secular reader tends to blame her for bringing her children up by teaching them the superstitious and frightening doctrines of Catholicism. The incessant demand to confess and regret one's sins, and the images of purgatory and hell must be behind Sebastian's feelings of guilt too. It would also be easy to conclude that because he

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<sup>78</sup> Greene, "A Partiality for Lords: Evelyn Waugh and Snobbery". *American Scholar*. Summer 1989, Vol. 58, Issue 3, p. 454

<sup>79</sup> Waugh himself has been reported to have been a heavy drinker throughout his adult life. Alexander Waugh writes of his grandfather's drinking habits as a student at Oxford: "Many of his friends noticed a manic, even suicidal quality in his drinking bouts. Dudley Carew later recalled, 'Evelyn went at the bottle as though he was engaged in a desperate murderous struggle with one who was at the same time deadly enemy and devoted comrade. It was almost a combat on the physical level.' He would arrange to meet friends in a pub, arrive early and, in the few minutes before they came, paralyse himself with a speed and deadly determination that, on one occasion, astonished even the hardened pub landlord: 'Never seen anything like it; not in all my life'."/Alexander Waugh, *Fathers and Sons: The Autobiography of a Family* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2004) 184-185. See also Patey, 318

realizes his homosexuality, he blames himself for this mortal sin, and therefore turns to drink in order to escape. The drinking, of course, is also a grave sin, and therefore makes him even more remorseful; the vicious circle is complete. The urge to flee from his family, from the Brideshead Castle, from Oxford; to run away from everywhere, is constantly present in Sebastian's dialogue – and his last name, Flyte, is also a symbol of this.

Consequently, one secular interpretation is that Sebastian wants to run away from his suffocating mother and the demands of the aristocratic tradition and convention. However, a Catholic interpretation could be that he is trying to escape “the twitch upon the thread” that is, his religious vocation. Charles the narrator admits that Sebastian's faith was an enigma to him when they were young, but that he was not particularly interested in solving this enigma. He reminisces:

I had no religion. I was taken to church weekly as a child, and at school attended chapel daily, but, as though in compensation, from the time I went to my public school I was excused church in the holidays. The masters who taught me Divinity told me that biblical texts were highly untrustworthy. They never suggested I should try to pray. My father did not go to church except on family occasions and then with derision. My mother, I think, was devout. (BR, 83)

Charles goes on to explain how he wondered as a child how his own mother could leave him and his father to go off to Serbia to do humanitarian work, and later die of exhaustion in the snow in Bosnia. Here a hint of his subsequent conversion is given, as (the narrator) Charles concludes that later he has recognized the same kind of spirit in himself, and that now he has come to accept the claims which in 1923 he never troubled to examine; now he accepts the supernatural as real. (BR, 83)

But during their “Arcadian summer” in Brideshead, when they are still happy, often ‘tasting’ wine until dawn, they never discuss Sebastian's religion until one Sunday Sebastian starts a conversation:

‘Oh dear, it’s very difficult being a Catholic.’

‘Does it make much difference to you?’

‘Of course, all the time.’

‘Well, I can’t say I’ve noticed it. Are you struggling against temptation? You don’t seem much more virtuous than me.’

‘I’m very, very much wickeder.’ (BR, 84)

According to Patey, Sebastian’s being a Catholic makes him wickeder than other people (non-Catholics) when he transgresses.<sup>80</sup> This same sentiment is later echoed by Julia when she compares herself to Protestant girls: they could sin (by marrying whomever they liked, even divorced men) because they were brought up in ignorance, whereas if Julia sins, she goes to hell. Patey states that “‘The point in both cases is that sin entails *knowing* choice (of a lesser good over a greater)’”.<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, although Catholics consider heavy drinking a mortal sin, they also believe that God forgives alcoholism when it is clearly an illness. A clear indication of this is given later in the novel during a conversation between Bridey and Charles concerning the deliberateness of Sebastian’s drinking. Bridey says: “ I hope it’s dipsomania. That is simply a great misfortune that we must all help him bear. What I used to fear was that he just got drunk deliberately when he liked and because he liked”. (BR, 158) Thus, if a drunkard drinks with no free will of his own, then he is not destined to eternal death. Charles does not understand Bridey’s point at all but says that Sebastian used to drink and does still drink in the company of Charles to celebrate, that is, deliberately, and that if the family does not stop bothering Sebastian with “keepers” and “cures”, he will end up a physical wreck in a few years. Charles is justly appalled at Bridey’s inhuman dogmatic callousness as he replies that there is nothing wrong with being a physical wreck. In other words, he does not care if Sebastian suffers or dies, the only important thing is to keep him out of

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<sup>80</sup> Patey, 391

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. (Also Cf. mortal sin, Chapter 1.3. above)

hell.

Sebastian's alcoholism could also be analyzed within the framework of religious literary tradition, where alcohol is considered an agent of mystical transport.<sup>82</sup> In his article, Allan Beveridge discusses such novels as *Under the Volcano* (1947) by Malcolm Lowry, who wrote that "the agonies of the drunkard find their poetic analogue in the agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers", and *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* (1939) by Joseph Roth, who "portrays the alcoholic hero as a saint-like figure, who witnesses miracles and who achieves a state of grace just before he dies".<sup>83</sup> Beveridge also describes Waugh's Sebastian Flyte as someone who is too sensitive for the ways of the secular world eventually finding salvation "in a monastery where his drinking is regarded benignly". And in Cordelia's words he is "very near and dear to God".<sup>84</sup> Some religious writers seem(ed) to consider alcohol a way to broaden the mind. Beveridge quotes William James, who wrote in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as follows:

The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites and says yes...It makes him for the moment one with truth. Not through mere perversity do men run after it.<sup>85</sup>

This romantic attitude seems to be related to the one which bohemian artists have shared for ages: the artistic integrity demands them to break the boundaries of the bourgeois life-style; furthermore, some of them must experience the degradation in order to understand the human condition and produce great work. In the Catholic context: in order to become a saint, you must suffer first. Catholics from the lower classes, that is, the poor, have no

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<sup>82</sup> Allan Beveridge, "I drink, therefore I am: alcohol and creativity". *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, Vol 92, December 1999, 646

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 647

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 646

difficulties in finding suffering, but for an aristocrat like Sebastian, with all the essentials provided for, it is a different matter. Alcoholism, as a perfect way to destroy one's life, can be of help in this.

However, Sebastian does not seem to be searching mystical religious experiences through his drinking. At first he drinks for fun, but later he drinks with the aim of oblivion. Yet another reason for Sebastian's drinking problem could be his reluctance to grow up. As Cara predicts to Charles during their conversation in Venice: "Sebastian is in love with his own childhood. That will make him very unhappy. His teddy-bear<sup>86</sup>, his nanny...and he is nineteen years old..."(BR, 100) Cara is also the first to notice that Sebastian drinks too much, and when Charles says that they both do, she states that Sebastian drinks in a different way, which is the same way Alex (Lord Marchmain) used to drink when she met him, and that he will be a drunkard if someone does not stop him. (BR, 100)<sup>87</sup> Although Cara is insightful in some respects, she is quite stupid in others; she does not realize that no-one, but the alcoholic himself, can stop an alcoholic drinking. At least Lady Marchmain's attempts to do this turn out to be catastrophic. But Cara analyzes correctly the differences in the way the boys drink. As Patey remarks: Charles drinks for pleasure whereas Sebastian drinks to escape the claims of his conscience.<sup>88</sup>

It is possible that Sebastian refuses to grow up because he is afraid of his sexual tendencies. Thus it could be argued that he tries to be totally asexual and seems to prolong his childhood instead of acknowledging his homosexuality, which he has been led to believe is a mortal sin by his Catholic educators. When his attempts fail, and he finds

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<sup>86</sup> According to Patey, the teddy-bear Aloysius is perhaps ironically named after St Aloysius Gonzaga, patron of Catholic youth. (Patey, 392)

<sup>87</sup> Interestingly from today's point of view, Cara claims the drinking problem to be hereditary: "It is in the blood." (BR, 100) Presumably when BR was written, the nowadays fashionable 'scientific' claim of alcoholism being biological and genetically passed on to the next generation, was not yet heard of.

<sup>88</sup> Patey, 226



himself wanting/loving Charles, he escapes to more and more excessive drinking. It is Cara again, who pays attention to the boys' relationship. In her opinion, this kind of "romantic friendship" is typical for Englishmen and Germans, and that it is "very good as long as it does not go on too long". (BR, 98) But Sebastian wants just that, he wants Charles to be his partner in childhood – or a slightly sinful adolescence –, and who is "contra mundum", that is, against Lady Marchmain and the complexity of the adult world. When Charles seems to mature faster, drinks less while Sebastian drinks more, and, worst of all, is friendly towards Lady Marchmain, there happens the inevitable rift in the friendship, and Sebastian takes flight. Thus their days in Arcadia are numbered. Wirth sees Sebastian's retreat into adolescence and alcoholism as a subconscious and conscious flight from his noble heritage and the duty to continue this nobility, and this could also be interpreted in a larger sense as a symbol of a beginning of a decline in the traditional values of the English aristocracy.<sup>89</sup> But is he escaping a religious vocation or simply the respectability and responsibilities of a nobleman, which potentially include a heterosexual marriage?

Itäkare argues that the analogical, sacramental Catholic interpretation (cf. Greeley in 1.2. above) of *Brideshead Revisited* is particularly evident in the portrayal of Sebastian.<sup>90</sup> However, I disagree with Itäkare when she claims that he is, without any reservations, depicted as the only holy character in the novel. I think there are plenty of reservations and Sebastian could be seen as a mere human being with no saintly qualities or holiness whatsoever. I simply cannot see, what could make Sebastian holy, he drinks, lies and even steals money repeatedly. He is also selfish: if people act against his will, he finds a way to make them feel bad. In fact, all the characters in *Brideshead Revisited* are far

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<sup>89</sup> Wirth, 63

<sup>90</sup> Itäkare, 30

from being holy. But I do agree with Itäkare on one point though; biblical analogies could also be found in the portrayal of Sebastian. First, Charles sees Sebastian as a symbol of everything beautiful and innocent, and Brideshead Castle is given a paradisaical glint in the narrative; during their first summer, Charles believes himself to be “very near heaven, during those languid days at Brideshead”. (BR, 77) Thus, these are like the days before the Fall of Man.<sup>91</sup> But it should be remembered that Charles was an agnostic at the time, and therefore his word ‘heaven’ could hardly be understood in its religious sense. His heaven is more likely a sensuous, profane heaven – the ecstatic heaven of a boy in love.

The paradise ends over the years as both Charles and Sebastian leave Oxford without graduating, and go their separate ways. With the aim of becoming a painter, Charles goes to Paris to study art, while Sebastian, after Lady Marchmain is finally incapable of stopping his drinking and his many escapes abroad, ends up in Morocco, and establishes a relationship with another fugitive, the self-centered homosexual Kurt. He is a German who has left his country and joined the Foreign Legion. When Charles goes to Morocco in order to bring Sebastian home to see his dying mother, and finds him in a Franciscan hospital very ill with pneumonia, a monk in the hospital ward describes Kurt to him as suffering from “a secondary syphilis” and “a foot that will not heal”. He says that Sebastian found Kurt “starving in Tangier and took him in and gave him a home”. Charles thinks the monk is simple and “a poor booby”, when he states that Sebastian is a true Samaritan. (BR, 206)<sup>92</sup> Charles has met Kurt briefly the day before going to the hospital, and apparently he disliked the lisping<sup>93</sup> German, who told him that he shot himself in the foot in order to get

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<sup>91</sup> Itäkare, 30

<sup>92</sup> At this point, Charles, the converted narrator, comments on the younger unconverted Charles, and his judgement of the monk as being stupid: “God forgive me!” (BR, 206)

<sup>93</sup> Charles the narrator describes Kurt: “There was a brass tray by his side on wooden legs, and on it were two beer bottles, a dirty plate, and a saucer full of cigarette ends; he held a glass of beer in his hand and a cigarette lay on his lower lip and stuck there when he spoke. He had long fair hair combed back without a parting and a

out of the Legion. He also showed his selfishness in telling that Sebastian is very good for him because he can provide for him. Kurt was totally unconcerned when Charles told him that Sebastian's mother was ill. He only asked whether she was rich, and why she did not give Sebastian more money, and whether Charles could make her give Sebastian more money.

Charles visits Sebastian several times in the hospital, but cannot persuade him to come home to England, not even when they hear the news of Lady Marchmain's death. Sebastian simply states that going back would be lovely in some ways, "but do you think Kurt would like it?". (BR, 207) Charles is appalled and exclaims: "For God's sake, you don't mean to spend your life with Kurt, do you?" Sebastian answers:

'You know, Charles, it's rather a pleasant change when all your life you've had people looking after you, to have someone to look after yourself. Only of course it has to be someone pretty hopeless to need looking after by *me*.' (BR, 207)

Charles the narrator, says that these words were the key he lacked if only he had paid more attention to them. In other words, we are supposed to believe that the converted Charles now knows that Sebastian had a religious vocation, and that entailed a Christlike servitude even to the most unpleasant sinners.

Charles sees Sebastian for the last time when he takes Sebastian home from hospital to the house which he shares with Kurt. There Charles has to witness a scene, where Sebastian humbles himself completely. Kurt starts whining and complaining the minute Sebastian arrives. He then asks Sebastian, who is still very weak, to give him cigarettes from under his bed. As Sebastian starts to painfully rise from his chair, Charles offers a helping hand, but Sebastian refuses and says it is his job. Kurt confirms this with

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face that was unnaturally lined for a man of his obvious youth; one of his front teeth was missing, so that his sibilants came sometimes with a lisp, sometimes with a disconcerting whistle, which he covered with a giggle; the teeth he had were stained with tobacco and set far apart". (BR, 203)

lipping complacency: “Yeth, I, reckon that’s Sebastian’s job”. After this Charles concludes that there is nothing more he can do for Sebastian, and he leaves him “with his friend in the little enclosed house at the end of the alley”. (BR, 208)

One Catholic interpretation of Sebastian’s decision to stay with Kurt is that it is an indication of his sainthood, his vocation to help hopeless people. Thus he has become the good Samaritan who gives himself as a present to another human being.<sup>94</sup> In this interpretation the apparent homosexuality is usually ignored<sup>95</sup>, although it would be incredibly naïve not to acknowledge the real nature of the relationship since there is no doubt of its sexuality. I also claim that Charles is jealous of this affair – this becomes perfectly evident in the attitudes of Charles the narrator: even after so many years and Charles’ own affair with Sebastian’s sister, Charles seems to be smarting with bitter jealousy and hurt as he describes Kurt in no uncertain terms, and recounts Sebastian’s attitude towards this appalling human being. If we assume that Charles is jealous, then Sebastian’s devotion to Kurt can be seen as a kind of revenge to Charles. Hekanaho states that in witnessing the domestic life of Sebastian and Kurt, Charles finally realizes he is an outsider, and that Sebastian has chosen Kurt because he is not in any way connected to Lady Marchmain as Charles is.<sup>96</sup> Sebastian has always considered Charles’ friendliness towards his mother a serious betrayal as he is quite strict in his demand of absolute loyalty. Charles has failed in this, and thus is deported from Sebastian’s life. Furthermore, Sebastian could be angry at Charles because he thinks that Charles has cowardly denied his own homosexuality, and tries to conform into the conventional bourgeois way of life – he

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<sup>94</sup> Itäkare, 30

<sup>95</sup> Even a need of parenthood is suggested by Robert Murray Davis: “Kurt replaces Aloysius the teddy bear in allowing Sebastian to take a parenting role”. (Davis, 103)

<sup>96</sup> Hekanaho, 33

even tries hard to become heterosexual, whereas Sebastian has had the courage to be himself, that is, to live in a homosexual relationship. This interpretation has nothing to do with religion, instead the behaviour of the characters is seen as simply very typical of human beings who are disappointed in love.

Later in the novel, Charles learns from Cordelia that Sebastian and Kurt had gone to Greece where Kurt had been arrested for an obscure reason, and shipped back to Germany, only to be caught and put into a concentration camp, where he hanged himself during the first week. Sebastian did not know of his death but hung about in Germany for a year trying to get a word to Kurt, but when he heard that Kurt had died, he returned to Morocco, and there Cordelia had met him. She tells that Sebastian is now a “hanger-on” at a monastery, where all the monks love him. He drinks in regular bouts, and “he’ll never be able to join the order, but the Father Superior is going to take charge of him”. Cordelia describes Sebastian as being someone who cannot fit in either to the world or the monastic rule. (BR,291-293) Cordelia predicts that he will become a familiar and endearing figure among the inhabitants of the monastery, and that one day, after one of his drinking bouts, he will be found dying outside the gates, and given the last sacraments. When Charles wonders if he suffers, Cordelia responds:

‘Oh, yes, I think he does. One can have no idea what the suffering may be, to be maimed as he is – no dignity, no power of will. No one is ever holy without suffering. It’s taken that form with him. ... I’ve seen so much suffering in the last few years; there’s so much coming for everybody soon.’ (BR, 294)<sup>97</sup>

In Cordelia’s words, the likes of Sebastian are “holy” and “near and dear” to God.(BR, 293) In some Catholic readings of the novel, Sebastian is seen as an example of the

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<sup>97</sup> By “there’s so much (suffering) coming for everybody soon”, Cordelia refers to the threatening war. Cordelia has just returned to Brideshead from the Civil War in Spain.

Christian tradition: “the hopeless sinner saved”.<sup>98</sup> Itäkare argues that while emphasizing Sebastian’s remorse and return to the Church, the Catholic readings have further interpreted this to mean that Sebastian has also renounced his homosexuality. Alternately, they have interpreted his fate as a state of degradation which in turn is a result of the sinful life he has led.<sup>99</sup> However, according to Itäkare, it is possible to consider Sebastian as both a homosexual and a holy man. She defines “holy” as “surrendering yourself unconditionally to God, as yourself”. According to her, there is no need for Sebastian to change, because he has retained his childlike belief in God, and because holiness is not self-betrayal or a denial or suffocation of one’s self.<sup>100</sup> To me this conclusion seems somewhat peculiar, because it suggests that Sebastian could go on drinking, lying and stealing – because there is no need for him to change – and still be holy. Logically, all of us would be holy on these grounds: everyone could repeatedly sin, that is, do things against the Christian doctrine, (and claim the sinning to be one’s self-expression, one cannot help being what one is), but at the same time declare a firm belief in God and an unconditional surrender to God. A *very* Catholic logic, undeniably.

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<sup>98</sup> McDonnell, 1988, 95

<sup>99</sup> Itäkare, 30

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 31

### 3. Positive Catholicism

In the next two subsections I will analyse the characters of Cordelia and Nanny Hawkins who might be argued to possess some qualities that could be considered to be positive in Catholicism. However, the use of the term “positive Catholicism” is perhaps somewhat misleading, since these qualities refer not only to Catholicism, but Christianity in general. As I stated in section 2., “positive Catholicism” is a term coined by Wirth, and I will use it here in order to contrast it with the term “negative Catholicism” used in section 2. and its subsections to analyse the negative traits of Lady Marchmain and Brideshead and also the negative impacts that Catholicism has in the lives of the other members of the Marchmain family.

It should be noted that some of the positive traits which Cordelia and Nanny Hawkins possess might not have anything to do with their religion, but are simply personal characteristics or an outcome of their position in life. For example, it is not uncommon for the youngest child of a family to be more carefree than the elder siblings, and this seems to be true in Cordelia’s case too. Nanny’s gentleness could also be the consequence of her old age as we do not really know whether she used to be tyrannical as a young governess. Also, it is a known fact that even the most positive of intentions can sometimes lead to unhappiness or even disaster, and some of Nanny Hawkins’ presumably well-intentioned teachings lead Julia into deep feelings of guilt and unhappiness.

#### 3.1. Taking Life in Her Stride: Cordelia

The youngest member of the Marchmain family, the warm-hearted Cordelia<sup>101</sup> is perhaps

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<sup>101</sup> The name Cordelia is said to have a Latin origin, its meaning being ‘heart’ (=cor). Davis states that “Cordelia is, as the Latin root of her name implies, the heart and thus the emotional center of the family”. (Davis, 94). Another possible etymology derives from French, *coeur de lion* (=lion-hearted). (Cordelia is also the youngest daughter of *King Lear* by Shakespeare.)

the most sympathetic Catholic character in *Brideshead Revisited*. We first meet her when she is “a robust child of ten or eleven”. (BR, 87) Unlike Sebastian and Julia, she is not beautiful, but has the “unmistakable family characteristics” that are “ill-arranged in a frank and chubby plainness”. (BR, 87) She has a mischievous sense of humour and is capable of a genuine love for all human race, even the weaker members of it. She is honest but also playfully sensible, she realises the hypocrisy in obeying every last letter of the Catholic law. For example, at her school run by nuns, she sees no point in becoming an “Enfant de Marie” if this entails keeping her room tidy. (BR, 88) Bridey pompously reproaches her for disobedience, but as Bridey represents the letter, Cordelia represents the spirit of their religion.<sup>102</sup> To her, keeping her room tidy is less important than helping other people.<sup>103</sup> Sebastian describes the difference between Bridey and Cordelia, stating that they are both fervent Catholics, but Bridey is miserable whereas Cordelia is “bird-happy”. (BR, 86)

When Bridey and Cordelia hear for the first time that Charles is an agnostic, Bridey does not seem interested, but makes small talk by asking whether there is much of agnosticism at Charles’ college. Cordelia, in turn, seems genuinely worried about Charles’ soul in a childlike fashion, and says that she will pray for him, but: “I can’t spare you a whole rosary you know. Just a decade. I’ve got such a long list of people. I take them in order and they get a decade about once a week”. (BR, 90) Charles is often amused by Cordelia’s cheerful chatter. She is like a breath of fresh air in the sometimes stuffy and solemn atmosphere of Brideshead Castle.

However, even Cordelia’s Catholicism may sometimes seem a little dubious to contemporary readers; one conversation with Charles reveals a decidedly imperialistic

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<sup>102</sup> Davis, 82

<sup>103</sup> Wirth, 87



attitude in her otherwise innocent faith. She tells Charles that a missionary priest has started “a new thing”: by sending five shillings to some nuns in Africa it is possible to buy a black god-daughter and the baby is christened after the sender. Cordelia delights in this: “I’ve got six black Cordelias already. Isn’t it lovely?” (BR,91) However, according to Davis, Catholics could see this in a different way: their belief is that membership in the Church is the surest way to salvation, and this accounts for Cordelia’s pleasure in amassing African namesakes.<sup>104</sup> From the outside the desire to convert may look imperialistic, but from the inside it is considered an act of charity.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, one cannot avoid a feeling of unease about Cordelia’s collection of black ‘dolls’.

Cordelia seems to be the only one in Sebastian’s family who is genuinely worried about his alcoholism for his sake and not for the sake of the family’s reputation. She tries to help him, but like everyone else she is at a loss of how to do this. For example, she tries to encourage him to take interest in outdoor activities such as riding and hunting – to no avail. Later, feeling sorry for her hung-over brother, she even acquires liquor for him in their home, where Lady Marchmain has told the servants to lock up the bottles. Once she is caught sneaking whisky for Sebastian, and punished by Lady Marchmain. Thus, she commits the same ‘crime’ as Charles who has been thrown away from Brideshead for giving money to Sebastian. In a letter to the ‘exiled’ Charles, Cordelia explains how she too is “in disgrace”. (BR, 164)

Cordelia is disarmingly forgiving by nature. For example, when Julia decides to marry Rex, Cordelia is very disappointed at first. The girlish reason for her indignation is that she had looked forward to being her sister’s bridesmaid, and the more serious one is her worry

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<sup>104</sup> Davis, 30

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

over Julia's soul. Julia tells Charles that at first Cordelia would not speak to her, but on the morning of the wedding she came to her in floods of tears: "[she] begged me not to marry, then hugged me, gave me a dear little brooch she'd bought, and said she prayed I'd always be happy". (BR, 192) Also, when Julia and Charles become lovers over ten years later, Cordelia never judges them. When Charles asks Julia whether Cordelia knows about them, Julia responds: "Yes, she wrote me a sweet letter". (BR, 286)

Cordelia's relationship with her mother is not without problems, although she does not rebel against her with the desperation of Sebastian. In turn, Lady Marchmain is not as harsh in her treatment of Cordelia, sometimes she even has difficulties in hiding her amusement at her daughter's mischievous practical jokes. Thus, Cordelia has the ability to awaken the playful side in her sometimes overtly controlled mother. Cordelia understands that although appearing to be saintly, her mother is far from being a saint. Shortly after Lady Marchmain has died Cordelia confesses to Charles: "I got on best with her of any of us, but I don't believe I ever really loved her. Not as she wanted or deserved. It's odd I didn't, because I'm full of natural affections". (BR, 212) During the same conversation, Cordelia says she hopes she has a vocation to be a nun. She adds that without vocation it is no good trying to become a nun, however much you want it – on the other hand: "if you have a vocation, you can't get away from it, however much you hate it". (BR, 213) She states that Sebastian (who is at the time living in Morocco with Kurt) could have a vocation and hates it, but she is not certain. When Charles predicts that Cordelia will someday fall in love, she says: "Oh, pray not". (BR, 214) Perhaps Cordelia is terrified of romantic love – and it is no wonder considering her parents' disastrous marriage, and Julia's and Sebastian's sufferings for love.

In fact, no indication is ever given that Cordelia has any love affairs. She tries to become

a nun and goes to a convent, but failing that she goes on to the Spanish Civil War to work as a nurse for those injured.<sup>106</sup> When she returns to Brideshead before World War II, Charles thinks that she is ugly and looks tired and older than her twenty-six years. He makes comparisons wondering “how the same ingredients, differently dispensed” could produce Brideshead, Sebastian, Julia and her”. (BR, 286) As an artist and lover of aesthetic values, Charles feels sorry for Cordelia, who is “without any of Julia’s or Sebastian’s grace”. Charles the narrator describes “how it hurt to think all that burning love spending itself on serum-injections and de-lousing powder”. (BR, 286) Thus, the younger Charles seems quite superficial – and certainly lacking in Christian charity.

The day after her arrival Cordelia tells Charles about visiting Sebastian in Tunis. (cf. 2.3. above) After she has explained to Charles about suffering and holiness, he begins to understand that there is a deeper beauty in Cordelia that he thus far has been unable to appreciate. Cordelia sees through Charles as she asks: “When you met me last night did you think, ‘poor Cordelia, such an engaging child, grown up a plain and pious spinster, full of good works’? Did you think ‘thwarted’?” (BR, 294) Charles admits this, but says that he does not think so now. Cordelia retorts that funnily enough “thwarted passion” is the expression that came to her mind to describe Julia and Charles. (BR, 295) Davis argues that Cordelia’s viewpoint gives Charles a new perspective on Julia. Although still beautiful as an ‘object’, Julia has indeed the thwarted look caused by her sadness – the sadness which had originally drawn Charles to her. But now Charles sees that Julia’s suffering may have value on a larger scale.<sup>107</sup> Davis states that Charles now learns to see Julia as a person

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<sup>106</sup>The reader is never told why Cordelia does not adjust to the life in the convent. Judging by her not too pedant character as a teenager, presumably she rejects the strict rules of the community. She also has a voracious appetite (cf. BR, pp. 88, 211, 214, 312), perhaps the culinary delights of the nunnery are less than satisfactory for her.

<sup>107</sup> Davis, 122

rather than an object, and at the same time that he is distanced from her as a lover, he sees her more clearly.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, according to Davis, Cordelia implies an opposition between Arcadian aestheticism and the concept of suffering, between charm and grace, happiness and holiness.<sup>109</sup> Thus, one of Cordelia's roles in the narrative, is to give Charles some subtle theological education. Cordelia's words indeed make him thoughtful. At this point in the narrative, for the first time the metaphor of the avalanche appears to Charles' thoughts during his sleepless night. The avalanche, which represents both a threat to his affair with Julia, and in a religious sense could be seen as a purifying force of conversion.

Cordelia seems to be the only one of the Flytes who lives according to the spirit of Christianity right from the start. Furthermore, she seems to be satisfied with her life; she does not fight her vocation – or upbringing – as Sebastian and Julia do. She is modest, and since she has no ambitious expectations from life, she is not disappointed either. She is quite different from Julia; she does not even seem to mind although she is not even given the debutante ball, because her mother dies and their house in London is sold. A more superficial girl would become embittered for life, but not Cordelia, who suffers quite a lot of losses at a young age. She resigns to her fate, understanding that there are far harsher sufferings in the world, and she is willing to help those in need. I agree with Wirth as she claims that Cordelia's ability to place love of human beings over the dogmatism of her church and to act according to the demands of her faith and to sacrifice her own life to helping others, shows her to be a representative of "Positive Catholicism".<sup>110</sup> After Julia reconverts and leaves Charles, she is reported to follow Cordelia into the warfields helping the wounded. Thus, Cordelia is an example to her older sister, and Julia's faith is not

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<sup>108</sup> Davis, 122

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 121-122

<sup>110</sup> Wirth, 87

completely self-centered in the end.

### **3.2. The Faithful Servant: Nanny Hawkins**

Nanny Hawkins represents a contrasting mother figure to that portrayed by Lady Marchmain. All the children, but especially Sebastian, are very attached to her. According to Wirth, this kind of high esteem in which these nursery matriarchs are held is common throughout the English upper classes.<sup>111</sup> Davis states that Nanny Hawkins, like all nannies, represents simplicity and security, and serves as a surrogate mother for the children.<sup>112</sup> These nannies never retire but continue to have a position of authority among the families even when their charges are grown up.<sup>113</sup> Nanny Hawkins is almost a member of the family, but not quite; she is still a servant. As Rex complains to Charles about the extravagant finances of the Marchmain household, he probably refers to Nanny among others as he lists the expenses: "...dozens of old servants doing damn all, being waited on by other servants". (BR, 168) But Rex could never succeed in disposing of Nanny. As McDonnell points out, once a nanny is established in an aristocratic family, she cannot be easily removed. A nanny often brings up several generations, and thus it is unthinkable that such a part of a family should be considered a servant who can be dismissed.<sup>114</sup>

Nanny Hawkins' room is a haven of peace and love. It is cosy and inviting.<sup>115</sup> Lady Marchmain's room represents elegance and glamour, to which her children have never felt to be welcome. Nanny's room is full of not so elegant mementoes and photographs brought to her by the children over the years. Waugh endows Nanny Hawkins with the traditional values and sentiments of motherhood. At the same time, she represents the simple

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<sup>111</sup> Wirth, 87

<sup>112</sup> Davis, 69

<sup>113</sup> Wirth, 87

<sup>114</sup> Jacqueline McDonnell, *Waugh on Women* (London: Duckworth & Company Ltd, 1986) 123

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-128

unintellectual Catholicism of a lower-class woman. Wirth argues that she represents the security of religion.<sup>116</sup> Although she is a peripheral figure in the novel, she is important to the Flyte family; she establishes a continuance of faith in the members of the family.<sup>117</sup> She is secure because she is permanent – almost immobile. As Wirth puts it, she is “a relic of the past” and “an unchanging monument in a chaotic and fast-moving world”.<sup>118</sup> This is evident as, in the epilogue, she is the only member of the Marchmain household that is at home for Captain Charles Ryder to meet as he revisits Brideshead (now transformed into an army camp) for the last time.

In the novel, Nanny is never outside her room. If the family members want to see her, they go to her room. More often than not, she is dozing in her chair when her visitors arrive.<sup>119</sup> It is Nanny Hawkins that Sebastian takes Charles to see the first time at Brideshead rather than the members of his family. For the trip to Brideshead, Sebastian chooses a day when he thinks the Marchmains are in London. When he hears from Nanny that Julia is in the village giving a speech at the Conservative Women’s gathering and about to return soon, he wants to avoid her at all costs and hurries away with Charles. Charles misinterprets Sebastian’s behaviour as being ashamed of him. But Sebastian denies this, and explains:

‘I’m not going to have you get mixed up with my family. They’re so madly charming. All my life they’ve been taking things away from me. If they once got hold of you with their charm, they’d make you *their* friend not mine, and I won’t let them.’ (BR, 38-39)

It is clear that Sebastian does not consider Nanny to be as ‘dangerous’ as his family –

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<sup>116</sup> Wirth, 88

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 87

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 88

<sup>119</sup> When Charles is taken into her room for the first time, Nanny is asleep in her chair. Charles the narrator describes her: “Long hours of work in her youth, authority in middle life, repose and security in her age, had set their stamp on her lined and serene face.” (BR, 37)

most notably Lady Marchmain (and apparently Julia too). He knows that Nanny is not going to ‘steal’ Charles from him because she is a gentle old woman who does not possess the charm to do it. Sebastian is smart enough – even at this early stage of their friendship – to understand that his family’s upper-class charm is something that Charles is unable to resist.

Sebastian’s attachment to Nanny could be seen as another indication of his being “in love with his childhood”. (cf. Cara in 2.3. above) With Nanny, Sebastian is free of the demands of the adult world and its responsibilities. Nanny still treats him as if he were a child, and she appears to be quite innocent herself – presumably she sees nothing strange in the fact that Sebastian carries a teddy-bear with him. Furthermore, she probably does not pay any attention to Sebastian’s sexual tendencies; or if she suspects that Sebastian could be homosexual, she ignores or shuts this possibility out of her mind. To her, he always remains the sweet little boy. This becomes evident even at the later part of the novel: as Cordelia returns from Spain and tells Nanny about meeting Sebastian in Tunis, and that he is now “with the monks”, she answers: “I hope they look after him properly. I expect they find him a regular handful”. (BR, 287) To Cordelia’s remark that Sebastian has even grown a beard, and is very religious now, she retorts:

‘That I won’t believe, not even if I see it. He was always a little heathen. Brideshead was one for church, not Sebastian. And a beard, only fancy; such a nice fair skin as he had; always looked clean though he’d not been near water all day, while Brideshead there was no doing anything with, scrub as you might.’ (BR, 288)

If one reads between the lines of this remark, it becomes evident that although Sebastian was “a little heathen”, Nanny loved him more than the murky Bridey. Furthermore, in a religious sense, Nanny’s words are suggestive of Sebastian’s purity and holiness, and that his being a heathen is only superficial. At the same time, Bridey’s being dirty despite all the

efforts to clean him, could be an indication of the merciless dogmatism of his faith.

However, even the nursery brand of Catholicism has negative effects, particularly on Julia. When Julia and Charles are crossing the Atlantic in the storm, she tells him about her being punished for marrying Rex: “You see I can’t get all that sort of thing out of my mind, quite – Death, Judgement, Heaven, Hell, Nanny Hawkins, and the catechism. It becomes part of oneself, if they give it one early enough”. (BR, 247) In other words, Nanny Hawkins has been a participant in the religious brainwashing too.



#### **4. Romantic Love Destroyed: Julia and Charles**

In the next two subsections I will analyse the love affair of Julia and Charles, and particularly its ending in Julia's reconversion beside her father's death bed. First, however, I will examine Charles' artistic development from his days with Sebastian to the final loss of inspiration, which occurs gradually over the years. I will try to trace the reasons as to why he fails as an artist.

I will also analyse Julia's character, and how she gradually gathers the feelings of religious guilt, which allegedly force her to abandon Charles. Somewhat illogically, Charles is said to convert to Catholicism at the same time, although Julia's main reason for abandoning him seems to be Charles' fierce opposition to her religion. One could ask: if they both are converted, what is there to keep them apart – except the fact that they are both divorced and therefore cannot marry again? In the secular reader, the end of Julia's and Charles' relationship raises numerous questions, and I will look into some of these questions in the following sections.

Besides Julia and Charles, there is also said to be a third (re)conversion – that of Lord Marchmain. This conversion, however, is questionable in many ways, and I will deal with the paradoxical death bed miracle in section 4.2.

##### **4.1. The Unhappy Relation of Julia and Charles**

The mood of Charles' narrative changes as he tells about his life after he has lost the connection first with Sebastian and then the rest of the Marchmain family. Charles becomes a respected architectural painter who mainly paints portraits of noble houses that are “soon to be deserted or debased”; his arrival is often “only a few paces ahead of the auctioneer's, a presage of doom”. (BR, 216) Characteristically, his career too, has its roots with the

Flytes; the first paintings of this kind are of the Marchmain House, the Flytes' townhouse in London, which Lord Marchmain is going to sell after Lady Marchmain's death, and which is to be demolished and replaced by a modern block of flats. Of course, Charles' artistic vocation started to develop even earlier, when Sebastian took him to Brideshead Castle, which was full of art. Charles pointed out during his first summer in that house that "it was an aesthetic education to live within those walls". (BR, 78) He also stated that "this was his conversion to the Baroque". (BR, 79) At Brideshead, he was also fascinated by the fountain, which dominated the yard, and which Sebastian asked him to draw. He found it "an ambitious subject for an amateur" but "by judicious omissions and some stylish tricks" he produced "a very passable echo of Piranesi". (BR, 79)

Earlier he had been a devotee of modernism, but here too it was Sebastian who made him see the fallacy of art when compared to living nature:<sup>120</sup>

it was not until Sebastian, idly turning the pages of Clive Bell's *Art* read: "'Does anyone feel the same kind of emotion for a butterfly or a flower that he feels for a cathedral or a picture?' Yes, *I do*", that my eyes were opened. (BR, 30)

The modernist aesthetic, Clive Bell, is attacked here for elevating human creativity above God's.<sup>121</sup> Laura White argues that Charles uses the expression of spiritual awakening – "my eyes were opened" – to describe a sense of revelation. This suggests that the young Charles has progressed enough to see that placing the artifacts of human creativity above the creations of nature could be unnatural and arrogant.<sup>122</sup> However, his eyes are not completely opened yet to acknowledge Sebastian's premise, that the supreme Artist is God.<sup>123</sup> At Oxford, Sebastian also takes Charles to the Botanical gardens "to see the ivy".

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<sup>120</sup> Patey, 235

<sup>121</sup> Laura White, "The Rejection of Beauty in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*". Renascence. Spring 2006, Vol. 58, Issue 3 pp. 183-184

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 184

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

Here again, Sebastian is seen as an admirer of natural beauty, (that is, God's creation), he is an innocent pastoral figure living in Arcadia.

However, after the initial inspiration when painting the rooms of the Marchmain House, Charles does not seem to derive much satisfaction from his work as an artist, a sense of melancholy and bitterness hangs over his reminiscences of the ten years that he is separated from the Flyte family. For years Charles has believed painting to be his vocation, but little by little he becomes disappointed with his art, as he states:

But, as the years passed, I began to mourn the loss of something I had known in the drawing-room of Marchmain House and once or twice since, the intensity and singleness and the belief that it was not all done by hand – in a word, the inspiration. (BR, 216)

In search for the lost inspiration, Charles goes to Mexico and Central America, where he travels around for two years painting deserted ruins of churches, palaces and cloisters.<sup>124</sup>

He leads an isolated life, and only occasionally reads letters from England, but still he feels “unchanged, still a small part of myself pretending to be whole”. (BR, 218)

For reasons that remain somewhat vague,<sup>125</sup> he has married a fashionable and superficial socialite, Celia Mulcaster, some years before going to Central America. They have a son and a daughter, who is born after Charles has left England. On his return to England, Charles meets his wife in New York, and they are to cross the Atlantic together. Charles is quite sarcastic and hostile towards his wife, and the reason for this becomes clear: Celia has

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<sup>124</sup> The concept of “primitive” became idealized by many modernists from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, whereas before, the imperialistic notion of primitive cultures seen as “the other” and inferior to the western world had been the norm. For example Picasso, Matisse and Gauguin drew inspiration from the primitive. Of the English writers, D.H. Lawrence associated the primitive with the lost awareness of the body. He emphasized the male and female sexuality in the primitive – and defined the ideal female in a way which feminists have since found extremely problematic, and who therefore have begun to shun Lawrence's work. Lawrence's novel, *The Plumed Serpent* (1923-25), is a product of his sojourns in Mexico and the American Southwest./ Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive. Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990) pp. 3-12, 159-174

<sup>125</sup> Later in the narrative, in response to Julia's answer as to why Charles has married Celia, he says: “Physical attraction. Ambition. Everyone agrees she's the ideal wife for a painter. Loneliness, missing Sebastian”. (BR, 245)

been unfaithful to him in the past. Not that Charles minds this very much, it simply gives him an excuse to be indifferent towards her. He does not seem to have loved her in the first place. Charles also shows an almost callous indifference towards his own children; for example when discussing the letters he had received during his travels, he says to his wife: “I do not remember that your new baby was called Caroline. Why did you call it that?” (BR, 219) Perhaps Charles’ coldness derives from the fact that Celia has been unfaithful, and thus he cannot be certain of being the father of her children.

Celia is energetic, socially talented and popular, and these qualities have been useful to Charles in the artistic circles. Celia seems to be interested only in how she can further promote Charles’ career and in the commissions she can obtain for him.<sup>126</sup> Aboard the ship, Celia immediately begins to arrange a cocktail party in order to ingratiate Charles with some Hollywood magnates, because she thinks that this is a good opportunity for Charles to get work as a scenery designer for films. Charles is not at all interested but Celia keeps on pushing him. While Celia is busy with her arrangements, Charles wanders around the ship. There he encounters Julia Flyte (now Mottram) and notices how much she has changed during the ten years that they have not met. They start a conversation, during which Charles discovers that Julia is returning to England after breaking up with a lover. Her marriage to Rex Mottram is also failing, though they have not yet divorced.

Both Julia and Charles remark how much the other has changed during the ten years: Julia says that Charles is “lean and grim and harder”, and “not at all the pretty boy Sebastian brought home with him”. (BR, 227) Charles in turn describes Julia as being softer and sadder. He thinks to himself how she has lost the “fashionable, spidery look”, and how the “haunting, magical sadness” was a “completion of her beauty.” (BR, 227-228)

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<sup>126</sup> McDonnell, 1986, 163

Charles did not like Julia very much when they were young because he thought she was selfish. For example, he did not like Julia's attitude to Sebastian's alcoholism. As a young debutante, she had no sympathy or understanding for it, but thought simply that her brother's drinking problem was tedious and harmful to her reputation. Julia's only ambition as a young girl was to get married. This was not atypical of her social circles: "To be married, soon and splendidly was the aim of all her friends". (BR, 174) Marriage, to these girls, was to be the beginning of individual existence. Because there already was a scandal (her father) in the family, Julia did not need the further complication of Sebastian's shameful habit. Also, her Catholicism was a problem: it was preferable to marry a rich Catholic but, at the time when she was on the market, there were no heirs available of marriagable age.<sup>127</sup> There were only Protestant elder sons of noble families available, and they preferred Protestant girls. Julia had some idea of the kind of man she wanted to marry: some wealthy Catholic widower, perhaps a diplomat, who would share her "mild agnosticism" but would agree to bring his children up as Catholics. She also imagined her future husband as someone who would be contented with a small family, and not to expect yearly pregnancies – as a Catholic husband might.<sup>128</sup> Julia's plans were never realized, of course, because fate intervened in the form of Rex Mottram, and her falling in love with him.

Conveniently for Charles and Julia, a storm breaks out at sea, and almost everyone on the ship becomes seasick. Most importantly, the storm clears Celia out of the way, as she is violently sick and becomes completely bedridden for a couple of days. This gives Charles and Julia the opportunity to recount their lives to each other. While doing this, they fall in

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<sup>127</sup> McDonnell, 1986, 99

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

love, and make love for the first time in Julia's cabin after a couple of days of discussing their lives. Charles changes his opinion of Julia completely as she tells the tragicomical story of her marriage to Rex. The reasons for her sadness become clear; she has given birth to a dead baby, and furthermore, as her girlish infatuation and sexual desire to Rex have died over the years and she has come to know his true character, she realizes what a mistake she has made in abandoning her religion and possibly causing her mother's death in rebelliously marrying him.

As I mentioned in 2.2., it was Bridey who found out about Rex's previous marriage to a Canadian woman, and this fact put an end to Julia's and Rex's intentions to be married in a Catholic church. Rex had tried to become a Catholic partly to ingratiate himself with Lady Marchmain, and partly in order to have a ceremonious Catholic wedding. Rex had been surprised to hear that he had to undergo religious instruction before he could be admitted to the Church. His instructor Father Mowbray admitted to Lady Marchmain that Rex had been the most difficult convert he had ever met. (BR, 185) Laura Mooneyham says that for Rex, conversion is a form of business contract, and he expects Catholicism to be a set of rules.<sup>129</sup>

In my opinion, the hopelessness of Rex's Catholic instruction is one of the funniest scenes depicted in the novel. As Lodge points out, Mottram's instruction in the Catholic faith is "the occasion of some amusing theological farce".<sup>130</sup> At the same time, however, there is an irritatingly snobbish and contemptuous attitude towards Rex behind the narrative. Perhaps Lady Marchmain reflects the attitudes of the writer by stating condescendingly to Father Mowbray after Cordelia has tricked Rex into believing stories she had made up (for example that there were sacred monkeys in the Vatican, that the Pope

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<sup>129</sup> Laura Mooneyham: "The Triple Conversions of Brideshead Revisited". *Renascence*. Vol. 45, Issue 4, 1993, p. 229

<sup>130</sup> Lodge, 32

had made one of his horses a Cardinal, and that Catholics have to sleep with their feet pointing East): “Poor Rex. You know, I think it makes him rather lovable. You must treat him like an idiot child, Father Mowbray”. (BR, 187) A non-religious reader might ask: is it not true that there are several unbelievable stories and seemingly absurd rules in the Catechism and the Bible, and thus, what is there to be condescending about Rex’s believing in Cordelia’s stupid stories? Rex might not see them differing in any way from the real religious tales in the degree of implausibility.<sup>131</sup>

Rex Mottram represents the rational modern man, towards whom Charles the narrator feels contempt. Also Julia shows her superior attitude in describing her husband to Charles:

‘You know Father Mowbray hit on the truth about Rex at once, that it took me a year of marriage to see. He simply wasn’t all there. He wasn’t a complete human being at all. He was a tiny bit of one, unnaturally developed; something in a bottle, an organ kept alive in a laboratory. I thought he was a sort of primitive savage, but he was something absolutely modern and up-to-date that only this ghastly age could produce. A tiny bit of a man pretending that he was whole.’ (BR, 193)

Wirth points out that this is a harsh indictment of Rex, and also of the modern world which produced him.<sup>132</sup> Rex is very strongly judged by Charles and Julia throughout the narrative, and it is mostly on the basis of the treatment of his character and the negative attitude towards him by the narrator in particular, that Waugh has been accused of snobbery. For example, Julia states that Rex had only married her for her social status, and is only interested in materialistic matters, he is not at all spiritual. Charles, in turn, quite snobbishly describes Rex as having no aesthetical or culinary taste. Also, most of the critics of *Brideshead Revisited* despise Rex Mottram and everything he stands for. However, David Bittner defends Rex, and says he is unfairly judged as being only repulsive.<sup>133</sup> For example,

<sup>131</sup> Mooneyham draws attention to this too as she states: “And indeed, to Charles and the secular reader, many of the Catholic observances seem almost as ludicrous as sleeping with one’s toes pointing East “because that’s the direction of heaven””./ Laura Mooneyham: “The Triple Conversions of *Brideshead Revisited*”. *Renascence*. Vol. 45, Issue 4, 1993, p. 229

<sup>132</sup> Wirth, 68

Bittner points out that Rex offers to help the Flyte family in their financial troubles, he gets Sebastian off the hook with the judge after his drunken driving, he knows a specialist who could help Lady Marchmain in her illness (but of course, she is too saintlike and holy to accept such worldly favours). Rex also tries to take Sebastian to a rehabilitation clinic in Zurich, but Sebastian, of course, escapes from him. Bittner also reminds us that Rex is a gentleman, he treats Lady Marchmain “masterfully”, and he does not pretend to be a religious man to her. He also agrees to give Julia her divorce quite easily towards the end of the novel. And though he is unfaithful to Julia, so is Julia to him.<sup>134</sup> In my opinion, Julia and Charles have no right to condemn Rex (or Celia) for adultery although they seem to think of themselves as somehow nobler and truer lovers and not simply as committing adultery in the same way as their respective spouses have done. Furthermore, McDonnell points out that although Rex is a “blunderer”, he is “a good deal more honourable than most of the Flytes”.<sup>135</sup> She goes on to claim that the fact that Rex cannot be redeemed leaves us with an uncomfortable feeling that he was born in the wrong social class, and that this forces us to confront the difficult topic of snobbery in Waugh.<sup>136</sup> In my view, however, it is possible to conclude that since Rex is not a lapsed Catholic, but an ignoramus, he is not necessarily destined for hell the same way that Waugh seems to think Sebastian and (in particular) Julia are.

In any case, the beginning of Charles’ and Julia’s love affair is very similar to the beginning of Charles’ romantic friendship with Sebastian. In addition to being stereotypically romantic, the storm creates a possibility for isolation, and Julia points out

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<sup>133</sup> David Bittner, “A Kinder, Gentler Look at Rex Mottram”. *Evelyn Waugh Newsletter and Studies*. Vol. 35, No. 2, Autumn 2004

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> McDonnell, 1988, 101

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*



that they are “orphans of the storm”.<sup>137</sup> The couple feels a strong urge to exclude the outside world, much the same way as Sebastian wanted to stay in Brideshead alone with Charles, without any members of his family present. At this point in her life, Julia is ready to receive comfort from Charles of whom she did not care much about before; to her, he was just her brother’s friend. Obviously Charles is ready for any kind of change or salvation in his life. He does not turn to religion, yet; instead he falls in love with a woman who resembles her brother, Sebastian, so much. In fact, Charles even says to Julia that Sebastian was her forerunner. (BR, 245) The voyage is made from the new world to the old, and thus it is a homecoming in more ways than one for Charles. But, as Davis points out, Charles and Julia cannot continue to live in romantic isolation any more than Charles and Sebastian could remain in Arcadia.<sup>138</sup>

When the ship arrives in England, Charles decides to stay behind in London to arrange his art exhibition, while his wife goes home to their children. Celia is hurt by Charles’ reluctance to come home to see his daughter:

‘Oh, but Charles, you *must* come. You haven’t seen Caroline.’  
 ‘Will she change much in a week or two?’  
 ‘Darling, she changes every day.’  
 ‘Then what’s the point of seeing her now? I’m sorry, my dear, but I must get the pictures unpacked and see how they’ve travelled. I must fix up for the exhibition right away.’ (BR, 251)

The real reason for his staying in London is of course Julia, and Celia seems to have a hunch of their romance, as she offers to stay with Charles in London. But he refuses her by saying that she must not disappoint the children. (BR, 251) I think that this scene with his wife shows the brutal, hard and grim side of Charles’ character; this is the kind of man he

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<sup>137</sup> “Oh dear,” said Julia, “where can we hide in fair weather, we orphans of the storm?” (BR, 249) “Orphans of the Storm” is supposedly an allusion to D.W. Griffith’s classic silent film from 1921. (Davis, 111)

<sup>138</sup> Davis, 111

has become during the ten years of being separated from the love of his life, the charming Flyte family.

At Charles' exhibition of his South American paintings, the fashionable and pretentious guests give praise to Charles, stating his paintings to be "virile and passionate". Anthony Blanche is given the role of the truth-teller as he turns up at the last minute, and dismisses Charles' art as "simple, creamy, English charm, playing tigers". (BR, 260) Charles agrees completely, he knows that his paintings are shallow and painted without inspiration. At this point of the novel it becomes clear that Charles' vocation as an artist has failed to give him the inner satisfaction he needs. White argues that Charles' reason for travelling to Mexico was the desperate need for authenticity that modernism ascribes to the primitive, but that ironically, in Central America, his art becomes even more inauthentic.<sup>139</sup> He does not stop painting, however, but he moves from painting buildings and nature to painting humans – and particularly portraits of Julia. Patey points out that just as Blanche's voice is needed to recall Charles to recognise what is wrong with his Mexican paintings, so is the return of Sebastian's beauty in Julia needed to draw him to the next, higher phase of art: painting the human form.<sup>140</sup> Charles seems to have found his lost inspiration as he says: "I never tired of painting her, forever finding in her new wealth and delicacy". (BR, 263)

The love affair goes on, and after two years Charles spends more and more time in Brideshead Castle, where Julia and Rex are living. Officially the place belongs to the exiled Lord Marchmain, and Bridey as the eldest son, is expected to inherit it eventually. Rex is busy with his political career, and therefore is mostly living in London, thus giving his wife and her lover a chance to live together in Charles' beloved Brideshead. Julia expresses

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<sup>139</sup> White, "The Rejection of Beauty in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*". *Renascence*. Vol. 58, Issue 3, Spring 2006, p.188

<sup>140</sup> Patey, 239

her growing wish to get married, whereas Charles is not yet as enthusiastic as she is:

‘I want to marry you, Charles.’

‘One day; why now?’

‘War, this year, next year, sometime soon. I want a day or two with you of real peace.’

‘Isn’t this peace?’ (BR, 265)

Julia wants to hurry their respective divorces and get married quickly because she is worried about the future – or something else. It seems almost as if she is unconsciously afraid of herself, and her threatening religious vocation which will demand her to give up Charles. There is a sense of doom in Julia’s words: “Sometimes I feel the past and the future pressing so hard on either side that there’s no room for the present at all”. (BR, 266)

The affair is a public secret and outwardly no-one seems to be hurt by it. Julia’s father seems to approve of Charles. Of course, he is in no position to pass moral judgement, since he has been living in an extra-marital relationship for two decades. Celia has found a lover of her own, and together with Charles, they start their divorce proceedings. Rex does not seem to mind Julia wanting to divorce him, although he is preoccupied with his political career, and asks Charles whether it would be possible to postpone the divorce because Julia “couldn’t have chosen a worse time”. (BR, 283) In his turn, Charles’ father has a practical – albeit mischievous – attitude; as he later hears of his son’s plans to divorce and remarry immediately, his answer is typical of this humorously cynical and shrewd old man:<sup>141</sup>

‘Well, I do call that a lot of nonsense. I can understand a man wishing he hadn’t married and trying to get out of it – though I never felt anything of the kind myself – but to get rid of one wife and take up with another immediately, is beyond all reason.’ (BR, 282)

Bridey comes to stay in Brideshead from time to time, but he has not yet expressed his

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<sup>141</sup> I agree with Alexander Waugh (grandson of Evelyn Waugh), as he states: “Like all fictional Evelyn Waugh fathers to this date Mr Ryder is distant, unhelpful, one might say uncaring, even a little malicious towards his son. But for all that he is an attractive character. His wry wit may be uncongenial to Charles but the reader delights in his parlour games and looks forward to his every appearance”. /Alexander Waugh, *Fathers and Sons. The Autobiography of a Family* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2004) 283

disapproval of the adulterous affair. Charles describes him as seeming to accept him, without curiosity, as one of the household, and he acts quite kindly towards Charles. (BR, 267) Bridey's true feelings are revealed, however, as he visits Brideshead one evening.

As I discussed in section 2.2., Bridey is given the role of a speaker of unpleasant truths, especially those concerning Julia. It could be argued that as Lady Marchmain represents the voice of dogmatic conscience for Sebastian, Bridey represents this same for Julia. It is Bridey who finally wakes the slumbering feelings of guilt in Julia, and thus he is the instigator of Julia's reconversion. As Bridey sits down to dinner with Julia and Charles, he announces that he is engaged to be married. Julia and Charles can barely suppress their amusement – after all Bridey is not known to have had any romantic affairs with women, and he has already reached the age of thirty-eight. Julia starts to ask questions about the fiancée. It becomes clear that the bride-to-be, Beryl Muspratt, is a Catholic widow with three children, she is “big but not fat”, she is not at all well off and she is just about Bridey's age.<sup>142</sup> Bridey is a collector of match-boxes and this hobby has led him to his future wife. Julia asks Bridey where he met her, and he replies with complete gravity: “Her late husband, Admiral Muspratt, collected match-boxes”. By now Julia trembles “on the verge of laughter” and asks: “You're not marrying her for her match-boxes?” (BR, 270) The fact that Bridey quite seriously answers this question (“No no; the whole collection was left to the Falmouth Town Library.”) shows that Bridey has no sense of humour, or understanding of irony, he is indeed like an inhuman robot. On the other hand, the reader is left uncertain of this; maybe he does understand that Julia is making fun of him, because he strikes back and kills her joy quite cruelly – and crucially to the narrative – as Julia finally

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<sup>142</sup> Later it is found out that Mrs. Muspratt has lied about her age and is in fact at least forty-five, seven years Bridey's senior. As Julia says: “I don't see her providing an heir”. (BR, 283)

asks when they are going to meet her and why Bridey has not brought Mrs. Muspratt with her. Julia wants to invite her to Brideshead immediately, otherwise “she’ll think us most peculiar leaving her alone at a time like this”. (BR, 271) Bridey answers: “She has the children. Besides, you *are* peculiar.” Julia asks what he means, and Charles describes the ensuing scene:

Brideshead raised his head and looked solemnly at his sister, and continued in the same simple way, as though he were saying nothing particularly different from what had gone before, ‘I couldn’t ask her here, as things are. It wouldn’t be suitable. After all, I am a lodger here. This is Rex’s house at the moment, so far as it’s anybody’s. What goes on here is his business. But I couldn’t bring Beryl here.’  
 ‘I simply don’t understand,’ said Julia rather sharply. I looked at her. All the gentle mockery had gone; she was alert, almost scared, it seemed. ‘Of course, Rex and I want her to come.’  
 ‘Oh, yes, I don’t doubt that. The difficulty is quite otherwise.’ He finished his port, refilled his glass, and pushed the decanter towards me. ‘You must understand that Beryl is a woman of strict Catholic principle fortified by the prejudices of the middle class. I couldn’t possibly bring her here. It is a matter of indifference whether you choose to live in sin with Rex or Charles or both – I have always avoided inquiry into the details of your *ménage* – but in no case would Beryl consent to be your guest.’  
 (BR, 271-272)

Bridey’s “drobbing his bomb” about her living in sin sends Julia running out of the room and into the garden to the fountain, which in Charles’ words “seemed always to draw us to itself for comfort and refreshment”. (BR, 272) Charles follows her there and takes her in his arms as Julia breaks down and ends up in tears of sadness, anger and remorse. She delivers a long speech to Charles on the subject of her guilt that has deep roots in her childhood and her Catholic upbringing by her mother and Nanny Hawkins. At this point Charles does not understand how Julia can take her (lost) faith and her pompous brother so seriously: “Why do you mind? What does it matter what that old booby says?” (BR, 272) Charles feels powerless to help her. But Julia replies that Bridey and his widow are quite right: “they’ve got it in black and white; they bought it for a penny at the church door. You can get anything there for a penny”. She talks about the difference between living in sin and

just doing wrong:

*‘Living in sin, with sin, always the same, like an idiot child carefully nursed, guarded from the world. “Poor Julia,” they say, “she can’t go out. She’s got to take care of her sin. A pity it ever lived,” they say, “but it’s so strong. Children like that always are. Julia’s so good to her little mad sin.”’* (BR, 273)

Julia also talks about the years when she was trying to be a good wife, how she tried to bear Rex’s child, “torn in pieces by something already dead”, about how she found Charles, the two years with him, the whole future with or without him, “war coming, world ending” – all her life in sin. Next, she talks about her childhood; how the word ‘sin’ was present even then, in the teachings of her mother and Nanny Hawkins (cf. section 3.2.). Then about how her mother carried Julia’s sin to the church with her, and: “Mummy dying with my sin eating at her...Mummy dying with it; Christ dying with it, nailed hand and foot; hanging over the the bed in the night-nursery...” (BR, 274) Julia’s desperation and the belief that she is destined for hell, that there is absolutely no salvation for her becomes clear as she sobs:

*‘No way back; the gates barred; all saints and angels posted along the walls. Thrown away, scrapped, rotting down; the old man with lupus and the forked stick who limps out at nightfall to turn the rubbish, hoping for something to put in his sack, something marketable, turns away with disgust. Nameless and dead, like the baby they wrapped up and took away before I had seen her.’*(BR, 274)

Davis states that Bridey’s doctrinally accurate label “living in sin” burdens Julia with the weight of her religious past.<sup>143</sup> It also forces her to see her love affair with Charles “by absolute standards” and to place it in the context of her whole life as opposed to the private, romantic world and the two previous years with Charles.<sup>144</sup>

Davis also discusses the fact that Julia’s soliloquy has been criticized by many, and that

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<sup>143</sup> Davis, 115

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

Waugh himself expressed doubts about the verisimilitude of Julia's long speech.<sup>145</sup> Waugh even stated in the preface of the 1960 edition that either this speech or Lord Marchmain's final soliloquy "were never intended to report words actually spoken" but that they were retained in the novel because "they were essentially of the mood of the writing".<sup>146</sup> I agree with Davis as he states that Waugh may have been unduly harsh on himself. Davis describes the construction of this passage, and the two distinct parts in it. In the first part, Julia defines the difference between living in sin as opposed to committing sin, and she personifies sin first as a kind of double of herself and then as an "idiot child". Julia seems to think that her stillborn child is a judgement on her marriage to Rex. The second half is more lyric in tone with surrealistic imagery and associational development, spoken in a muffled voice so that Charles hears only single words and broken sentences and makes a construction of his own from them.<sup>147</sup> In my opinion, it is completely plausible that a distressed person can deliver such a surreal and seemingly irrational speech to a close person; in fact, in this kind of situation, it is more believable than well-constructed and logical sentences would be. After all, Julia's guilty feelings have been growing gradually over the years, she is bound to 'explode' at some point.

Thomas Churchill makes an important observation as he criticizes Bridey's role in the narrative: he finds especially depressing the crucial effect of Bridey's narrow comment about living in sin to the whole outcome of the novel. He argues that this originally stupid and cruel comment becomes the rule by which the lovers must play the game, because it

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<sup>145</sup> For example, McDonnell argues that Julia has spiritual power because her religion controls Charles' future but that she has a weakness in her controlling role, as she has to explain herself. Julia is the first of Waugh's heroines to have a moral conscience, and this makes the "reasons for her actions tedious beyond belief". Waugh's other female characters "would have told the world go to hell", but Julia can't because of her "sin". McDonnell thinks that her controlling role would have been stronger, if she had behaved differently – for example, she could have gone to the chapel shutting the door behind her./McDonnell, 1986, 116

<sup>146</sup> Davis, 115-116; see also BR, 7-8

<sup>147</sup> Davis, 116

initiates the chain of dialectic that eventually leads to Charles' and Julia's separation.<sup>148</sup>

I have to agree with Churchill, the passage where Bridey serves his verbal blow causing Julia's outburst is one example of negative Catholicism which is likely to provoke a strong resentment towards religious people like Bridey and his pious Mrs. Muspratt. These people are hypocritical, manipulative and smug. At this point the reader's sympathy is almost entirely on Julia's side, she is being tormented by something that is infuriatingly futile: by the feelings of guilt that have their roots in the brainwashing she has received in her childhood by a manipulative religious community. Furthermore, Bridey and his fiancée are obviously only interested in holding the socially acceptable façade, for them keeping up appearances seems to be as important as it used to be for Lady Marchmain earlier. Thus, it is the stiff inhuman doctrine rather than a merciful loving Christianity which will be at the root of Julia's subsequent reconversion. In my opinion, instead of a desire to convert, Waugh succeeds in provoking a hatred of religion in the reader. Furthermore, as Churchill points out, Waugh creates an even greater outrage in the reader, as Bridey's remark is contrasted with the funny interlude which precedes it in the dialogue about match-boxes and Mrs. Muspratt's age and looks.<sup>149</sup>

However, there is one passage in Julia's monologue which could evoke irritation towards her – and the social class she represents. It is the part about her mother and even Christ dying with *her* sin. To me, this seems a highly self-centered point of view, Julia seems to think that she is the centre of the universe, and that her sin is the most important in the world. Like her brother Sebastian, she has no financial troubles, and thus her pangs of

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<sup>148</sup> Thomas Churchill, "The Trouble with *Brideshead Revisited*". Modern Language Quarterly. June 1967, Vol. 28, Issue 2, p. 222

<sup>149</sup> Churchill, 222. Churchill also points out that the name Beryl Muspratt has a phonic suggestion of lust and pratfall, thus making it funny.



conscience could be seen as representations of an elitist spiritualism. Unlike this privileged lady, people who have to struggle for their daily bread do not have the time or energy to constantly obsess about the state of their souls. In this respect, Julia has not changed much since her youth; she is still the egocentric aristocrat that Charles knew during his Arcadian days.

Later, when Julia has calmed down, they go back inside the house, and there Julia quite happily discusses with Bridey his intention to move back to Brideshead when he is married, and she is certain that Rex will not mind moving to some other place. Charles does not forget her outburst and when he is again alone with Julia, he starts to analyse her religious feelings in his agnostic way:

‘Of course it’s a thing psychologists could explain; a preconditioning from childhood; feelings of guilt from the nonsense you were taught in the nursery. You do know at heart that it’s all bosh, don’t you?’ (BR, 276) <sup>150</sup>

Charles is baffled; he does not understand what draws the Flytes to Catholicism. Charles makes Julia angry by remarking that what has gone on tonight has been like a comedy, he talks about settings, scenes and acts. Earlier, he has also compared Julia’s outburst to a picture of Holman Hunt’s, “The Awakened Conscience”. He is obviously confused and maybe he tries to distance himself from the distressing feelings by escaping to his beloved art. Julia does not accept this, she exclaims:

‘Oh, don’t talk in that damned boulderish way. Why must you see everything second-hand? Why must this be a play? Why must my conscience be a pre-Raphaelite picture?’ (BR, 277)

She is so angry that she hits Charles’ face twice with a switch she has snapped off a lime-tree. She immediately expresses her regrets and wonders if she is going crazy.

Davis argues that it is Charles’ failure to understand her which motivates Julia’s angry

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<sup>150</sup>According to Patey, Waugh was hostile to psychology./Patey, 36, 339

rejection of his aesthetic and detached viewpoint.<sup>151</sup> White, in turn, states that it is Waugh that speaks through Julia in her rebuke of Charles' seeing everything secondhand.<sup>152</sup>

White's argument is that as much as Waugh loved and admired art – in much the same way that Charles Ryder does – he condemned the modernist view that artistic creation itself holds preeminent value. Waugh's firm conviction was that art and beauty cannot substitute for religion.<sup>153</sup> I discussed earlier in this chapter White stating that it was Sebastian who opened Charles' eyes to see that art is inferior to God's creation. In a similar way, Julia wants to make Charles understand, that the human soul and life itself are more important than art could ever be.<sup>154</sup>

#### **4.2. The Paradox of Conversion: the Death of Lord Marchmain**

The dramatic climax of *Brideshead Revisited* is the death of Lord Marchmain. At the same time, it is the death of Julia's and Charles' love affair. The preparations for that scene begin as the old Lord returns to England and Brideshead Castle because of the critical political situation of Europe in 1939. He is also very ill and everybody knows that he has come home to die. Now that Lady Marchmain is dead, he is free to bring his mistress with him. Bridey and his Mrs Muspratt had been planning to move to Brideshead, but had to take a small villa at Torquay instead, because Lord Marchmain himself was going to live in his ancestral home.<sup>155</sup> Julia and Charles have already moved away from Brideshead, but return

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<sup>151</sup> Davis, 117

<sup>152</sup> White, "The Rejection of Beauty in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*". *Renascence*. Vol. 58, Issue 3, Spring 2006, p. 188

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 181

<sup>154</sup> Patey discusses Waugh writing in a correspondence in 1949 with David Cecil: "each soul is born with a longing for God and Beauty' but 'I can't think of a single Saint who attached much importance to Art'. Art is 'humanism', and thus 'recreation', 'a harmless way for men to occupy their leisure and earn their living', but it cannot 'reconcile man with his unhappy predicament on earth.' 'Perhaps in the Providence of God the unqualified hideosity of Modern Art has been sent us to scourge us for just this aberration' of confusing art with religion."(Patey, 240; see also Mark Amory; *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, 303, 305)

<sup>155</sup> Charles seems quite malicious as he recounts how Mrs. Muspratt had put her house at Falmouth on sale and taken leave of it with "some justifiably rather large talk of her new establishment." Therefore she could

for the reception of Lord Marchmain. Cordelia has come home from Spain, and she goes to meet her father and Cara at the station while Julia and Charles wait for him at Brideshead. As Lord Marchmain slowly steps out of the car, Charles is surprised to see how old he has become in only nine months since he had last seen him in Monte Carlo. There he had been “an upright and stately figure, little changed from when I first met him in Venice. Now he was an old man”. (BR, 299) Charles has admired him ever since he first met him in Venice on his trip there with Sebastian. According to Davis, Lord Marchmain appears to offer an ideal model of aristocratic masculine style for Charles.<sup>156</sup> Charles also identifies with the old man’s agnosticism.

When Lord Marchmain arrives at Brideshead he takes centre stage like an emperor, who makes everybody fuss around him. He does not have the strength to walk any further than the hall, but there he sits down and starts giving orders to his servants. They have prepared his old rooms upstairs for him, but he says: “Won’t do; not till I’m fit again. Too many stairs; must be on the ground floor”. (BR, 300) He wants the “Queen’s bed” made in the Chinese drawing-room. Charles describes how “few things could have caused more stir in the house” and “what had been foreseen as a day of formality became one of fierce exertion”. (BR, 301) The bed had to be dismantled by carpenters and it was taken down the stairs in pieces and it took the best part of the afternoon to put this elaborate four-poster bed back together.

Meanwhile tea is brought to everyone at the hall as the Lord seems to regain his energy as he talks about how he met his eldest son Brideshead and his wife in Rome<sup>157</sup>, and how

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not return there, but had to find a new place, and “having had her expectations so much raised, it was disconcerting to be brought so low so suddenly”. (BR, 297)

<sup>156</sup> Davis, 52

<sup>157</sup> Bridey and Beryl had been to an audience at the Vatican to receive a blessing for their marriage. (BR, 305)

he “found her deplorable”. (BR, 301) When finally the room and the bed are ready, the party moves there with Lord Marchmain who admires the bed, and as Charles with the rest turns to go, the mischievous Lord calls him back and says to him: “You might paint it, eh – and call it the *Death Bed?*” (BR, 303) Patey suggests that here Lord Marchmain makes the same mistake as Charles did after Julia’s soliloquy, that is, he sees his coming death “secondhand” by assembling a stage-set to showcase it, and thus confuses the ends of art with those of life.<sup>158</sup> One could argue, though, that his behaviour is not so much a mistake as a humorous way to deal with a difficult situation. At the same time, his brilliant punch line surely must have a disquieting effect on Charles in more ways than one. Is Lord Marchmain perhaps ridiculing him by this remark?

At this point Lord Marchmain is capable of making jokes about his death. Cara says that his condition changes from day to day, and when he is better, he knows that he is dying and accepts it, but when he feels worse, he is afraid of dying and deceives himself by saying he is confident of recovery. In *Brideshead*, for some time after his arrival, he seems cheerful enough. Once, as the others gather in his room, he reverts to the topic of his new daughter-in-law. He says that he is appalled at the prospect of Beryl taking what was once his mother’s place in *Brideshead*: “Why should that uncouth pair sit here childless while the place crumbles about their ears?” (BR, 304) He dislikes Bridey’s wife so much that he finally decides to disinherit Bridey (this is possible since the entail ends with him) and bring his will up to date and leave *Brideshead Castle* to Julia and Charles. (BR, 305-306) Lord Marchmain hates Beryl’s hypocritical piousness, and according to Davis, he prefers aesthetic rather than moral principles<sup>159</sup> as he states: “I have rather a fancy for the idea of

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<sup>158</sup> Patey, 239

<sup>159</sup> Davis, 125

installing Julia here; so beautiful this evening, my dear; so beautiful always; much, much more suitable". (BR, 307) Charles is naturally fascinated by the idea of having Brideshead.

White states that Charles is dazzled by the prospect of marrying Julia and inheriting

Brideshead with her as he describes the dream of Brideshead as a "temptation of beauty".<sup>160</sup>

It opened a prospect; the prospect one gained at the turn of the avenue, as I had first seen it with Sebastian, of the secluded valley, the lakes falling away one below the other, the old house in the foreground, the rest of the world abandoned and forgotten; a world of its own of peace and love and beauty; a soldier's dream in a foreign bivouac; such a prospect perhaps as a high pinnacle of the temple afforded after the hungry days in the desert and the jackal-haunted nights. Need I reproach myself if sometimes I was taken by the vision? (BR, 306)<sup>161</sup>

The last question is, of course, uttered by Charles the narrator, trying to understand and

forgive his younger self the very human 'sin' of greed. Churchill argues that this is a

needless admission of guilt. He also points out that there is a "suggestion of hermitism and

anti-life in "the rest of the world abandoned and forgotten"<sup>162</sup>. In my opinion, Charles as

an artist has been in love with Brideshead Castle ever since he first saw it. McDonnell

states that "there is a persistent ambiguity about his successive loves; does he love

Sebastian, or Julia – or Brideshead itself?"<sup>163</sup> Thus, it could even be argued that Charles

falls in love with Sebastian and Julia because of their connection to his real love,

Brideshead.<sup>164</sup> He and Sebastian always sought to be left alone in Brideshead, and now he

wants Brideshead all to himself and Julia, the rest of the world abandoned. And there could

be some unconscious escapism from the harsh realities of a world about to plunge into yet

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<sup>160</sup> White, 189

<sup>161</sup> White points out that the "high pinnacle of the temple...after the hungry days in the desert" is a reference to one of the temptations of Christ, in which the devil takes Christ to the temple's parapet. ( Matthew 4:5-7 and Luke 4:9-12) /White, "The Rejection of Beauty in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*", 189

<sup>162</sup> Churchill, "The Trouble with *Brideshead Revisited*", 227

<sup>163</sup> McDonnell, 1988, 97

<sup>164</sup> According to Wilson, Humphrey Carpenter suggested that as Charles failed to join the family through Sebastian, he tries to do that again through Julia. / John Howard Wilson, *Evelyn Waugh: A Literary Biography, 1924-1966* (London: Associated University Press, 2001) 108

another major war. Charles, as the (converted) narrator now realizes the vanity of his aesthetic love of a beautiful place, and therefore it is logical for him to regret it.

When Bridey and Beryl return from their honeymoon and stay in Brideshead for a few nights, Lord Marchmain refuses to see them; he only lets Bridey in his room for a minute of leave-taking. As it is, Lord Marchmain's condition gradually deteriorates, as "the bad spells became longer and more frequent". (BR, 308) His body does not respond to treatment, and thus Bridey is called back. He comes alone during the Easter holidays, stands silently for some minutes beside his father – and decides that "Papa must see a priest". (BR, 308) The priest has already once tried to see Lord Marchmain as a mere matter of politeness, but Cordelia "had to put him off with apologies and excuses". (BR, 309) Charles is appalled at Bridey's idea, and asks Julia: "Can't they even let him die in piece?" He goes on:

'It would be an outrage. No one could have made it clearer, all his life, what he thought of religion. They'll come now, when his mind's wandering and he hasn't the strength to resist, and claim him as a death-bed penitent. I've had a certain respect for their Church up till now. If they do a thing like that I shall know that everything stupid people say about them is quite true – that it's all superstition and trickery.'

(BR, 309)

As Julia remains silent, Charles asks twice whether she agrees, but she says: "I don't know, Charles. I simply don't know." (BR, 309) This answer is extremely frustrating, more and more Charles realizes how Julia is pulled by *their* faith – as he calls it – and this must be at the same time infuriating and also frightening – Charles seems to understand that he could lose Julia to the Church (and with her Brideshead Castle).

No one speaks of the subject of the priest for a while, but the question is ever present. Cordelia and Cara attend mass in the early mornings, and seem to be pondering about the question silently. Bridey presses the point once again, and Charles asks Julia how they could "stop this tomfoolery". (BR, 309) Julia gets angry with him as she raises her voice to Charles:

‘I really can’t see why you’ve taken it so much to heart that my father shall not have the last sacraments.’

‘It’s such a lot of witchcraft and hypocrisy.’

‘Is it? Anyway, it’s been going on for nearly two thousand years. I don’t know why you should suddenly get in a rage now...For Christ’s sake, write to *The Times*; get up and make a speech in Hyde Park; start a “No Popery” riot, but don’t bore me about it. What’s it got to do with you or me whether my father sees his parish priest?’ (BR, 310)

After Julia’s outburst, Charles describes his feelings of doom as an image of a threatening avalanche: at this point the snow was beginning to shift on the high slopes. (BR, 310)

The next day Bridey and Cordelia take Father Mackay to see Lord Marchmain. The visit is not a success, as Cordelia gravefacedly later tells the secretly triumphant Charles:

‘Cara was reading a paper aloud to papa. Bridey said, “I’ve brought Father Mackay to see you”, papa said: “Father Mackay, I am afraid you have been brought here under a misapprehension. I am not *in extremis*, and I have not been a practising member of your Church for twenty-five years. Brideshead, show Father Mackay the way out.” Then we all turned about and walked away, and I heard Cara start reading the paper again, and that, Charles, was that.’(BR, 312)

At this point Charles, the narrator, tells how he felt that he had won the battle, and the threat that had been hanging over him and Julia had been averted; he also confesses how there also was “another unexpressed, inexpressible, indecent little victory” of furtively celebrating the fact that what Bridey had done had put him “some considerable way further from his rightful inheritance”. (BR, 312) Charles carries the news of the priest’s eviction to Julia: “Mumbo-jumbo is off. The witch-doctor has gone”. (BR, 312) McDonnell points out that Charles is quite insensitive towards Julia in his choice of words (“witch-doctor”, “mumbo-jumbo”, “superstition”, “trickery”) as he expresses his hostility towards religion.<sup>165</sup> On the other hand, I think Charles’ choice of words is understandable, he has so much to lose – in fact he has already lost Sebastian (at least in part) to Catholicism – it is no wonder he hates religion fervently. But his anger also seems to derive from a less self-

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<sup>165</sup> McDonnell, 1988, 99

centered and more idealistic source – he is defending the right of a proud and independent spirit to remain just that. On the other hand, Julia’s anger at Charles is equally justifiable – a big part of his criticism is at least indirectly aimed at her; after all, she is a member, albeit a lapsed member, of *their* Church. Perhaps Charles with his dismissively agnostic attitude is unwittingly pushing Julia only further into a reconversion.

Contrary to Charles’ assumption, the religious controversy is not over yet. On Bridey’s last evening at Brideshead yet another theological conversation is held, and Charles asks questions but gets only vague and conflicting answers from Bridey, Cara and Cordelia – which of course is very typical of any religious conversation between atheists / agnostics and believers. For example, Charles asks about the meaning of the last sacrament: “Do you mean that if he dies alone he goes to hell, and that if the priest puts oil on him – well, whatever the priest does – that he then goes to heaven?” As Cara answers that if the priest got there before the body was cold, it would be all right, the others protest that she has got it all wrong. Charles then inquires whether they simply want to arrange the last sacrament so that their father can have a Christian burial, or whether they want to keep him out of hell. Bridey tries to explain, and Cara (although she is Catholic<sup>166</sup>) states: “I never heard that before”. (BR, 313-314) Charles finally bursts out:

‘Let’s get this clear, he has to make an act of will; he has to be contrite and wish to be reconciled; is that right? But only God knows whether he has really made an act of will; the priest can’t tell; and if there isn’t a priest there, and he makes the act of will alone, that’s as good as if there were a priest. And it’s quite possible that the will may still be working when a man is too weak to make any outward sign of it; is that right? He may be lying, as though for dead, and willing all the time, and being reconciled, and God understands that; is that right?’ (BR, 314)

As Bridey agrees with this, Charles, quite logically asks: “Well, for heaven’s sake, what is

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<sup>166</sup> McDonnell argues that Cara seems to represent faith without understanding, but that we may suppose that there is salvation for her as well. /McDonnell, 1988, 99



the priest for?" During the conversation, Julia remains a silent bystander, but later she reproaches Charles again for starting the religious arguments, and Charles, quite justifiably, complains about the lack of logic in their faith.

As the weeks pass, and Lord Marchmain goes on living, Julia speaks more and more wistfully about their future marriage. She does not really seem to believe that the marriage is possible any more. Also, the war is threatening, and Charles is summoned to the War Office and put on a list of emergency. Lord Marchmain becomes more and more anxious, he wants everyone around him as he is afraid of loneliness and darkness. He is slowly suffocating and at times has to struggle for air. As Charles remarks to the doctor what a wonderful will to live he has, the doctor says that in his opinion Lord Marchmain is in truth afraid of dying and that this fear is wearing him out. (BR, 316)

Lord Marchmain delivers the other long monologue (cf. Julia's soliloquy above) of the novel as he is nearing his death. According to Davis, both of these monologues have important functions in the novel's understructure.<sup>167</sup> As I mentioned earlier, Waugh expressed doubts about the verisimilitude of Julia's and Lord Marchmain's soliloquies, but I agree with Hynes as he argues that Lord Marchmain's speech seems quite plausible. The man is in the last stages of his life, and obviously delirious, so that his ramblings about sacred and secular history make sense realistically.<sup>168</sup> Lord Marchmain's semiconscious speech deals with a vision of an aristocratic past, his ancestors who lived long lives and how they built Brideshead – and how they even moved it from its original position Castle Hill to its current place. He deceives himself by speaking of his strong health: "I have lived carefully, sheltered myself from the cold winds, eaten moderately of what was in season,

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<sup>167</sup> Davis, 125

<sup>168</sup> Hynes, 248

drunk fine claret, slept in my own sheets; I shall live long". (BR, 317) He then talks about "these little gold men living so long without breathing", and this, according to White, is a reference to the murals of mandarin figures which decorate the Chinese drawing-room in which he has lived for months. White states that this is Waugh's final attack on art; the contrast of the mandarins surrounding Lord Marchmain are deathless as only figures of art can be, while he as a human being must die. White argues that "in the face of spiritual emptiness, the lovely representations of the Chinese landscape and their denizens only mock the dying".<sup>169</sup>

Lord Marchmain also talks about how he built and gave the chapel of Brideshead as a wedding gift to his wife. He shows some remorse over abandoning his family as he addresses Cordelia: "Then I went away – left her in the chapel praying. It was hers. It was the place for her. I never came back to disturb her prayers. They said we were fighting for freedom; I had my own victory. Was it a crime?" To this Cordelia answers that she thinks it was, and this causes Lord Marchmain to wonder whether his current condition is a vengeance of heaven. He asks if that is why he is "locked in this cave", "with a black tube of air and the little yellow men along the walls, who live without breathing". (BR, 318)

Lord Marchmain lingers on until mid-July. Then he finally falls into a coma, and since Cordelia and Bridey are away on this particular day, it is Julia alone who is forced to decide whether his father should receive the last sacrament. After consulting the doctor who cannot state for certain whether Lord Marchmain will recover or not, she decides to fetch the priest, despite the fierce protestations of Charles. He tries to win the doctor to his side

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<sup>169</sup> White argues that the mandarins are a reference to Yeats' poem *Lapis Lazuli* in which Chinese figures on a sculpture come alive and climb to their goal, and find "joy, gaiety, from the act of Yeats' imaginative will". This poem is a modernist meditation on the value of art in times of tragedy and war. Allegedly, Waugh was doing his best to write against Yeats' poem in this passage. /White, "The Rejection of Beauty in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*", 189-190

reminding him of his words that even the least shock would be fatal to the old man and that they should not disturb him. Charles suggests that the mere presence of Father Mackay could kill the man if he were to wake up from his coma during the sacrament: “What could be worse for a man who fears death, as he does, than to have a priest brought to him – a priest he turned out when he had the strength?” (BR, 319) Charles tries his utmost to convince the doctor, the priest and Cara of the harm that the Last Sacrament would do to Lord Marchmain. He does not address Julia, who silently contemplates what to do. Finally Julia thanks the doctor and says she will have full responsibility for whatever happens, and asks the priest to see her father. Charles, Cara and the doctor follow them. At this point, Charles must know that he has lost the battle of wills, that religion has taken Julia from him, and that there can be no future for them.

In my opinion, the priest’s words to the seemingly unconscious man seem like some kind of mental pressurizing or even hypnotism:

‘I know you are sorry for all the sins in your life, aren’t you? Make a sign, if you can. You’re sorry, aren’t you? Try and remember your sins; tell God you are sorry. I am going to give you absolution. While I am giving it, tell God you are sorry you have offended him.’ (BR, 322)

As the priest offers absolution to Lord Marchmain, Julia and Cara kneel to pray for a sign that the unconscious man has heard and understood what is being done, and that he wants to receive absolution. Charles kneels with them and prays the agnostic’s prayer: “O God, if there is a God, forgive him his sins, if there is such a thing as sin”. (BR, 322) It is hard to understand what makes him pray; Hynes suggests that he is motivated to make the prayer because he loves Julia and knows what she wants and wants her wish to come true.<sup>170</sup> This becomes clear as Charles describes how he suddenly longed for a sign, if only for the sake

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<sup>170</sup> Hynes, 241

of the woman he loved. I argue that this is inconclusive and uncharacteristically selfless since Charles is definitely going to lose Julia if her father repents.

Then the “miracle” happens as Lord Marchmain slowly moves his hand to his forehead, down his breast and then to his shoulder thus making the sign of the cross. Charles the narrator tells us:

Then I knew that the sign I had asked for was not a little thing, not a passing nod of recognition, and a phrase came back to me from my childhood of the veil of the temple being rent from top to bottom. (BR, 322)<sup>171</sup>

These are dramatic words, and certainly suitable in depicting the feelings of those watching a beloved person dying. But are these words proof of Charles’s conversion? To me these words convey a sense of tragedy in Charles’ mind: partly because to witness a human being dying is always dramatic, and partly because he can guess that now he will lose the woman he loves to religion. He has seen the signs in Julia, she is drawn to religion, and her father’s death must be the last impulse for her. And if she becomes a true Catholic, then Charles knows that she thinks that she has to obey the strict rules of the Church, that is, she cannot marry him, because they are both divorced. As I have pointed out, it is almost impossible to find any suggestion that Charles has converted into Catholicism. This is, however, the message that Waugh allegedly wanted to convey to the readers.

Also, the reader has to ask what exactly is meant by “miracle” in this context: Lord Marchmain (the hopelessly adamant independent sinner) *making* the sign of the cross, or the fact that he is *unconscious* or even already *dead* at the time of making it? If the former is meant, then, unfortunately, to a non-Catholic the sign of the cross that Lord Marchmain

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<sup>171</sup> “the veil of the temple being rent from top to bottom” is taken from the Bible (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38, King James version) /Davis, 129

makes represents no miracle, it is merely a gesture. A person who is afraid of dying is probably ready to do anything – just to make sure. And the narrative so far has made it perfectly clear that Lord Marchmain was indeed terrified of dying. If the latter interpretation is meant, that too is easily disproved: Lord Marchmain could have momentarily woken up from his coma (and it is no great accomplishment for a priest to hypnotize a weak and delirious person), also nothing in the text suggests that he was dead and resurrected in order to make the sign. He does not in fact die immediately after the sign either, since after the scene is over, we are told by Charles that Julia remained in the Chinese drawing-room and that his father died at five o'clock that evening. (BR, 323) In my opinion, the sign of the cross is not a proof of anything. Certainly not of God's divine plan (or the twitch upon the thread), although Wirth maintains that the sign of the cross is an affirmation of Lord Marchmain's belief in the mercy of God.<sup>172</sup>

After Lord Marchmain has died, Julia and Charles meet “in the shadow, in the corner of the stair” (BR, 323) to say their final good-byes. Julia explains to Charles something he already knows; the fact that Julia feels she has to sacrifice her love for him in order to please God in a “private bargain” between her and Him and thus she cannot marry Charles: “...that if I give up this one thing I want so much, however bad I am, he won't despair of me in the end”. (BR, 324) Wirth argues that Julia's speech shows how personal her commitment to God is, because she uses the word “I” twenty-two times in the course of her explanation. She states that this shows the personal way in which the belief in God touches each individual.<sup>173</sup> However, another interpretation could be that Julia is simply being egoistical. As McDonnell points out, the part about “private bargain” in order to stop God

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<sup>172</sup> Wirth, 93

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 92

from despairing of her seems almost unChristian in its attitude.<sup>174</sup>

Charles Ryder's (retrospective) narrative ends with Charles' sense that a symbolic avalanche has fallen, leaving the hillside swept bare behind it. He has talked about this image of avalanche entering into his thoughts twice before (BR 295-296<sup>175</sup>, BR 310). This image has generally been interpreted to symbolise Charles' conversion. According to Mooneyham, the image of the relentless power of avalanche conveys the irrational nature of Charles' first acceptance of God.<sup>176</sup> Hardly a positive allegory, although Davis states that Charles Ryder is alive to complete the image, and the brightness and silence of the new world imply at least the possibility of hope.<sup>177</sup> Mooneyham's idea of the avalanche is a huge wave of purifying destruction, which sweeps away Charles's secular values.<sup>178</sup>

I mentioned in 1.2. that Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* (1951) shares some thematic similarities with *Brideshead Revisited*. These similarities concern first and foremost the part of the novel which concentrates on Charles' and Julia's love affair. Miracles are also an integral part of *The End of the Affair* – and much more blatantly at that. This story too, is told by a first-person narrator, Maurice Bendrix, who is extremely hostile towards religion. Bendrix too is an artist (a professional writer), and he too falls in love with a married woman, Sarah Miles, who (re)converts<sup>179</sup> into Catholicism after making a private bargain of her own with God. The lovers meet secretly during the London Blitz, and one day the house they are in is bombed and Sarah finds Bendrix under a door

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<sup>174</sup> McDonnell, 1986, 116

<sup>175</sup> Cf. 3.2.

<sup>176</sup> Mooneyham, "The Triple Conversions of *Brideshead Revisited*", 231

<sup>177</sup> Davis, 130

<sup>178</sup> Mooneyham, 233

<sup>179</sup> Sarah has not been religious, but later in the narrative (after Sarah's death), her mother tells Bendrix that she has been baptized at the age of two. This baptism is supposed to have taken "like vaccination". Sarah did not even know she was Catholic, but it is hinted that she was drawn to the Church because of this "vaccination". /Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair*, 163-164

assuming he is dead. Then and there she promises that if God lets him live, she will give him up for good, and devote her life to loving God instead.<sup>180</sup> No prove is given that he actually was dead, he could have been simply unconscious, (cf. Lord Marchmain), but Sarah concludes that a miracle has happened and she leaves her lover with no explanations. Bendrix is jealous and thinks that she has found a new lover, and only after acquiring Sarah's diary with the help of a detective, does he find out that Sarah has actually left him for God. Sarah's diary depicts her fight against the temptation to return to her lover. After reading her diary, Bendrix tries to win her back. At this point, he is jealous of God. Once he follows Sarah to a Catholic Church, and she escapes him into the cold rain, and this later causes her pneumonia – and death. After Sarah has died, Bendrix moves in with Henry, her (too) good-natured husband – now a widower – who has known for some time that Bendrix and Sarah used to be lovers. These two men try to console each other in their mutual loss. Most of the time, however, Bendrix expresses his bitter hatred towards God who has taken away his mistress. Bendrix even convinces Henry not to give Sarah a Catholic burial, instead she is cremated. But Sarah 'speaks' to Bendrix from beyond grave; she performs miracles as a fatally ill child is cured by her, and as one of their agnostic acquaintances experiences a miracle healing of a deformity in his face. We are expected to believe that Sarah has in fact become a saint, and that her miracles convince also Bendrix so much that he reluctantly converts to Catholicism.

The problem with both Charles Ryder's and Maurice Bendrix' conversions is that they do not seem to be conversions at all. Instead, the reader is left with the feeling that at the end of these novels the male protagonists are deeply disappointed and lonely after losing their respective mistresses to a senseless faith. As the loss of love is too painful to swallow,

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<sup>180</sup> *The End of the Affair*, 95

they listlessly turn to the God that their women seem to love – a God they quite obviously still continue to hate. Perhaps they do this in order to convince themselves that this way, they can at least pretend that they are somewhat closer to the women they love.

Furthermore, the miracles at the end of the novels - particularly the ones in Greene's novel – are extremely unbelievable to the modern reader. According to Hynes, Greene himself has at least implied agreement to the fact that although he did not reject the idea of having miracles in a novel, he did end *The End of the Affair* too suddenly for the miracles to have their realistic effect.<sup>181</sup> However, I fail to see how they could have been rendered believable at all. In addition to this, the whole concept of Sarah becoming a saint seems absurd – at least from a doctrinal point of view. After all, if the definition of a canonized saint is “a distinguished Christian who led a holy life, and successfully conquered all enemies” (cf. 1.3.) then it is extremely difficult – for me, at least – to define Sarah as “holy”. She does no good deeds during her lifetime. She simply gives up a lover, and I fail to see the nobility or holiness in this not-too-demanding exercise in self-discipline, (which I would not define “conquering all enemies”). On the contrary, she hurts her husband Henry quite frivolously by starting the love affair in the first place. Because the beginning of the affair with Bendrix seems quite spontaneous (she is not in love with him yet), it proves that Sarah is completely indifferent to her husband's feelings.<sup>182</sup> Furthermore, her diary reveals that after giving up Bendrix she sleeps with an arbitrarily chosen man (who happens to be her husband's chief) just to get her lover out of her mind. Maybe the constant betrayal of your spouse (who is still devoted to you) could be interpreted as saintly behaviour by

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<sup>181</sup> Hynes, 249

<sup>182</sup> Julia's situation differs from that of Sarah: Rex is also unfaithful to her, and does not mind Julia's affairs with other men. Thus Julia is not hurting anybody, therefore her guilty feelings are unfounded.



Greene,<sup>183</sup> but to a secular reader, naming Sarah a saint gives an impression of gross hypocrisy.

Andrew Tate discusses the role of such supernatural events as miracles and faith healing in serious literary fiction. He raises the question of whether the evocation of supernatural events should be exclusively confined to the genres of fantasy fiction and Gothic romance. He states that today's "materialistic fictional trends" are not adequate to express the "complex dynamics of religious belief" for such writers as Salman Rushdie.<sup>184</sup>

Tate quotes Rushdie as follows:

If one is to attempt honestly to describe reality as it is experienced by religious people, for whom God is no symbol but an everyday fact, then the conventions of what is called realism are quite inadequate. The rationalism of that form comes to seem like a judgement upon, an invalidation of, the religious faith of the characters being described. A form must be created which allows the miraculous and the mundane to co-exist at the same level – as the same order of event.<sup>185</sup>

Tate states that Rushdie suggests here that cynicism about the mystical weakens the possibility of empathy with believers.<sup>186</sup>

O'Prey reflects this same idea as he argues that since *The End of the Affair* deals with religion "which has its foundations in the divine answering of prayer and the performance of miracles", it is unreasonable to demand that in fiction ("where anything can legitimately happen anyway") this religion should be depicted without its "magical aspect". Thus, he

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<sup>183</sup> Greene seemed to be doctrinally selective in his Catholicism. According to Norman Sherry, "in later life, Greene scotched the notion of sexual sin altogether". His excuse was that since mortal sin must in definition be committed in defiance of God, and because he doubted that a man making love to a woman ever does it in defiance of God, thus it could not be a mortal sin. (Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene. Volume 2: 1939-1955*, London: Pimlico, 2004, p.257) Greene's personal life was lived according to this double standard; he had several mistresses, and for many years, he even lived together with Catherine Walston, who had a husband and five children, who reportedly suffered from their mother's adultery. Evidently, Greene considered hurting the families of adulterers a minor sin – if a sin at all.

<sup>184</sup> Andrew Tate, *Contemporary Fiction and Christianity* (London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008) 57

<sup>185</sup> Tate, 57 (Quotation taken from: Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*(London: Granta, 1992), p.376

<sup>186</sup> Tate, 57

disagrees with those readers and critics who have criticized Sarah's secret baptism as a child (which took like vaccination) and who "have found the portrayal of God and miracles to be out of place in a realist novel".<sup>187</sup> It is my opinion that if a writer feels that he/she is absolutely obligated to include a miracle in the narrative, it should be written in a way that it could also be interpreted in a realistic way by a (non-believing) reader – which Waugh has done in the death bed scene of Lord Marchmain. Greene's first "miracle" of Bendrix getting up from under the door is quite plausible too, but the two "miracles" which end the novel could create a strong disappointment and anger at being deceived in the reader.

Perhaps one reason for many contemporary readers to resent and reject the endings of both *Brideshead Revisited* and *The End of the Affair* is the prevailing western and secular notion of romantic love being the ultimate good. Terence C. Wright makes this observation as he discusses the reaction of his (mostly female and Catholic) students at a literature seminar to Julia's sacrificing her future marriage for religion.<sup>188</sup> Many of the students empathized with Julia, and found her character faced with a lot of confusions that they themselves had to deal with (sex, love, relations to parents, the teachings of Catholic faith and the expectations of their culture). They also accepted Julia's adulterous affair with Charles, as she obviously had chosen the wrong kind of husband in Rex Mottram, and was clearly genuinely in love with Charles, and thus finally able to become happy. Wright states that his students were surprised by the ending, and this was because Julia does something quite unexpected to them, she seizes a possibility that none of them could foresee.<sup>189</sup> One could fairly argue: if this ending is unfathomable for Catholic students, it is no wonder that it is all the more surprising and disappointing for a non-Catholic reader.

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<sup>187</sup> O'Prey, 93

<sup>188</sup> Terence C. Wright, "Phenomenology and the Moral Imagination". *Logos*. 6:4 Fall 2003, pp. 118-119

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5. Conclusion, or the Conversion of the Reader

In my thesis I have analysed the various aspects of Catholicism in *Brideshead Revisited*. My method was to study the mentality and actions of the characters of the novel in relation to the Catholic faith, using the concepts of “negative Catholicism” and “positive Catholicism” as tools in order to find out which sentiment has the strongest overall impact on the reader. As I have stated before, ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ are quite subjective words, and I have used these terms for the most part to represent my own interpretations. However, besides my own analyses, I have also included the viewpoints of several other sources, either opposing those of mine, or agreeing with me. After all, the starting point of this thesis was my wonderment at the realization that *Brideshead Revisited* was widely considered a Catholic novel; a novel in favour of religion while my own interpretation when reading the novel, was that it was against religion.

In addition to the analysis of the Catholic aspects, I traced some other possible readings of the novel. After all, *Brideshead Revisited* is considered an example of gay literature by some researchers – but it is seldom read as both a Catholic and a “gay novel” at the same time. In my opinion, *Brideshead Revisited* functions better as the latter. This novel also has some features of *Künstlerroman* when it deals with the life story of the narrator, Charles Ryder.

In the Introduction I discussed the Catholic doctrine and the genre of “Catholic novel”. In some respects, *Brideshead Revisited* falls into this genre; for example, it contains the themes of: 1) *A person becoming “holy” (Sebastian)*, 2) *Repentance (Lord Marchmain)*, 3) *Conversion through witnessing a miracle (Julia and Charles)*, 4) *The abandoning of personal happiness for a greater good (Julia)*. Furthermore, the sacrament of Baptism and its mystically permanent effect on Catholics becomes clarified in Cordelia’s explanation

about the “Twitch upon the Thread”; the point being that God has a separate plan for every Catholic, and he will eventually ‘pull back’ even the lapsed ones to his grace. Nevertheless, the Catholicism in *Brideshead Revisited* is controversial and full of paradoxes. Catholicism is most definitely not overtly idealized in this novel.

In the Preface of the 1960 edition of *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh announced the theme of his novel to be “the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters”. (BR, 7) According to Hynes, Waugh’s intention was to present a novel in the realistic tradition which would make plain the reality of God’s becoming the crucial fact of life for some characters who at first seem indifferent to such a possibility or either scoff at or resist any such notion.<sup>190</sup> Hynes points out that after 400 years of secularisation, and especially after the arrival of Darwin, Marx and Freud – not to mention the huge advancement of science – it is difficult to get readers to understand and take seriously a belief in the supernatural.<sup>191</sup> In section 4.2., I discussed this difficulty also in connection of Graham Greene’s *The End of the Affair*, and I came to the conclusion that for many contemporary readers miracles in an otherwise realistic novel are more easily accepted if it is possible to give them other, more ‘natural’ interpretations as well. In my opinion, these ambiguous miracles are more effective even if the supernatural interpretation is given – ironically, the possibility of a reasonable explanation makes them somehow more mysterious, whereas blatant supernaturalism is simply tedious in its naiveté. Furthermore, the sudden occurrence of the ‘miracles’ performed by the adulteress ‘saint’ Sarah at the end of Greene’s novel only made me resentful – as a reader I had been deceived since I would not have started to read the novel in the first place, had I known it would turn into a

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<sup>190</sup> Hynes, 234

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

fairy tale. And I am not alone in my indignation; Michael Gorra states that the ending of *The End of the Affair* will make some readers lose patience because fiction and religion speak a different kind of truth.<sup>192</sup> According to him, religion demands an absolute belief, but fiction exacts a provisional belief at best. The reality of fiction is such that the reader is always free to choose not to believe. Greene later admitted that this “cheating” harmed his novel and that every miracle should have had a natural explanation.<sup>193</sup> Waugh, on the other hand, succeeded better in his handling of Lord Marchmain’s death bed scene, because the miracle is ambiguous. Thus, my argument is that a religious miracle should always retain an element of ‘what if’ in order to convince – or even convert – agnostic readers.

In order to induce the readers to entertain at least the possibility of a larger reality, Waugh either deliberately or instinctively avoided overt authorial preachment.<sup>194</sup> He used a first-person narrator, that is, Charles Ryder, in a narrative that is in a sandwich form: penultimate present, past leading to it, and then the ultimate present – chronologically these parts could be numbered 2-1-3.<sup>195</sup> This practise establishes a situation in which a narrator moves into the past to tell a story and then returns to the present.<sup>196</sup>

In the prologue we meet Captain Charles Ryder during World War II camping with the army on the English countryside. One night the regiment moves to the estate of Brideshead, which is temporarily turned into an army headquarters. Brideshead is a place associated with the most thrilling and also painful moments of his past.<sup>197</sup> The Charles of the prologue is a disillusioned and melancholy man. The army is a disappointment to him, serving his country does not give him satisfaction any more because he feels that the old values of the

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<sup>192</sup> Michael Gorra, “On *The End of the Affair*”. *Southwest Review*. Vol. 89, Issue 1, 2004, p.123

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 124

<sup>194</sup> Hynes, 235

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 236

<sup>196</sup> Davis, 39

<sup>197</sup> Lodge, 31

old England are dead and replaced by the values of the common man. At the age of thirty-nine he has begun to feel old and stiff and weary and set in his ways.

This is the gloomy state of mind that Charles is in at the beginning of the novel. Yet, at this stage he is supposed to have been converted into Catholicism even before the war. The reader is not yet told this, only small hints of his Catholicism are given.<sup>198</sup> The point is that throughout the prologue the reader is led to believe that Charles Ryder is totally tired of life, and yet we are supposed to believe after reading the whole story, that the Charles of the prologue had already found God beside Lord Marchmain's death bed. Religion is not guaranteed to bring happiness, that much becomes clear. Mooneyham claims that Waugh's strategy is to demonstrate Charles' first conversion, while shaping through retrospection a deeper and more ordered reconversion in the epilogue. According to her, this double conversion is meant to create a third, that of the reader.<sup>199</sup> In my opinion, it is very hard to actually interpret the feelings that Charles feels beside Lord Marchmain's death bed as a conversion at all. Naturally, he is moved by Marchmain's death, and furthermore he has witnessed Julia slipping away from him towards religion – *anyone* would pray in this kind of situation; agnostic or not, but a conversion at this stage would be highly illogical.

In *Brideshead Revisited* Waugh gives Charles Ryder a double self; he is both the narrator and the actor. Charles, the narrator comes to Brideshead and starts the nostalgic reminiscence of his youth, and comments on the actions of Charles the actor. Davis points out that the "I" teller of the story is not the same as the "I" who lives through the action.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> The first hint is when Charles' subaltern Hooper who has just been checking their future camp Brideshead, (and who does not know that Charles has been there before) describes it as a "Great barrack of a place" and "very ornate"; "a queer thing, there's a sort of R.C. Church attached. I looked in and there was a kind of service going on – just a padre and one old man. I felt very awkward. More in your line than mine". (BR, 22)

<sup>199</sup> Mooneyham, "The Triple Conversions of *Brideshead Revisited*". *Renascence*. Vol. 45, Issue 4, Summer 1993, p. 226

<sup>200</sup> Davis, 46 (Waugh also stressed that Charles Ryder is not Evelyn Waugh)

The narrator is very understanding towards his young self as a student in Oxford. He does not condemn the young agnostic Charles seeking secular pleasures in wine and leisure, but towards the end, the narrator becomes more and more critical of the behaviour of the older more cynical self, who fiercely opposes the Catholic customs of the Marchmain family.

When the story is told and the epilogue begins, the narrator and the actor have become one.

Through the entire middle section, that is, the past section, Charles is more and more hostile towards religion, and the events and characters of the story influenced by Catholicism give a strong impression of the irrationality of religion. The strategy is perhaps to trap the agnostic reader to identify with the non-believing Charles and then to lure him/her into conversion along with Charles. This tactic does not work effectively because – yet again – the supposed conversing effect on Charles caused by the death bed scene is too vague. The attention of the secular reader is firmly placed on Charles' tragic disappointment at losing Julia – and with her, Brideshead Castle. There is no indication of happiness in finding God; on the contrary, Charles seems miserable and bitter at Julia's God. More than anything, the lovers' break-up strengthens the agnostic reader's resentment of religion as a frustratingly futile obstacle to secular happiness.

Also, the second conversion of the epilogue – or the enhancement of Charles' alleged former conversion that he experiences in the Brideshead chapel – leaves too many questions unanswered for it to be convincing. Just moments before, Charles has confessed to his subaltern Hooper that he is homeless, childless<sup>201</sup>, middle-aged and loveless. (BR, 330) Wirth points out that he is not, however, hopeless.<sup>202</sup> I have to disagree: Charles'

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<sup>201</sup> Charles is apparently totally estranged from his children with Celia, or alternately he does not believe that they are conceived by him. He could also be thinking that he has no right to call himself their father, because he has divorced their mother.

<sup>202</sup> Wirth, 62

situation seems just that. He has lost his youth, his friend/lover Sebastian, his love Julia, his artistic inspiration, his idealism. And still, he goes to the chapel and experiences religious reawakening after only looking at the symbolic small red flame of the beaten copper lamp that is relit. According to Davis, Charles now sees human purpose and divine plan, himself as soldier and spiritual being as parts of a complex whole.<sup>203</sup> All I see is a middle-aged man momentarily cheered up. In my opinion, Charles' change of mood is too fast for it to be lasting: one minute he is desperate, and the next joyful. This kind of euphoria is usually shortlived, and therefore Waugh's religious message is totally lost on me.

Supposedly Charles is made an agnostic so that he can ask questions and wonder about the faith of the Marchmains, and this way Waugh has a chance to explain some doctrinal facts to the non-Catholic reader. Unfortunately, it is the agnosticism which gives the strongest impression on the reader. Perhaps Waugh made Charles too accurate in his agnosticism. Even after the reader has reached the end of the novel, Charles' agnostic reasonings continue to make more sense than any religious statements in the novel. Also, the depiction of the unhappy fate of Sebastian only succeeds in reinforcing the resentment of religion in the reader. One is reminded of Charles' words that Sebastian would be quite happy and healthy if only his mother and Bridey would cease their religious manipulations.

I also asked myself: if indeed Waugh's intention was to convert the reader, why did he make most of the religious characters of *Brideshead Revisited* seem either unpleasant or hypocritical or both? Some of the characters, Lady Marchmain in particular, are manipulative and tyrannical. Sebastian and Julia (and Charles) suffer the consequences of her religious manipulation when they end up leading lonely lives without families of their own. On the other hand, I found the non-believing characters – or the ones that are

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<sup>203</sup> Davis 135



religious in a childlike fashion – of this novel much more sympathetic and human than the strict Catholic ones. These characters have their flaws, but they also have a sense of humour and vulnerability, and at least for a contemporary reader, I think it is much easier to identify with them. In my opinion, such ‘sinful’ characters as Anthony Blanche, Lord Marchmain, Charles’ father Edward Ryder, young Sebastian, Julia and Charles himself are the most interesting ones, and this certainly does not allure the reader into conversion.

For me, the idea of a ‘free spirit’ succumbing to faith – or to any kind of sect or philosophy which professes one truth – is terrifying. Therefore, I found the penitence of Lord Marchmain extremely disappointing. Furthermore, nothing proves that his sign of the cross had anything to do with “divine intervention”. It could merely be a gesture done to please his anxious daughter Julia, or done in a moment of weakness facing the fear of death. In any case, for a secular reader, the death bed scene is an anti-climax. In the same way, the metaphor of the “Twitch upon the Thread” is far from positive, although Cordelia depicts this allegory in a positive light. I cannot help feeling that persons who are pulled by this thread are victims of religion rather than saved by it.

The fact that the Marchmain family is aristocratic has made the Catholicism seem elitist and self-centered for some critics; according to them, faith seems to be the privilege of a class that has no mundane worries of how to feed their family. Robert S. Powell termed *Brideshead Revisited* “an espousal of antidemocratic, selective religiosity”.<sup>204</sup> I do not completely agree with Powell, I think there is no suggestion in the novel of excluding the lower-classes from God’s grace. But I do think that the everyday struggle for life with which the lower classes have to cope with leaves no time for the kind of theological

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<sup>204</sup> Robert S. Powell, “Uncritical Perspective: Belief and Art in *Brideshead Revisited*”. *Critical Quarterly*. 22, 1979, pp. 53-67

consciousness depicted in this novel. Hynes discusses Charles' conversion: To what exactly does Charles convert to; to the truth of Catholicism or the power and persuasiveness of what he regards as the British aristocratic tradition (the Catholic branch)? Although according to Hynes, we have no right to demand that Waugh write about "working-class blokes", or thinking that privileged persons cannot be taken seriously, still we are left with a nagging doubt and a problem of evaluating Charles' conversion.<sup>205</sup>

The secular reader could interpret the reason for Julia's abandoning Charles as sheer cowardice – and not caused by real religious feelings at all. It is also possible that she has begun to detest Charles' apparent greed for inheriting Brideshead Castle. Furthermore, the future life with a husband and children might not seem very glamorous to her, and perhaps in realizing this, Julia escapes into the romantic and self-centered nun-like existence. It is the faith of the privileged, where the ceremonies and sacraments and obeying the rules set up by Rome are more important than Christian charity. The Catholic urge to spend one's life in celibacy is a constant cause for wonder to many non-Catholics. It is symptomatic of the shrivelling nature of the Catholicism in *Brideshead Revisited* that not one of the Marchmain children procreates; whether this was intentional on Waugh's part is not clear. The childlessness of this aristocratic family could also represent the death of an era, the death of the class-system which Waugh as an admirer of the upper-classes feared would happen after the war.

If we consider *Brideshead Revisited* as an example of gay literature, the narrative gives enough clues to the reader to conclude that Sebastian is either asexual or (more probably) homosexual. In the 1940's, when the novel was written, homosexuality could not be depicted as openly as today, and thus Waugh was unable to state the fact clearly. In any

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<sup>205</sup> Hynes, "Two Affairs Revisited", 249

case, it is probable that Sebastian would be free to live happily with Charles without the Catholic guilt imposed on him by his mother. The secular reader is tempted to interpret his alcoholism a consequence of his anxiety over his suppressed homosexuality rather than a fight against religious vocation. Another reason for his drinking could be his disappointment at Charles, who he thinks betrays him by acting like a social climber; Charles seems to be more interested in pleasing Lady Marchmain than Sebastian. McDonnell points out that a more loyal friend would have resisted Lady Marchmain's attempts to charm Charles.<sup>206</sup>

Charles could be seen as a coward denying his own homosexuality. Charles' reasons for denying it are not religious, however; he is simply afraid of becoming socially unacceptable if he does not conform to the conventional heterosexuality. Further proof of this is his becoming cynical and hardened after his estrangement from Sebastian and his loveless marriage to Celia. Furthermore, because he is not honest to himself (and perhaps hates himself and is ashamed of himself because of this), he fails as an artist. The fact, that it is the homosexual Anthony Blanche rather than anyone else, who sees the inauthenticity in his art, manages to convey the idea of a gay recognizing a fellow gay pretending to be straight.

Another indication of Charles denying his true tendencies is his falling in love with Julia.<sup>207</sup> The narrator constantly reminds us of Julia's resemblance to Sebastian. Charles'

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<sup>206</sup> McDonnell, 1988, 97

<sup>207</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses "erotic triangles", and points out that within the European novelistic tradition, the triangles are most often "those in which two males are rivals for a female". Sedgwick states that it is the rivalry between the males, which makes the female seem more desirable to both males, and thus this rivalry creates a strong bond between the males. (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 21) Charles' relationship with Sebastian and Julia could be analysed as another kind of "erotic triangle". The triangle of Charles, Sebastian and Julia is somewhat different from the one mentioned by Sedgwick: Sebastian and Julia are siblings, and there is no rivalry between men over a woman. In any case, there is a triangle in the sense that Charles seems to desire Sebastian, and later Julia *because* she resembles Sebastian.

love affair with her is never described with the eloquence with which Charles remembers the Arcadian days with her brother. Furthermore, Charles has some misogynistic attitudes towards Julia. (In fact, he seemed to despise all women during his days with Sebastian.) Towards the end, Charles and Julia quarrel quite often, and sometimes it seems that Charles loves Brideshead Castle and the glamour of aristocracy more than his fiancée. The mood of the novel changes quite radically as Sebastian's character fades from the narrative – to the extent that sometimes the reader is left with a feeling of reading two separate novels. It would be interesting to analyse further this division of the first and second halves of *Brideshead Revisited*, although for the purposes of this current thesis it is not relevant.

Art plays a central role in Charles' narration. As I have stated, *Brideshead Revisited* could be read as *Künstlerroman*, because it recounts the artistic development of Charles Ryder. During his Oxford days, he is fashionably attached to modernism, but realizes through Sebastian the vanity of the modernists conception of Art being the ultimate good. He then “converts to the Baroque”, and in this, Brideshead Castle is the source of his inspiration. However, as an architectural painter he eventually loses his inspiration. Perhaps frustrated with himself, he seems to turn back to the modernist ideals, as he travels to the then fashionable Mexico. Allegedly, he tries to find inspiration in the primitive surroundings – which was not uncommon for the artists and writers of the 1920's. As I have pointed out before, this was a futile attempt for Charles, and his primitive art turns out to be superficial and only politely admired by his wife's circle of people, but doomed by the real aesthete, Blanche. White states that although Waugh rejected the modernist aesthaetics, at the same time he used modernist rhetorical ploys.<sup>208</sup> Although Waugh was a master in manoeuvring some modernist rhetorics (one of his influences being T.S. Eliot),

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<sup>208</sup> White, 181

this had no effect on his rejection of the idea of art replacing religion.<sup>209</sup> White's argument is that Charles represents the artist and art-lover in Waugh, and in order to make Charles realize the ultimate value of God over beauty, he has to make Charles fail as an artist. Charles is also made to see the futility of his admiration of Brideshead Castle (in the epilogue Brideshead is in chaotic disorder, and constantly mishandled by the soldiers); instead he finds the true value of life in the chapel, which he has always despised as an ugly example of *art nouveau*.<sup>210</sup> Another notable subject for further research would be the numerous (hidden) artistic meanings and themes woven into the narrative of *Brideshead Revisited*.

As the novel ends, Charles seems to be unhappy and resigned to his fate. The future looks bleak. In fact, every main character – with the possible exception of Cordelia – ends up unhappy or dead. To use Wilson's words, Charles too “ends in limbo: divorced, still in the army, separated from the Flytes, but within the Catholic Church”.<sup>211</sup> Julia's conversion is brought about by immense feelings of guilt and perhaps also her sadness over her dead child. Furthermore, her ‘sin’ of marrying a wrong kind of man seems quite innocent to the contemporary reader. In fact, some researchers have pointed out that Julia could have had her marriage to Rex annulled, and proceed to marry Charles. Nevertheless, she feels very strongly that she has to sacrifice Charles in order to be saved. Does this sacrifice make her happy, is another matter entirely. Sebastian ends up in suffering, and even if he has found God, his life does not seem easy as he is unable to stop drinking. He is simply waiting for his death. His youthful dream of becoming happy was not fulfilled. As a young man, during a conversation with Charles about the differences in the Catholicism of Sebastian's family

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<sup>209</sup> White, 182

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Wilson, 109

members, he remarked: “Anyway, however you look at it, happiness doesn’t seem to have much to do with it, and that’s all I want.... I wish I liked Catholics more”. (BR, 87) Clearly, for Waugh the point of becoming a Catholic is something else than personal happiness – but what the point is remains a mystery.

For me, *Brideshead Revisited* is a continually haunting, nostalgic novel. Charles Ryder experiences the inevitable melancholy of mid-life in the chaotic atmosphere of the wartime world. At the same time, he understands that his own world is in chaos, but he has no choice but to live on. As he is reconnected with the paradisaical Brideshead of his youth, he is reminded of the happiness and sadness he experienced there with the people he loved. The fate of every human is to lose the joyfulness of youth. It is this universal truth, which Evelyn Waugh so brilliantly succeeds in impressing on the reader.

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