

Love in brideshead revisited



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The novel *Brideshead Revisited*, by Evelyn Waugh, explores the meaning of love and the many incarnations it can take; love of family and friends, romantic love, and love of God. The novel follows Charles Ryder through his youth and into adulthood focusing on his relationships with Sebastian, Celia, Julia, and God. Waugh also contrasts Charles' relationships with Julia with Bridey's relationship with his wife, Beryl. Through these relationships, Waugh's idea of the construction of love becomes apparent; we learn to love through loving and in that way the love of a parent or friend can be a precursor to romantic love. Waugh also believes love of God is the base and forerunner of all love and without it no other love can be sanctified.

Sebastian is Charles's first love of his young life. Charles has received no love through his grisly relationship with his father, and Charles's friends at Oxford before Sebastian are made to seem intellectual but dull. We define ourselves by our relationships to others and because Charles does not love or receive any love, that we are aware of, he is vulnerable to Sebastian's promise of friendship and with it a sense of belonging. He truly falls in love with Sebastian when Sebastian is flipping through a book of art theory and reads "Does anyone feel the same kind of emotion for a butterfly or a flower that he feels for a cathedral or a picture?" and said "Yes. I do" (Waugh 28). Because their love is so deep and they are nearly inseparable, it is easy to mistake Charles and Sebastian for homosexuals, even the prostitutes at the Old Hundredth misidentify them for "Fairies" (Waugh 116). Cara, Lord Marchmain's mistress addresses this when she tells Charles "I know of these romantic friendships of the English... It is the kind of love that comes to children before they know its meaning" (Waugh 102). Waugh is long believed

to have been bi-sexual. In her biography *Mad World: Evelyn Waugh And The Secrets of Brideshead*, Paula Byrne states that Sebastian is a composite of two of Waugh's three lovers Alistair Graham and Hugh Lygon, citing the fact that in some manuscripts the name Alistair is written instead of Sebastian (Stephen 1). With this biographical information in mind along with Cara's opinion it seems that Waugh does consider Charles and Sebastian's relationship to be more than simple friendship. While I don't believe Charles and Sebastian are homosexual I do believe their love is a form of romantic love without a physical aspect. Cara also recognizes that Sebastian is stuck in his childhood and predicts his demise, saying "He will be a drunkard if someone does not come to stop him...I see it in the way [he] drinks" (103). Despite Sebastian's decline into alcoholism, Charles remains loyal to him, telling Sebastian he doesn't have to hide his drinks from him and even giving him money to go to the bar. Charles recognizes trying to pin Sebastian down will only make him more desperate to escape. As Sebastian runs farther and farther away from Brideshead and the constraints of his family, his friendship with Charles peters out but that love is not lost, only transferred, Sebastian's to his love of God and Charles's to his eventual love for Julia.

Before Julia, however, Charles meets and marries Celia who he has two children with. We are introduced to Celia's relationship to Charles on its deathbed. It does not seem to matter to Waugh that we know if there ever was love between them, when we are allowed into their story all traces of love are gone. Celia teases Charles on his return from abroad by saying "... Have you [fallen in love with someone else in the meantime]" he replies "No. I'm not in love," (Waugh 231). Charles truly does not have any love or

even concern for Celia or his children, although we later learn their paternity is questionable as Celia has been cheating on Charles with the pimply youth Robin. This realization, however, only causes Charles to feel relief that he has a legitimate reason to hate Celia. Charles and Celia's relationship fails because they are both essentially using each other. Celia uses Charles's talent to propel them both to success and Charles uses Celia to replace Sebastian. Neither, it seems, have any real attachment to each other. Even Charles's art suffers from his lack of love; because he has no love in his relationships he can have no love in his art and the result is cold and passionless. When Julia re-enters Charles's life it is a welcome change from his stale marriage with Celia.

When Charles and Julia's lives collide so many year later they are both different people. Julia has endured her marriage to Rex and a miscarriage, both of which she emerges from matured and sadder. Charles has also suffered within his marriage to Celia, and he is left gray and passionless. When they meet again the "thin bat squeak of sexuality" Charles felt years prior swells into an intensely passionate affair that will last two years (Waugh 76). Charles loves Julia deeply, in part because he learned to love her by first loving her brother. Charles himself says that Sebastian was Julia's forerunner, and when Julia accuses Charles of forgetting him he thinks "I had not forgotten Sebastian. He was with me daily in Julia; or rather it was Julia I had known in him," (Waugh 303). By learning to love Sebastian, Charles had learned to love the part of Sebastian that was Julia and later was able to transfer that love to Julia. Charles and Julia's relationship seems intended to bring them the happiness they deserve, but it does not last.

Charles's lack of religion creates a wedge between them that is exacerbated by Julia's own religious crisis. When Bridey accuses Julia of living in sin, it resonates with her own shame and throws her into a hysterical fit that Charles can neither understand nor hope to resolve. In the end Julia realizes that to repair her relationship with God, she must give up the thing she loves most; Charles. Charles says that he knew even before Julia knew that this would be necessary, " I hope your heart may break" he says, " but I do understand." (Waugh 341)

Despite its lack of passion, Bridey's marriage to Beryl is arguable the most successful of the novel. Neither marry for love, although Bridey is quick to emphasize he is " ardently attracted" (Waugh 285). Beryl marries to provide financial security for her children after her husband's death and goes as far as to lie about her age and exaggerate her piety. Bridey marries not for love or matchboxes but because he sees a wife as the next logical step in his life, and his father has been pressuring him to get married. This maddeningly logical approach to marriage contrasts with Charles and Julia's relationship which is centered on their unappeasable passion and emotional need for one another. And yet, where Charles and Julia's relationship deteriorates and ends, Bridey and Beryl seem reasonably happy. This seems to suggest that Waugh believes long term commitments should be centered on rational and logistics rather than just love or passion. Another reasoning, however, is that Charles and Julia's relationship only failed because, unlike Bridey and Beryl, they loved each other before they loved God.

Waugh believes love of God supersedes all other forms of love and without it no other love can be consecrated. This is seen with the failed relationship

between Charles and Julia, Lord and Lady Marchmain, and Julia and Rex. In each relationship one or more of the partners either doesn't have a relationship with God or loves their partner above God. Charles wonders if "perhaps all our loves are merely hints or symbols" (Waugh 303). This is the idea that all earthly love is just a physical manifestation of the love of God, because essentially God is love. Charles is an agnostic and remains so until the very end of the story when he finds himself once again at Brideshead. He visits the chapel to say a "newly learned" prayer and finds "[the flame] burning anew among the stones," (Waugh 351). This is symbolic of the love and acceptance of God that Charles has been fighting all his life. Now that Charles is open to the potential for a relationship with God, he will be able to have love that is consecrated.

Waugh believes Love, like matter, can neither be created nor destroyed. It can be changed or transferred but it never disappears. Charles marvels over this viewpoint of love that Cordelia's diction reveals when she says "[Julia] never loved him the way we do." "Do" the word reproached me; there was no past tense in Cordelia's verb "to love"" (Waugh 308). Waugh also believes each love is a forerunner to the next and that love of God must be a forerunner to all love. Charles learns these lessons of love the hard way. It is only after he has lost every object of his love that he is finally able to allow the possibility of a relationship with God and thereby allow himself a future with the prospect of new love.

Works Cited

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