

# Themes of brideshead revisited



In the novel *Brideshead Revisited* there are several themes that emerge throughout the story. The central theme of the novel is religion, with an emphasis on Catholicism. The topic of religion is very common in the novel and relates to each of the characters. Although all are not religious, each has been around Catholicism at one time or another.

Another theme is alcoholism and it surrounds Sebastian during his lifetime. The first time Sebastian and Charles meet Sebastian is drunk and pukes into Charles's window. His alcoholism grows as he gets older and his family does not do much to help his problem. Male friendship is another dominant theme and it can be seen through the relationship between Sebastian and Charles. Though it is never officially stated that they are homosexuals, there are several implications throughout the novel that support this theory. Lady Marchmain is one of the most devout Christians of all the characters in the novel and tries to convert those around her.

The only other person who has a similar devotion is Cordelia. Charles is an agnostic and has never been truly introduced to religion until he meets Sebastian and his family. He never truly understands religion until the end of the novel in the epilogue. In the epilogue Charles returns to Brideshead on military business and is delighted to find that the chapel is still unchanged from the last time he saw it. He enters the chapel and says a small prayer, the only time in the story that Charles exhibits any religious behavior. Lady Marchmain raises her children in a religious household and while this seems to work for some of the children, for others it causes them to resist it. Sebastian believes in Catholicism but has a difficult time adhering to the

rules of the church. But in the end of the novel Sebastian becomes an aide at a monastery, a sign that he has returned to his religion.

Brideshead is religious but only because that was the way he was raised. He believes it is what he is supposed to do and goes along with it but never truly feels passionate about Catholicism. Julia never seems to be very interested in religion until the end after she divorces Rex and starts her affair with Charles. After her father's death Julia tells Charles she can no longer see him and this affair with him has filled with her sin. Lord Marchmain, who rejected Catholicism after leaving Lady Marchmain, is against religion until his last breaths on his deathbed.

After the priest places oil on his forehead, he raises his finger as to wipe it off but instead he made the sign of the cross. Although not all the characters start off religious, those who didn't believe in the beginning came around by the end. Sebastian's drinking problem starts off as many do, drinking casually with friends and having a good time.

But as the novel goes on his problem gets progressively worse and worse. One of the worst incidents that show how bad Sebastian's alcoholism has become is during Easter at Brideshead. He treats Charles poorly and Charles ends up paying the consequences for helping his friend. Sebastian asks Charles for money because Sebastian knows that Charles will say no and he doesn't. When Lady Marchmain confronts Charles about this he admits he gave Sebastian money and he is promptly kicked out of the house. The family's reaction to Sebastian's drinking is to have Charles fix the problem because they do not want to deal with it. Lady Marchmain, Julia, and

Brideshead all ask Charles to get Sebastian to stop drinking and do not think that they have any responsibility to him. His family does not understand the problem and doesn't want to try and understand.

Julia claims that it is not her business even though Sebastian is her own brother. Lady Marchmain tries to help him by sending Sebastian off with Mr. Samgrass to the Middle East but this only makes the problem worse. Sebastian's alcoholism is part of the reason his friendship with Charles falls apart. His family does not know how to deal with the alcoholism and tries to find others who might know what to do. The friendship between Charles and Sebastian is very intense and the novel never directly states whether or not they are homosexual.

Regardless of if they are or not, the theme of male friendship can be seen through the two of them. One of the first people to notice how close they are is Cara, Lord Marchmain's mistress. She does not find anything wrong with their relationship and believes it is a kind of love that comes to children before they know its meaning (Waugh 102). Their love is still innocent and has not been tainted because they are still so young. If Charles had never met Sebastian than he wouldn't have been to Brideshead and the story would be completely changed.

By meeting Sebastian, Charles was introduced to his family and began to consider them his own. Lady Marchmain would treat Charles as if he was her own and they began to rely on him as if he was responsible for Sebastian. Even after the affair between Charles and Julia begins he calls Sebastian the

forerunner. Part of the reason Charles begins to have an interest in Julia is because Julia looks like the female version of Sebastian.

Being with Julia is the second best thing after Sebastian for Charles. Since the relationship between Charles and Sebastian does not last, he looks for a replacement in Julia. The central theme in the novel is religion because that is something that all the characters have in common. Although not all characters are religious, that is still something that ties them all together. By the end of the novel, everyone has become religious in a sense. Bridey is the only character that does not find religion on his own but only continues to be Catholic because he feels that is what's expected of him. But his wife is very religious and refuses to enter their house because of the sin that occurs.

Both Charles and Lord Marchmain, who were originally not religious, come around by the end. Julia finds religion after her divorce with Rex and when she begins her affair with Charles. She feels filled with sin and can no longer continue seeing Charles. Lady Marchmain is religious throughout the novel and tries to convert those around her as well. Cordelia is also religious and though when she is a child she doesn't seem to truly understand Catholicism, as she grows older it is evident she understands and believes in it.

Sebastian is a believer but finds it difficult to do what is expected of him by the church. But in the end he becomes an aide at a monastery, going back to his religious roots. Religion is the theme of the novel that relates to all characters and affects each of their lives.