

Brideshead revisited essay sample



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Traditionally, the pastoral genre celebrates the beauty and aesthetics of the countryside which is often depicted as promoting prosperity and joy within its inhabitants. However, considering *Brideshead Revisited*, *She Stoops to Conquer* and Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* were all written during times of change and development in which the urban is presented to infringe upon the rural, contradictions to this traditional pastoral genre are highlighted.

In *Brideshead Revisited* Waugh uses the character of Charles Ryder to present the countryside as a useful means of escape, as Charles is 'suspended' above his mundane life and liberated in the beauty of the country 'under a clump of elms'. Waugh contrasts Charles' dysfunctional, constricting relationship at home with his father, with the freedom; exemplified through Charles, in rural *Brideshead* in order to present the pastoral as a constructive, liberating environment.

Charles comments that 'the dinner table was our battlefield', through this metaphor Waugh highlights Charles' uncomfortable familial situation, since the 'dinner table' is symbolic of family unity, however the metaphor of the 'battlefield' suggests there is something nefarious about their relationship and presents the two characters as distant, much like two sides of a battle. Furthermore, Waugh uses a collective pronoun 'our' to illustrate that both Charles and his father perceive their relationship as corrupt, augmenting the disparity within their family.

Structurally, Waugh uses Sebastian's letter to 'dearest Charles' to illustrate Charles' freedom experienced through the country. Charles says to his father

' I must go at once', after receiving Sebastian's letter. Waugh's use of the modal verb ' must' shows Charles' feeling of obligation towards his friend but also reflects Charles' preference of the country over his constricting home environment. Through the setting of pastoral Brideshead, Waugh characterises Charles as uninhibited and care-free, ' a pair of children'.

Referencing Charles and Sebastian as ' children', illuminates the freedom and feelings of happiness synonymous with youth that the pastoral bestows onto characters; contrasting his time spent ' forlorn' at home. Furthermore, Waugh uses descriptive language to present the liberating environment of the ' enchanted palace' of Brideshead, which is a useful means of escapism from the hostility of Charles' urban home.

The vivid depiction of the ' alpine strawberries' and ' warm figs' ameliorates the presentation of Charles' adoration of the rural idyll, since he is able to recount minute aspects of his experience despite narrating retrospectively, which illuminates Charles' happiness at Brideshead and nostalgia to return to ' the languor of youth' spent in the pastoral, therefore Waugh presents the aesthetics of the pastoral as useful for escape from constricting environments. Similarly, Waugh presents the country as a useful memento for reminiscence in later years.

The character of Sebastian wishes ' to bury a crock of gold' in ' every place (he's) been happy' on pastoral, ' cropped knoll(s)' in order to access more positive memories when he's ' old and miserable'. The attachment to the contentment found in the countryside through the burial of ' crock(s) of gold' also suggests that the country allows characters, to an extent, to control

time, in the sense that when Sebastian is ‘old(er)’ the happiness endowed onto his character through the pastoral will remain and secure his happiness in the future.

Contrarily, Waugh suggests that the nostalgia resulting from rural experience can have a negative effect, suggesting the countryside is not useful but in fact, harmful. Charles reflects that Sebastian’s ‘escape from reality’ in the country has resulted in him being ‘increasingly hemmed in’, as a result of his liberal, indulged lifestyle being unsustainable. This creates a tone of sad resignation in the novel which highlights the negative influence of the country.

Moreover, through the character of Julia, Waugh presents the novel from an anti-pastoral, modernist viewpoint; suggesting the country is not as attractive as the ‘finery’ in the city. Waugh characterises Julia as a typical ‘flapper’ woman, symbolic of the 1920’s; which is the epoch Charles is recounting retrospectively. Waugh describes, through Charles, that Julia’s hair is ‘scarcely longer than Sebastian’s’, which was stereotypical of women during the Jazz Age; having short bob haircuts.

Furthermore, Waugh highlights Julia’s ‘bangle of charms’ and ‘painted mouth’ to reflect her association with the sophistication of the city which has resulted in her ‘gold’, urban veneer, contrasting the simplicity of the bucolic rural. Furthermore, the listing of jewellery, ‘skirts’ and ‘rings’ show the Julia’s materialistic personality which is commonly associated with the town. This positive depiction of Julia suggests that the city and its inhabitants are more beautiful and ‘especially female’ than the rural countryside.

Moreover, Charles ' caught a thin bat's squeak of sexuality' from Julia, the adjective ' thin' and the profound description of Julia's character exemplifies the close attention Charles was paying Julia, suggesting that Charles is able to enjoy the city and its fopperies as much as the beauty of the countryside. Similarly, in *She Stoops to Conquer* Goldsmith reflects the desirability of the town and subsequently the lack of excitement and beauty found in the country.

Through the character of Mrs Hardcastle, Goldsmith presents the anti-pastoral view that it is the city which is useful, to ' rub off the rust', which is accumulated with time spent in the country. ' Rust' suggests that country life is constricting and harmful rather than fruitful, contrasting excitement of prosperous ' London' and the ' fashions', of which Mrs Hardcastle ' love(s) to talk'.

Moreover, Goldsmith reveals that Mrs Hardcastle reads the ' Scandalous Magazine' in a vain attempt to vicariously enjoy London and keep abreast of ' every tete-a-tete' in the town, which suggests that Mrs Hardcastle wishes to escape the useless ' trumpery' in the country in order to pursue a more adventurous town existence portrayed in the ' Scandalous Magazine'.

However, Goldsmith uses misinformed references in Mrs Hardcastle's speech to show her limited, ' second-hand' understanding of the town, which presents her character as vacuous and unsophisticated, which is how pastoral characters can be presented in the pastoral genre, therefore highlighting the usefulness of the country in its ability to illustrate character faults. Mrs Hardcastle says Hastings, a ' gentleman' of the town, has ' been

bred all (his) life' at ' Tower Wharf', which is ironic considering Tower Wharf in the 18th century was associated with thievery and prostitution, far from a location a gentleman would frequent.

Through this ironic reference, Goldsmith presents Mrs Hardcastle as an ignorant character which is apparent because of her affiliation with the country, thus highlighting the country's utility in illuminating character flaws. Alternatively, Mrs Hardcastle's lack of competence could reflect the hindrance of the country. Goldsmith uses repetition of the word ' old' to reflect the lack of development and prosperity in the country. Mrs Hardcastle's life spent in the ' old rambling mansion' in the country could be the reason for her lack of enlightenment, suggesting the country is not useful but restricts the intellect of characters.

Similarly, Goldsmith presents the character of Tony as stereotypical of an unsophisticated country dweller lacking intelligence and refinement as a result of his indulged rural lifestyle. Goldsmith highlights Tony's lack of prosperity through the lyrics of Tony's song, the words ' nonsense' and ' learning' are juxtaposed in the lyrics to show Tony is uninterested in education and furthermore he is a lazy and unambitious character which compliments Vicki Janik's criticism of Tony as " the most ignorant of the country bumpkins", suggesting his simple idyllic country life has hindered his development, presenting the country negatively.

However, Goldsmith's characterisation of Tony as uninhibited and interested in ' fun going forward', highlights that the Arcadian country, in which otium is paramount, has resulted in Tony's happiness and ' consumptive figure' which

is reflective of his care-free lifestyle. The country has reacted positively with Tony and much like Charles in *Brideshead Revisited* the country is useful in promoting prosperity and pleasure, which are seen as important aspects of life in the pastoral genre.

Equally, in Blake's *Laughing Song*, the country is presented as a positive force which results in the 'merr(iment)' of the rural population. Blake personifies the pastoral, 'the green woods laugh', in order to highlight the peaceful bliss found in the country which is reflected onto the rural inhabitants 'Mary and Susan', whose happiness is depicted through interjections of laughter 'ha ha he'. However, the laughter 'ha ha he', is seemingly faltered. Blake creates a harsh tone through the change of 'ha' to 'he' on the last line of the poem, suggesting the 'joy' in the country is ephemeral and superficial.

Furthermore, Blake suggests this depiction of Arcadia is unattainable through the repetition of 'when'. Blake pessimistically suggests that humanity can only 'be happy' 'when' all the pastoral elements of the poem come into fruition, 'when the meadows laugh with lively green'. These elements of the poem which are fundamental to a bucolic paradise are nonsensical which suggests that this depiction of utopia is doubtful, suggesting that in the 18th century the countryside was not beautiful but rather, corrupt as a result of increasing industrialisation and the 'charter(ing)' of the rural.

Moreover, in *The Echoing Green*, Blake reflects that the country is a useful moral guide for humanity. Blake presents nature as a domineering force

which guides humanity into maturity through the use of the imperative.

Blake shows the ‘sun’ ‘make happy the skies’, showing the control which nature and the country has over our lives. Furthermore, Blake juxtaposes the ‘girls and boys’ with the ‘old folk’ in this poem to show how the country and the ‘echoing green’ has resulted in the maturation of ‘Old John’ and the other ‘old folk’.

The use of positive language reflects how nature has positively influenced the lives of those on ‘the echoing green’. Blake highlights that John ‘does laugh away with care’, by using ‘care’ at the end of the line Blake emphasises the love and kindness of John which has been nurtured by his ‘youth time’ on ‘the echoing green’, suggesting that nature has been a useful moral guide and resulted in an empathetic ‘car(ing)’ generation. In conclusion, it is clear all texts present the countryside as beautiful and uncorrupted, with varying degrees of profundity.

However, between texts the utility of the country is debatable, while Brideshead Revisited and Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Experience form the prominence and importance of the country as a major theme, She Stoops to Conquer debates the influence of the country on the lives of its inhabitants and challenges the stereotypes of the country as being adorned by all. Overall, highlighting the country as important with perhaps certain characteristics which undermine its utility.