

# Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited": Paradise Lost or Paradise Regained?

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It is worth asking why, in a secular and post-romantic age, a myth of the Fall should have such validity. . . . One answer, I think, is that the experience of being abandoned, of losing an unconditional love, and thereby of forfeiting the simple confidence and wholeness which it sanctions, is a common childhood tragedy.

(Thurman 327)

## 1. Introduction

*Brideshead Revisited* was first published in a limited edition in 1944, then in a revised edition for the general public in 1945, and then again, fifteen years later, in another revised edition, in 1960.<sup>1</sup> The novel caused great controversy on its first appearance because of the striking changes it presented in Waugh's style and subject-matter.<sup>2</sup> Previously known to his readers as a purveyor of ironic, apparently nihilistic black comedy and as a writer of no explicit moral or religious persuasion, Waugh emerges in *Brideshead Revisited* as the author of a Catholic apologia whose dominant mode is that of realism. The novel traces the emotional, moral, and spiritual development of its protagonist and first-person narrator, Charles Ryder, through his relations with the Flyte family. As Waugh puts it in his 1960 Preface to the novel, its "perhaps presumptuously large" theme is "the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters" (7). In the first edition "Warning," he described the theme even more precisely as "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" (quoted in Heath 163). The novel thus, in Waugh's eyes at least, is a mid-twentieth-century attempt to dramatize and "justify the ways of God to men."<sup>3</sup> It is also, as this essay will argue, an evocation of the lost paradise of childhood and

youth, and it is the tension between the themes of faith and the lost paradise of youth which gives the novel much of its problematic fascination.

The explicitly Catholic intention of *Brideshead Revisited* has provoked much critical comment, most of it adverse. Edmund Wilson was the first to articulate criticism of the novel as "a Catholic tract," calling the last scenes "extravagantly absurd" and accusing Waugh of mistaking Ryder's snobbery for religious faith (72). His criticism was swiftly followed by that of Donat O'Donnell (reprinted in Stannard 255-63). More recent critics of Waugh have expressed more balanced views: Robert Murray Davis has shown Waugh's careful revisions of certain scenes in the novel, Jeffrey Heath has offered a detailed analysis of the novel as a successful depiction of Charles Ryder's maturation and conversion, while Ian Littlewood has offered some more sceptical remarks about the novel, noting that Waugh's use of miracles is "likely to strike us as a kind of special pleading" (157), which he sees as unsatisfactory. The same critic also identifies a less metaphysical, more concrete source of the book's problematic fascination by suggesting that when the reader is called upon to accept Lord Marchmain's sudden conversion and Charles's moment of revelation as miraculous events which do not follow the normal laws of logic, yet which cannot be questioned, he "becomes too aware of the fact" that he is being "practised upon" for the novel to be altogether convincing at this point. "Something," says Littlewood, "has gone wrong" (157).<sup>4</sup>

What has "gone wrong" in *Brideshead Revisited*, I would suggest, has to do less with the protagonist's conversion *per se* than with the author's less than total control of some elements of narrative technique and characterization. The novel is remarkable for the contradiction between its *Bildungsroman* plot, which enacts its Catholic message, and the emotional balance and structure of the novel. The *Bildungsroman* plot implies Charles's development and growing maturity: he must move from his immature love for Sebastian, with its implicit homosexual overtones, to his mature but extra-marital love for Julia, and finally to the calm satisfaction of his love for God. But the novel's emotional emphasis falls on the first stage of his development, his love for Sebastian, to the

detriment of the later stages. It is Charles's early love for Sebastian which is sensuously, comically, and fondly evoked, and which is both memorable and convincing. His love for Julia is much more summarily and less successfully treated, while his love for God is, perhaps by necessity, entirely absent from the text. The novel is dominated by the older Charles's memories of his love for Sebastian and his grief at its loss, both evoked through the recurrent image of the "enchanted garden" (32, 163) and the paradisaical image of "those languid days at Brideshead" when the younger Charles believed himself "very near heaven" (77).

One corollary of Charles's youthful love for Sebastian is his scepticism, which dominates the narrative to the almost complete exclusion of the faith of the older man, whose sparse retrospective comments (46, 83, 164) are too brief and inexplicit to act as correctives to his earlier self's scepticism.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, when the narrative finally moves from scepticism to the assertion of faith, it expresses this faith not in the confessional narrative mode of the bulk of the novel, but through the metaphors of the "twitch upon the thread" (which gives Book Three its title), the rending of the veil, and the avalanche. The metaphors may be taken as Waugh's attempt to indicate a completely different area of experience from that treated in the rest of the novel, or, in Littlewood's words, "another order of things" (161). These metaphors break the spell of the earlier narrative. The strategy may well be intentional on Waugh's part, but its effects are somewhat ambivalent. Furthermore, Sebastian, Charles's first love, is, as Jeffrey Heath has observed, "so sympathetic a creation that Charles's other loves seem pale by contrast" (178). Despite his status as a "forerunner" and despite Anthony Blanche's attempts to warn Charles of the dangers of Sebastian's "charm" (51), the fascination which the latter exercises over both Charles and the reader is never dispelled, and the grief the older Ryder re-experiences upon narrating his memories of Sebastian and Brideshead twenty years later is seemingly not alleviated even by his newly adopted faith.

The result of all this is that the emphasis of the novel falls on Charles's sense of grief and loss as he relives his own youth and his love for Sebastian, suggesting ultimately, perhaps, that he embraces Catholicism in an unconscious attempt to regain, indirectly,

the "paradise lost" of his experiences with Sebastian rather than out of religious conviction alone. The analysis of the novel that follows will examine, firstly, the conflict in the novel between scepticism and faith and, secondly, the role played by childhood in linking love and Catholicism in an attempt to identify the sources of the novel's paradoxical appeal.

## 2. *Faith and Scepticism: The Problem of Charles's Conversion*

The predominant tone of the largely confessional, first-person narrative of *Brideshead Revisited* is both sceptical and sensuous. It is not seriously disturbed until the moment of revelation which comes to Charles at Lord Marchmain's bedside at the end of Book Three. The change of heart Charles experiences at this moment would seem to run counter to everything he has previously said in the novel about Catholicism. Moreover, it is expressed through metaphorical language which, in trying to communicate a different order of experience, marks a break with the dominant tone of the novel.<sup>6</sup> Charles's conversion itself is doubly problematic. Firstly, it occurs outside the text in the lapse of time between Lord Marchmain's death and the appearance of the older Ryder at the beginning of the novel; secondly, it is not made explicit until the novel's Epilogue. The very slight hint dropped in the Prologue, when Hooper tells the narrator that the Roman Catholic chapel at Brideshead is more "in your line than mine" (22), is easily overlooked, and the reader is likely to be extremely surprised (on a first reading of the novel) when Ryder asserts his newly found faith in the Epilogue.<sup>7</sup>

The moment of revelation which Charles is presented as experiencing at the bedside of the dying Lord Marchmain represents a problematic shift to a different order of reality from the one evoked in most scenes of the novel, where Charles has been characterized by his scepticism, rather than by his readiness to accept even the possibility of such revelations. Davis has observed that in revising at least one passage in the novel, Waugh makes Ryder "indifferent rather than actively hostile to or condescending towards religion" and thus "makes more plausible his movement into faith" (183). This is certainly true in relation to the passage Davis is discussing,

yet the point needs to be put into perspective. Although the comments on and criticisms of Catholicism early in the novel by such characters as Hooper and Jasper can obviously be discounted, since they merely reflect the meanness of spirit or the prejudices of the speakers (22, 28, 42-43), the young Charles's own comments on Catholicism are another matter. His initial acquaintance with the everyday application of Catholic rites like prayer and making novenas by Sebastian and Cordelia leads to comedy and even farce; but most of all it reveals Charles's total lack of comprehension of the Catholic faith (84-85, 91). As he says after one of his abortive attempts to discuss Catholicism with Brideshead, their disagreement "expressed a deep and impassable division between us; neither had any understanding of the other, *nor ever could*" (90; my emphasis), a categorical statement which is not qualified in any way by the retrospective narrator. Moreover, Charles sees Catholicism more and more as a threat to Sebastian's happiness. As he tells Brideshead: "It seems to me that without your religion Sebastian would have the chance to be a happy and healthy man" (140). Again, the comment is not qualified by the retrospective narrator's perspective. Littlewood's discussion of the passage is instructive; he says that Charles may be right, yet he adds that this is not the point, since "'happy' and 'healthy' refer to values that are human rather than divine. . . . The demands of religion may not be attractive, they may indeed run counter to what is attractive — to the claims of both social charm and human affection — but they are none the less absolute" (168). The novel's problematic appeal, it might be argued, lies in the conflict which it sets up between two irreconcilable forces, the desire for human or earthly health and happiness, and the belief in eternal salvation or damnation. This conflict is clear in Charles's comment on Sebastian, quoted above; it emerges even more dramatically when Brideshead, much later, coolly informs Julia that he cannot bring his middle-aged Catholic fiancée, Mrs. Beryl Muspratt, to Brideshead while Julia is living there "in sin with Rex or Charles or both" (272). Brideshead's words have a sudden, devastating effect on Julia, provoking in her a paroxysm of grief and guilt, of which he is quite unaware. As Littlewood observes, it "is as though Brideshead's religion blocks out a whole area of human sensibility"

(169). For the sceptical reader, Catholicism is given a problematic image insofar as it is represented by Brideshead: his theology may be impeccable, but impeccable theology, combined here with lower-middle-class prudery, denies some normal human desires. Not all readers find it easy to accept such a denial.

Charles's criticism of Catholicism reaches its height, paradoxically, just before Lord Marchmain's death. After Julia's guilty outburst, Charles tries, inept sceptic as he apparently still is at this point, to reassure her: "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?" (276). When the idea of bringing a priest to the dying man is first mooted, Charles states that this would be "an outrage," since no one "could have made it clearer, all his life, what he thought of religion;" he adds that any attempt on the part of the Catholic church to claim the dying man as a death-bed penitent will convince him that Catholicism is "all superstition and trickery" (309). These criticisms are never directly answered by the narrative; they are simply by-passed as Charles is made to undergo a moment of revelation at Lord Marchmain's bedside. As the dying man makes the sign of the cross, Charles realizes

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.

(322)

The narrative rendering of Charles's moment of vision thus relies greatly on the image of the rending of the veil, which he calls "a phrase . . . from my childhood." Yet we know nothing of Charles's childhood except that it was unhappy, so we cannot associate the phrase with any specific moment in Charles's childhood experiences. Thus the evocative power of the allusion to Christ's death on the cross, with the parallel it establishes between Charles and the centurion who are both miraculously made aware of the central mystery of the Christian faith (Mark 15.37-39), is somewhat obscured, and Charles's change of heart is communicated with less than complete success. It might certainly be argued that the experience which he is undergoing is, by definition, incommunicable.

As Sebastian says, "If you can't see, you can't" (85). While this failure to communicate (and, therefore, to convince) may be acceptable in a character, it is surely much less satisfactory in a narrator, especially the narrator of a *Bildungsroman*.

The novel's awkwardness in its presentation of Catholicism is related both to the beliefs involved and to questions of narrative technique. The overt scepticism and mockery of the young Charles as protagonist far outweigh the relatively rare retrospective comments of his older self, whose point of view seldom modifies the earlier vision. Indeed Davis observes that most of Waugh's revisions related to Charles's characterization "serve as implicit correctives to Ryder's judgment of his experience as it occurs rather than the way he judges it retrospectively" (143). The resultant gap between later faith and earlier scepticism is never fully bridged. One might say that the novel includes its own criticism of the postulates of Catholicism, a self-criticism which is presumably meant to be answered by Charles's conversion. Unfortunately for the novel's Catholic message, however, the criticism is more convincing than the conversion. In a somewhat similar way, Charles's early experience of love with Sebastian dominates the text and overshadows both his love for Julia and his love of God, as the next section will attempt to argue by examining the novel's use of childhood images and allusions.

### 3. *Love, Faith, and Childhood: Problematic Associations*

From Charles's first encounter with Brideshead, Catholicism is associated, apparently incongruously, with childhood, the nursery, and Nanny Hawkins.<sup>8</sup> Charles's first visit to Brideshead occurs when Sebastian takes him to visit Nanny Hawkins, whom they find occupying the old nursery, surrounded by the mingled relics of childhood and faith: "There was a rocking horse in the corner and an oleograph of the Sacred Heart over the mantelpiece" (38). Like Sebastian's rooms at Oxford, Nanny Hawkins's room is a jumble of heterogeneous objects, a jumble which Jeffrey Heath sees as implying "veiled hostility" on Waugh's part (168). Whether or not authorial criticism is intended, the combination of the signs of religious faith with the relics of childhood becomes increasingly ironic as the novel progresses, and as Catholicism

comes to be strikingly and problematically associated with both childhood and youthful love.

The association between childhood, faith, and youthful love is first made in two retrospective comments by Charles about his youthful self's state of mind soon after the beginning of his friendship with Sebastian. He says that

it seemed as though I was being given a brief spell of what I had never known, a happy childhood, and though its toys were silk shirts and liqueurs and cigars and its naughtiness high in the catalogue of grave sins, there was something of nursery freshness about us that fell little short of the joy of innocence. (45-46)

Then, a little later, he observes:

There is no candour in a story of early manhood which leaves out of account the home-sickness for nursery morality, the regrets and resolutions of amendment, the black hours which, like zero on the roulette table, turn up with roughly calculable regularity. (61)

The phrases, "nursery freshness," "the joy of innocence," and "the home-sickness for nursery morality," perhaps suggest that Charles's later conversion to Catholicism should be seen not only as a belated attempt to share Sebastian's and Julia's childhood experiences of religious faith, but also as an unconscious effort both to attain the innocence and bliss of the "happy childhood" he never knew in reality and to regain the paradisaical bliss of his early love for Sebastian.

If faith, childhood, and love are linked for Charles only in retrospect (and with implications I shall examine in more detail below), for Sebastian and Julia the connection between childhood and faith is both natural and inescapable since Catholicism is part of their upbringing. Sebastian, as Cara says, "is in love with his own childhood" (100), and that childhood includes, willy-nilly, Catholicism. As Littlewood says, in "adult life the monastery will offer him the security that as a child he had found in the nursery" (163). For her part, Julia tells Charles that Catholicism "becomes part of oneself, if they give it one early enough" (247), as she tries to explain the power of Bridey's words about "living in sin" to distress her.

Ultimately, perhaps, it comes as no surprise, given the power of the links established for Sebastian and Julia between Catholi-

cism and childhood, that they are both, finally, "twitched back" to the faith. Sebastian, after attempting to run away "as far and as fast as [he] can" (130), ends his days reconciled to the Catholic faith as a drunken but saintly derelict in Tunisia, while Julia at first rebels by marrying a divorced man, Rex, and then by having at least two extra-marital affairs, the second with Charles, before her father's death-bed re-acceptance of the faith apparently confirms her own decision to return to the Catholic values of her childhood. Strikingly, as Julia moves back towards Catholicism, her memories of childhood return, and the association between the nursery, faith, and punishment for the wrong kind of love intensifies. The word "sin," in particular, becomes an obsession with her, an obsession expressed through her anguished meditation on it after Brideshead's matter-of-fact words about her "living in sin," which, she says, is a "word from so long ago." It conjures up first the apparently anodyne images of "Nanny Hawkins stitching by the hearth and the nightlight burning before the Sacred Heart" and "Cordelia and me with the catechism, in mummy's room, before luncheon on Sundays" (274). But the images she evokes immediately afterwards are less anodyne and link sin, more conventionally, with guilt and death. In her monologue, it is noticeable that Julia uses the word "sin" to refer exclusively to sexual behaviour. Indeed, it seems to be used in this way all through the novel. Moreover, Julia is the only one among all the variously sinning characters in the novel to show any sense of guilt. Neither Charles, nor Rex, nor Sebastian possesses Julia's guilty awareness of sin. This seems illogical and unfair, although, in view of the Catholic Church's patriarchal character, not particularly surprising.<sup>9</sup>

The Catholic faith in the novel, then, is ultimately inescapable for Sebastian and Julia, along with its double sexual standard and despite — or because of — its association with the nursery, which might seem to suggest that it is a relic of childhood and therefore something of an anomaly in adult life. Yet whereas, for Sebastian and Julia, the return to Catholicism, the religion of their childhood, involves the rejection of earthly happiness, for Charles the case is somewhat complicated by the fact that his first, sceptical, acquaintance with Catholicism is brought about his intense emo-

tional relationship with Sebastian. For Charles, as retrospective narrator, not only links his early love for Sebastian with "a happy childhood" and "a nursery morality," but also with the attainment of wisdom and, arguably, also with religious faith. Thinking back on his youthful response to his cousin Jasper's "Grand Remonstrance" (41), he says: "I could tell him, too, that to know and love one other human being is the root of all wisdom" (46). The "one other human being" he is referring to is obviously Sebastian; indeed, it is he who dominates both Charles's actual youth and his later memories, thus becoming both the main source of the book's fascination and one of its problems. As Jeffrey Heath says in this connection:

Unfortunately, [Sebastian's] brilliance constitutes a liability for the novel after he leaves it. As a forerunner of Ryder's love for Julia, and of the Church, he must be rejected, but he is so sympathetic a creation that Charles's other loves seem pale by contrast. The risk, therefore, is that the reader's attention will linger on Sebastian rather than focusing on Julia, who is the subject of the next part of the book. (178)

Just how great the risk is that the reader will concentrate unduly on Sebastian emerges clearly in Heath's own analysis, for he devotes a rapt four-page discussion to him, calling him "unquestionably the most vivid character in the novel" (178), and even "beyond a doubt the most successful character Waugh ever created" (177), a figure with whom "Waugh's imagination is intensely engaged" (176). Yet, despite all this, Heath argues, "the notion of perpetual beauty" embodied in Sebastian must be exorcised "as a snare and a delusion" (174), and Charles's love for him must be recognized "as a gorgeous mistake and a *felix culpa*," although, as Heath admits, "Waugh never says so explicitly" (178). Here Heath's insistence on the biographical parallel between Waugh's feelings for Alastair Graham and Charles's for Sebastian seems to mislead him in his reading of the novel. For Sebastian does not represent physical beauty alone; he also represents love, "the root of all wisdom" (46). If physical beauty is ultimately to be rejected, love is not, since it leads to knowledge and, later, faith.

Indeed as Heath also observes, and as his own reading of the

novel perhaps inadvertently underlines, Charles's whole experience with Sebastian is rendered with an emotional intensity not to be found anywhere else in the novel. Cara describes their relationship as one of "these romantic friendships of the English and the Germans," a "kind of love that comes to *children* before they know its meaning" (98; my emphasis), adding a little later her comment about Sebastian being "in love with his own childhood. . . . His teddy-bear, his nanny . . . and he is nineteen years old" (100). Despite its childhood associations, however, Charles's love for Sebastian is both sensual and passionate, as the novel's early scenes show. Charles insists on Sebastian's "beauty, which was arresting" (30), elsewhere describing him as "entrancing, with that epicene beauty which in extreme youth sings aloud for love and withers at the first cold wind" (33). When Sebastian and Charles set off on what is to be Charles's first visit to Brideshead, the description of their idyllic lunch of strawberries and wine ends with an image of the two of them: "Sebastian's eyes on the leaves above him, mine on his profile" (26). Later, Charles sums up this period of his life with the words, "I had no mind then for anything except Sebastian" (123). Later still, while reflecting, in retrospect, that "we possess nothing certainly except the past," Charles, now a middle-aged man, observes that

never during that time [the ten years after his separation from Sebastian], except sometimes in my painting — and that at longer and longer intervals — did I come alive as I had been during the time of my friendship with Sebastian. I took it to be youth, not life, that I was losing. (215)

Moreover, the vital importance and the emotional intensity of Charles's love for Sebastian is also clearly indicated by the fact that it is the memory of this love which provokes the only two moments of explicitly evoked retrospective grief in the novel. The first occurs when, on arriving at Brideshead during the Second World War, Charles remembers his "first brief visit" there with Sebastian, asking, rhetorically, "could I have known then that it would one day be *remembered with tears* by a middle-aged captain of infantry?" (41; my emphasis). The second moment of retrospective grief is recorded when Charles remembers how Sebastian, drunk and in disgrace, accused his friend of spying on him and of siding

with the family against him. The older narrator reports that Sebastian said "more than I can bear to remember, even at twenty years' distance" (129). There is nothing in the later account of Charles's relationship with Julia or of his conversion to Catholicism to equal the emotional intensity of these moments of felt and remembered grief. Indeed, Charles's affair with Sebastian's sister, Julia, has nothing of the idyllic and little of the innocently passionate about it. The description of their first lovemaking, indeed, is almost embarrassingly proprietary. Charles says that the act of love was

a formality to be observed, no more. It was as though a deed of conveyance of her narrow loins had been drawn and sealed. I was making my first entry as the freeholder of a property I would enjoy and develop at leisure. (248)

Even though Charles has just warned the reader that it "was no time for the sweets of luxury; they would come, in their season, with the swallow and the lime flowers," the images of legality and property-owning still come as something of a shock. Julia is a "property," Charles a "freeholder"; Julia is an object to be "enjoyed," Charles a subject to do the enjoying. The sexual act is an act of possession, not one of mutual enjoyment.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the later description of the affair shows Charles's feelings for Julia to be coloured by material concerns in a way which his feelings for Sebastian never were in any obvious way. When his love for her is evoked, it is already a thing of the past (265), and Julia is usually described as being dressed in gold or silk, or as wearing jewels (264, 286, 295), as if it were her accessories rather than her self that mattered. It comes as no surprise that when Charles realizes that, through Julia, he may come to inherit Brideshead, he is immediately "taken by the vision"; yet the vision is "the prospect one gained at the turn of the avenue, *as I had first seen it with Sebastian*, of the secluded valley . . . a world of its own of peace and love and beauty" (306; my emphasis). The way in which Charles associates Julia with material wealth and the splendour of property may suggest that he wishes to possess the material world which had once been Sebastian's. Certainly, Charles's visions of paradise or Arcadia are still invariably associated with Sebastian.

The "world of its own of peace and love and beauty" invoked here inevitably reminds the reader of Charles's earlier vision of Brideshead as a "new and secret landscape" (36), a "place of such enchantment" (82) that, during the few days which he spent there alone with Sebastian, he believed himself "very near heaven" (77).

If Charles's love for Julia is less sensuously and less convincingly evoked than his love for Sebastian, his love for God is not depicted at all but, rather, intimated through certain images towards the end of the novel, the most important of which is that of the avalanche.<sup>11</sup> The image's importance is underlined by the fact that it occurs three times towards the end of the novel (295-96, 310, 324), and it can be taken to represent the destruction of human happiness by other-worldly forces.<sup>12</sup> Yet, like the image of the rending of the veil discussed above, the avalanche image can only be assimilated into an overall reading of the novel with some difficulty, since it both intimates the sudden awareness of the incapability of faith *and* expresses the difficulty of communicating that experience, since it belongs to a different order of things than that which prevails in everyday life.

Moreover, the image of the avalanche becomes even more problematic when it is considered in connection with the other images used in the novel to represent the permanent values of Catholicism, or as Littlewood puts it, "an unchanging point of reference in a changing world" (162): Nanny Hawkins in the old nursery at Brideshead and the lamp burning in the chapel there.<sup>13</sup> These images do indeed suggest comfort and reassurance. Yet both sanctuaries — the nursery and the chapel — are threatened by the war being waged outside, just as the security of the trapper's hut is threatened by the impending avalanche. The image of physical security (of light and warmth), whose vulnerability is revealed through the avalanche image, is, ironically, reinstated by the image of Nanny Hawkins's sanctuary in the nursery. The movement towards Catholicism becomes less the transcendence of physical reality than a return to the womb or, at least, to childhood. Waugh's religion may have "none of the blandness of conventional religious escapism," as Littlewood asserts, but, as he also notes, it does nonetheless fulfil "certain escapist needs" (170).

#### 4. *Conclusion*

*Brideshead Revisited* may be said to represent the conflict between the imperious demands of faith and the equally urgent claims of earthly affections and desires. Charles's conversion involves the rejection of the pleasures of the senses for the certainties of Catholicism. Yet the main appeal of the novel and its persuasive power lie with Charles's memories of youth, especially of his relationship with Sebastian. The novel presents a series of paradisaical visions, which, in Charles L. Sanford's words, perhaps "suggest self-assertion against some cramping restraints or restrictions within the social environment" (32). Yet although the novel's evocation of earthly pleasures, "a kind of gluttony," as Waugh calls it (7), can be partially explained as a reaction against the austerities of the 1930s and of wartime England — Davis sees it in this way (113-14) — such an explanation does not do full justice to the novel's continuing appeal.

Like some other famous first-person narrators, Charles Ryder reconstructs an idyll of the recent past, remembered but irretrievably lost. Like *David Copperfield*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,<sup>14</sup> or *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the beginning of *Brideshead Revisited* presents the vision of a lost idyll, a vision qualified by the retrospective comments of the protagonist as an older man. Like other images of paradise — David Copperfield's memories of his mother before she remarries, or Marcel's memories of *his* mother and the bed-time kiss — Charles's and Sebastian's midsummer idyll at Brideshead is no sooner evoked than it disappears. The visit to Brideshead is both the apogee and the beginning of the end of paradise for Charles. Sebastian drifts into drink and disappears from the foreground of the novel, but he remains a force in Charles's imagination and the book. His relationship with Charles provides the latter with love, which, as he realizes in retrospect, is "the root of all wisdom" (46), with the inspiration for his later knowledge of both art and life (215), and, finally, with the happy childhood he never actually had (45). The emotional intensity of this experience for Charles, accordingly, is not found anywhere else in the novel, not in his affair with Julia, who has a disconcerting tendency to remind Charles of Sebastian

at the most significant moments in their relationship, not in his art, which, as Anthony Blanche tells him, is "t-t-terrible t-t-tripe" (257),<sup>15</sup> and not in his ultimate conversion to Catholicism.

Perhaps the central problem with the novel is that Charles's conversion belongs to a different order of reality from that of the other experiences depicted in the novel. It seems, in a curious way, and despite the novel's carefully placed suggestions that both Sebastian and Julia are forerunners of a greater love, almost irrelevant to Charles's love for Sebastian which forms the main emotional centre and focus of the work. The images of the rending of the veil and of the avalanche sweeping away the trapper's hut are not in themselves difficult to interpret, but they are difficult to assimilate into a coherent reading of the novel. They suggest the sudden awareness of the inescapable demands of faith; they intimate what is perhaps an almost incommunicable experience. It might be argued, with some justification, that the difficulty of assimilating these images is precisely the point, that the reader must be persuaded, or even forced, to make such an imaginative leap as the necessary concomitant of the novel's shift to a different order of experience and apprehension. However, when set against the more extensively and effectively communicated vision of the youthful, sensuous, passionate love of Charles for Sebastian, the images tend to fade away. What the reader remembers is not Charles's conversion, but the "enchanted garden" of his love for Sebastian. Although the novel finally asserts the rightness and the inevitability of Charles's rejection of this earthly paradise, its remembered image still remains fascinating and alluring. Ironically, the "paradise lost" of earthly joys is more compelling than the "paradise regained" of religious faith. Even if the claims of the latter are theoretically recognized as paramount, many readers are, in fact, drawn back to the magnetic vision of young love which continues to cast its spell over them as it does over Charles himself.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Information concerning the publication of *Brideshead Revisited* is taken from Sykes (247). The edition of the novel referred to here is the Penguin edition, which follows the 1960 published text. I would like to acknowledge the assistance I have received from the comments of *ARIEL*'s reader and the remarks of Hasna Lebaddy. Any errors or deficiencies are, of course, mine. I would also like to thank Lucille W. Cameron for technical assistance.

- 2 However, Davis has shown how Waugh had been preparing for the change of tone and technique in *Work Suspended* (108-09).
- 3 See Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1.26). Littlewood also draws attention to one similarity between Milton and Waugh: "He [Waugh] did not, any more than Milton, conceive of his religion as a faith necessarily congenial to average human standards" (168).
- 4 William Empson makes a similar observation about *Paradise Lost* when he says that "there is something badly wrong" about Milton's attempt to justify the Christian God, but he adds that it is the poem's search for this justification which "is the chief source of its fascination and poignancy" (11). *Brideshead Revisited*, I suggest, is equally problematic and equally fascinating; it was Empson's analysis of Milton which provided the initial inspiration for my much slighter discussion of Waugh's novel.
- 5 Davis comments on the third of these retrospective passages where, as he says, "the mature Ryder insists that the merely three-dimensional world [the world of the five senses] does not exist" (152).
- 6 It is true that there are other striking metaphorical passages in the novel, yet they are in general more successfully positioned as introductions to chapter four of Book One and chapter one of Book Three (77, 215) and do not so obviously need to be integrated into the novel's generally realistic, confessional tone.
- 7 Davis has also pointed to this area of the novel as problematic: "Still greater is the problem of Ryder's character in the Prologue. He is already Catholic — though Waugh removed from the manuscript the sole implication of the fact — but he is presented as barren and alienated. Only after he has seen Brideshead and remembered the past is he consoled and reconciled to his lot at the end of the Epilogue" (185). In fact, there is, as I have noted, still one very slight clue about Ryder's Catholicism in the Prologue. However, Davis's apposite comment implicitly underlines the importance of Sebastian in bringing about Ryder's reconciliation to life.
- 8 Littlewood discusses this relationship at some length (162-63), observing in particular that "there exists between the security of religion and the security of the nursery a close relationship. Nannies, like other divinities, tend to offer an unchanging point of reference in a changing world" (162). He observes the inevitability of the connection between childhood and faith for Sebastian and Julia and sees the link between the nursery and Catholicism in the novel as primarily a case of nostalgia being "met by the author's religion and absorbed into it" (163). Littlewood does not see the association of childhood and faith as being problematic although, as noted above, he does criticize Waugh's use of miracles in the novel.
- 9 Julia and her monologue have been frequently criticized. The most extreme comments come from Sykes who calls her "a wax-work" and says that throughout the novel "she remains dead as mutton" (256). He observes that her sudden repentance adds "an ugly note of religiosity" to the treatment of Catholicism in the novel: "She makes it ludicrous" (257). Churchill (222-23), McDonnell (73), Reed (240), and Wilson (71) also find her unreal. None of them, however, notes the uniqueness of her sense of guilt.
- 10 Reed, McDonnell, and Davis all comment on the language of this scene, but none of them notes its sexism. Reed simply says that "made free of her narrow loins" is "a curious phrase" (240), while McDonnell's analysis of the change in Julia's symbolic function between the 1945 and 1960 versions of the novel pays no attention to the fact that these changes make no difference to Julia's object-status (210). Davis analyzes Waugh's revision of the passage in proof (183-84) but, again, makes no comment on Julia's lack of autonomy.

- 11 Davis notes that several other metaphors were removed "perhaps to emphasize more strongly the recurrent figure of the impending avalanche that follows" (180).
- 12 Davis interprets the trapper's hut as representing "cosy human comfort isolated from the outside world" (155), while Heath sees it as standing for "autonomous and therefore false joy" (180).
- 13 Littlewood compares the lamp burning at Brideshead with the use of the same image elsewhere in Waugh (150, 167).
- 14 Heath notes that *Brideshead Revisited* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are two very different examples of the "artist-novel" (162).
- 15 Heath also points out that the "enigmatic Anthony Blanche knows that Ryder's work is false" (170). Heath's assessment of Blanche's judgment seems to me correct. Blanche can be seen as representing another dimension of the novel's self-criticism in his comments on Charles's paintings. Davis suggests, on the contrary, that Blanche's criticism is devalued since his "aestheticism . . . has degenerated into modernist sensationalism" (138). However, the novel suggests that it is Charles's painting which has degenerated in this way and not Blanche's aesthetics.

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