



[Brideshead Revisited](#), by Evelyn Waugh

In A Nutshell

Brideshead Revisited was published in 1944 by already famous British novelist Evelyn Waugh and based loosely on his own experiences as a student at Oxford University. The novel tells the story of a young man at Oxford captivated by an eccentric young man and his very wealthy, Catholic family. Like the narrator and protagonist of *Brideshead*, Waugh ignored his studies, lazed away his days in the company of aesthetes and drunkards, and focused on his personal writing and art at the expense of his grades and reputation. Waugh was an unlikely member of the Royal Marines and on a leave of absence when he decided to write *Brideshead*. He finished the first 60,000 or so words in fewer than three weeks, and completed the novel in about four months.

Reading *Brideshead* is about equivalent to sitting down for a five course meal. The narrative abounds with lush descriptions of food of every kind and lots and lots of expensive booze. (Waugh was on limited rations while writing the novel, so you might chock these results up to wishful thinking.) On top of that is the vivid portrait painted of architecture, interior design, and art of all kinds. It's certainly a trip for the senses.

This literary gluttony certainly caught the attention of the critics, as did the novel's rendering of the British aristocracy and Catholicism. At the time Waugh was writing, the golden age of aristocracy was coming to a close, and the novel has received criticism for glorifying classism. As far as religion goes, Waugh tried to present Catholicism positively and reflect his own

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reasons for converting to it; yet many interpret the novel in the *opposite* light, believing that religion actually brings about the ruin of every character in the story. How does it strike you?

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 Take a look at the cover picture on your book or, if you're not using the American edition, then check out the image here. Now for our Super Important Question: which character is which? What makes you think so? What is this cover saying about the novel? And, most importantly, ARE THEY PLAYING FOOTSYE!?
- 2 Think about the way time is manipulated in *Brideshead Revisited*, particularly the way Charles reveals his marriage to Celia and his affair with Julia. We jump around a lot in time as the details become clear. What is the effect of this sort of narration?
- 3 Here's another plot structure question for you: why is Lord Marchmain's death the novel's finale? Isn't he a minor character? Who cares if he dies?

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