

A **STUDY GUIDE** BY MARGUERITE O'HARA

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OVERVIEW >

This film, *Brideshead Revisited* (2008) directed by Julian Jarrold, has been adapted for the screen from Evelyn Waugh's 1945 novel of the same name. It tells the story of Charles Ryder and the Marchmain family in the period between the First and Second World Wars in England. The novel has been adapted for the screen before, most famously in an eleven-part British television series in 1981. This is a story about love, sexuality, religion, class, families and identity. It explores the connections between all these things in a narrative that is richly detailed. While the story is set between the wars from the 1920s to the 1940s, its themes are universal.

Curriculum Relevance

Brideshead Revisited will have interest and relevance for students at middle and senior secondary levels, as well as tertiary students studying in a number of areas including:

- **ENGLISH** – exploring a complex narrative that moves between several time periods and societies; understanding the psychological dimensions to characters and how they are revealed over time.
- **MEDIA AND FILM STUDIES** – screenwriting and adaptation of text to screen. What can be left out and what must remain?
- **HISTORY** – changes to society and life in Britain between the first and second world wars.
- **CULTURE AND SOCIETY** – understanding the changes in attitudes and values in a society over time as they are reflected in a work of literature and a film.
- **RELIGIOUS STUDIES** – the influence of religious faith in the life of a family.

For some viewers of *Brideshead Revisited*, the film may seem to be very much a 'period piece' reflecting a time and place and social attitudes that are long gone. There is an element of 'soap opera' about the story as we are carried along by the intensity of these people's lives and loves as they come together, travel, move apart and come together again. We want to know how it will all end. Will Lady Marchmain's will and insistence on her children's adherence to the tenets of her Catholic faith prevail? What does it mean to be happy? Do family loyalties and values inevitably prevail as we face the complexities of life? What do we discover about life in England between the two wars when the social order was changing in so many ways? Are class differences and social aspirations different today? How have attitudes towards sexuality changed over the past eighty years? In what ways is this story relevant to our lives today?

... an evocative and poignant story of forbidden love and the loss of innocence, set in pre-World War Two England as the privileged aristocracy fell into decline.

Synopsis

Brideshead Revisited is an evocative and poignant story of forbidden love and the loss of innocence, set in pre-World War Two England as the privileged aristocracy fell into decline. It tells the story of young, middle-class Charles Ryder's involvement with the aristocratic Marchmain family over a period of twenty years, and in particular, with the Marchmain brother and sister, Sebastian and Julia.

Charles meets Sebastian, the charismatic but flawed younger son of the family, at Oxford University. He is soon seduced both by Sebastian and his world of wealth, glamour, and outrageous behaviour. His seduction is complete when Charles visits 'Brideshead', the Marchmain's magnificent ancestral home, where he is introduced to a new family and a world entirely unlike his own middle-class upbringing in London. Sebastian, meanwhile, has fallen in love with Charles and is determined to keep his new friend to himself. Over a glorious summer they share

all the pleasures Brideshead affords, from wine-tastings and lakeside picnics to bathing in Brideshead's grand, sculpted fountain. During the course of this idyll, Charles becomes infatuated with Sebastian's beautiful younger sister, Julia. As Charles' emotional attachment to the entire Marchmain clan deepens, however, he finds himself and his atheism increasingly at odds with his friend Sebastian and his family's ardent Catholic beliefs, rigidly enforced by the matriarch, Lady Marchmain.

Charles is invited to accompany Sebastian and Julia on a trip to Venice where he meets Lord Marchmain, their spirited, hedonist father. Marchmain has left his wife and the formality of Brideshead for the vitality of Venice and the passion of an Italian mistress, Cara (Greta Scacchi). In the heady atmosphere of the Venetian summer, the brooding attraction between Charles and Julia ignites. Caught up in the decadent excitement of the Carnivale, they kiss for the first time. Confused and troubled by this turn of events, Julia flees. Charles discovers that Sebastian has witnessed this intimate moment and knows that his friendship with the younger son of the Marchmains will never be the same.

Back in England, any thoughts of a relationship between Charles and Julia are quickly quashed by Lady Marchmain, who is well aware of the spiritual and social divide between them. Nevertheless, Lady Marchmain invites Charles to Julia's twenty-first birthday ball at Brideshead, not so much as a guest than as a companion and chaperone to Sebastian whose drinking is getting out of hand. Charles' initial excitement at seeing Julia again is dashed when Lady Marchmain announces the engagement of her daughter to the Canadian businessman, Rex Mottram, a match the matriarch has engineered. Charles' miserable evening ends abruptly when a drunken, grief-stricken Sebastian lurches into the party, bellowing his hatred for his family and for Charles for having deserted him. Lady Marchmain casts Charles into exile from the Eden that is Brideshead.

Two years pass before Charles receives a surprise visit from Lady Marchmain. With some humility and in desperation for her son's welfare, she implores Charles to find Sebastian and help him back onto the straight and narrow. Locating him in Morocco, Charles begs Sebastian to come home to visit his ailing mother. Although ill and weakened by alcohol, Sebastian has found his own peace and declines to return. Charles bids a final farewell to his friend and in time, loses touch with the Marchmain family as he establishes himself as a successful artist with an international reputation and marries a young socialite, Celia.

In 1935, travelling back to England from an expedition to the jungles of Central America, Charles has



Charles meets Sebastian, the charismatic but flawed younger son of the family, at Oxford University. He is soon seduced both by Sebastian and his world of wealth, glamour, and outrageous behaviour.

a chance meeting with Julia. Neither of them is in a happy marriage and both recognize that they remain one another's true love. At last, it seems that Julia, and perhaps even Brideshead, are within Charles' reach.

Charles and Julia return to Brideshead to negotiate the annulment of Julia's marriage to Rex. Julia is exasperated when the men barter for her with Charles' paintings. Rex points out that Julia's second marriage would never be recognized by the Catholic Church but despite this, she and Charles are poised to leave for Europe, happy together at last. Their escape is thwarted when Lord Marchmain returns to Brideshead to die. Knowing the old man had abandoned Catholicism long ago, Charles is furious with the family's insistence on a deathbed reconciliation between God and Lord Marchmain. In the end, however, even Marchmain succumbs to the will of God and the power of Brideshead.

Julia is deeply moved by her father's death and his last-minute acceptance of the Catholic last rites. Charles realizes that she will never be free of her religious upbringing. Her feelings of sinfulness and her desire to be close to God mean that Julia will never truly be his. Charles walks out to a lonelier future.

During World War Two, Charles is billeted back at Brideshead which has been requisitioned as an army base. As he wanders the grounds, he recalls his turbulent, passionate history with the Marchmain family and his two lost loves. Bustling with soldiers and bursting with supplies, Brideshead begins its own transformation, swept away by a more modern, less privileged world.

– From the Press Kit for *Brideshead Revisited*



Evelyn Waugh describes the novel's theme as 'the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters'.

Background

1. Evelyn Waugh and *Brideshead Revisited*

Evelyn Waugh wrote *Brideshead Revisited* in 1944 while he was on leave from the army. It was published to widespread acclaim and some controversy in 1945. It is no coincidence that this story about the decline of the English Catholic aristocracy was written during the upheavals of World War Two – a period of uncertainty and change. Waugh believed that this upheaval would pave the way for the rise of the common man and the end of the gentry, and with it, a rich and glorious era. He describes the novel's theme as 'the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters'.

The novel includes autobiographical detail – Waugh converted to Catholicism in 1930; he also encouraged a friend to convert on his deathbed. Despite his stated belief in the inevitable rise of the common man, Waugh was, like Charles Ryder, strongly attracted to the lifestyle of those coming from grander and richer backgrounds than his own. As an undergraduate at Oxford, Waugh, like Sebastian, drank too much and is believed to have had at least one homosexual relationship. Waugh wrote a dozen other novels, several of them, like *Scoop*, satirical and sharply critical of social pretensions, but it is the romantic and elegiac *Brideshead* which has always been most popular.

2. Adaptation from text to screen

When a novel or play is adapted for the screen, it is inevitable that it will not be a literal transference of text and characters into the visual medium of film. What do we expect from a film based on a novel and how reasonable are our expectations?

In the case of *Brideshead Revisited*, the filmmakers' task would have been made more difficult by coming after the eleven-part Granada television series of 1981. This series was immensely popular and ran for over 700 minutes in total, whereas the makers of this feature film have 135 minutes in which to tell the story. Still, comparisons are inevitable, both with the novel and with the series.

When we read a novel, we often picture the characters, from the way they look to how they behave and relate to one another. We may also have a visual sense of place and landscape. When the film or series is as well-known and widely read and loved as novels by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, J.R.R.

Tolkien or J.K. Rowling, we are sometimes delighted by the filmed adaptation, but at other times disappointed that the actors playing these much-loved characters are not as we imagined them when we read the book. We may feel that the director and screenwriter have not got the tone quite right, that they have chosen the 'wrong' emphases or that the actors do not represent the characters we imagined from our reading of the text.

What is it reasonable to expect of a film adaptation of a novel, given the differences in the media and time available? We can hope that the film will reflect the essential truth of the novel and be an accurate reflection of the author's intent. But just what this 'essential truth' is can be quite different from reader to reader.

Films and novels, or 'visual texts' and 'written texts' as they are sometimes described on English courses, are different artistic creations in many ways. While each often has a narrative (many of the best films have strong story lines, reflecting their genesis in the written word), the means available to the author or director for presenting the story are very different. Increasingly, directors are creating, or engaging writers to write, screenplays from novels. This can often do wonders for book sales, even in the case of the Harry Potter novels, where readership was already enormous. There is little doubt that the 1981 television series of *Brideshead Revisited* led to huge increases in the sales of Waugh's 1945 novel, which has been continuously in print since publication and frequently appears on readers' lists of 'most popular novels'. And now, with the release of this 2008 film, a whole new generation of readers may read or re-read the novel.

This version of *Brideshead Revisited* was adapted for the screen by Andrew Davies and Jeremy Brock, who have each been responsible for adapting a number of novels for both film and television. Davies has adapted several of Jane Austen's novels, including *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* for the screen as well as Dickens' *Bleak House*. Changes to some details and emphases of Waugh's original story have been made in this adaptation. To create a fluid dramatic screenplay, Brock felt some reconstruction was necessary, particularly in relation to the details of Charles' developing relationship with Julia Marchmain. Her inclusion in the scenes set in Venice has drawn some criticism as this departs from the structure of the novel.

What expectations can we reasonably bring to a film in terms of its fidelity to a novel in relation to characters, narrative details and tone? Here are some questions you can reasonably ask.

- Is the film entertaining and convincing in its representation of a world and society that no longer exists?
- Do we empathize with the characters and their struggles to find happiness, love and spiritual fulfilment?
- Does the way in which the film is constructed and shot create a believable and complex social world that we are able to understand and enter into imaginatively?
- Does this adaptation respect the spirit of the novel?

Given the highly collaborative nature of filmmaking, the number of individuals involved in putting together the final product and the inherently different medium film is from text, we need to make some allowances for the film deviating from parts of the novel from which it draws – perhaps telescoping some parts, exploring others in more depth and sometimes making explicit some things that may only be implied in the novel. Budgetary and time constraints, as well as the final length of the film after editing are all factors we need to at least be aware of. We should watch the film with an open mind, acknowledging that the film is a separate artistic entity from the book on which it is based and try to see the story through clear eyes, without looking to find fault with what is left out or who gets more screen time than they get pages in the book … unless the way it is done seems quite unconvincing in dramatic terms.

If you are watching this film, having read the novel or seen the 1981 television series, bear in mind that no two-hour feature film can, or should be expected to, offer a 'faithful' representation of every detail of the written text on which the film is based. How does this version speak to a new audience?

***BRIDEHEAD*: KEY CAST AND CREW**

CAST	CREW
Charles Ryder – Matthew Goode	Director – Julian Jarrold
Sebastian Flyte – Ben Whishaw	Producers – Kevin Loader, Robert Bernstein, Douglas Rae
Julia Flyte – Hayley Atwell	Scriptwriters – Jeremy Brock, Andrew Davies
Bridey Flyte – Ed Stoppard	Production Designer – Alice Normington
Cordelia Flyte – Felicity Jones	Costume Design – Eimer Ni Mhaoldomhnaigh
Lady Marchmain – Emma Thompson	Composer – Adrian Johnston
Lord Marchmain – Michael Gambon	Make-up and Hair Design – Roseann Samuel
Cara – Greta Scacchi	Director of Photography – Jess Hall
Mr Samgrass – James Bradshaw	Choreographer – Jane Gibson
Mr Ryder – Patrick Malahide	
Anthony Blanche – Joseph Beattie	
Nanny Hawkins – Rita Davies	
Hooper – Thomas Morrison	
Rex Mottram – Jonathan Cake	



STUDENT ACTIVITIES:

STUDENT ACTIVITY 1

Before watching the film

1 Make a list of any films you have seen after reading the book on which the film is based.
2 Name any novels you have read after seeing the film on which the novel is based.
3 Comment on whether you thought the filmed version, or written version, in each case, was more enjoyable.
4 What are the main differences between reading a book and watching a film? Discuss the differences and then create a list of what each is able to do best. Explain what is specific to each experience.
5 Imagine you are the author of a popular novel. You have been persuaded to sell the film rights to a director whose films you admire. Consider how you would address concerns that you may have about how the story is to be filmed. Discuss some of the issues raised below.
   a Are you going to trust the director to present the story or do you want to retain some control over how this is done, such as assisting with the scripting process?
   b Do you want to have a say in which actors will play the main parts?
   c Do you want to spend time on the set while the film is being made to see that it is faithful to your novel?
   d Do you expect to share in either the profits the film makes, or accept some of the losses, or are you simply happy to have sold the 'rights' to the film company?

STUDENT ACTIVITY 2

Watching *Brideshead Revisited*

The film is framed by Charles Ryder's return to Brideshead during the Second World War in 1944. Brideshead has been requisitioned as an army base for soldiers and it is this return to a much-changed Brideshead that is the starting point for Charles' recollections of the time he spent there in the 1920s and 1930s.

The opening scenes set the location and tone and there is some use of voiceover narration as the film moves back in time to recreate Charles Ryder's introduction to the Marchmain family.

As you watch the film, make notes on some of the following questions which will help you to understand the characters and themes of the novel. These questions are grouped together to reflect the different parts of the film, although there is overlap and enrichment revealed as the film develops.

1. Recollecting a golden summer

- How would you describe Charles Ryder, army officer, as we see him in 1944 when the film opens?
- What do we see of Charles' life with his father in London before he leaves for Oxford in the 1920s?
- What is it about Sebastian Flyte that Charles finds so attractive when he meets him in Oxford?
- What is it about Charles Ryder that Sebastian finds attractive?
- How is student life at Oxford, as it is shown in the film, both similar to and quite different from, student life today?
- What does Charles Ryder fall in love with at Brideshead?
- What are some of the artefacts and images shown of life at Brideshead which Charles finds so attractive?
- How is the fundamental nature of the Roman Catholic religion made apparent at Brideshead in daily life as well as through the behaviour and practices of different members of the Marchmain family?
- How is the life Charles leads at Brideshead over the summer with Sebastian different to his life in London with his father?
- What is at the heart of the family estrangements and tensions in the Marchmain family?

2. Venice, Lord Marchmain, Cara and Julia

- How does the magical city of Venice intensify Charles' feelings of infatuation for all that the world of the Marchmains offers?
- Describe some of the idyllic scenes of sensuality and beauty that lead up to Charles and Julia's kiss in Venice.
- What are the more obvious similarities between Sebastian and Julia which might help to explain Charles' falling in love with both of them?
- How is Lord Marchmain's life with his mistress Cara different to the life we see in England at Brideshead?
- How does Cara explain to Charles the difference between the meaning and practice of Catholicism in Italy and in England?

3. Losing 'Paradise' and growing up

- How are any ideas Charles may have had about a relationship with Julia thwarted?
- What is it about Charles that Lady Marchmain believes would make him an unsuitable match for Julia?
- What does Rex Mottram represent in relation to changing values? How is he shown to be quite unlike the other characters in the film in his attitudes and approach to life?
- Why does Lady Marchmain initially welcome



What is at the heart of the family estrangements and tensions in the Marchmain family?

Charles' close friendship with Sebastian, despite the clearly homo-erotic aspects of this relationship?

- Sebastian's easy access to alcohol allows him to drink to excess. How do different members of the Brideshead household explain why they think he drinks so heavily? How does Charles explain Sebastian's drinking?
- Describe the scene that precipitates Lady Marchmain's dismissal of Charles from Brideshead and Sebastian's flight into overseas exile.
- Why is Lady Marchmain's engagement of Mr. Samgrass to monitor Sebastian's movements such a desperate and foolish move?

4. Accommodating different needs

- After an absence of two years, Lady Marchmain asks Charles to find Sebastian as she is ill and wants to see her son before she dies. Is this request to Charles reasonable? How does Lady Marchmain reveal her vulnerability in this scene?
- What kind of life is Sebastian leading in Morocco? What satisfactions are there for him that he did not find in England? How does he seem to be changed both physically and emotionally?
- Is it simply ill-health that prevents Sebastian from returning to England?

5. Success and Failures

- What has Charles been doing since leaving university?



This is a drama that is strongly driven by characters and how they respond to the situations they are in and to one another.

- What happens on the ship when Charles is returning to England in 1935?
- What is the arrangement Charles comes to with Rex Mottram, Julia's husband? What is the difference between a marriage being annulled and a divorce? Why is the annulment a preferred option for Julia?
- Why is Bridey not prepared to bring his new wife to Brideshead?
- What happens that ensures that Charles and Julia can't leave Brideshead to start a life together?
- Why is Charles so opposed to Lord Marchmain being offered the Catholic sacraments on his deathbed?
- Why are Julia, Bridey and Cordelia so determined that their father will accept the last rites from the Catholic priest before he dies?
- What does Julia's response to her father's death and his acceptance of the last rites indicate to Charles about Julia?
- Explain how Brideshead and much of what it stood for seems to be swept away by what happens to the place during the war?
- What do we know about how each of the Marchmain children is now living their lives while Charles is billeted with the army at Brideshead?
- Does the final scene with Charles in the Brideshead chapel suggest any change in his beliefs?

STUDENT ACTIVITY 3

Key Characters*

This is a drama that is strongly driven by characters and how they respond to the situations they are in and to one another. As an audience, it is important that we are able to understand how and why individuals behave as they do and that the actors are able to demonstrate character development and emotional complexity in their performances. We should be able to feel both their joys and their pain. The film was cast with British actors. The Director Julian Jarrold believed that they would 'have an inherent knowledge of the British class system' and 'be able to understand the clash of manners, propriety of the period and intricacies of the English social system'.[1]

CHARLES RYDER is played by **MATTHEW GOODE**. He is the observational centre of the film and for much of the time is reacting to what other people do. Goode has said of his character that his greatest challenge was 'overcoming the feeling that he did not much like Charles Ryder' … but that he 'eventually felt a certain amount of sympathy towards him'.

SEBASTIAN FLYTE is played by **BEN WHISHAW**. The difficulties in playing this part include balancing the feminine aspects of Sebastian's character without making him too 'camp'. Whishaw has said of his character:

He's sort of a lost soul really. His story is one about his love for a man and a non-Catholic and this conflict between his sexuality and the Catholicism he's been brought up with … Even if you took



While Charles Ryder's personal situation is not one of economic deprivation, relative to the Marchmains, his background is described as middle-class.

Catholicism out of the question, homosexuality was a different proposition in those days.

JULIA FLYTE is played by **HAYLEY ATWELL**. One of her challenges was to play both ends of the scale of Julia – the young Julia is a bit wayward and disconcerting while the older Julia must convince of the toll taken by the struggle with her religious roots and sense of guilt, the conflicted nature of her soul. Atwell says of the story 'the themes are universal – war, loss and religion – which gives it a timeless quality'.

LADY MARCHMAIN is played by **EMMA THOMPSON**. She has said of her character:

She is so interesting, so different and quite peculiar – dark and controlling as well as controlled. She had lost her brothers in the First World War – these wonderful strong, solid men in her life – and when we first meet her it is at a time before women had the vote so all her power is invested in her children and the form behind which she lives, which includes her house, her clothing and her manners.

- What were the strengths of the performances of the major characters in this film? Does anyone stand out as especially strong?

Choose one role, either that of a principal or a supporting role, and write out a brief account to support a nomination for an acting award for this actor.

At what point(s) in the film does the character appear vulnerable or show insights that may be unexpected?

- The publicity for this film features the names of Emma Thompson and Michael Gambon (the older Marchmains) as starring in the film. Why do you think their names are featured rather than those of Matthew Goode, Ben Whishaw and Hayley Atwell who occupy much more screen time?

*A more detailed cast and crew list appears at the end of this guide.

STUDENT ACTIVITY 4

Themes – Class, Religious Beliefs, Sexuality and Family

1. Class

While Charles Ryder's personal situation is not one of economic deprivation, relative to the Marchmains, his background is described as middle-class. The Marchmains have inherited property and wealth and there is no evidence of anyone needing to work for a living. Bridey and Cordelia, and later Julia, are working but not as a financial necessity. Charles Ryder eventually makes a living as a successful painter, but his time at university is supported by his father's money and in the holidays by Sebastian and the Marchmain family.

- How do the different members of the Marchmain family spend their time and money?
- What is the basis of Charles Ryder's attraction to the world of Brideshead?
- Can people like Charles, who are clearly not 'to the manor born', ever be anything more than a visitor at Brideshead, an outsider who may sometimes be useful to people?
- How are class distinctions – such an integral part of British society before the Second World War – shown to be breaking down in the army scenes set in the 1940s, particularly in the relationship between Ryder and Hooper?

2. Religious Beliefs

Membership of the Roman Catholic Church in England is growing in the twenty-first century, largely as a result of migration. Tony Blair, recently retired British Prime Minister, converted to Catholicism in 2007, becoming the first Catholic Prime Minister of Britain. While in Italy and Ireland Catholicism is the dominant religion, this has not been the case in England. In the 1940s when *Brideshead Revisited* was published, fewer than five per cent of English people described themselves as Roman Catholic, though this situation underwent rapid change after the Second World War. The Marchmains were part of a minority group. Having a Chapel for private worship as part of their estate would also have been unusual. Here is Sebastian describing to Charles his family's religious beliefs and practices:



Is Charles able to understand either Julia or Sebastian's sense of sin, guilt, belief, and even belonging to the Catholic faith?

So you see we're a mixed family religiously. Brideshead and Cordelia are both fervent Catholics; he's miserable, she's bird-happy; Julia and I are half-heathen; I am happy, I rather think Julia isn't; mummy is popularly believed to be a saint and papa is excommunicated – and I wouldn't know which of them was happy. Anyway, however you look at it, happiness doesn't seem to have much to do with it, and that's all I want … I wish I liked Catholics more.[2]

- What is each of the four Marchmain children's evident commitment to their Catholic upbringing – Bridey, Julia, Sebastian and Cordelia?
- What is behind Sebastian and Julia's desire as young people not to be bound by all the expectations of being a member of a Catholic family?
- How does Charles describe his beliefs? Does he characterize himself as an agnostic or an atheist, and what is the difference between these two positions?
- Is Charles able to understand either Julia or Sebastian's sense of sin, guilt, belief, and even belonging to the Catholic faith?
- When Lord Marchmain is dying, does Charles seem to be more or less sympathetic to the family's wish that their father receive the final sacrament from the priest, despite his previously avowed rejection of the Church's practices and precepts? What is implied by Charles' choosing not to extinguish the candle in the Brideshead Chapel in the final scene of the film?

3. Sexuality

When the novel was published in 1945 there was some disquiet amongst some readers about the sexual themes. While the nature of the relationship between Charles and Sebastian may not be spelled out explicitly, it is clearly a love affair, an infatuation that includes a lot of physical affection; it is shown to be a homosexual, or in today's terms, gay relationship. Equally, Julia and Charles' relationship as it is shown later in the film, was seen as adulterous, as both were married at the time they met up again on the ship. Lord Marchmain is 'living in sin' with his mistress Cara in Italy.

- How is the physical intensity and sensuality of Charles' and Sebastian's relationship made clear in the film?
- Was 'being gay' at a time and place in history when this was far less socially or morally acceptable shown to be a factor in Sebastian's spiral into alcoholism and despair?
- What are the likenesses between Sebastian and Julia that make it believable that Charles would be in love with both?
- To what extent is Julia consumed by guilt about

her failed marriage and attraction to Charles Ryder?
- What kind of freedom is Lord Marchmain able to find in Venice with Cara that was not possible in England?

4. Families

Lady Marchmain is a powerful figure in this story and her attempts to control her children's attitudes and behaviour cause both Sebastian and Julia a good deal of grief. Both make unwise decisions that are partly the result of Lady Marchmain's emotional and moral pressure and of their father's absence as an influence in their lives.

- To what extent is Charles Ryder both welcomed into the family but never allowed to be part of their emotional world?
- What similarities are there between Charles and Sebastian's family situations?
- In her efforts to keep her children close to her within the family home, Lady Marchmain drives at least two of them away. How does she do this?
- What does Marchmain's returning to Brideshead to die suggest about the strength of his family ties?
- How are Bridey and Cordelia shown to be different to Julia and Sebastian?

STUDENT ACTIVITY 5

Production Values

Brideshead Revisited is a beautiful film, inhabited by beautiful people. The places where this story takes place are spectacular. From the Marchmain's ancestral home, Brideshead, to Oxford, Venice, London and Morocco, we are seduced, like Charles, by the beauty of the settings. From the golden light of Oxford and the warmth of Venice to the grandeur of Brideshead and its gardens, the settings and the lighting are crucial in establishing moods that reflect and inform the characters' behaviour.

Like the 1981 series of *Brideshead Revisited*, the filmmakers shot this film at Castle Howard in Yorkshire. The fountain, the gardens, the chapel, the grand entrance hall, the summer house and the religious artwork of Castle Howard all feature in the film. Castle Howard is a popular tourist attraction in England, one of the enormous stately homes of England that has gradually been restored to its original state. Many of these houses have long been unaffordable for aristocratic families like the Marchmains to live in, and now depend on hiring out the buildings and grounds to cultural groups, as well as opening their doors to tourists who still seem endlessly fascinated by the grandeur of a bygone era. While the reality of the class differences these houses represent may have passed, the fantasy of a perfect world, which they still represent for many people, remains.

The sheer size of the rooms created challenges for the lighting technicians on this film. Producer Kevin Loader said 'lighting the Great Hall was like lighting a cathedral. The space is big and it's just as complicated'. Jess Hall, director of photography and director Julian Jarrold, wanted various looks for different sections of the film and this involved two colour palettes for Brideshead to reflect Charles' early visits with Sebastian and Julia in 1925 and then later with Julia in 1935.

When Charles first visits there is a sort of optimism … and we tried to generate a romantic warmth to it as well as hard sunlight. This then is contrasted with the later period at Brideshead which is quite cool, colour-wise and the lighting is quite different, much softer and colder.[3]

As the film covers several periods, the production team, including Hair and Makeup, Costume, Production Design and Cinematography, all needed to work closely together to achieve the authentic look and feel of *Brideshead Revisited*. For instance, as Charles becomes increasingly fascinated with Sebastian, he starts to look less neat and slightly more Bohemian.

- Comment on how particular scenes, especially the way they are shot and filmed, reflect the characters' changing moods and attitudes.
- What are the differences between Charles' London house, his Oxford rooms and the world of Brideshead?
- Filmgoers can be seduced by beautiful places and settings, as much as characters. Which of the settings in this film did you find most attractive?

STUDENT ACTIVITY 6

Reviews

When *Brideshead Revisited* opened in the United States, it received mixed reviews from filmgoers and critics. Some critics were perturbed by the changes to the story while others compared the film to the more detailed and expansive 700-minute television series of 1981.

- How fair are such approaches to reviewing a feature film?

Here are some excerpts from some of these reviews.

From the *New York Observer* <http://www.observer.com/2008/arts-culture/holy-waugh-finally-intelligent-movie-i-ve-been-waiting> the writer describes the film as 'a masterpiece'. He says:

Waugh's descriptions of the nostalgia of vulnerable youth are beautifully captured in clear, crisp images. The conflicting themes of an outsider longing for social status he can never achieve, willing to endure any humiliation to get it, and the ruinous lessons learned by living above his station are clearly defined, and the root of the Flyte family madness that has always been buried in Catholicism has never been so expertly explained.[4]

Another review by Joe Neumaier in *The Daily News* <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/movies/2008/07/25/2008-07-25_lifestyles_of_the_rich_and_fatuous_in_br.html> is headed 'Lifestyles of the rich and fatuous'. The writer describes the film as 'ultimately gauzy and unfocussed'.

- Go to the Rotten Tomatoes website <http://au.rottentomatoes.com/m/10009457-brideshead_revisited/> and choose several reviews to read. Do you agree with any of them?

Now write your own review of the film.

- How much of the story should your review reveal?
- Who do you think would enjoy this story and the way it is presented?
- What kind of appeal might *Brideshead Revisited* have for audiences in 2008, apart from its depiction of a past era?
- Does it explore issues that are still important and relevant?

Extension Questions

1 'This is a story about people refusing to grow up. Happiness eludes them all.' Discuss.
2 'The rich the fatuous': Conduct a discussion about this description of the

people in the film. (What does 'fatuous' imply?) Five people could support and illustrate this description and five others make out a case for the Marchmains and Charles Ryder being something more interesting than 'fatuous'.

3 'While the film lovingly recreates a bygone era, the beautiful world of Brideshead is riven with family tensions and unhappiness, and religion is at the heart of it all.' Discuss.

4 'Spiritual and religious values underpin the decisions people make about their lives. Finally it is Charles who is alone, always a visitor to the world of Brideshead.' Discuss.

5 Are strong religious beliefs still a major factor in how we live our lives, or have they been replaced with more overtly material values and drives?

6 If you have read the book from which the film has been adapted, how well do you think screenwriters, Andrew Davies and Jeremy Brock, have condensed the novel into a satisfying drama? Compare their work with that of another film you have seen that is based on a novel you have read.



References and Resources

Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, Penguin, 1945 and numerous subsequent reprints.

Brideshead Revisited, Granada television, 1981. Eleven-part television series based on the novel. Jeremy Irons played Charles Ryder in this series, which is available from larger libraries and some video shops.

http://www.bridesheadrevisited-themovie.com
Explore the film's website and watch clips as well as background information about the actors and the production.

http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2008/08/07/1217702245464.html
Andrew Davies, a guest at the Melbourne Writer's Festival and one of the writers on *Brideshead Revisited* talks about adapting novels for the screen.

Endnotes

1 From the Press Kit for *Brideshead Revisited*, p.6.

2 *Brideshead Revisited*, Evelyn Waugh, Penguin paperback, 1967 edition, pages 86–87.

3 From the Press Kit for *Brideshead Revisited*, p.13.

4 From <http://www.observer.com/2008/arts-culture/holy-waugh-finally-intelligent-movie-i-ve-been-waiting>.

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