

Brideshead Revisited (2008)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V- 1; L- 1; S/N-2 . Running time: 2 hours 13 min.

He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Ephesians 1:5-10

Based on Evelyn Waugh's 1945 novel *Brideshead Revisited*, the film talks with Charles Ryder, Sacred & Profane Memories of while Julia and her sister Captain Charles Ryder, director follow behind.

Julian Jarrold and scriptwriters 2008 Miramax Films

Andrew Davies and Jeremy Brock do a fairly good job of adapting the complex novel to a feature length film (though fans of the eleven-hour BBC series might disagree).

During World War 2 Captain Charles Ryder is stationed at Brideshead Castle where memories of his youth come flooding back. He had met Sebastian Flyte (Ben Whishaw) during his first week at Oxford in a bizarre way when the latter, in the company of several besotted students passing by, vomited through the window of Charles ground floor. Thus began a friendship that included a touch of homoeroticism, though

climaxing in just a kiss.

In a real sense Sebastian was Charles' first love, but later, when invited to stay at Sebastian's palatial home, Brideshead, Charles' romantic feelings are soon directed to Sebastian's sister Julia (Hayley Atwell), especially when they travel to Italy to see Sebastian and Julia's father, Lord Marchmain (delightfully played by Michael Gambon). At first Julia pays the star-struck friend of her brother little attention. They are from different worlds, he middle class, and she aristocratic with vast wealth. Even more important, especially in the eyes of the imperious matriarch of the estate, Lady Marchmain (Emma Thompson), Charles is an atheist, whereas the Flyte family is Catholic. Lady Marchmain is very devout, clinging to the church's law as if her very soul depends upon it, which is true for her. She and her husband have been long separated because of her devotion to the Church, he living in Venice with his mistress. However because there is still a mote of faith residing in his heart (he was a convert from Anglicanism), divorce for either of them is out of the question. The church will not allow it, and so there it is. Sebastian and Julia are anything but devout, and yet the faith of the church has a hold on them which neither can deny, as Sebastian reveals when he objects to be calling a "heathen," he preferring "sinner."

Eventually Charles finds himself banished from Brideshead. Sebastian, like the disappointed lover that he is, grows cold toward his friend because of the latter's preference for Julia and plunges into serious drinking. And when Charles fails in Italy to prevent Sebastian from overdrinking and persists in his pursuit of Julia, Lady Marchmain tells him that he has betrayed the family. She makes sure that her daughter marries a man of their own class. There will be a sort of rapprochement when she needs Charles to visit the ill Sebastian in Morocco, as well as when Lord Marchmain comes home to die, but this will be short lived.

Years later, after Charles has become a famous painter and married his agent, he and Julia meet on a ship crossing the Atlantic. She too has married, according to the wishes of her mother, but their old feelings are revived. Julia is traveling alone and Charles' wife is confined to her cabin with a terrible case of sea sickness, so the two lovers spend time together and lay plans to seek divorces. But can they break the laws of a church that one believes in only slightly and which the other disdains?

The filmmakers focus far more on the love story and less on the book's theology, but there is no way that they can ignore it. Evelyn Waugh, a converted Catholicism, stated that the major theme of the novel was "the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters." Like Charles, he had once believed that Christianity was "without substance or merit." So there may be a touch of the author himself in that late scene when Charles enters the chapel and does something he had not done since Sebastian had chided him for it. Lady Marchmain's obsession with guilt and narrow outlook may be enough to turn one against the faith, and yet it is obvious that that faith is a source of grace and comfort. Little wonder that her freedom loving husband left her, and yet he too at his end finds that he has been caught "with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread." The latter is a line that Waugh uses in the novel, borrowed from a detective story of fellow Catholic novelist G.K. Chesterton. Both men were part of the "Catholic novelist" group that included Graham Greene, though Waugh is far more indirect and ambiguous than Greene. Watch this film and see how well the themes of faith and doubt, sin, guilt, redemption, and grace are woven through the decades of the lives of the characters. Had the apostle Paul, quoted at the beginning of this review, lived in the 20th Century, he might have been capable of writing such a novel.

For Reflection/Discussion

1) What is the relationship between Charles and Sebastian? How does one want it to be more than friendship? Do you think this is why he is so reluctant at first for Charles to meet the members of his family?

2) When Julia says that she and her brother are heathens, what do you think of Sebastian's contradicting her with, "No, we are sinners" ? What do think is the difference in his mind? An acknowledge of a connection that even his turning his back on his church upbringing cannot break?

3) In Venice Lord Marchmain asks Charles what he thought of Brideshead, and when the young man replies, "Magnificent," what does the Lord say to him? How is this a story of temptation and fall? Remember Julia saying to him later, "What does Charles Ryder really want?"

4) Do you think that Charles might love Julia because if he can marry her, he will be able to live, and not just visit, Brideshead?

5) Compare what the apostle Paul wrote with the quotation from G.K. Chesterson's Father Brown detective story "The Queer Feet" that Cordelia quotes to Charles to illustrate the nature of Grace, "I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread." How are the various characters "caught" "with an unseen hook," eventually reconciled to faith?

6) Do you see evidence of that "unseen hook" in the events in your own life or that of friends and loved ones?