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## The Influence of St Augustine on Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited"

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THE INFLUENCE OF ST. AUGUSTINE ON  
EVELYN WAUGH'S BRIDESHEAD REVISITED

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

Andrew Damian Moran

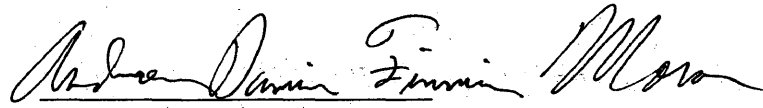
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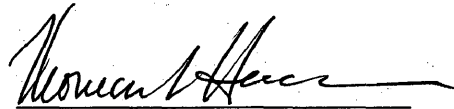
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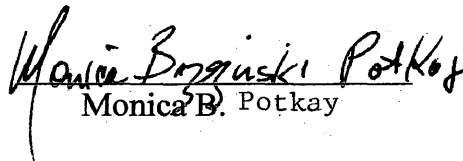
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION	2
CHAPTER I.	
AUGUSTINIANISM AS A RESPONSE TO MODERNITY	9
CHAPTER II.	
FIVE AUGUSTINIAN THEMES IN <i>BRIDESHEAD REVISITED</i>	22
CHAPTER III.	
THE CONVERSIONS OF AUGUSTINE AND CHARLES RYDER	53
CONCLUSION	61
NOTES	63
WORKS CITED	66

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I would like to thank my grandmother, both for her generosity that allowed me to finish this thesis, and, more importantly, for her decency, perseverance, service, and quiet dignity:

Winifred Violet Lane Moran Rice  
Never was ever nothing but nice.  
Five names are too few  
To give her her due.

## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I will examine how *Brideshead Revisited* shows the marks of Augustinian theology and philosophy. To be more specific, I will first look at the prologue and then the rest of the novel to understand how Waugh regarded the Modern Age as an age of collapse—decaying, parodic, uncivil, and irrational—and how he found in Augustine’s response to the chaos of the decline of Rome a model that would permit men to seek out the permanent things and eschew false values. Second, I will examine how five central themes of the novel derive from Augustinian insights: the nihility of evil, that evil stems from the privation of being; the distinction between *sapientia* (wisdom) and *scientia* (knowledge); conversion and aversion, Augustine’s terms for man’s capacity to turn toward or away from God; the secret and severe mercy that draws souls back to God; and the power of memory and its capacity to understand God’s loving providence. Finally, I will argue that the novel is structured through three distinct conversions that Ryder experiences and that these conversions parallel those of Augustine in the *Confessions*. Having argued for a heavily theological reading of *Brideshead Revisited*, I will conclude by considering whether Edmund Wilson’s criticism of the novel was right, that it is merely a religious tract.

THE INFLUENCE OF ST. AUGUSTINE ON  
EVELYN WAUGH'S *BRIDESHEAD REVISITED*

## INTRODUCTION

After having taken part in the failed defense of Crete, Evelyn Waugh spent the next few years of the Second World War in Britain, and in January of 1944, frustrated by his lack of action, he requested and was granted leave from his unit to begin work on a novel. That novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, published in 1945, departed significantly in both content and style from Waugh's earlier works, and to those accustomed to the anarchic comedy and caustic satire of *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*, the novel came as something of a disappointment. Instead of happy-go-lucky pederasts and Bright Young Things, *BR* is peopled by lost souls profoundly aware of their own spiritual exile. From some quarters the critical reaction was harsh: in "Splendors and Miseries of Evelyn Waugh" Edmund Wilson, formerly one of Waugh's most vocal American admirers, disapproved of the religious theme, and Conor Cruise O'Brien, himself raised a Catholic, in "The Pieties of Evelyn Waugh" found Waugh's theology fraudulent, a façade for class-based snobbery. Yet Waugh himself, for a time,<sup>1</sup> was highly pleased with his creation. He frequently referred to it in his letters as his "magnum opus," mentioned in a *Life* magazine article that it was his favorite ("Fan-Fare" 304), and in a letter to his mother predicted that "it will go on being read for years" (*Letters* 200). The book was Waugh's most popular: it was selected as a Book-of-the-Month Club choice<sup>2</sup> and earned him an expenses-paid trip to Hollywood, where he met with studio executives who wanted to buy the rights.<sup>3</sup> As late as 1979 the opulent BBC mini-series based on it, starring such respected actors as Jeremy Irons, Laurence Olivier, and John Gielgud, was a huge success both in Britain



and America. This success was odd for a book that is not merely dominated by religious themes but also marked by a theology that unceasingly puts every sort of worldliness, every sort of descent from spiritual perfection, before the harshest light.

It is the presence of this serious and robust but often difficult theology that distinguishes *BR* from Waugh's earlier novels and characterizes the latter half of his career in which his novels are explicitly Catholic.<sup>4</sup> It is also because of this theology that Waugh characterizes *BR* as his best novel. He has integrated a love story, a *Kunstlerroman*, a university novel, and a paean to a beautiful but dying aristocratic England into one novel by subordinating these subplots to the novel's central action—the action of God's grace working in the world. Waugh boasted of his accomplishment: "Its theme—the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters—was perhaps presumptuously large, but I make no apology for it" (Lane 91). In response to Edmund Wilson's criticism, that *BR* is a religious tract, Waugh more fully set out the theological purpose behind his fiction:

He was outraged (quite legitimately by his standards) at finding God introduced into my story. I believe that you can only leave God out by making your characters pure abstractions ... (Modern novelists) try to represent the whole human mind and soul and yet omit its determining character—that of being God's creature with a *defined purpose* ... So in my future books there will be two things to make them unpopular: a preoccupation with style and the attempt to represent man more fully, which, to me, means only one thing, man in his relation to God. ("Fan-Fare" 304)

As is evident from the novel itself and as Waugh himself explains, theology and the relation of man to God are central to *Brideshead Revisited*. What that theology consists of, however, remains to be explained.

A useful starting point for discerning Waugh's religious thought would be to look at the man himself. Biographers have had a field day with Waugh. In the thirty-odd years since his death three full-length biographies have been written (by Christopher Sykes, a friend of Waugh, whose book, though rich in anecdotes, is not very scholarly; by the unyieldingly Freudian Martin Stannard; and by Selena Hastings, whose book is more charitable than Stannard's and regarded as more accurate), as well as a history, focusing primarily on Waugh, of the Oxford set of the early 1920s (Humphrey Carpenter's *The Brideshead Generation*), a host of memoirs in which Waugh is prominent, and numerous critical essays that have sought to understand the novels by understanding the man. What has escaped none of these biographers and critics was the profound cleft in Waugh's nature. When the Jesuit father Martin D'Arcy received Waugh into the Roman Catholic Church in 1930, he received a man in whom the division of his soul was so pronounced that the novelist Hilaire Belloc, a fellow Catholic reactionary, on first meeting Waugh pronounced that "[h]e has a devil in him" (A.N. Wilson 325). Waugh possessed a profound religious sense, something already apparent even in his early comic novels, and often exhibited a hatred of earthly life that led to laudable acts of charity and fidelity but also to extremes of melancholy and morbidity. Yet at the same time he maintained a love for the things of this world, playing the dandy and aesthete in his youth, and until middle age craving experience, whether it be of politics or war.

This temperament, this dual attraction to both worldliness and holiness, seems not at all dissimilar from that of St. Augustine, who had difficulty reconciling his love of beautiful creatures with his love of the uncreated, eternal, triune God. Waugh, of course, did not in his lifetime come to the wholeness and serenity that the Bishop of Hippo did, but he could see in the saint a like-minded soul and find in the *Confessions*, that beautiful and challenging testament to God's grace and Augustine's own spiritual struggles and maturation, a paradigm for the Christian wayfarer, for the spiritual exile seeking to return to his beatitude.

I do not know when Waugh first read Augustine,<sup>5</sup> but I suspect that Fr. Martin D'Arcy, the Jesuit instrumental in his conversion, led Waugh to the doctor of the Church. Though well-versed in the neo-Thomism prevalent among Catholic intellectuals of his day, Fr. D'Arcy also wrote "The Philosophy of St. Augustine," an essay first published in 1930, the year Waugh was receiving instruction from him. In it Fr. D'Arcy notes that, for Augustine, "[m]an with nothing but his natural endowments is an abstraction; he has never existed" (160). This phrase sounds familiar because I previously quoted from Waugh, in his response to Edmund Wilson, something markedly similar: "I believe you can only leave God out by making your characters pure abstractions." Waugh has learned from St. Augustine, possibly through Fr. D'Arcy's interpretation of the latter's thought, a certain understanding of human nature, what may be called Augustinian realism, and Waugh's later fictive enterprise is devoted to exploring this central truth of the human person, that he is principally defined by his relation to God.

I am not the first to note the heavy influence of St. Augustine's thought on Waugh's fiction. In *Our Age: English Intellectuals between the World Wars*, Noel Annan claims that there were three "deviants," three central figures who swam against the tide of English intellectual life during his age: Waugh, the literary critic F.R. Leavis, and the conservative political philosopher Michael Oakeshott. Waugh, whom he recognizes as the best novelist of the era, is distinguished not so much for his Catholicism—this was, after all, the time when a number of prominent English intellectuals and artists converted to Catholicism—or his conservatism—the previous generation of Yeats and Eliot had shown no liking for democracy—but for his Augustinianism. Augustine's Christianity, according to Annan, "explained to Waugh why the world was as evil and horrible as it was ... It also explained to him why *he* was evil and so often cruel and odious" (159). Annan emphasizes that Waugh's psyche was so disordered that Augustine's insistence on Original Sin naturally appealed to him.

While also noting the division in Waugh's personality, Jeffrey Heath treats the novelist more sympathetically, primarily because he takes Waugh's Augustinianism more seriously. In his essay "The Lush Places" Heath asks, "What induced Waugh habitually to view life as a seductive trap?" and then answers, "The pervasive influence of that magnificent *eminence grise* St. Augustine" (6). In his book-length study, *The Picturesque Prison*, he goes on to explore Waugh's attraction to and condemnation of "the lush places" and finds that Augustine's pronouncements on ends and means underlie Waugh's critique of the search for an earthly paradise: human persons have as their end union with God and so "may turn upward towards

God (conversion) or downward (aversion) towards the body and merely human concerns. Lower things are not in themselves evil, since all things are good; rather, it is the *decision to turn away* from a higher things to a lower thing which is evil” (7-8). Heath’s explanation of how Waugh borrows from Augustine’s understanding of evil is persuasive, and I will return to this distinction between conversion and aversion.

I agree with Annan and Heath that Waugh was heavily influenced by the writings of St. Augustine and that Waugh’s fiction may be better understood by reading it within the context of Augustinian thought. *Brideshead Revisited* in particular shows the marks of Augustinian theology and philosophy, and in this essay I will examine the influence of the Doctor of the Church on the novel. First, after a brief summary of *BR*, I will look at the prologue and then the rest of the novel to understand how Waugh regarded the Modern Age as an age of collapse, and how he found in Augustine’s response to the chaos of the decline of Rome a model for the present that would permit men to seek out the permanent things and eschew false values. Second, I will examine how five central themes of the novel derive from Augustinian insights: the nihility of evil; the distinction between *sapientia* (wisdom) and *scientia* (knowledge); conversion and aversion, Augustine’s terms for man’s capacity to turn toward or away from God; the secret and severe mercy that draws souls back to God; and the power of memory and its capacity to understand God’s loving providence. Finally, I will argue that the novel is structured through three distinct conversions that Ryder experiences and that these conversions parallel those of Augustine in the *Confessions*. Having argued for a heavily theological reading of

*BR*, I will conclude by considering whether Edmund Wilson's criticism of the novel was right, that it is merely a religious tract.

## CHAPTER I

### AUGUSTINIANISM AS A RESPONSE TO MODERNITY

*Brideshead Revisited* begins with its protagonist and narrator, British army captain Charles Ryder, in a “sere and lawless state” (9), without hope or joy. It is 1943, and instead of experiencing the purpose and excitation of war, he is moving his company to yet another training base and finds himself oppressed by mediocrities such as his platoon commander Hooper and his commanding officer. Ryder is surprised to discover that the new camp is on the grounds of Brideshead, the home of the Flytes, an aristocratic and Roman Catholic family with whom while younger he had been intimately involved. The time of the novel switches to the preceding two decades as Ryder remembers his involvement with them. At Oxford Ryder was befriended by Sebastian, the charming but unhappy younger son of the Flytes, who introduced him to Anthony Blanche, a well-traveled and well-read homosexual, sinister and mysterious but observant and prescient. Blanche, “ageless as a lizard” (32), does not change as he ages, but Sebastian becomes a drunkard and, seeking to escape the influence of his family and faith, flees to North Africa where he first befriends a German deserter from the French Foreign Legion, a “thoroughly bad lot” according to the British consul (209), and finally ends up as an under-porter at a monastery. He still binges occasionally, but Cordelia, the loving and honest youngest child of the Flytes, assures Ryder that her brother has grown holy. After leaving Oxford, Charles becomes a successful architectural painter but is dissatisfied and leaves his wife for Julia, Sebastian’s beautiful sister who had been married, much to

the sorrow of her dying mother, Lady Marchmain, to a divorced man, Rex Mottram, an ambitious and worldly but dim politician. Charles and Julia live together outside of marriage, but when her apostate father, Lord Marchmain, who had left his wife during the war to live in Venice with his mistress, returns home to die and receives absolution on his deathbed, she knows that she too must return to her faith and must leave Charles. He, too, moved by the sight of Lord Marchmain making the sign of the cross, becomes a Catholic, but it is only at the end of the novel, when as an army captain he returns to Brideshead and prays in its chapel, that he takes joy in his faith.

The Charles Ryder of the epilogue who has been praying in the chapel, the one who is “looking unusually cheerful to-day” (351), seems to be a much different man than the Charles Ryder of the prologue, who is reserved and melancholic, mired in acedia. This change has been effected by his calling to mind through his narrative a certain type of understanding, the wisdom Augustine struggled to discern, but to see why Charles needs to arrive at this understanding, it is necessary to plunge into the world of the prologue. It is a world of decay. The camp stands within an abandoned fruit garden, by “mutilated old trees” (3). Whatever romance and adventure army life once promised has vanished as the men, shuttling from camp to camp, are resigned to their purposelessness. The initial group of volunteers have been replaced by less spirited conscripts, the former commanding officer has been replaced by a “less lovable man,” and unimpressive men such as the hapless platoon commander Hooper, who sought military deferment rather than patriotic service, now populate the officer class. The camp is a shambles and looking at it Ryder imagines how future archaeologists will write about his society’s decline:



The Pollock diggings provide a valuable link between the citizen-slave communities of the twentieth century and the tribal anarchy which succeeded them. Here you see a people of advanced culture, capable of an elaborate draining system and the construction of permanent highways, overrun by a race of the lowest type. (7)

Before these signs of decay, however, Ryder can do nothing other than muse that “it was not as it had been” (5).

The disorder of this world manifests itself as well through parodic inversion—things are not merely disordered, they are parodies of themselves. When transferring to a new camp, the c.o. has his troops exercise the most stringent security measures, not in order to deceive the enemy, but rather to shake off the slatterns seeking the company and the cash of the soldiers. Officers are no longer judged by their daring and capacity to inspire; instead, as the c.o. explains, they are judged according to how well they keep their area clean, how well they lead custodial operations: “The state in which a camp is left is the best possible test of the efficiency of regimental officers. It is on such matters that the reputation of a battalion and its commander rests” (12). In addition, the army does not fight in a battle but takes part in a parody of a battle. While travelling to the new camp, their train undergoes a mock liquid mustard-gas attack, so that there must be a mock decontamination and a mock situation-report<sup>6</sup> about the attack.

Sanity and insanity have taken on each other’s characteristics. Rough wire encloses the disordered camp of the soldiers; the lunatic asylum is bounded by cast-iron railings and noble gates (4). Pleasant lawns, “embosoming trees,” and gravel

walks make its campus livable and even appealing, and the inmates seem to respond well to their environment: their babblings are “mouthed politely” (11) as they spend their days “sauntering and skipping” (4).

While the lunatics are polite, the sane men, governed by a debased code of human relations, know no such civility. No deference is paid to authority and no natural respect is offered from one person to another. No *esprit de corps* binds the army, to the extent that the enlisted men avoid the officers so that they do not have to salute (4). Rather than converse, the soldiers kill time listening to the radio and drinking beer (5). Personal relations are so degraded that they may best be described as reflective of a sort of Hobbesian natural state, without civility, warmth, deference, and respect for justice and order. Each seeks his own good in the basest and least refined manner. “If you get on the wrong side of (people) they take it out of you other ways” (10, 11), Hooper twice warns Ryder when the latter objects to the injustices of his fellows. Hooper, aware of the primitive code of conduct, urges his commander to be indifferent to good order and is proved right.

At the heart of this unhappy world is a lack of vision, a murkiness that obscures understanding of purpose and order. In the very beginning sentence of the novel Ryder writes that, looking back, he could only see the camp “through the grey mist of early morning” (3), a gray mist that precludes insight and comprehension. The incessant popular music from the wireless; the “zoo-noises” of the battalion (15); the darkness, leading to breakages, in which the army transfers to a new outpost; the “removing of all distinguishing badges” demanded by the c.o. as part of his fatuous security measures; Hooper’s imprecise and low slang; the starless sky (15); the fact

that none of the platoon commanders read during the train ride (12): all these images and incidents are metaphors for a world so enfogged, so lost in distractions, excrescences, and mindless procedures, that it prevents the mind from reflecting and making distinctions, which thus prevents the person from ordering, planning, improving. What comes out of this world is an army camp that is amorphous and incomplete: "The smoke from the cook-houses drifted away in the mist and the camp lay revealed as a planless maze of short-cuts, super-imposed on the unfinished housing scheme ..." (7). What comes out of this world is Charles Ryder in his despair—without hope, love, or curiosity, aloof, critical, and untrusting, infected by the sickness unto death.

This is not merely the situation of the British army in 1943; this is, as Waugh sees it, the modern world. Examples and images of decay, inversion, corrupt human relations, and obfuscation and undifferentiation, themes introduced in the prologue, continue throughout the novel, for this is the way of life in the twentieth century. For Waugh, as seen in this and indeed all his novels, it is a world defined by loss and collapse. The world that Charles and Sebastian knew at Oxford is "submerged now and obliterated, irrecoverable as Lyonesse, so quickly have the waters come flooding in" (21), and that world itself is only a Silver Age in comparison to the Golden Age before the Great War. Charles reports that the art students in Paris only wish to make a commercial splash and do not live up to the standards of their teachers. Marchmain House, the Flytes' London home which is to be replaced by a block of flats, and other great, old English houses are painted by Ryder before they are marked for destruction. Julia's debutante ball at Marchmain House is the last of

its kind. Back at Brideshead the wine is running out since it has not been restocked since Lord Marchmain deserted his family, but since Bridey married a woman past child-bearing years and the other Flytes will also not have children, there will be no heir for this depletion to inconvenience. The bishop closes Brideshead's chapel and a priest comes to empty the holy water from its stoop, blow out the lamp in the sanctuary, and leave the tabernacle empty and open, so as though, Cordelia sadly notes, "from now on it was always to be Good Friday" (220).

Examples of the parodic inversion of expectations abound as well. Julia suspects that the Old 100<sup>th</sup>, the abode of sharkish madams and tubercular prostitutes, is "heaven" (122). Sebastian predicts that the donnish Collins will go bald (44), but it is the epicene youth who does, and it is his glamorous sister Julia, about whom Nanny Hawkins thinks it a shame that she cut her hair short like a nun's (37), who ends up living alone and giving herself to charity, much as a nun would (348).

Uncharitableness and disinterest mark human relations not only in the prologue but throughout the novel. Rex worries more about his gambling winnings that Sebastian stole than about the troubled and lost youth himself. Samgrass, the oily Oxford don, also ignores Sebastian, more keen on a jaunt to the historical sites of the Near East than he is on looking after his charge. Charles stops his ears to Rex's story of the misery of Sebastian and his family so he can better savor his meal at the Parisian restaurant. Charles's acquisitiveness and materialism will so overmaster him that later he will take joy that the bond is ruptured between a father and son, between Lord Marchmain and Bridey, which means that he and Julia stand to take possession of Brideshead rather than Bridey, its rightful inheritor.

Finally, the characters in the novel remain handicapped by their lack of understanding, both of themselves and their purpose in life. As a result, they pursue ephemeral ends and lay waste their time and strength in chimeras, things that have no true value: Lord Marchmain's life in Venice as a Byronic milord, Julia's barren marriage, Charles's Gauguinesque trip to the jungles of South America from which he brings back paintings that Anthony accurately describes as "t-t-terrible t-t-tripe" (270). These characters see as through a glass darkly because of their own unilluminated spiritual vision. Waugh reinforces their spiritual darkness through the leitmotif of images of obfuscation: images of smoke, mist, shadows, night, clouds, and the color gray pervade the novel so that, for example, after his fall into drunkenness, Sebastian speaks "from the shadows beyond the lamplight" (149), and the worldly Rex continually is associated with cigar smoke.

Julia, who speaks of the cigar smoke as a smell that cannot be washed off, like a sin that has not been forgiven, sees through Rex after she marries him and describes him to Charles as "something absolutely modern and up-to-date that only this ghastly age could produce" (200). In her condemnation of the modern age her voice very much seems to be Waugh's own. Waugh was at war with the practices, pieties, and ideas of the century of the common man, the age of Hooper, finding it tainted by irresponsibility, bad taste, and, worst of all, spiritual and intellectual vacuity. He found it an age without a compass, one that had abjured the ancient verities, delighting in the trivial distractions that technological progress had granted (the automobile, the telephone, the long-playing record, all those toys of The Bright Young Things), and ignoring the principle human concerns—the nature of the human

person and his relation to God. In *Confused Roaring* George McCartney argues that Waugh did not so much find fault with modern immorality—people will always misbehave—as with modern confusion and the loss of principle. Waugh’s primary concern was

The bankruptcy of a civilization unable or unwilling to sustain its commitment to the metaphysical principles that had made moral distinctions possible in the first place ... In his view, the real issue was the general disillusionment with the notion of absolutes, whether moral or metaphysical ... Instead of submitting to their “rigid discipline,” people were inclined to cultivate “a jolly tolerance of everything that seemed modern.” For Waugh, this amounted to a profoundly dispiriting dereliction that could only serve to undermine the intellectual resolve necessary to maintain civilized order. (2)

And, indeed, in *BR* Waugh depicts the civilized order, having lost the necessary resolve, as lost. Returning to England from his sojourn in South America, Ryder comments that “It’s just another jungle closing in” (232). This neo-primitive world is one “where wealth is no longer gorgeous and power has no dignity” (237). Even though he is spiritually immature, Ryder (whose pronouncements are frequently Waugh’s own) is still a talented artist and a perceptive thinker and he, like many of Waugh’s brightest characters, directs his antipathy towards his age. Guy Crouchback, the protagonist of the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, does too, and of all Waugh’s characters he may best express Waugh’s contempt for the modern age: on

hearing of the Molotov-Von Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, he enlists in the British Army and thinks “[t]he enemy at last was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off. It was the Modern Age in arms. Whatever the outcome there was a place for him in that battle” (*Men at Arms* 7-8).

Yet Guy’s fervor for battle is ultimately revealed as vanity and his simplistic, even Manichean dualism, in which the Nazis and Communists are the forces of evil and the British the forces of good, as a romantic illusion. Human evil infects all places and times, even if the modern age is particularly corrupt. In truth, paradoxically, the modern age, because of its corruption, may be especially conducive to spiritual insight and regeneration. No longer may one rest in Augustan urbanity or Victorian propriety, since they have been trampled underfoot beneath a savage horde of new barbarians. In this regard Charles Ryder’s chance of spiritual renewal is greater than that of Tony Last, the protagonist of *A Handful of Dust*, even though the latter is more decent and moral than the former. Last is a latter-day Victorian—dutiful, sentimental, honest, proper—dedicated to upholding the standards of that bygone age. That age, however, is a sham; its Gothic façades merely cover a structure of utilitarianism and polite atheism.<sup>7</sup> The Tony Lasts of the world, however, cannot distinguish the appearance from the thing itself.

Charles Ryder is luckier because his age’s mediocrity has left him no false standards to cling to. At the beginning of the prologue he reveals that he is completely without happiness in the world. After an at times happy youth in the 1920s, that last heyday of splendor and elegance, Ryder has been disillusioned by his own experiences and by the following decades during which the spiritual and

intellectual vacuity, which Waugh believes has been gnawing at the West, finally fully manifests itself. Ultimately, army life has so purged him of illusion that he finds himself “stripped of all enchantment” (6). His truly is a dark night of the soul, and it may even be too severe, for Charles’s darkness is such that it would not seem possible to let in light.<sup>8</sup> But it is from this forlorn state that his experience of spiritual regeneration does commence. He has benefited from an age that in its decay has not only dismissed eternal truths but also exposed and destroyed distracting pleasures and illusory beliefs. Modernity may destroy, but in the wake of its destruction there may be clarity of insight for the willing mind.<sup>9</sup>

The insight that Charles Ryder does achieve may accurately be characterized as Augustinian, and to some degree he discovers the same wisdom as did the saint who lived 1,500 years before because their times are very similar. Augustine is a thinker particularly relevant to our century because, as John O’Meara writes in his commentary on *The City of God*, “our situation is closer to his than, perhaps, is ordinarily realized” (ix). Thomistic scholasticism has been dubbed the “perennial philosophy” by some Catholic apologists, but Waugh and other like-minded thinkers in the twentieth century have turned to Augustinian philosophy because his age so closely mirrors our own, and his response to it provides a way of thinking for his intellectual descendents.

Augustine lived during a time of transition and collapse, when the old religion of the Roman Empire was falling more and more into disrepute, while the new one, Christianity, had yet to achieve full sway over the people. Customs and institutions were altered and disregarded as Rome both imploded under its own weight and was



pierced through by a series of barbarian invasions which culminated in the city's sacking in 410 by the Arian Goths led by Alaric. The old ways of thinking and living no longer sufficed. In response to this dramatic and troublesome change, a change that, as the *City of God* attests, he was aware he was living through, Augustine neither despaired nor put on a false front of optimism. Furthermore, as Robert Scott Dupree explains in *Allen Tate and the Augustinian Imagination*, his understanding has a universal quality, and he put forth a philosophy capable of guiding future ages:

Augustine forged out of his historical moment a vision of things that was not simply a response to his own times but a far-reaching program for the future. In finding solutions to his personal problems, he showed how men can build a life that is not a nostalgic restoration of a fading past but a genuinely new kind of existence that draws on yet does not fear to leave behind what is dying. (132)

It is questionable whether Waugh entirely lived up to this goal. Too often mired in gloom, he did not experience the saint's beatitude, and his own highly developed sense of taste and contempt for contemporary vulgarity tended to direct him towards romanticism and nostalgia so that he was tempted to take refuge in the achievements of more sophisticated ages and regard the future with distaste and distrust. "I See Nothing but Boredom...Everywhere" was the title of one of Waugh's last essays, a title that well expresses his disinterest in the years to come. His protagonist Ryder exhibits this same tendency towards nostalgia. His wife even upbraids him for it after he objects to a tacky ice sculpture that stands in their cabin

room on board the ocean liner: “If you had read about it in a description of a sixteenth century banquet in Venice, you would have said those were the days to live” (241).

Yet even if Waugh and his creation Ryder at times fail to transcend nostalgia, that does not mean that Waugh is proposing a program of nostalgia. Indeed, it is Ryder’s nostalgia, his tendency to romanticize and to conceive of the world according to past aesthetic forms, what Julia calls his “damned boulderish way,” that handicaps him spiritually and limits him in his vocation as artist. It makes him liable to be seduced by charm, that soft and welcoming but distorting covering which, Anthony Blanche warns him, “spots and kills anything it touches. It kills love; it kills art” (273). Though the protagonist Ryder too frequently settles for the lower and diverting goods of nostalgia, romanticism, and charm, Waugh’s novel itself points to the necessity of responding to the chaos of the modern world, much as Augustine responded to the chaos of his age, by seeking out the permanent things and building a life that is in accord with these truths. In fact, Waugh had considered using as *BR*’s motto “*Non hinc habemus civitatem manentem*” (“We do not have here an abiding city”) (Stopp 108) to indicate that the soul’s only abiding home is the celestial city. The earthly city comes to dust: London, for example, once urbane and sophisticated, the center of civilization, has become, as Waugh renders it throughout his novels, a glittering but barbaric metropolis, the symbol of earthly vanity, and the capital of the City of Man. To escape the false values of the City of Man and of modernity, which as we have seen manifest themselves in decay, inversion, incivility, and confusion, what Ryder the man and the artist must do, and what he eventually does by calling to

mind his experience in his narration, is understand and accept God's providential action in his own and others' lives.

## CHAPTER II

### FIVE AUGUSTINIAN THEMES IN *BRIDESHEAD REVISITED*

From this central credo, that God is active in the lives of His people so that, out of love, he may draw them to Him, other beliefs follow, almost as corollaries, and five of these distinctively Augustinian beliefs are central themes in the novel. I will show how four of these themes are revealed and developed in the *Confessions* and then how they manifest themselves in *BR*. The fifth theme, the distinction between *sapientia* and *scientia*, wisdom and knowledge, also can be seen in the *Confessions* but is much more fully explained in *On the Trinity*, so I will draw from that work as well.

#### 1

A central theme of the *Confessions*, indeed the philosophical problem that most weighed on Augustine's mind, was the question of evil. He, of course, saw human perniciousness all about him, in political misrule, in his students who skipped out without paying their fees, even in the selfish wants of infants. What burdened him more, he saw the panoply of human faults within himself, from the vanity which in adolescence led him to steal pears to win his peers' approval, to the ungovernable lusts which beset him in early manhood, and he analyzes these sins with a clarity that is chilling. For an answer to the problem of evil, but not one that would demand he amend his way of life, Augustine fell in with the Manichees. This dualistic Persian sect, greatly influential throughout the Near East and the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., claimed that evil was material substance and that souls,

originally purely spiritual and wholly good, had fallen into the world of matter and into evil.

Augustine fully rejected Manichean doctrines when in his late twenties he read the books of the Platonists. He learned that since all created beings and all matter were created by an immutably good God, they must be good and evil cannot be a material substance (VII.xii). Now those substances liable to corruption are lesser goods than incorruptible ones, and so there is a hierarchy of goods; but the salient point here is that evil is not a thing but quite the opposite—it is a no thing, the absence of being.<sup>10</sup> Evil has no being, it “has no existence except as a privation of good, down to that level which is altogether without being” (III.vii). This understanding of evil takes root in the relation between the human person and God, the source of all being: “Accordingly, my God, I would have no being, I would not have any existence, unless you were in me. Or rather, I would have no being if I were not in you ‘of whom are all things, through whom are all things, in whom are all things’” (I.ii). Man, if he is divorced from the source of being, and hence the source of good, is evil.

Whether evil is or is not material substance is never an issue in *BR*, but Waugh seizes upon the idea that evil is a privation of being and employs it in his novel. Of course, in both a physical and metaphysical sense all men and women have being, and Waugh’s characters function as characters, not voids, and it would be both simplistic and unsympathetic to label any of them “evil.” Still, some of them, notably Rex Mottram and Ryder’s father, are marked by a profound deprivation that manifests, if not an outright rejection of God or the good, at least a profoundly

misshapen nature. Julia claims that her husband, Rex Mottram, does not completely exist and so suggests that he is worse than just a greedy and dim-witted politician; he is, in his profound incompleteness, sinister if not evil. She tells Charles that “He simply wasn’t all there. He wasn’t a complete human being at all. He was a tiny bit of one, unnaturally developed ... A tiny bit of a man pretending he was the whole” (200). Later, she will add, “he isn’t a real person at all” (257).

The priest who had given Rex instruction on entering the Catholic Church had noticed something similar. Rex is so efficient and businesslike that something beyond the ken of worldly interests, such as Catholic teaching, means nothing to him. He is so devoid of mind and spirit—“He doesn’t seem to have the least intellectual curiosity or natural piety,” warns Fr. Mowbray (192)—that he can neither accept nor reject what he is told. Instead, he just wants to “sign on the dotted line” (192) to enter the Church. When the Jesuit tells Lady Marchmain that Rex “doesn’t correspond to any degree of paganism known to the missionaries” (193), he inadvertently points to Rex’s deficiency: the pagans exist as human beings, even if they are without the Christian faith; Rex, as Julia had said, is not even human. Charles’s description of him as “the burlesque of power and prosperity” (119) reminds one not only of his worldly success but of his lack of humanity—to be a burlesque is to be less than a real thing. Through this characterization, Waugh depicts what Augustine had said, that man has no being without God. Rex’s worldliness—his political ambition, his greed, his expensive and ostentatious tastes, all the machinations which these have led him into—so possess him that he is unaware that there may be anything outside his pursuits. Of course in his worldliness Rex is not overtly vicious or malicious but only

ridiculous, and so to hint that such a man is evil would seem harsh, excessively critical (though Lady Marchmain, thinking he has black blood, says “he is suspiciously dark” (187), a comment that points to a second meaning of which she may or may not be aware). But Rex’s worldliness is a type of *cupiditas*, a misdirected or inordinate desire, which keeps him from *caritas*, love, and as he is without love, he is incomplete as a man, deprived of full being.<sup>11</sup>

The nothingness that characterizes Rex is the nothingness of his mind and worldly desires. The nothingness that characterizes Charles Ryder’s father is a nothingness of meaning. His privation of meaning is a manifestation of his rejection of God. The elder Ryder has a stock phrase that he uses at every opportunity: “such a lot of nonsense.” All ideas, all conversations, all language he claims are nonsense, and so he divorces meaning from existence and truth from words. The elder Ryder further testifies to an essential meaninglessness through his own absurdity: he laughs without cause, responds with non sequiturs to his interlocutors, and dithers pointlessly over words, not so as to gain their precise meaning, but so as to make words just a game, an arbitrary collection of signifiers that have no bearing on human experience. He prefers to think of ancient ages where “the names of his companions were corrupt readings of words of quite other meaning” (65). He makes “little fantas(ies)” (69) for himself so that things are muddled, seen as not what they are. He imagines that his son’s boring acquaintance Jorkins is an American and spends an evening deliberately confusing this guest. Later, he arranges as boring a dinner party as he can, inviting guests (including a monoglot German) who will have nothing to say to each other and

who must listen in silence to poorly played piano music for most of the evening, in order that there can be no conversation and no making sense of things.

Unlike Rex, the elder Ryder has a malicious purpose: he wants to make life as unhappy as possible for his son. Beneath his veneer of smiling buffoonery, hatred governs his heart. That may explain why he professes to like Sebastian (146) and allows him to stay frequently at his London residence: he enjoys the prospect of the young drunkard's suffering. Indeed, about him and his hatred there is something diabolic; that he is forbidden wine (63), representative of the blood of Christ, hints that he is estranged from God. His absurdities, his antiquarian obsessions (a type of *cupiditas*), and most notably his cruelties testify to a fundamental lack of charity, so that he is ultimately revealed as a menacing and evil figure.

## 2

Rex Mottram and the elder Ryder are also similar in the type of knowledge they seek, though this similarity may not be immediately obvious since the former likes to plunge into the center of things while the latter prefers his curious detachment. Rex prides himself on being in the know, and throughout the novel he evinces a great deal of knowledge about politics, finance, brandy, jewels, social gossip, Austrian psychoanalysts, how to handle the police and the press, popular restaurants, et al. The elder Ryder, on the other hand, pursues more peculiar and obscure interests: Etruscan notions of immortality and fifth century terra cotta figurines. Nor does he share Rex's expensive tastes: he drinks barley water and dines



on simple, bland fare. Yet they are similarly worldly in that the knowledge they seek is of the same type—the difference is only a matter of degree, not kind. They both only seek knowledge of the things of this world.

St. Augustine calls this type of knowledge *scientia*, rational knowledge of temporal beings and objects. Obviously such knowledge is necessary, but it is lower than *sapientia*, intellectual knowledge of eternal things. Man is created to seek after God, and so, in order to ascend to God, he should privilege *sapientia* over *scientia*. Augustine differentiates between the two types of knowledge in *On the Trinity* (finished in 417), though the distinction is already apparent in the *Confessions*, written some 20 years earlier. Augustine bases his distinction on Paul's discussion of the different gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:8):

Wisdom has been defined, in such discourse, as “the knowledge of things human and divine.” I, too, have expressed the opinion that acquaintance with both, things divine and things human, can be called both wisdom and knowledge. But if we adopt the apostle's distinction—“to one is given the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge”—it is proper for us to break up this definition, giving the name of wisdom in its strict sense to the knowledge of divine things, while of human things we speak, in the strict sense, of knowledge. (*Trinity XIV.i*)

Wisdom, then, has as its end knowledge of God and, since the soul has as its end knowledge of God and existence with him, knowledge of the soul as well. Depending upon one's station in life, one should also have some knowledge of particular human

affairs, but this type of knowledge, if it is sought as an end, if it is regarded as an ultimate and not a lesser good, can lead to “superfluous vanity or harmful curiosity” (*Trinity*, XIV.i). Augustine goes so far as to claim that the pursuit of knowledge rather than wisdom is the cause of the Fall:

The Fall of man is the result of the “lower reason” throwing off the control of the “higher,” and devoting itself to the pursuit of the material and temporal. Man seeks to be his own master, to have private possession instead of his share in the universal good; and through preferring the knowledge which “puffs up” to the love of wisdom, sinks below the level of the rational. (*Trinity*, XII,i)

Those who seek the lower knowledge, then, not only are misdirected away from the highest things but also become less than human since they have sunk “below the level of the rational.” Hence Rex is not “a complete human being at all” and hence the elder Ryder prefers the irrational animals at the zoo to human friends (73).

Augustine treats the distinction between wisdom and knowledge not only in the abstractly philosophical *On the Trinity* but also in the more personal *Confessions*. He considers his education and laments that he knew more about the wanderings of Aeneas and the death of Dido than he did about his own wandering from God and his own spiritual dying (I.xiii). But reading Cicero’s lost defense of philosophy, the *Hortensius*, at the age of twenty opened his eyes to a new type of knowledge so that “every vain hope became empty to me, and I longed for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible ardour in my heart” (III.iv). Later, the books of the Platonists will have a similar appeal to him. After his conversion, knowing of the fruits produced by

the desire for wisdom, he condemns that desire which seeks knowledge only of human things: "there exists in the soul ... a cupidity which does not take delight in carnal pleasures but in perceptions acquired through the flesh. It is a vain inquisitiveness dignified with the title of knowledge and science" (X.xxxv).

Rex and Mr. Ryder are not alone in pursuing *scientia*, the lesser knowledge of temporal objects; other unattractive characters, such as Samgrass and Collins, do so as well. Samgrass, the Oxford don who becomes an unwelcome presence in Sebastian's and Charles's lives after he testifies on the former's behalf following his arrest for drunken driving, possesses great knowledge, literary skill, and a passion for history. Yet these admirable traits do not come to any worthwhile fruition, indeed are the instruments of his corruption, as he confuses these means for an end and is content with his lower knowledge. Though he is an antiquarian and a scholar of great repute, he does not seek or find any signification in his studies, anything that points to a higher wisdom, and so he approaches the past by mining for facts. As a result, he is divorced from the real, his mind and the world around him cordoned off from each other:

[H]e claimed to love the past, but I always felt that he thought all the splendid company, living or dead, with whom he associated, slightly absurd; it was Mr. Samgrass who was real, the rest were an insubstantial pageant. He was the Victorian tourist, solid and patronizing, for whose amusement these foreign things were paraded. (110)

Because he divorces knowledge from being, he chooses not to participate in action. While the rest of the Christmas party goes fox hunting, he merely watches the “deliciously archaic spectacle” (124). When the ladies attend benediction in the chapel, he, who knows all about Catholic theologians and the machinations of the Vatican, joins them, but only to watch, not to pray (110).

Inactivity and abstraction result from Samgrass’s pursuit of *scientia*, and that pursuit itself, like Rex’s and the elder Ryder’s incompleteness, stems from an improper love, from the privileging of *cupiditas* over *caritas*. Samgrass’s lack of charity is most obviously seen in the little care he has for Sebastian, for whom he has been employed by Lady Marchmain as a tutor and chaperon. Worried about Sebastian, she restricts the availability of alcoholic drinks at Brideshead, measures to which Samgrass objects, “as they tend to compromise the comfort of our own little visit” (160). Later, he more explicitly defends his selfishness: “But it is less Sebastian’s welfare than our own I have at heart at the moment. I need my third glass of port; I need that hospitable tray in the library” (160). Most objectionable is Samgrass’s use of Sebastian and subsequent deceiving of his family so that the scholar can tour Greek monasteries and Near Eastern archaeological digs. He is to lead Sebastian through the Levant, a tour which Lady Marchmain hopes will relieve Sebastian’s sadness and keep him from drink. Samgrass takes little interest in Sebastian’s welfare, however, and when the young lord escapes from him, the scholar continues on with his pleasant tour, untroubled by the dangerous circumstances his charge has fallen into.

The budding art scholar Collins (as with Samgrass, we never learn his first name) never displays such callousness, but this minor character is marked by the same sort of desiccated scholarship. He is the central figure among the college intellectuals with whom Charles associated before meeting Sebastian. Since he is not fleshed out, he does not represent so clearly as does Samgrass the seeking after the wrong sort of knowledge, but there are hints that he, too, chooses *scientia* over *sapientia*. He is an “embryo don” who argues about modern aesthetics and later becomes a known art historian. Something about the quality of his knowledge and his taste, however, rings false. Commenting on Sebastian, he uses Freudian terms “to cover everything” (29) pertaining to the complicated lord, an act of intellectual presumption that, at least in the context of this novel, reveals too simplistic an understanding of the soul. Moreover, his tastes are faulty<sup>12</sup>: on first visiting Ravenna, the site of some of the best early Christian art, “Collins made notes for a little thesis pointing out the inferiority of the original mosaics to their photographs” (44).<sup>13</sup> Collins does no great evil and no great evil is done to him, but the novel leaves the impression that there is something wrong with his narrow-minded scholarship—we are left with the image of him “alone with his texts working by the failing light. . . .” (145).

Charles Ryder himself, though he is aware of these scholars’ limitations, before his spiritual maturation also opts solely for knowledge of worldly things. Though he has blossomed under the influence of the Flytes, Ryder uses Lady Marchmain’s remonstrance (she learns that Charles gave Sebastian money for drink and upbraids him) as an excuse to break with her and reject her religion. He

embraces a materialist ethos: “‘I have left behind illusion’ I said to myself. ‘Henceforth I live in a world of three dimensions—with the aid of my five senses.’” (169). Ryder will learn that *scientia* is not sufficient, that there is a need for *sapientia* as well, and the mature Ryder looking back on his youthful proclamation admits “that there is no such world.” For the next ten years of his life, however, he devotes himself to this materialist philosophy.

The novel’s next scene after his break with Lady Marchmain reveals how Charles’s materialism makes him mindless and uncharitable. He dines with Rex Mottram at an expensive restaurant in Paris. Mottram assails him with unhappy news about the Flytes: Lady Marchmain’s illness, Sebastian’s alcoholism, the family’s distress at Julia’s upcoming marriage to Rex. While hearing this story of human misery, Charles delights in how “the cream and hot butter mingled and overflowed separating each glaucose bead of caviar from its fellows, capping it in white and gold” (173). Upon hearing of the Flytes’ financial problems, he rejoices in the burgundy and spends half a page discoursing on its quality. He says “I closed my mind to Rex as best I could and gave myself to the food before me ...” (175). Later, in the same vein, “I tried to think only of the salad. I succumbed for a time in thinking only of the souffle” (177). Devotion to the world of the senses and to knowledge of it, as represented by the dinner, has made him callous and loveless. Explaining Augustine’s theory of knowledge, Henri Marrou in *St. Augustine and His Influence Throughout the Ages* writes that knowledge not directed to God and salvation is “so much weak curiosity, the unhappy consequences of man’s disordered desires” (73). That condemnation certainly applies to Ryder’s dwelling on his caviar

and burgundy. Moreover, his materialism retards him—he stagnates both as an artist and as a person. The world of three dimensions and five senses only offers *scientia*, a limited type of knowledge. If one only knows temporally and through sensation, the world is meaningless, chaotic, as Ryder later puts it, a wasteland.

## 3

The type of knowledge one possesses will as well affect the decisions of the will. The converse is true, too: one chooses what type of knowledge to seek. Ryder chooses to know and content himself with the things of this world, what Augustine calls “the pestilential life of easy comforts” (I.xiv). To choose lower goods over higher goods, such as choosing *scientia* over *sapientia*, is what Augustine calls aversion. As I mentioned earlier, Jeffrey Heath notes that the struggle between aversion and conversion, moving upwards towards God, is central to Waugh’s fiction. I will examine how this Augustinian theme plays itself out in *BR*, but first I will return to Augustine and explain more carefully this struggle between aversion and conversion.

There is a false popular belief that after his conversion Augustine so set his heart on God and ultimate union with him that he hated the world of creation. To do so would be heresy, however, and Augustine, a man of great passion and sensibility, never forgot that creation, since it was made by God, was attractive and good in itself:

There is beauty in lovely physical objects, as in gold and silver and all other such things. When the body touches such things, much significance attaches to the rapport of the object with the touch.

Each of the other senses has its own appropriate mode of response

to physical things. Temporal honour and the power of giving orders and of being in command have their own kind of dignity ...

The life which we live in this world has its attractiveness because of a certain measure in its beauty and its harmony with all the inferior objects that are beautiful. Human friendship is also a nest of love and gentleness because of the unity it brings about between many souls. (II.v)

Augustine is no longer a Manichee; he does not claim that the material world is evil. Yet he recognizes that there is a hierarchy of goods, and that mutable and temporal goods are lesser, that created things are below their creator. To prefer the former to the latter is the source of moral evil. Augustine continues:

Yet sin is committed for the sake of all these things and others of this kind when, in consequence of an immoderate urge towards those things which are at the bottom end of the scale of good, we abandon the higher and supreme goods, that is you, Lord God, and your truth and your law. These inferior goods have their delights, but not comparable to my God who has made them all. (II.v)

When Augustine then speaks harshly of earthly delights, it is not because they are in themselves evil, but because in their goodness they distract souls from the higher good, God.

With this philosophic insight in mind, Augustine looks back on his life and sees that he had spent his youth and early manhood delighting in the inferior goods, oblivious to all else. "My sin consisted in this, that I sought pleasure, sublimity, and



truth not in God but in his creatures, in myself and other created beings” (I.xx). Eventually, his false preference makes him miserable: a friend dies and he mourns bitterly as he is left with the knowledge of the transitoriness of all human affection and of human life. After his conversion, he does not regret that he had human affection, but he has learned that he must not let “transient things be the ground on which my soul praises you” (IV.x). The things of the world then, to the degree to which they reflect God’s glory and goodness, are to be means to conversion.

For the characters in *BR*, however, the things of the world too often are goods in themselves. Some—Rex, Samgrass, Hooper—are oblivious to the existence of anything other than the things of the world. For those who have had a Christian (specifically Roman Catholic) formation, however, aversion takes the form of spiritual flight, a condition referred to by the family name (Flyte) of Sebastian, Julia, and Lord Marchmain, characters who flee God’s providence. All three are blessed with great talents—looks, wealth, and charm—and all have known the pleasures of the life of the world—Sebastian with his friends at Oxford, that “city of aquatint”; Julia at the debutante balls of London; Lord Marchmain living the life of an expatriate milord at his Venetian palazzo. Yet the three, though aware that these goods are not the end of life, do not submit themselves to the highest good.

Though never explicitly stated, it appears that Sebastian turns to drink not because of “something chemical” as Julia claims (129), but because of great psychic pressure: he has homosexual inclinations, to act upon which would be sinful according to the doctrines of his faith and thus a rejection of God’s will; and he seems to have a vocation to the priesthood, the rejection of which would as well be a

rejection of God's will. That he is homosexual is indicated by his name: St. Sebastian, an early Roman martyr who was shot full of arrows and survived only then to be clubbed to death, has been taken as a sort of patron saint of homosexual persons since at least the Renaissance, when he was usually painted as a young man of great beauty. The outwardly homosexual Anthony Blanche alludes to this connection: "My dear, I should like to stick you full of barbed arrows like a p-p-pin cushion" (33). There is a strong homosexual element to Sebastian's friendship with Charles, who is clearly attracted by his friend's beauty: "I was lying beside him in the shade of the high elms watching the smoke from his lips drift up into the branches" (34). Cara, Lord Marchmain's mistress, notices the eroticism of their friendship—"I know of these romantic friendships of the English and Germans"—and hints that it may impede maturation: "I think they are very good if they do not go on too long" (101). In fact, from this point on Sebastian regresses, drinking heavily and engaging in homosexual relationships that are unlike his friendship with Charles. Escaping from his keeper Samgrass, he takes up with an American sailor in Athens (158), and later, while living with Anthony in Marseilles, he visits male prostitutes (203). Finally, he flees to North Africa and takes care of Kurt, an unpleasant and syphilitic German. The character of their friendship is uncertain; Bridey asks if there is "anything vicious" about it, but Charles (misleadingly?) assures him there is not.

Sebastian's homosexuality is, in the context of the novel, a type of spiritual flight as is his possible rejection of a priestly vocation. There are numerous connections between him and the priesthood. He names his teddy bear, his alter ego, after St. Aloysius Gonzaga, a sixteenth century Jesuit priest. As Charles Hutton-

Brown points out in “Sebastian as Saint: The Hagiographical Sources of Sebastian Flyte,” St. Aloysius’s parents were very similar to Sebastian’s, and both families are marked by a strange mixture of piety and worldliness. St. Aloysius, like Sebastian, suffered extreme spiritual desolation but ultimately experienced consolation (3). Other hints include his nonsensical letter to Charles in which Sebastian mentions that “now I must try to catch a fish” (44). Of course from the Gospels the Catholic Church derived the metaphor that priests win souls as fishermen catch fish. Furthermore, when telling Charles about Bridey’s frustrated desire to be a priest, he admits that it would be better if he, the younger son, became one (88). It is this possibility that may be the “difficulty” about his religion which he had spoken of to Charles (87). The perceptive Cordelia, in fact, later tells Charles that she thought but is now not sure that is Sebastian’s problem: “I used to think Sebastian had and hated (a religious vocation)—but I don’t know now” (222).

Sebastian soon grows depressed and self-destructive and seeks to escape from something, though what is never made explicit. Charles mentions that Sebastian has “a deep, interior need ... (to) escape from reality” (107). Sebastian frequently claims that he will run off abroad. His religious family and his faith especially upset him. He is always unhappiest when at Brideshead, and after a Holy Week retreat at a monastery, he returns in “a state of acute depression” (130). Escape, flight, now becomes the goal of his life as he tells Charles: “I shall go on running away” (135). Ultimately, he ends up in North Africa (near, not so coincidentally, Augustine’s hometown of Thagaste) where he ministers to Kurt. Though Sebastian may seem to be most degraded at this point, this is the beginning of his conversion. Though his

drinking and subsequent illness make him unfit for the priesthood, he now accepts priestly duties—ministering to the sick and forgotten. After Kurt's death, Sebastian in fact seeks a religious vocation but is turned down because of his drinking. Yet he has finally turned from the things of this world to the things of God and ends up as an under-porter at a monastery. In this movement from a worldly life to a religious vocation, he parallels Augustine, and Augustine's life seems a paradigm for his. The most obvious allusion to the *Confessions* in *BR* occurs when Sebastian, while talking with Charles, garbles Augustine's famous quote, "grant me chastity and continence but not yet":

"Who was it used to pray, 'Oh God, make me good, but not yet'?"

"I don't know. You, I should think."

"Why, yes, *I* do, every day." (86)

Julia also dramatically moves from aversion to conversion, and she too ultimately seeks to do the will of God and returns to the faith of her childhood. Like her brother, she is beautiful and blessed with the advantages of wealth and status. Her Catholic faith, however, makes her an unsuitable match for members of the predominantly Protestant aristocracy, and the problem of marriage becomes foremost in her mind. Though she initially finds Rex uncouth, Julia, attracted by his air of danger, power, and worldly knowledge, eventually falls in love with him, despite his utter unsuitability: he is Protestant with only a superficial interest in Catholicism, and, worse yet, he is, she will learn later, a divorcé. They cannot marry in the Catholic Church. Yet she does marry him, even though she knows it is wrong; indeed, she seems attracted to him because he is not good: "I don't know that I like nice people"

she tells her mother, justifying her romance (185). She consciously chooses what she likes, what she knows to be a lesser good, over what she knows to be the greater good and the proper choice. She chooses to reject the teachings of her faith, which we find out in the “living in sin” soliloquy she has never truly stopped believing in, because she desires what she should not. She is even willing to take the ultimate step in aversion: “Maybe I risk going to hell. Well, I’ll risk it” (197).

She and Rex are unhappy together and eventually she begins an affair with Charles. She is happy with him, and they plan to marry after their divorces come through, but all the while she senses that she has done wrong and that God is “in a conspiracy” against them (276). She knows that to marry Charles may be to reject, finally and completely, God. When Bridey mentions that he does not want his fiancée exposed to their “peculiar” arrangement, she can no longer bear the psychic pressure of the knowledge of her own sin and of her rejection of God. She knows that she has not merely out of weakness committed individual sins; she has permanently turned away from God and the good he has ordained. She recovers herself and goes about her life, but she senses that she is approaching a climacteric. When her father is dying, she goes against the advice of his doctor and the wish of Charles and calls in a priest to administer last rites. This is her moment of conversion, when she chooses to do what she believes is God’s will. Her father’s own conversion signifies to her that she cannot go back to the way of life she had been leading for the past decade. Though she knows that after a lifetime of sin she will indubitably sin again and again, Julia cannot live any longer in a state of conscious and continual sin. She must reject Charles to turn further towards God. In language that is frankly Augustinian, she tells

him that she cannot “set up a rival good to God’s” (340). That she chooses God’s good is apparent in the Prologue, when Charles learns from Nanny Hawkins that Julia has joined her sister in Palestine in military service. Presumably, they are nurses (Cordelia had served as a nurse in the Spanish Civil War), and so are engaged in corporal acts of mercy in, quite symbolically, the Holy Land.

The absentee patriarch of the Flyte family, Lord Marchmain, is another who lives amidst worldly luxuries while fleeing from the higher good of God’s purpose, yet his motive appears different: he is in a state of aversion because he is attracted to a moral good, freedom, that he privileges above all else. Life in England had not been bad to him: he was rich and admired, blessed with a family and high social status, and yet after serving in the first world war, he did not return home. Ostensibly, he did not return because he had found a charming mistress, Cara, and preferred the sunlight and splendor of Venice to the dankness of England. He never evinces, however, any affection for this mistress, nor does he enjoy the social scene of Venice as he has made himself an outcast.

He is not moved by earthly pleasures but rather by hate. Charles first learns this from Cara: “You would think him so calm and English—the milord, rather blasé, all passion dead, wishing to be comfortable and not to be worried, following the sun, with me to look after that one thing that no man can do for himself. My friend, he is a volcano of hate” (102). Most obviously he hates his wife and does what he can to make her unhappy. To spite her, he approves of Rex’s request that he and Julia marry in a Protestant church. Lady Marchmain, however, has done him no injustice. When young, he had made an idol of her—“[s]he ... has been loved in the wrong way,”

notes the perceptive Cara (103)—an idolatry that is a type of aversion but nothing for which she can be blamed. After Lord Marchmain deserts his family, he hates her all the more because her piety reminds him of his own fault: he had made a moral good, freedom, one that should serve the process of conversion, the ascent to the highest good, into the highest good itself. He admits that he abandoned his wife to serve this good: “I committed a crime in the name of freedom” (334). He goes on to explain to Cordelia why he left: “They said we were fighting for freedom, I had my own victory. Was it a crime?” His religious daughter responds, “I think it was, Papa” (334). Knowing his sin and yet refusing to admit it, the dying Lord turns waspish, lashing out at his family, and fears his approaching death. Yet after exhausting his energy in hate and fear, his life ends in conversion, symbolized in his making the sign of the cross as the priest gives him the last rites of the Church.

## 4

Sebastian, Julia, and Lord Marchmain did not re-embrace their faith in the perfect isolation of intellectual detachment and while living, pleasant, untroubled lives. Rather, after anxiety, deprivation, and loneliness, after blow upon blow so that they were left nothing but weary and spent after their suffering, did they, seeking consolation, turn to God. The world of pain that Waugh depicts would, at first glance at least, not encourage anyone to believe in and seek out this world’s creator.<sup>14</sup> These characters, however, have come to understand that God has not ordained suffering for them because he is inspired by the malice and caprice of a pagan deity, but that God uses suffering, much of which they have brought on themselves through their own sinfulness, to call them to their beatitude, union with him.

St. Augustine well understood this secret and severe mercy as he had seen this action of God in his own life and had read of it in the lives of the psalmist and the prophets. Augustine was well-suited to respond to the perennial question of how a good God could permit human suffering since he could draw upon the topics of human freedom and original sin, theological doctrines that he had done much to clarify, to fashion a reply. In part interpreting the story of Genesis, he argues in book XII of the *Confessions* that God out of love had endowed man with a free will, that man had used it to sin against God, and that, as a result, suffering, disorder, and death had entered the world. In Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, the Logos became incarnate to suffer, die, and rise again so that men may be saved from the full effects of sin. God, who in his love wants to draw all souls to him, is just as well as merciful. Sin leads to suffering, but suffering teaches men to aspire to the highest things and to take solace and rest only in God and not the lesser things of creation. Man is not an angel possessed with pure intellect; predominantly his knowledge is acquired experientially, and the experience of suffering teaches man about himself and God.

In the first paragraph of the *Confessions* Augustine pronounces upon the relation between human suffering and God: “our heart is restless until it rests in you” (I.i). For Augustine, this is the great key to human happiness, and to prove his claim he writes his narrative, rather than a dialogue or a philosophical treatise, since he has learned this truth primarily through his own experiences, through his restlessness and suffering. He has discovered that behind all the seemingly senseless misery God has been directing Augustine’s life and using this misery to bring Augustine to love God and be happy. Unhappiness is the means to bring men to love: “if I fail to love you,



you are angry with me and threaten me with vast miseries” (I.v). Augustine makes it clear, however, that God is not cruel or unjust in his use of punishments; it is all done out of love—God is “mercifully punishing” him (II.ii). Even in describing perhaps his greatest suffering, his agony in the garden in Milan as he attempts to put his sinful self behind him, Augustine attributes his pain to God’s mercy: “You, Lord, put pressure on me in my hidden depths with a severe mercy ...” (VIII.xi).

As part of this severe mercy, God does not allow those who seek to flee him to remain in peace but pursues them and brings them back to him. Augustine finds that “there is no place where one can entirely escape from you” (II.vi). The image that Augustine presents of the sinner rejecting God is that of the runaway (III.iii), another Prodigal Son, and the runaway finds that there is no place where he can “fly for refuge” (IV.ix). Since man is God’s creation and was created out of love, out of love God will not abandon him:

Where have those who fled from your face gone? Where can they get beyond the reach of your discovery? But they have fled that they should not see you, though you see them, and so in their blindness they stumble over you; for you do not desert anything you have made. (V.ii)

The image of a God continually seeking his people is the central action in *BR* as well as in the *Confessions*, and in the novel severe mercy is again necessary to the fulfillment of God’s plan.

Book II of *BR* is entitled “A Twitch Upon The Thread,” a phrase first voiced by Cordelia when dining with Charles and talking about her family’s religion:

“Anyhow, the family haven’t been very constant, have they? There’s [father] gone and Sebastian gone and Julia gone. But God won’t let them go for long, you know. I wonder if you remember the story Mummy read us the evening Sebastian first got drunk—I mean the *bad* evening. Father Brown said something like ‘I caught him’ (the thief) ‘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.’” (220)

As a Catholic of orthodox belief, Waugh does not intend this image of a twitch upon the thread to imply that God denies man freedom of the will. Rather, the metaphor proclaims God’s loving providence and the futility of the runaway’s attempt to escape God. Exploring the image further, however, we must remember that for the runaway at the end of the thread the twitch must initially be painful though there is peace when the thread again rests in the hands of its holder.

Most obviously, Sebastian represents the run-away who through his sufferings is “twitched” back and finally finds peace in God. He claims that he wants to “go abroad” (112), “to be let alone” (127), and promises that he “shall go on running away” (135). Yet divinely ordained suffering leads him back to God, beginning at the nightclub where he gets drunk, the Old 100<sup>th</sup>. The establishment, of course, shares the same name as the melody to which a popular hymn by Isaac Watts is sung:

His Sovereign power, without our aid,  
 Made us of clay, and formed us men;  
 And when like wandering sheep we strayed,

He brought us to His fold again.

Julia later asks about the Old 100<sup>th</sup>, “Is it heaven?” (122), and in a way it is: Sebastian’s stint in jail, the punishment meted out by his college, his subsequent despair—all these incidents are part of a chain beginning at the ironically-named club that brings the wandering sheep Sebastian back to the fold. More sufferings follow after he leaves England—physical illness, continued heavy drinking, Kurt’s suicide in a Nazi prison. Yet, as the perceptive Cordelia explains to Charles, Sebastian finally grows very holy, inspired by suffering, “the spring of love” (309).<sup>15</sup>

Sebastian, however, is not the only runaway in need of severe mercy. Julia, because of moral problems, and Charles, because of his non-religious upbringing, also flee God and meet with sufferings that ultimately effect their conversion. She is disregarded by her loveless and philandering husband and gives birth to a stillborn child; he is cuckolded by his wife,<sup>16</sup> loses his artistic inspiration and his family, and ends up “homeless, childless, middle-aged, loveless” (350). They finally take consolation in each other, something that Julia sees as “part of a plan” (259), but while their adulterous union may be used by God for his purposes, events press them to end not in sin but in fidelity. In rebellion against this plan of God, they hold on to each other with a desperate resolution as they feel that “all mankind, and God, too were in a conspiracy against us” (276). Their romance becomes increasingly a thing of anxiety and conflict, an instrument of the severe and secret mercy, as Julia is beset by religious qualms and Charles senses the avalanche pressing against his arctic hut (310). With their break-up, they suffer even more, and the avalanche comes “down,

the hillside swept bare behind it” (341), but now their suffering culminates in conversion.

## 5

Why do Charles, Sebastian, and Julia come to believe that the movement of their lives and particularly their sufferings are part of God’s loving providence? Why not regard the circumstances of their lives as merely random or the effects of discernible material causes? They do not do so but come to praise God because through the power of memory they see patterns in their lives that reveal God’s saving action. It should be noted that in *BR* memory is not regarded simply as recall but as a complex faculty that recalls, sifts, orders, understands, and guides. It is both intellectual, as it analyzes the data of the senses, imaginative, as it discerns analogies and correspondences between sense data and immaterial truths, and moral, as the knowledge retrieved by memory then directs action. It is a faculty that serves *sapientia*, not *scientia*, as it seeks to know of the higher things. It is not satisfied with mere knowledge of particulars but synthesizes them so as to construct a narrative that will provide insight.

Augustine, Christianizing the Platonic tradition, also offers an account of memory in the *Confessions*, one from which, it seems quite likely, Waugh draws. Indeed, the whole of book ten of the *Confessions* is an inquiry into memory, and the whole work itself is produced by an act of memory. Memory calls Augustine back to his prior life so that “it became sweet for me, Lord, to confess to you by what inward goads you tamed me” (IX.iv). Memory, then, is the means of confession, or praise, which is the central act of man, and so memory is prized. Through memory he knows

what a sinner he was, “how vile [he] was, how twisted and filthy, covered in sores and ulcers” (VIII.vii), and how great then was God’s mercy that lifted him from his misery.

Augustine writes of man’s capacity for memory grandiloquently and with reverence and awe. Memory is a place of “vast palaces” which hoard “the treasures of innumerable images” (X.viii). Its power is “great, very great .... Who has plumbed its bottom?” (X.viii). Augustine so praises this faculty because it permits him to transcend the limited information provided by the senses and ascend to God. From its storehouse hosts of images may be gathered, the “hand of the heart” chasing away those that distract the seeker from the valued images, which are the steps up the spiritual ascent.<sup>17</sup> These images derive both from the senses and from thought and learning. The ideas possessed by the mind are not mere images of a sense impression but realities (X.x), and one such idea that we possess is that of the happy life. Augustine then ponders how he could possess the knowledge of the happy life since we have not lived it. He proclaims that the authentic happy life consists in taking joy in the truth, God, and that therefore if we have in our memory knowledge of the happy life, which is God, God must then dwell in memory:

But where in my consciousness, Lord, do you dwell? Where in it do you make your home? What resting-place have you made for yourself? What kind of sanctuary have you built for yourself? You conferred this honour on my memory that you should dwell in it.

(X.xxv)

The novelist Waugh does not develop as systematic and intricate a theory of memory as did the philosopher Augustine, but his understanding of memory is essentially Augustinian as he too exalts memory as the faculty which enables man to both understand himself and ascend to God. Indeed, *BR*'s subtitle is "The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder," and its protagonist Ryder's first person narrative is not just a story of his past but a story in which his memory, by examining his past, comes to understand the truths of God's loving providence so that Ryder is brought to conversion. Frederick Beaty in *The Ironic World of Evelyn Waugh* also asserts that religious insight is arrived at through the examination of the past: "[b]y resurrecting and restoring such episodes [of his past] in the larger context of his life, [Ryder] turns chaotic events into a parable of human salvation" (149). Even before this introspective and religious turn, Ryder had valued the past and studied it. He contrasts his education with that of Hooper:

The history they taught him had had few battles in it but, instead, a profusion of detail about humane legislation and recent industrial change. Gallipoli, Balaclava, Quebec, Lepanto, Bannockburn, Roncevaux, and Marathon—these, and the Battle in the West where Arthur fell, and a hundred such names whose trumpet-notes, even now in my sere and lawless state, called to me irresistibly across the intervening years with all the clarity and strength of boyhood, sounded in vain to Hooper. (9)

Ryder's history speaks of courage, glory, and tragedy, Hooper's nothing but statistics and parliamentary wrangles. At Oxford Ryder had further pursued his interest,

reading for the School of History (26). This knowledge of the past developed in him a strong critical sensibility, which aided him as a painter and permitted him to discern the cultural decay of his time. It is not until he explores his own past and delves into his memory, however, that Ryder matures spiritually and becomes more than a Samgrass with good taste.

Early on the novel hints at the great good that memory will offer when, during their Edenic day together, Sebastian tells Charles that he would like to bury “a crock of gold” on the knoll where they are eating strawberries and drinking wine: “I should like to bury something precious in every place where I’ve been happy and then, when I was old and ugly and miserable, I could come back and dig it up and remember” (24). Memory does become a crock of gold for Ryder. The book begins with him considering: “I paused and looked back” (3). He is looking back at the army camp at which he has been stationed for three months, a place where he has known nothing but frustration and purposelessness. He calls to mind how unhappy he has been in the army. And yet this reflective act, though it is initially a return to thoughts of unhappiness, is his entrance into the reflective mode, the mode of memory, which will ultimately bring him happiness. He considers his present desolation and how he has been brought to it, and then, after encamping at Brideshead, he remembers the previous decades, sifting through the clutter of the years to focus on his two great loves, Sebastian and Julia.

Book II, “A Twitch Upon The Thread,” begins with a long reflection on memory from the narrator Ryder, one that in its metaphor of memories as pigeons, as distinct and willful and omnipresent beings, is similar to Augustine’s image of

memories as impertinent, active, and speaking creatures: “Some memories pour out to crowd the mind and, when one is searching and asking for something quite different, leap forward into the centre as if saying ‘Surely we are what you want?’” (X.viii). Indeed, the whole of Ryder’s passage mirrors Augustine’s thought on the nature of memory, and as the passage is so central to the novel (and to my thesis), I will quote it in full:

My theme is memory, that winged host that soared about me one grey morning of war-time.

These memories, which are my life—for we possess nothing certainly except the past—were always with me. Like the pigeons of St. Mark’s, they were everywhere, under my feet, singly, in pairs, in little honey-voiced congregations, nodding, strutting, winking, rolling the tender feathers of their necks, perching sometimes, if I stood still, on my shoulder or pecking a broken biscuit from between my lips; until, suddenly, the noon gun boomed and in a moment, with a flutter and sweep of wings, the pavement was bare and the whole sky above dark with a tumult of fowl. Thus it was that morning.

These memories are the memorials and pledges of the vital hours of a lifetime. These hours of afflatus in the human spirit, the springs of art, are, in their mystery, akin to the epochs of history, when a race which for centuries has lived content, unknown, behind its own frontiers, digging, eating, sleeping, begetting, doing what



was requisite for survival and nothing else, will, for a generation or two, stupefy the world; commit all manner of crimes, perhaps; follow the wildest chimeras, go down in the end in agony, but leave behind a record of new heights scaled and new rewards won for all mankind; the vision fades, the soul sickens, and the routine of survival starts again.

The human soul enjoys these rare, classic periods, but, apart from them, we are seldom single or unique; we keep company in this world with a hoard of abstractions and reflections and counterfeits of ourselves—the sensual man, the economic man, the man of reason, the beast, the machine and the sleep-walker, and heaven knows what besides, all in our own image, indistinguishable from ourselves to the outward eye. We get borne along, out of sight in the press, unresisting, till we get the chance to drop behind unnoticed, or to dodge down a side street, pause, breathe freely and take our bearings, or to push ahead, outdistance our shadows, lead them a dance, so that when at length they catch up with us, they look at one another askance, knowing we have a secret we shall never share. (225-6)

Ryder states that not only is his narrative a remembrance but that his very “theme is memory”: *Brideshead Revisited* is a reflection on the faculty of memory, its nature and what it is capable of. More so than Lord Marchmain’s deathbed penitence, it is memory that persuades Ryder to accept ultimately the Catholic faith and take solace

in it (something I will explain in more detail in the final section). Ryder claims that his memories are at the center of his existence, that they constitute his life. These memories, like the pigeons of St. Mark's, are both active and omnipresent, which means that whatever the flux of the present dictates, his memories are still shaping his life.

Ryder depicts memory as a "winged host" and thus associates it with a dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit. Memories are also the "hours of afflatus in the human spirit, the springs of art ..."—that is, memory begets inspiration and imagination. As associated with both the Holy Spirit and the imagination, memory is then the key to transcendence. Although men are rarely fully human, usually content to live as "counterfeits of ourselves," they are capable of moments of transcendence, moments of higher insight and heroic achievement, but only if they, even momentarily, escape the abstraction and stupor of quotidian existence ("drop behind unnoticed ... dodge down a side street"), which means only if they turn inward and reflect, entering into their memories.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CONVERSIONS OF AUGUSTINE AND CHARLES RYDER

Charles Ryder does not merely think his memories. He verbalizes them, shapes them, puts them on paper, so that we have this memoir. Memory is given expression through a creative act which is itself a means to spiritual growth: the book of memories is part of Charles Ryder's conversion. To explain how his conversion is only completed through the verbalization of his memories, through his narration, I will examine the structure of *BR* and show that Ryder undergoes a series of conversions. But before examining Ryder's conversion, I will first return to St. Augustine and his conversion to show how, once again, Waugh is drawing from Augustinian thought and patterning his book on the *Confessions*.

In the *Confessions* St. Augustine undergoes not a single conversion—not only the famous scene in the garden in Milan, the “*tolle lege*,” “take it and read”—but a series of conversions, in fact three distinct ones.<sup>18</sup> His first was the conversion of his intellect after reading the neo-Platonists. There were numerous reasons why Augustine was unhappy as a young man—including the inevitable disturbances of youth, certain aspects of his native temperament, and problems with his rearing—but all this was compounded by philosophical difficulties, most particularly with the question of evil: “a problem remained to trouble me ... I had no clear and explicit grasp of the cause of evil” (VII.iii). To resolve this difficulty he turned to the Manichees and their dualistic notion of evil as pure material substance, but his experiences with them and his exasperation with their teachings only left him more

vexed. Finally, he arrived at some intellectual surety when “[b]y the Platonic books I was admonished to return into myself” (VII.x). Though they did not know of Christ and had no concept of personal sin and Christian charity, the neo-Platonists, by revealing the existence of immaterial being and by pointing to evil not as material substance but as the deprivation of good, provided the means for Augustine to overcome dualism, reject Manicheism, and accept Christianity on an intellectual level.<sup>19</sup>

Augustine, however, though he no longer cared for his secular ambitions and desired to enjoy God, felt constrained by his attraction to women: “I was still firmly tied by woman” (VIII.i). Stories of men who had accepted chastity and poverty for the love of God excited his admiration, but he still felt unable to accept that calling—“Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet” (VIII.vii)—and because of his anxiety he did not enter the Church. While retelling the story of this anxious period, Augustine reflects on the “morbid condition of his mind” and discerns that there was a division within his will so that his lower inclinations did not allow his higher aspirations to reach the way of truth he desired. Despairing, he thought himself forever doomed to this state of psychic warfare until he felt inspired to read Sacred Scripture after hearing a child repeat “[p]ick up and read, pick up and read.” He opened to Paul’s letter to the Romans and on reading “make no provision for the flesh in its lusts” felt assured that he could live chastely. This assurance signified a conversion of the will as he no longer felt divided and now knew himself fully capable of serving and enjoying the Lord.

At the end of book eight Augustine had reached a climactic and seemingly his conversion was ended. So that his conversion from pagan rhetorician to Christian *praedicator* may be complete, however, Augustine must experience a third conversion, what may be called a conversion of the lips and the pen, of rhetoric. He is not immediately ready for his new role, so he needs time for this verbal conversion to be complete, just as he needed time for his intellect and will to accept Christ completely. Despite his turning to God, Augustine still has worldly ties, and in order to prepare himself for his role he must extricate himself from them. The worst of these is his post as "a salesman of words in the markets of rhetoric" (IX.ii). Two illnesses, chest pains and a severe toothache, both of which take away his power to speak, afflict him in the period immediately after his acceptance of Christianity. They are fortunate illnesses, however—the first forces him to quit his hated profession so that he may join with friends to establish a communal, Christian way of life, and both serve as purgations, as parts of his body symbolically diseased by the misuse of his rhetorical skills, by his misspeaking, afflict him but only so that he may be purified and speak again as a Christian. His rhetorical gifts sanctified, he now turns away from his own life and focuses on God's plan of salvation for others so that he may further praise the divine love. He ends book nine with the story of his mother Monica's life, which is no mere interpolation but the most fitting subject of discourse for Augustine as a Christian *praedicator* since her holiness testifies to God. He now fully enters into the service of God through the employment of his rhetorical gifts.

Augustine reveals by these different stages of conversion that conversion is a continual process, that the soul must repeatedly turn to God, since "our heart is

restless until it rests in you” (I.i). *BR* shares with the *Confessions* this understanding of conversion, and indeed Charles Ryder undergoes three distinct conversions which closely parallel those of Augustine. John W. Mahan notes in “Charles Ryder’s Catholicism” that Ryder visits Brideshead three times, first as Sebastian’s friend, then as Julia’s lover, then as an army captain who is a Roman Catholic convert (7), and I argue that these three visits structure the novel and correspond directly to the three stages in Ryder’s conversion.

Thorny philosophical issues do not bewilder Ryder and make him miserable, and he never reads and finds resolution in the books of the Platonists, but Ryder does, while under the influence of the Flytes, experience a distinct change in the way he views the world that mirrors Augustine’s intellectual conversion. Ryder calls it his “conversion to the Baroque” (82), what might be called a conversion of the worldview. Prior to his entanglement with Sebastian, Ryder had known little joy and gaiety, growing up with a widowed and unpleasantly eccentric father and subdued by the “hard bachelordom of English adolescence” (44). This childhood well prepared him for the stolid company of Collins and the college intellectuals. Moreover, he had had no real religious education: “The view implicit in my education was that the basic narrative of Christianity had long been exposed as a myth ...” (85). Of course, Ryder’s artistic awakening does not immediately counter his agnosticism and convince him of the validity of the Catholic faith—far from it. But it does lift from him a gray veil of frustrated aspirations and polite despair, introduce him to his vocation as artist, and provide him with an enthusiasm and vitality that had previously been deficient: “I felt a whole new system of nerves alive within me, as though the

water that spurted and bubbled among [the fountain at Brideshead's] stones was indeed a life-giving spring" (82). Just as the Baroque is a liberation from the formality and rigidity of classicism, so too Ryder's conversion is a liberation from the colorless and dry world of his father and his former friends. Moreover, Baroque sensibilities developed out of the counter-Reformation, and so Ryder's artistic awakening introduces him to a way of thinking and feeling that is at least not antithetical to Catholicism and that ultimately prepares him for further conversion. As did neo-Platonism for Augustine, the Baroque—dynamic, sensual, expansive—for Ryder provides him with an understanding of the goodness of the created, material world.

The second set of conversions parallel even more closely, both in tone and type. Ryder, like Augustine, experiences a conversion of the will. After Lord Marchmain's deathbed repentance,<sup>20</sup> he both rejects his former adultery, agreeing to end his affair with Julia, and accepts the faith. At the start of this drama, when the dying Lord Marchmain returns to Brideshead after his years in Venice, Ryder had firmly set himself against the wish of Bridey and Cordelia that their father receive a priest before dying. Yet his hostility to Catholicism—"superstition and trickery" (324), "witchcraft and hypocrisy" (325), "mumbo-jumbo" (327)—conceals a growing anxiety. He mentions feeling a thread hanging over him and Julia (327), an allusion to "A Twitch Upon the Thread," the title of Book II and the dominant metaphor of the novel for God's grace. Julia sees through her lover's mask: "You don't convince anyone else and you don't really convince yourself ... Oh Charles, don't rant. I shall begin to think you're getting doubts yourself" (330). When Fr. Mackey finally

administers last rites, Ryder evinces stronger signs of a divided will. He has opposed the priest's presence, but at the beginning of the rite he kneels and prays, and when Lord Marchmain moves his hand to his forehead, he fears that the dying man is rejecting the sacrament: "'Oh God,' I prayed, 'don't let him do that'" (338). Lord Marchmain, however, is only making the sign of the cross, a sign that means to Ryder what the "*tolle lege*" and Paul's epistle had meant to Augustine. That he so quickly accepts the faith is evidenced by his generosity to Fr. Mackey (339) and his admission to Julia that, despite his sorrow at the end of their affair, he knows they must part because their adultery separates them from God: "I do understand" (341). Both Augustine and Ryder had resisted the presence and pressure of God, but they accept God and resolve the division of their wills upon a special sign. The avalanche that Ryder had felt building (310) at last comes down (341), a metaphor similar to Augustine's: "a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart" (VIII.xii).

Before examining his third conversion, it is worth examining Ryder's state at this point, both emotional and spiritual. After witnessing Lord Marchmain's conversion, Ryder is received into the Roman Catholic Church. John Osborne points out various evidence of Ryder's Catholicism in "Hints of Charles Ryder's Conversion in *Brideshead Revisited*": Hooper, telling Ryder of a mass at the chapel at Brideshead, says it is "[m]ore in your line than mine" (17); Ryder also indicates that he has spent time in the company of priests—"he looked at me with the expression I have since seen in the religious" (85) (Osborne 4-5). Most obviously, the novel ends with Ryder saying a prayer—"an ancient, newly learned form of words" (350) in the chapel. It is odd, though, that after this conversion Ryder is so without solace and



hope, and it is then puzzling that in the epilogue after his severe acedia, he is described as looking “unusually cheerful.” Donald Greene, for one, cannot make sense of this inconsistency. He asks in “Charles Ryder’s Conversion?” whether we are “to believe that a formal conversion to Roman Catholicism, his having become ‘a mature Catholic,’ has left him still imprisoned in that dungeon, hopeless, loveless?” (6). Greene goes on to write that Ryder’s “new despair ... seems to me to damage the book not only as a work of art but as a document of serious theological interest” (7).

To respond to Greene’s objection, it is necessary to examine Ryder’s sudden joy after prolonged sadness. It occurs when he walks back to the camp after praying in the chapel. He reflects on how the age of Hooper is a new Babylonian exile (“*Quomodo sedet sola civitas*”) and how the works of Brideshead’s builders are “all brought to nothing.” And yet all their strivings have not been in vain and neither have his: “Something quite remote from anything the builders intended has come out of their work, and out of the fierce little human tragedy in which I played” (351). That something is “a small red flame,” the lamp in the sanctuary where the tabernacle is kept, which is alight once again after having been snuffed out when the chapel had been closed after Lady Marchmain’s requiem mass. On its extinction Cordelia had commented that it seemed “as though from now on it was always to be Good Friday” (220), and indeed the movement of the whole novel had seemed to be toward the desolation and sadness evoked by that day. The relighting of the sanctuary lamp then counters that somber movement even to the degree that the novel ends with something like Easter joy: if an unlit lamp represents the sorrow of the Cross, a lit one represents the triumph of the Resurrection.

Ryder participates in this triumph through his joy, but he only comes to that joy by reflecting on his “fierce little human tragedy” and how God’s providence worked through it so that something unexpected from a human perspective, Ryder’s coming to faith, comes to be. That reflection itself constitutes “The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder.” Only through his memories, through the story of his life, does he experience a third and final conversion, a conversion that lifts him from his great gloom. Laura Mooneyham makes a similar observation in “The Triple Conversions in *Brideshead Revisited*”: Charles comes to a “fuller, more deeply felt and more deeply thought out assumption of grace ... as a direct result of telling his story” (226).<sup>21</sup> He becomes “unusually cheerful” because of his narrative, because he tells a story that praises God for his providence in the life of Ryder and in the lives of those Ryder loves. The frustrated artist only achieves happiness when he creates an artwork, this novel, which is in the service of God. He experiences even after his formal conversion a third conversion, one that closely parallels Augustine’s conversion of the pen and lips. His conversion is not complete until his pen is converted to the service of God, until, like Augustine, he becomes a Christian *rhetor*. That occurs in the very composition of this memoir. Turning into his memory, he calls to mind the events of his life and sees that they are not chaotic but rather are governed by a God calling Ryder to him. By giving words to these memories and fashioning a story out of them, he is praising God, the central act of confession.

## CONCLUSION

Though his experiences and something within his temperament and intellect may have already prodded him in such a direction, Evelyn Waugh's reading of St. Augustine had a marked influence on Waugh's whole manner of thought, and *Brideshead Revisited* reveals frequently that acquaintance. The novel reflects how Waugh, looking to Augustine's own response to his age and his troubles, found a way to respond to what he saw as the collapse of the Modern Age, and how he saw that certain Augustinian insights were applicable to the lives of men and women of all times. Furthermore, Augustine's understanding of the continuous nature of conversion finds expression in the very shape of the novel, even to the point that the protagonist Charles Ryder's distinct stages of conversion mirror Augustine's own. It follows then that *BR*, like Augustine's work, may be classified generically as a *confessio*, a profession of faith and praise, and that Waugh, through the narrative of his protagonist Ryder, shares the same purpose as Augustine. To clarify further that purpose, let me quote from Raymond DiLorenzo's "Divine Eloquence and the Spiritual World of the Praedicator: Book XIII of St. Augustine's *Confessions*":

If the *Confessions* appear somewhat disjointed as Augustine's so-called autobiography, is not the reason that we fix our attention too much upon what Augustine tells us of his life—life as we superficially understand it—though he repeatedly says that his life (*vita*) is God, and God speaking so as to recall him from the erratic wandering of his soul in darkness to the formed, illuminated life of

a spiritually mature man who, in his turn, speaks divine mysteries to other men? (76)

Waugh, though unlikely (to put it mildly) to be beatified and not always saintly in his private life, is also attempting in *BR* to speak divine mysteries to men.

I have given the novel a heavily theological reading but only because it warrants it. Waugh himself wrote to his agent that “[t]he whole thing is steeped in theology ...” (*Letters* 183). Is Edmund Wilson’s complaint then just, that *BR* is merely a tract? Certainly the novel’s greatest admirers have been, for the most part, Roman Catholics, and the centrality of Catholicism can be off-putting to non-Catholic readers (and even quite a few Catholic ones). In particular, Lord Marchmain’s crossing himself may seem contrived. Yet many non-Catholic readers have loved it, and I do not think they do so only because of its sumptuous language and romantic nostalgia. I suspect it is well thought of still by many<sup>22</sup> because it well recognizes something fundamental within our souls, our vanity and longing. Waugh accounts vanity a sin, many others account it only a vice, but, whatever the classification, *BR* brings to light as few works do (Joyce’s *Dubliners* is another) the frequent futility of our most impressive gestures and actions and the foolishness of our complacency and self-regard. The novel as well knows how easily surfeited we are by our pleasures, how wearied by worldliness, and how we long for joys less transient so that we, like the young Ryder, seek a “low door in the wall” that opens onto “an enclosed and enchanted garden ...” (31). These insights about the human heart, while they coincide with religious values and are particularly pronounced in Augustinian Catholicism, do not depend upon the doctrines of any sect.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Waugh's enthusiasm for the novel waned as he grew older, as he explained in the preface to the 1960 edition: "I am less happy about its form (rather than its content—tracing the operation of divine grace), whose more glaring defects may be blamed on the circumstances in which it was written ... the book is infused with a kind of gluttony, for food and wine, for the splendours of the recent past, and for rhetorical and ornamental language, which now with a full stomach I find distasteful" ("Preface" 270-1).

<sup>2</sup> This popularity distressed Waugh, or so he claimed. In a letter to Mamie Lygon he mentions that "My book has been a great success in the United States which is upsetting because I thought it in good taste before and now I know it can't be (Hastings 512). Similarly, he wrote Robert Henriques in 1946 that "I was pleased with it at the time but I have been greatly shaken by its popularity in the U.S.A." (*Letters* 222).

<sup>3</sup> Waugh was not interested in their offer, as the studio executives wanted to re-write *BR* so as to emphasize its love story and de-emphasize its religious theme. The trip was not a failure, however, since a visit to Los Angeles's fantastical and neo-pagan Forest Lawn cemetery inspired *Whispering Glades*, the setting for *The Loved One*.

<sup>4</sup> Though, as both Jeffrey Heath in *The Picturesque Prison* and George McCartney in *Confused Roaring* ably point out, watching over the anarchy and immorality depicted in Waugh's earlier satires is a stern and religious authorial presence.

<sup>5</sup> Nor do I know what translation(s) Waugh read. I traveled to the Humanities Research Center of the Ransom Library at the University of Texas at Austin to see if I could find in their Evelyn Waugh collection—they bought the whole of Waugh's library and papers from his family a few years after the novelist's death—a copy of the *Confessions*. I found only a 1960 edition, F.J. Sheed's translation that was originally published in 1944. Obviously Waugh read the *Confessions* before his late fifties. I then wrote Auberon Waugh, a prominent English journalist and Waugh's eldest son, to ask if he knew of another copy of the *Confessions* that his father possessed, but I received no reply. All citations in this essay are from Henry Chadwick's translation (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Waugh's hostility to democracy at times came out of a whimsically archaic Toryism (on his not voting: "I do not aspire to advise my sovereign on her choice of servants" [Johnson 312]), and, what is less appealing, at times from a curmudgeonly desire to shock (e.g., his half-serious and later retracted support for Mussolini and Franco). Still, in this ludicrous example of bureaucracy, he shows that he has arrived at a similar understanding as have some of the better conservative thinkers, such as Alexis de Tocqueville and the contemporary historian John Lukacs (whose history of twentieth century America, *Outgrowing Democracy*, examines this problem), that the greatest danger posed by democratic regimes is not mobocracy and untempered egalitarianism, but rather bureaucracy with its concomitant evils conformity, social atomism, and moral and intellectual torpor.

<sup>7</sup> McCartney notes that when the parson tries to console Tony Last after his son's death, Tony remarks that "after all the last thing one wants to talk about at a time like this is religion" (*Confused Roaring* 15). Charles Ryder's father, another Victorian throwback, also regards religion as a social nicety, or at least as a tool in the service of worldly pursuits: "Until August 1914 his father had been accustomed to read family prayers every morning; on the outbreak of war he abruptly stopped the practice, explaining, when asked, that there was nothing left to pray for" ("Charles Ryder's Schooldays" 312).

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Spender, for one, argues in "The World of Evelyn Waugh" that the novel's emphasis on the misery of the world is overdone and accuses Waugh of showing that God only reveals Himself through

depriving others of happiness. Furthermore, he finds that there is an anti-marriage theme. He is right insofar as the novel does end with one marriage (Bridey's) that produces no offspring. Sean O'Faolain is another who in "Huxley and Waugh: or I Do Not Think, Therefore I Am" claims that Waugh makes religion seem miserable. As one who, through this study, has had to live closely with the novel and its suspicion that all worldliness is a trap to the unwary soul, I must say that there is some justice to Spendor's critique. Yet it also cannot be denied that Waugh possesses a certain ruthless courage to portray through his art the implications of a not easily palatable truth that he has learned through his faith, or, maybe more accurately, that has led him to his faith.

<sup>9</sup> McCartney quotes from a passage in Waugh's travel book *Labels* that I feel I too must quote, despite its length, both because it shows well how Waugh saw how modern disorder could, in McCartney's words, "unsettle secular assumptions to salutary effect" and because the excerpt is perfectly constructed and delightfully worded:

"looping the loop" develops in the mind clearly articulated intellectual doubts of all preconceived habits of mind about matter and movement ... In "looping," the aeroplane shoots steeply upwards until the sensation becomes unendurable and one knows that in another moment it will turn completely over. One looks down into an unfathomable abyss of sky, while over one's head a great umbrella of fields and houses have suddenly opened. Then one shuts one's eyes. My companion on this occasion was a large-hearted and reckless man: he was President of the Union, logical, matter-of-fact in disposition, inclined towards beer and Ye Olde Merrie Englande, with a marked suspicion and hostility towards modern invention. He had come with me in order to assure himself that it was really all nonsense about things heavier than air being able to fly. He sat behind me throughout, scarcely spoke, and two days later, without a word to anyone, he was received into the Roman Church. It is interesting to note that, during this aeroplane's brief visit to Oxford, three cases of conversion occurred in precisely similar circumstances. I will not say that this aeronaut was directly employed by Campion House, but certainly, when a little later, he came down in flames, the Jesuits lost a good ally, and to some people it seemed as if the Protestant God had asserted supremacy in a fine Old Testament manner. (5)

<sup>10</sup> To marry Scholastic realism with a more modern phenomenological approach, we might say that evil is the absence of being but that absence is itself a presence.

<sup>11</sup> Rex Mottram's spiritual nihilism, his purely earthly existence, is reinforced by his name: mottramite is a mineral compound of copper and zinc. That Rex is limited by his materialism is shown when he and his cronies discuss the international situation (293). They claim that Germany cannot make war since it does not have the necessary mineral reserves. Rex and the politicians cannot account for will and belief, for non-material causes.

<sup>12</sup> Waugh's own tastes were highly refined and carefully considered in part because, as Jeffrey Heath points out, he "believed that good taste was the force which could vanquish the bogus and that it was rooted in a recognition of God's reasonable design for the universe. Good taste, he was convinced, was the special insight which came from the exercise of 'right reason'—man's reason assisted by grace" (*Picturesque Prison* 35).

<sup>13</sup> I suspect that this sentence was intended to carry an even heavier note of irony that is now lost on readers. *Gardner's Art Through the Ages* mentions that the artworks of Ravenna "miraculously" escaped destruction during the city's bombing in World War II (265). Waugh, writing in 1944, likely assumed that they had been destroyed. Collins's photographs then would have been all that remained.

<sup>14</sup> In “Fan-Fare” Waugh quotes a letter from an American—“Your *Brideshead Revisited* is a strange way to show that Catholicism is an answer to anything. Seems more like the kiss of death to me”—and replies to his objection with one of his weaker witticisms: “I can only say: I am sorry Mr. McClose, I did my best. I am not quite clear what you mean by the ‘kiss of death’ but I am sure it is gruesome. Is it something to do with halitosis?” (304).

<sup>15</sup> From a letter to his agent, A.D. Peters: “I hoped the last conversation with Cordelia gave the theological clue” (*Letters* 183).

<sup>16</sup> The novel hints that Ryder is not the father of Celia’s second child, Caroline. The daughter is born while Ryder is in Latin America, and Celia had had an affair before he left (257). Moreover, Charles is completely disinterested in the girl—“There was also a daughter now, she remarked, and it came back to me that there had been talk of this before I started” (229)—and refers to Caroline when talking to Celia as “your new baby” (230). Later, he regrets that he has forfeited the right to watch his son mature but mentions no daughter (350). That Celia names the girl after Charles seems an attempted concealment of her bastardy.

<sup>17</sup> Without the hand of the heart, that capacity for reflection and discernment, the mind is overwhelmed, as Eliot knew, by “a heap of broken images.”

<sup>18</sup> For this understanding of three distinct conversions, I draw largely from a thesis propounded by Dr. Raymond DiLorenzo in a class on Augustine’s *Confessions* at the University of Dallas (11/13/96).

<sup>19</sup> Later, Simplicianus tells Augustine that “in all the Platonic books God and his Word keep slipping in” (VIII,ii).

<sup>20</sup> As most critics note, this scene is modelled on the death-bed conversion of Hubert Duggan in 1943, witnessed by Waugh and described by him in letters to his wife Laura and to Msgr. Ronald Knox (*Letters* 172, 206). Yet this death-bed conversion also corresponds to an incident in the *Confessions*. An unnamed youthful friend, who shared Augustine’s allegiance to “superstitious and pernicious mythologies,” was baptized while unconscious with a fever. On the friend’s restoration to consciousness Augustine joked with him about his baptism but the friend was grateful for the sacrament and horrified by Augustine’s mockery. The fever soon returned and the friend died (IV, iv).

<sup>21</sup> Although the title of Mooneyham’s fine essay would seem to indicate that her final thesis and mine coincide, they do not; we differ on a number of points. We both see three conversions occurring in the novel, but we point to different conversions: she points to Ryder’s conversion after Lord Marchmain’s death, and then secondly a “process of retrospection [that leads to] a deeper and more ordered reconversion.” The third conversion she argues for is the reader’s own conversion occasioned by reading the double conversion of the story. She leaves out, in addition to any Augustinian parallels, the conversion of Ryder’s worldview which, as with Augustine’s intellectual conversion, is so crucial to the later acceptance of faith, and which, besides, is the chief good from his time with Sebastian. I think it necessary to discern the process of conversion throughout the novel so as to see its structural unity and so that Ryder’s final coming to faith does not seem tacked on and forced as some argue, notably Valerie Kennedy in “Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*: Paradise Lost or Paradise Gained?”. Mooneyham also regards the conversion after Lord Marchmain’s death as misdirected whereas I regard it as properly directed, though not the end of Ryder’s conversion.

<sup>22</sup> This year a panel assembled by The Modern Library rated it as the 80<sup>th</sup> best novel of the twentieth century, a highly arbitrary claim to be sure, but evidence of some continuing regard among all sorts of readers.

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