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**Unhappy Endings: Queer Time in
Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead*
*Revisited***



Honors Thesis

Caitlin Grace Spicer

Department: English

Advisor: David J. Fine, Ph.D.

April 2024

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Abstract

This thesis examines Evelyn Waugh's 1945 Catholic novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, through the lens of queer theory. My work focuses on reproductive heteronormativity and queer time and how these concepts can be used to analyze Waugh's text. I argue that Charles and Sebastian, among other characters, step out of the traditional—or heterosexual—timeline in a way that queers temporality. I examine Sebastian, Charles, and Julia to understand how their lonely yet holy lives contribute to a larger tradition of unhappy endings in queer and Catholic fiction. In this thesis, I define reproductive heteronormativity as the assumption that people will follow a heterosexual and reproductive lifestyle. This lifestyle is often associated with the common timeline of finding a job, dating someone of the opposite sex, getting engaged and then married, having children, buying a house, and retiring happily. Following theorists like Jack Halberstam, Sara Ahmed, and Hil Malatino, I define queer time as the failure to replicate the timeline of reproductive heteronormativity. I utilize Ahmed's definition of happiness, in particular, to revalue Sebastian's sad story in Waugh's queer and Catholic novel. Ultimately, my thesis aims to bridge the gap between queerness and Catholicism, creating a space for inclusion and the opportunity to celebrate the unhappy ending.

Disclaimer

In this thesis I will be dealing with multiple factors of identity including queer identities. I am utilizing historical considerations and character analysis in order to discuss queer, or potentially queer, identities. It is important to acknowledge that, with this work, I am still making assumptions. I cannot know the identities of characters or historical figures, like Evelyn Waugh, because they have not explicitly stated their identities. Additionally, as philosopher Judith Butler might point out, there is a danger to labelling because, as it provides a way to understand something, it can also place limits on what that label represents. Therefore, I will be using a more general label of queer to describe characters and authors if they did not label themselves.

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Introduction

A story should start with the beginning...right? In the case of *Brideshead Revisited* written by Evelyn Waugh, this story starts at the end. In the prologue of the novel, the reader is introduced to Charles Ryder, a member of the British army who has a complicated past with a place called the Brideshead Estate and the family members that inhabited it. From there, readers are pulled through time, encountering obstacles of divorce, addiction, and fertility. Utilizing queer theory and the rich historical background of gender and sexuality, I examine the work of Evelyn Waugh. With this background, I explore the ways that the salient identities of characters, the pressures of reproductive heteronormativity, and the stepping outside of time function to queer temporality. Lastly, I call upon prominent queer theorists to assist in the understanding of queering time and the complexities of happiness. I argue that Charles and Sebastian, among other characters in *Brideshead Revisited*, step out of the traditional, linear—that is to say, straight—timeline, to queer temporality.

Historical and Conceptual Background

Evelyn Waugh was an English author (1903-1966), who primarily wrote during times of war. He focused on themes of religion—Catholicism specifically—complicated family dynamics, addiction, and sexuality, all of which emerge in his arguably most famous novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, originally published in 1945. *Brideshead Revisited* is a novel set during World War I and World War II that follows a man named Charles Ryder through his life at the University of Oxford until middle age as a member of the British Army during World War II. The novel explores his discovery of self, sexuality, and religion through interactions with the Flyte family. Sebastian Flyte, one of the sons of this

family, has a strong influence over Charles, introducing him to his family and subsequently opening his eyes to beauty and providing him with a connection to Catholicism. The novel follows the demise of Charles' relationship, or romantic friendship, with Sebastian and introduces the romantic influence of Sebastian's sister, Julia, to Charles' life. The reader last encounters Charles loveless after multiple failed relationships that, arguably, lead him to a life of celibate faith.

Waugh's writing is influenced by the historically and socially complex climate of late 19th and early 20th century England, a time ravaged by war, characterized by Protestant and Catholic tension, and shaped by the illegality of queer identity. *Brideshead Revisited* utilizes war as a frame for the novel itself. The novel begins with a prologue, which shows Charles as a middle-aged man fighting during World War II. He arrives at a new post, which turns out to be the home of Sebastian and Julia. From that moment, he takes the reader back through time to unravel all of his connections to the Flyte family. At the conclusion of the novel, the reader once again returns to Charles, during war, and lonely. World War II, in particular, serves as an isolator for Charles, reinforcing his lonely life; in a way, opens and closes his chapters of life with Sebastian and the Flyte family. Notably, Sebastian and Charles were too young to have fought in WWI, making them feel left out in not being able to serve their country. Thus, for Charles, fighting in WWII fails to fulfill his hopeful illusion, leaving him empty and hopeless.

Evelyn Waugh is one of many authors to write about the troubles of war, utilizing the trauma of being in the army to fuel his writing. In this regard, he sits among the ranks of great wartime authors such as Tim O'Brien. Waugh, in addition to writing about war, tackles more controversial topics such as Catholicism and queerness in straight,

Protestant England. In fact, Waugh is one of many in a line of queer Catholic converts, and he sits among the ranks of Oscar Wilde, Ronald Firbank, and Radclyffe Hall, three influential queer and eventually Catholic writers from the 19th and 20th centuries. All four writers were queer in their own respect and converted to Catholicism during their lifetime and those identities are reflected in their work. Wilde and Hall were also subject to obscenity trials: Wilde for his behavior and Hall for the “explicit” writing within *The Well of Loneliness*. These trials set a precedent for the difficulties and scrutiny queer writers would face in the future.

A primary historical consideration at that time was the illegality of queerness. In the 20th century when this novel was written and published, being queer was illegal. Queer was used to describe someone considered to be not normal or a person who did not conform to accepted ways of expressing desire and gender. In addition, the term queer can apply to things outside of the norm (Sedgwick 199-200). Queer was used as a slur during the 20th century but has been reclaimed by the queer community. For anyone who was queer or was suspected to be, they were subject to intense societal disapproval or even societal abuse and ridicule. Being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community and engaging in same-sex acts was relatively invisible, not fully understood, and against the law. A modern-day understanding of queer provides an umbrella term for people who do not conform to the heterosexual expectations of sexual and gender expression. The identities held under the modern-day umbrella of queer include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, and more. Although this is the modern understanding of queer, these identities were not understood during the 20th century and all of them

remained practically invisible or undefined apart from the identity of a gay man, a man attracted to other men.

This behavior and its history have been studied by scholars including authors Celia Marshik and Allison Pease. In the chapter titled “Sexuality,” from the book *Modernism, Sex, and Gender*, they explore the definition and history of sexuality. While doing so, they establish the adverse attitudes of society towards LGBTQIA+ identifying people during the 20th century, saying, “Whether in continental Europe, Great Britain, or North America, those who engaged in same-sex sexual relations could not help but be aware of widespread social disapprobation of such behavior and the labels that might or might not attach to them as a result” (Marshik and Pease 77). By participating in any type of non-heterosexual behavior, people became targets for criticism and moral disapproval from society.

The history of sexuality is necessary to contextualize *Brideshead Revisited* and the climate it exists in. As a matter of fact, queer can apply to Catholicism since Catholicism was outside of the norm in Protestant England. Waugh is one of many converts to Catholicism, including Radclyffe Hall. Jack Halberstam, in the chapter “A Writer of Misfits,” writes of the life of John Radclyffe Hall through an understanding of the prevalence of female masculinity, particularly in the 20th century. There were many changes in the understanding of sexuality, mainly, that sexuality was something connected to medical diagnoses and that sexual acts became part of identity rather than simply acts (Halberstam 75). At this time, sexuality began to be connected to identity and the system of binary became prevalent not allowing for as much fluidity of identity. Halberstam also recognizes the ability Hall had to explore gender and gender expression

through her class and social standing (Halberstam 94), reinforcing the fact that being able to experiment with identity and gender was an opportunity only afforded to a lucky few.

Patrick O'Malley in "Epistemology of the Cloister" investigates the connections between Catholicism and queerness including the idea of belief versus practice. In England, Catholicism is associated with actions such as prayer and sacraments and beliefs such as those in saints and miracles. In this way, with queerness and Catholicism, O'Malley questions whether belief or practice is greater proof of identity. In regard to the greater importance of belief or practice, O'Malley writes of, "The question, that is, is whether Catholicism is a matter of belief, or of acts, or of formal initiation. Does it come into being through its public acknowledgment or is it a function of subjectivity—or heart—itself?" (O'Malley 535). This is similar to an understanding of queerness; is a person queer because of beliefs, practice, or both? Additionally, O'Malley urges for others to utilize queer theory and its practices to understand religion (O'Malley 536). This is significant to queer lives and, by extension, the novel, because it connects to the question of identity in the novels and how queerness is defined and explored.

Reproductive heteronormativity is an idea that emerges in the discussion of family life. Through a modern lens, reproductive heteronormativity is the assumption that people will follow a reproductive and heterosexual lifestyle. The idea acknowledges and begins to criticize the timeline that is engrained in society of marrying someone of the opposite sex, having biological children, and buying a house. The idea itself leaves space for people to either follow or subvert this timeline while through its nature enforces the reproductive and heterosexual lifestyle and the pressure to follow one. This prescribed timeline is also in some cases extremely Catholic, and it is one that influences and places

pressure on characters in *Brideshead Revisited*. Each of the children, and specifically Sebastian and Julia, are pressured to conform to a reproductive heteronormative lifestyle and face disapproval from others and disappointment in themselves when they do not live up to this ideal. Both of these characters challenge the ideal of reproductive heteronormativity through their existence and lifestyle in the novel.

In opposition to reproductive heteronormativity, queer time emerges. In *a Queer Time & Place*, Jack Halberstam argues that “there is such a thing as ‘queer time’ and ‘queer space.’ Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” (Halberstam 1). Queer time steps outside of the “norm” and moves away from the prescribed scripts of society. It is not linear and is different for every person as they queer temporality. The concept of queer time is closely knit together with transgender identities and the expectation of happiness. In *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook: The Radical Potential of Getting in the Way*, Sara Ahmed draws upon Hil Malatino who “stresses that ‘transition won’t deliver you into some promised land of gendered bliss’” (Ahmed 205). Transition points to the way that conforming to reproductive heteronormativity will not immediately produce happiness.

While an understanding of the concepts of queerness, reproductive heteronormativity, and queer time are essential to my argument and analysis, it is important to acknowledge the historical context of the queer unhappy ending. Simply put, novels that were published while being queer was illegal had to end unhappily in order to be published. According to feminist and queer theorist Sara Ahmed, if a story had a queer character, there was no freedom for that character to have a happy ending. Ahmed states

that “Queer fiction in this period could not give happiness to its characters *as* queers; such a gift would be readable as making queers appear ‘good’: as the ‘promotion’ of the social value of queer lives, or an attempt to influence readers to become queer” (88). The possibility of happy queer art was seen as promotion of a queer lifestyle, and therefore queer stories needed to operate within unhappy endings for their characters. Sebastian is no exception to this rule as he is a character who does not follow a heterosexual lifestyle; he has no shortage of unhappy moments, and he does not end up in a happy relationship. The characters of *Brideshead Revisited* in a modern-day reading can benefit from a more well-rounded analysis and understanding by utilizing the concepts of queerness and reproductive heteronormativity.

Intervention

In my own interpretation of *Brideshead Revisited*, I argue for a queer and Catholic understanding of the novel. I take on some of the sentiments of Tison Pugh in that the labels of heterosexual or homosexual are not encompassing enough for the identities presented. It is important to consider that Pugh, among other scholars, separates queerness and Catholicism, while I argue that they exist fully and alongside each other in the novel and a focus on time makes this evident. This is also relevant considering the legacy of queer Catholic converts and their contributions to literary history. It is also unfair to assume identities of characters without consideration of historical context and the limiting aspects of labeling sexuality, especially so almost eight decades after the work was published. I therefore argue that, with an examination of queer temporalities and reproductive heteronormativity, the intersection of queerness and Catholicism becomes more apparent and striking.

In addition, this approach opens up the door to include queer theorists and authors such as Jack Halberstam, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Hil Malatino, and Sara Ahmed who examine queer timelines and what it means to be queer. I take on the sentiment of Ahmed with my focus on the unhappy queer ending, building off of her argument while incorporating a religious perspective. I intervene into this scholarly conversation by focusing on temporalities in an analysis of a queer and Catholic story, bringing forward the fact that Sebastian, among other characters, queers Catholic temporality. Although, *Brideshead Revisited* is not a novel that explores transgender identities, transness and the ideas from Hil Malatino aide in the understanding of time. Malatino in “Future Fatigue” engages with transgender identities and their relations to time. He writes, “Being out of time, trans connecting to time “the all-too-common experience of lag—a form of being out of temporal sync, left behind—” (Malatino 639), highlighting the necessity of exploring trans identities in the history of sexuality along with Halberstam. Along with this idea brings the connection to time and how trans identities, along with other queer identities, have a unique relationship to time, in that they lay outside of heteronormative or linear time.

Literature Review

Brideshead Revisited was Waugh’s definitive step into Catholic literature. Critics were shocked at Waugh’s move into Catholicism and away from the satirical writing of his previous work. This literature review will examine the ways critics have reacted to *Brideshead Revisited* and the critical conversation surrounding the novel. The secondary criticism I examine focuses on queerness, Catholicism, decadence, love, or combinations of those themes.

There are multiple critics who approach the novel from a queer lens or decided that *Brideshead Revisited* was a queer novel. Within this group, I place Ross Brooks and Tison Pugh. Ross Brooks wrote an article titled “Beyond Brideshead: The Male Homoerotics of 1930s Oxford,” where he discusses the history of queerness at Oxford University. This history influenced Waugh and likely shaped the characters of the novel. Rather than critiquing the novel, the article provides historical context while also diving into a possible connection between St. Sebastian and Sebastian Flyte as queer martyrs. Tison Pugh in his article “Romantic Friendship, Homosexuality, and Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*” takes the approach that labeling as homosexual or heterosexual is too connected to the binary and that Sebastian and Charles’ relationship is a romantic friendship rather than being explicitly gay. In this article, he also references two opposing scholars: David Leon Higdon who interpreted the novel as queer and David Bittner who says that the novel was not meant to be queer. Pugh takes a position between these two by acknowledging the historical context of how common same-sex romantic friendships were during school and especially in same-sex schools. In addition, he emphasizes the fact that practices do not equal identity. This meant that if a person practiced homosexual behaviors that did not mean that they were homosexual or would identify as such. That is an important concept to consider when examining *Brideshead Revisited*.

A sub-theme of the queer understandings of the novel is love. Love is another theme in the interpretation of *Brideshead Revisited* that is connected to queerness and sexuality. Douglas Lane Patey focuses on love in “Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*.” This article contextualizes Waugh’s writing rather than making a distinct argument but brings to light the common aspect of Waugh’s work is that there is love in

everything. It also discusses how love is at the source of the writing of Waugh. Patey also observes the shift in Waugh's work moving from more of political commentary to a religious commentary.

Critics also took a Catholic approach to the novel including Marcel DeCoste, Dustin Faulstick, J.V. Long, and Mark Zunac. Marcel DeCoste in "'Merely hints and symbols?' Kierkegaard and the Progressive Oracles of *Brideshead Revisited*" focuses on the importance of Charles' Catholic conversion and the importance of prophetic oracles. These oracles take shape in the forms of Anthony Blanche, Cara, and Cordelia as predictors of Charles' future. He argues that these characters bring Charles to his final destination of becoming Catholic, leaving out the romantic and queer influences of the novel. Dustin Faulstick also discusses the conversion of Charles and agrees with the position that he converts to Catholicism at the end. That article also brought in the consideration of Charles undergoing an emotional conversion in addition to a religious conversion. J.V. Long in "Edmund Wilson Had No Idea: *Brideshead Revisited* as A Catholic Tract" discusses how Waugh's work has a significant Catholic undertone from the references to Augustine's *Confessions* and using Catholicism for the sake of art. Long directly references the fact that *Brideshead Revisited* is a very Catholic novel and acknowledges the fact that it was so Catholic that a great deal of the references to religion were lost because of the sheer amount of references not all of them could be understood. Lastly, Mark Zunac takes a Catholic approach to the novel in the article, "'There Was Something Gentlemanly about Your Painting': Art and Beauty's Truth in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*." This article discusses the fact that Waugh wanted Catholicism and conversion to seem logical as readers see Charles go through the steps to reach

Catholicism, meaning that his human relationships fail, and the divine relationship is what he is led to. In addition, the majority of the characters—including Sebastian, Julia, and Cordelia—are pulled back to religion at the conclusion, foregrounding grace.

Additionally, decadence is connected to Catholicism and Alex Murray focuses on the concept of decadence in his article, “Decadence Revisited: Evelyn Waugh and the Afterlife of the 1890s.” This article discusses Waugh’s attitudes towards decadence over the years and how those attitudes changed. The article also discusses Waugh’s eventual rejection of the writings of Oscar Wilde and Ronald Firbank as he moved away from appreciating the decadence movement. Even though Waugh distanced himself from Wilde and Firbank, decadence is still a prominent feature in his novels, particularly in *Brideshead Revisited*.

Instead of taking either a queer or Catholic approach to evaluating the novel, some authors take a combined approach. Valerie Kennedy and Martin B. Lockerd view Waugh’s work from a queer and Catholic standpoint. Valerie Kennedy in “Evelyn Waugh’s ‘Brideshead Revisited’: Paradise Lost or Paradise Regained?” presents a theme of loss of youth and the connection of youth to faith. Kennedy emphasizes the power of Sebastian throughout the whole novel and the power he holds over Charles and specifically Sebastian’s overshadowing of other love. In the same vein, Martin B. Lockerd in “Decadent Arcadias, Wild(e) Conversions, and Queer Celibacies in *Brideshead Revisited*” recognizes the biases of scholars as they can either read the novel in a queer or Catholic light depending on what they want to see. The article dives into the concept of celibacy as it can be connected to queerness and religion. It emphasizes the lack of happy or “successful” marriages at the end of the novel and how that aspect of the

novel has religious and Catholic influences. I pick up on these themes in my exploration of reproductive heteronormativity.

Each of these scholars justly and thoroughly proves their argument or observation through examination of the novel and contextualizing their opinions with other theorists. It is also evident from the writings of these scholars that one work of fiction can be interpreted in multiple ways and that *Brideshead Revisited* can be seen in the light of queerness and Catholicism. The critical conversation surrounding *Brideshead Revisited* is that it is a Catholic novel that marks a shift in Waugh's beliefs and what he chooses to write about. This shift in his writing towards Catholicism is also a shift towards the queer because of the way Catholicism was outside of the norm. Scholars who interpret the novel as leaning Catholic are typically heteronormative, while scholars who interpret it as leaning queer typically dislike organized religion and Catholicism. This bias on either side has created a barrier to seeing the overlap between the Catholicism and queerness of the novel. I observe this interface and unravel the thread that ties them together to explore their connection. An understanding of the critical conversation surrounding the novel contributes to a richer understanding of the impact the writing had and continues to have.

Narrative Exploration and Analysis

I. Identities

Identity is intrinsic to a person or a character, and it is what drives narrative. The primary identities explored in *Brideshead Revisited* are connected to religion, sexuality, and gender. In the novel, many characters have overlapping identities that create conflict, breaking open the possibility for analysis on how identity shapes the novel. In *Brideshead*

Revisited, queerness and Catholicism cannot be separated, and their intersectionality shapes the novel's central themes and questions.

Before Charles has the chance to meet Sebastian and the Flyte family, his supposedly well-meaning cousin, Jasper, gives him the lay of the land and provides advice on how to succeed at the University of Oxford. One of the pieces of advice Jasper gives regards religion: particularly to avoid it at all costs. Charles was raised in a non-religious family and has no real religious connection when entering university. Jasper warns him, "Beware of the Anglo-Catholics—they're all sodomites with unpleasant accents. In fact, steer clear of all the religious groups; they do nothing but harm..." (Waugh 27). In this seemingly simple warning, Jasper is making the distinction between secular modernism and religious groups. He establishes religious groups as negative and corrupt, specifically the Anglo-Catholics by saying "they're all sodomites," using homophobic language and othering them as well. By drawing a figurative line in the sand between Charles and himself and religious others, Jasper enacts the process of othering which is an attempt to alienate a group and convince Charles that those groups are inherently "wrong." Most importantly, Jasper is making the connection between Catholicism and queerness. From the beginning of the novel, Jasper unites queerness and Catholicism in a way that intertwines them. After his conversation with Jasper, Charles soon dives into a life with the Flyte family, attaching himself to Sebastian, a man raised in Catholicism, and living in queerness.

Brideshead Revisited is steeped in Catholicism and is partly about character's exploration of their sexuality. There is no shortage of Catholic and queer moments in the novel and all of the characters are influenced by their presence. Early in the novel,

Charles describes his fascination with Sebastian, revealing the reputation of Sebastian's beauty at Oxford. Charles says, "...but it was not until Sebastian [...] that my eyes were opened. I knew Sebastian by sight long before I met him. That was unavoidable for, from his first week, he was the most conspicuous man of his year by reason of his beauty, which was arresting, and his eccentricities of behavior, which seemed to know no bounds" (Waugh 29). I argue that this encounter is Charles' first exposure to beauty, and the first instance of beauty in the novel that Charles explains his attraction to it. This moment establishes Sebastian as ethereal and not normal or traditional in comparison to other men at Oxford, and it is palpable enough that people make note of his "arresting beauty." The moment sets the stage for the blossoming of the relationship between Sebastian and Charles, and I believe that it is an indication of Charles' potential queerness. He will later come to understand Sebastian through his Catholic faith and queerness, intertwining the identities of Catholic and queer.

Charles experiences a different type of encounter with attraction when he meets Julia, Sebastian's sister, and instead of linking it to beauty, he connects Julia with sex. Charles is captivated by meeting Julia, thinking,

Because her sex was the palpable difference between the familiar and the strange, it seemed to fill the space between us, so that I felt her to be especially female, as I had felt of no woman before [...] It was the first time in my life that anyone had asked this of me, and as I took the cigarette from my lips and put it in hers, I caught a thin bat's squeak of sexuality, inaudible to any but me. (Waugh 84)

In this paragraph, it is Charles' first time meeting Julia, and he notes that the only difference between what he knows and does not is the fact that Julia is a woman. He

immediately draws the connection between Sebastian and Julia, thinking that they are not very different. This moment with Julia allows Charles to describe how he had never felt this way before and experiences a sexual awakening. Notably, both of his relationships with Sebastian and Julia set him up towards encountering religion and Catholicism. His involvement with the Flyte family has wrapped him up in the complexities of sexuality and Catholicism. Through meeting both Sebastian and Julia, Charles experiences sexual awakenings and moments of beauty that foreshadow his romantic involvement with both Sebastian and Julia.

Charles spends most of his life in the novel consumed by his relationships with Sebastian and Julia. He often describes his visions of them as fading into each other. In his mind, Sebastian and Julia are extremely similar to one another and the main thing that differentiates them is their gender. As Charles moves towards being closer to Julia and drifts away from Sebastian, he acknowledges that they are fading into each other. Charles thinks to himself,

On my side the interest was keener, for there was always the physical likeness between brother and sister, which, caught repeatedly in different poses, under different lights, each time pierced me anew; and, as Sebastian in his sharp decline seemed daily to fade and crumble, so much the more did Julia stand out clear and firm. (Waugh 205)

Charles acknowledges this “likeness” between Julia and Sebastian, attributing his attraction to Julia with her likeness to her brother. In a way, this overlap could arguably hint at Charles’ latent queerness as he alludes to his attraction to both Sebastian and Julia without explicitly mentioning it.

After Charles' relationship with Sebastian continues to develop, their relationship catches the attention of Sebastian's family members. While on a vacation in Italy visiting Sebastian's father, Lord Marchmain, and his mistress, Cara, Cara has a conversation with Charles about her thoughts and opinions about the relationship that she sees blossoming between the two of them. Cara remarks, "I think you are very fond of Sebastian" Charles answers; then, Cara continues: "I know of these romantic friendships of the English and the Germans. They are not Latin. I think they are very good if they do not go on too long" (Waugh 112-3). Cara, in this moment of the text, is one of the first authority figures to acknowledge the possible romantic aspect of the friendship between Charles and Sebastian. She deliberately points out how this relationship is based on affection and clear care for one another and in the same breath says that this type of relationship is not sustainable for a long-term relationship. This is an instance in the novel where reproductive heteronormativity and the expectation to "grow out" of queerness is shining through. Cara is supportive of the relationship by saying, "I think they are very good," in which she is validating this type of relationship and in the same breath tearing it down in emphasizing that the relationship should not be long term. It is implied through her words that, even though there are benefits to having a queer relationship in youth, it is expected that Charles and Sebastian will both settle down and marry women eventually. Queerness, and a queer relationship, at least to Cara, sees it as a stepping-stone towards a "real" relationship—or religious celibacy—for each of these boys and that the type of relationship that they have now would simply be a youthful indiscretion that would soon be long forgotten.

Family criticism runs rampant throughout the novel in regard to Sebastian. In the novel, Julia begins a relationship with a high brow, hyper-masculine, money-driven, man named Rex Mottram who sees Julia as more of a badge of achievement rather than a woman that he loves. In a conversation with the family about Sebastian, Rex brings up the possibility of sending him to a kind of medical treatment mainly for his addiction issues. The family is deeply concerned about Sebastian's drinking problem and is looking to help him. Rex is trying to contribute to the conversation and then remarks on how this medical treatment takes "sex cases" as well. Rex says, "she made it a condition that he should take the cure at Zürich. And it worked. He came back in three months a different man. And he hasn't touched a drop since, even though Sylvia walked out on him. [...] He takes sex cases, too, you know." (Waugh 190). Rex is suggesting that Sebastian should go to a type of rehabilitation program that will supposedly stop his drinking and help with his addiction. He then states that the same man who does this programming takes sex cases. This moment implies a type of conversion camp and "fixing" or "curing" of Sebastian's sexual orientation. Rex represents another way of Sebastian's family stifling his queerness, while the family itself is a living representation of Catholicism in the novel. Additionally, Rex would see Catholicism as queer because he does not appreciate or see value in religion, especially Catholicism. Once again, queerness and Catholicism continue to influence each other.

In the novel, one of the most explicitly queer characters also comes from a Catholic background. Anthony Blanche is a friend of Charles and Sebastian and attended school with Sebastian growing up. He is very explicitly queer in his attitude, dress, and the way he speaks about himself and his attraction to men. His queerness and Catholicism

have been woven together from his youth. While in university, he encounters a group of men who are essentially bullying him. Blanche counters this attack by getting in the fountain that they want him to go into. In recounting this moment to Charles, Anthony says, “Then one of them, rather a juicy little piece, accused me of unnatural vices. ‘My dear,’ I said, ‘I may be inverted but I am not insatiable. Come back when you are *alone*’” (Waugh 53). In this passage, one of his fellow students is accusing him of being attracted to men or having sex with them which is considered “unnatural” and is also illegal. In response to this accusation, Anthony labels himself as “inverted” which is a term heavily used by Radclyffe Hall. Inversion was used to describe a kind of reversal in gender identity, and that is what Anthony labels himself with. Through the novel, Anthony is the only character to label his sexuality and to label himself as inverted. He also, similar to other characters, cannot escape run-ins with religion or religious people.

In addition to Sebastian’s struggle with queerness and religion, his sister Julia encounters a struggle with the expression of her sexuality and love and how that fights against her Catholicism. Julia, like Sebastian, was raised in the Catholic church and is filled with what she deems as “feelings of guilt from the nonsense you were taught in the nursery” (Waugh 333). Julia has been, in the eyes of the Catholic church, and her older brother, Brideshead, living in sin while she is in a relationship with Charles but is still married to Rex. After hearing what Brideshead thinks of her, she begins to spiral. Her expression of her sexuality and how she chooses to live her life wars against her Catholic faith, and ultimately her faith wins. Julia, in conversation with Charles, says, “*Living in sin*, with sin, always the same, like an idiot child carefully nursed, guarded from the world. ‘Poor Julia,’ they say, ‘she can’t go out. She’s got to take care of her sin’” (Waugh

329). Her Catholic rearing from when she was a child is influencing how she is living today. She fails to separate her Catholicism and sexuality and is convinced that she is “*Living in sin.*”

In *Brideshead Revisited*, characters like Anthony, Sebastian, Charles, and Julia help Waugh tightly weave together supposedly contrasting identities like queerness and Catholicism. It may seem like these identities would not go together, but Catholicism and queerness are not able to be separated. They influence and affect each other, shaping the trajectory of the novel and the questions it raises. Through their interaction, Waugh questions the prevalence of salient identities and how human beings determine what is most important to them in life. For some characters, they end up alone, without love, without faith, and some end with faith, but without human love. Waugh calls into question the importance of bodily relationships on Earth in comparison to faith in heaven. Through the novel, he aims to show the stepping-stone nature of all loving relationships leading to faith, including queer relationships, and these cannot be separated.

II. Reproductive Heteronormativity

Throughout the text, there are traces of reproductive heteronormativity that emerge. There are underlying pressures to be in a procreative relationship and a focus on marrying and having children that is at the forefront of many characters’ minds. In *Brideshead Revisited*, the characters are pressured to follow a reproductive and heteronormative life and most of them fail to live up to this expectation. I argue that this failure matters because the introduction of reproductive heteronormativity’s influence in the novel is where the queerness of Catholicism emerges.

In one of her heated conversations with Charles, Julia begins to breach the concept of a timeline and the need to follow it, whether it be a Catholic, heterosexual, or combined timeline. Living in sin is Julia's way of acknowledging the Catholic timeline of relationships that is connected to the ideal of the heterosexual timeline of relationships. Neither of those timelines would involve having an affair and planning a divorce, let alone two—Charles and his wife Celia, and Julia and Rex—divorces. Julia and Charles are disrupting both of these timelines, and at the conclusion of the argument between Julia and Charles, it becomes too much for Julia to bear. Julia's Catholicism heavily influences her sexuality and the effects of that radiate out, affecting Charles as well.

Additionally, from the moment that Charles met Julia, she is searching for a husband to fulfill the expectations placed upon her by society and her family. She has an exact idea of someone she would want to marry, someone suitable for what she needs, and Charles remarks, "she was in search of him when she met me at the railway station" (Waugh 210). With this outlook on life, she has been conditioned by society, her mother, and her religion to follow an expected "script," a concept that Mari Ruti discusses in *The Ethics of Opting Out*. Ruti makes the case that there are scripts in life that are supposed to lead to a happy ending, which are deeply engrained in society so that people follow them, but there are bound to be problems. She states, "Our commitment to dominant happiness scripts can be so strong that when a given script does not deliver what it promises, when it makes us unhappy rather than happy, we do not think of questioning the script (say, the marriage script) itself but instead assume that somehow we have failed to live out the script correctly" (Ruti 18). This process is similar to what happens to Julia, and, through an application of Ruti's theory, one can begin to acknowledge the ways that Julia

immediately turns the blame back to herself instead of calling into question the marriage script she has followed even if it has not been a traditional script. Ruti exposes the power of societal scripts and how they can become motivating factors for people and, evidently, characters. The identities of characters are what push them to follow the societal and religious scripts, reasserting the fact that religion and identities cannot be separated.

In the case of Julia, even though she is trying to find her own way to happiness amidst familial disapproval, religious turmoil, and messy divorces, she is focused on having a child. During the conversation about living in sin with Charles, she tells him, “All I can hope to do is to put my life in some sort of order in a human way, before all human order comes to an end. That’s why I want to marry you. I should like to have a child. That’s one thing I can do” (Waugh 333). Through this conversation, Julia is assigning her worth to having a child and making it clear that having a child or being a mother is “one thing she can do.” She reduces herself to what her body can do and create rather than who she is. Additionally, she seems to be seeking stability in the form of marrying Charles and having a child. She is turning towards a pre-approved script passed down by Catholicism and heterosexual history. Get married and have a child, as that is what a woman is “supposed to do.” This moment pushes the heterosexual and Catholic timeline forward. Julia is focused on marriage and continuing the lineage of whoever she marries, something very heterosexual and in some cases, including her case, Catholic. Ultimately, when she decides not to marry Charles or have children with him, the reproductive and heterosexual timeline fails. Julia fails to live up to these expectations, revealing the queerness of her chosen Catholic and faith-filled life. By choosing the importance of her faith over her relationship with Charles, she cuts off another chance to

follow the reproductive and heteronormative timeline, but she instead follows the fruitful, but barren, path of Catholic faith.

The marriage between Julia and Rex also exposes the underlying motivators of reproductive heteronormativity, particularly through Rex. He views women as property and as a means to an end of continuing his lineage. Rex describes seeing Julia as on the market, having a very transactional view of marriage and relationships. In a conversation between Charles and Rex, Rex reveals his attitudes towards women and Julia:

He wanted a woman; he wanted the best on the market, and he wanted her at his own price; that was what it amounted to [...] All right, Julia can go to church whenever she wants to. I shan't try and stop her. It doesn't mean two pins to her, as a matter of fact, but I like a girl to have religion. What's more, she can bring the children up Catholic. I'll make all the 'promises' they want (Waugh 202).

This passage connects to reproductive heteronormativity in the way that Rex wants a wife desperately and sees women more as property than as human beings. Rex, in a way, sees Julia as an object to continue his lineage rather than a person and is going so far as to say he will make promises to “get” her. This moment reinforces the male-centric and heteronormative view of marriage and view of marriage where one party is “getting” something that they desire rather than being in a marriage for the sake of union and love. As a modern man, Rex does not have the same understanding of marriage that the Catholic characters in the story do and is focused more on the monetary and status benefits that come with marriage rather than the person he is marrying.

Julia faces pressure from Rex and her background to bear children, but she cannot live up to this expectation. While Rex and Julia are married, Rex wants to have children with her. In recounting Julia's story, Charles describes the relationship saying, "by that time Rex and she were out of love, but he still wanted his child, and when at last she consented, it was born dead" (Waugh 294). This passage is significant because of its subtle reinforcement of a "purpose" of marriage or of Rex's true purpose for marriage: producing an heir. Rex is so insistent on having a child that will bear his name that, even after Julia and Rex were not in love anymore, he insists on having a child, which causes Julia irreparable harm when her child is stillborn. When she was pregnant with Rex's child, she wants to pass down her Catholic faith, acknowledging that, even though she was not connected to her religious background at the time, she had "decided to have it brought up a Catholic [...] 'That's the one thing I can give her. Then, in the end, I couldn't even give her life'" (Waugh 297). This passage spotlights the self-criticizing that Julia does in reaction to not being able to have a child. She immediately turns to her ability to not have a child rather than questioning the pressure Rex places on her to have a child. Julia, in a harsher light, is failing at the role reproductive heterosexuality has prescribed to her. Her life has been leading her up to marriage and having children, and, even in this right, she fails. She cannot carry on Rex's lineage, and she cannot pass down her Catholic religion, uniting her to her daughter.

In another way, Julia fails by not producing a male heir to Rex's modern empire. The importance of lineage is therefore emphasized because, "she was a daughter, so Rex didn't so much mind her being dead" (Waugh 297). His family name would not be passed down to a daughter, so her life is minimized. Lineage therefore becomes a commodity in

their relationship that Rex desperately wants, but Julia is unable to provide. In this way, Julia's eventual turn back to Catholicism provides her safety from the enforced values of reproductive heteronormativity in 20th-century England. This reveals the queerness of Catholicism, as a way that provides a safe haven, an option for a celibate and unmarried life, one that follows faith instead of the pressures of the marriage and reproduction. In this way, Catholicism is queered.

Julia is not the only child of the Flyte family to have ignored the pressures of reproductive heteronormativity. The eldest child, Brideshead Flyte, is a strait-laced and disciplined older brother who does not seem to be invested in romantic relationships until, out of the blue, he announces that he is engaged. Charles remembers the moment: “‘Well,’ said Bridey, sitting back in his chair and gazing fixedly at his glass. ‘You have only to wait until Monday to see it in black and white in the newspapers. I am engaged to be married. I hope you are pleased’” (Waugh 325). Once again, the heterosexual timeline is being disrupted, but by another family member. In this passage, Brideshead is telling Julia and Charles how he is engaged. He recently proposed to an older woman named Beryl who already has children of her own and Brideshead is older himself, so having children to carry on the family name is unlikely. Brideshead disrupts the prescribed heterosexual timeline by waiting until later in life to get married and by choosing someone older who already has children. His choice shifts how priorities are seen as having children of his own does not appear to be a concern. This is significant because, even though he is entering into a straight relationship, it is still queer and not conforming to reproductive heteronormativity because of when he is marrying. Through his own upcoming Catholic marriage, he has a way to avoid the reproductive and heterosexual

timeline by not having his own biological children. His timeline is therefore queered and Catholic.

Sebastian is another child of the Flyte family to disrupt the reproductive heteronormative timeline. During his friendship with Charles and after their falling out, Sebastian's addiction continues to worsen, and he moves away from his family and friends. The last we hear of him, he is living on the outskirts of a monastery, not able to fully enter into a religious life, but avoiding the pull of heterosexual and reproductive society. While Cordelia, the youngest daughter of the Flyte family, and Charles are discussing what happened to Sebastian, they say, "So that was the end of Europe for Sebastian [...] he conceived the idea of escaping to the savages. And there he was" (Waugh 353). By escaping to the monastery, Sebastian is arguably living the queerest and most Catholic life. He is still on the outskirts of religious life, but, after his companion, Kurt, passes away, he is not in a relationship either. He is queering his timeline by stepping in and out of relationships with men, while still ending up clinging to his religious ties to keep him afloat as he sinks deeper and deeper into addiction. Sebastian rejects the reproductive and heterosexual timeline in practically all ways and is offered a place of semi-security in the arms of Catholicism.

Additionally, the youngest daughter of the Flyte Family, Cordelia, ends up unmarried and working as a nurse. She also rejects the traditional and embraces the single and religious life, turning outwards to help other people. Of all the characters, Cordelia appears most likely to be very Catholic or a vowed religious person, and yet, I want to say that her timeline is still queered. In a way, even though Catholicism is pushing reproductive heteronormativity on its lay people, it provides a space for religious people

and vowed religious people to live away from others and not reproduce or marry.

Protestantism, in contrast, does not offer this kind of space, revealing another instance in which Catholicism is queered because of its ability to move outside of the reproductive and heteronormative timeline.

It is vital to consider what Sebastian, and other characters have, in a sense, given up or not fulfilled. In the article, “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,” Halberstam identifies “the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence - early adulthood – marriage – reproduction – child rearing – retirement – death” (Dinshaw et al. 182). By utilizing the term “perverse,” Halberstam highlights how often, in making the decision to not follow this prescribed narrative, people can be condemned as perverse and looked down upon. In this discussion of queer temporalities, queer time is understood to be turning away from this projected heteronormative ideal that is frankly not feasible for all. Turning away from this ideal is what many of the characters in the novel are doing which exposes the greater influence of reproductive heteronormativity in a modern understanding and how these characters are pulling away from those expectations.

At the conclusion of the novel and readers’ time with Charles, they see Charles without children that he claims as his own and without love, living out another version of a queer and Catholic lifestyle. Charles is wandering the grounds and halls of the Brideshead Estate where the Flyte family resided. He says to another officer, Hooper, “I don’t know; I never built anything, and I forfeited the right to watch my son grow up. I’m homeless, childless, middle-aged, love-less, Hooper.’ He looked to see if I was being funny, decided that I was, and laughed” (Waugh 401). Charles, at the conclusion of the

novel, is in a sense living a queer lifestyle and even a traditional Catholicly queer lifestyle of being celibate and “childless.” Hooper, the modern soldier, even refers to the chapel as being queer, tying Charles to queerness and Catholicism. He is living out a life where his relationships with Sebastian, his wife and children, and Julia, have all failed. Instead, he is invested in the army and is not connected to his children or his past romantic flames. He is also queering his timeline by moving in and out of relationships and being last shown alone.

Through analyzing the language used in discussing the trajectory of the lives of the novel’s characters, one can begin to apply a modern-day understanding of reproductive heteronormativity. All of these characters are being encouraged towards marriage and reproduction, and specifically heterosexual marriage as well, which is noted in the conversation cited earlier between Charles and Cara about his relationship with Sebastian. Even though this expectation places pressure on these characters, all of them fail to live up to the reproductive and heteronormative standard. This failure is vital to the novel as it shows the inherent queerness of Catholicism in the freedom that it offers. As the characters queer their temporalities and step outside of their encouraged timelines, they are pushed towards religious life and faith, living a queered religious life.

III. Temporalities

The novel dabbles in alternative temporalities in the way that characters experience and step outside of time. Waugh strategically sets up the novel in a way that frames the readers’ whole experience of the novel knowing that Charles ends up middle-aged, in the army, and riddled with sadness and guilt. The main portion of the narrative follows the influence of the Flyte family, then, once again, Charles is alone and in war. The entire

narrative—excluding the prologue and epilogue—is meant to be experienced as a memory, and therefore subject to fault. In *Brideshead Revisited*, I suggest that both readers and characters experience moments outside of linear time that manipulate their outlook on life and allow them to step outside of a traditional timeline. This tension at the level of the character allows the reader to see the greater manipulation of time and the influence of emotion and memory through the novel's structure.

Building off Mari Ruti's discussion of happiness scripts, the structure of the narrative leads readers to question these prescribed scripts of happiness. In the novel, many of these characters work to meet the expectations society and reproductive heteronormativity have placed on them. It is important, however, to note that the characters, specifically Julia, start to question themselves in the wake of unhappiness rather than the societal scripts they are trying to follow. For example, when Julia is unable to give birth to a child as discussed above, she appears to blame herself rather than question Rex for the pressure to conceive and give birth to a child. Even more importantly, she does not question the prescribed life scripts. Instead of wondering if the scripts themselves and the pressure to follow them are what is causing her unhappiness, she immediately places blame on herself. Through her doing this, it points the reader to question the prescribed secular happiness scripts. The readers are moved to question what will bring happiness instead of placing blame on Julia. It means that readers, with the help of the structure of the novel, are questioning the validity of what is supposed to bring happiness like marriage and children. Even though the characters are stuck in linear time, the structure of the novel and the characters' subsequent reminiscences and thoughts about their actions challenges and queers time and the secular happiness scripts.

There are moments within the novel where time seems to slow and stretch itself out. These are moments “outside of time” or “ignoring time” one might say. These are moments where time *lags*. One such experience is Charles’ first stay at Brideshead Castle during the summer. Charles reminisces on that summer,

The languor of Youth—how unique and quintessential it is! How quickly, how irrecoverably, lost! [...] I, at any rate, believed myself very near heaven, during those languid days at Brideshead [...] If it could only be like this always—always summer, always alone, the fruit always ripe and Aloysius in a good temper.

(Waugh 87-8)

In Charles and Sebastian’s time at Brideshead, Charles is recovering his lost youth and laments for the lost childhood that he did not experience until his time during university and at Brideshead. Charles and Sebastian experience a type of boyhood freedom that comes with being young, and Charles desires to hold onto this time and these moments. This relates to their feelings of happiness in youth. Additionally, Charles compares his time at Brideshead in the summer to being close to “heaven.” With this word choice, there is possibly a greater significance in Charles using the word heaven as he is not religious. He is comparing his summer with Sebastian to the religious bliss, freedom, and safety that are promised in heaven. In describing the days, Charles uses the word “languid” to capture his time there and wishes that he can stay outside of time with Sebastian and wants it always to be these days of summer. In a similar way, Sebastian is known for clinging to his youth. This is most prominently seen through his teddy bear named Aloysius. Sebastian constantly carries this bear around, names him, and talks about his feelings as well. I believe that Aloysius is a symbol for youth as the teddy bear

shares the name of Saint Aloysius, the patron saint of youth, and because of the way that Sebastian does not let his childhood, or his teddy bear, go until after his years in college. This fear of letting go is potent, because, if Cara is correct that the relationship between Charles and Sebastian is a youthful endeavor, then, by letting go of youth, Charles and Sebastian let go of each other. In these ways, both Charles and Sebastian desperately cling to the childhood they have created and attempt to stretch time.

Charles is longing to avoid the constraints of time and pressures of the outside world. These moments of avoiding the responsibilities of the real world connect to the ideas discussed in the article, “Queer Time: The Alternative to ‘Adulthood’” written by Sara Jaffe. In this article, Jaffe introduces the way that queer people often experience time differently than the straight world. Jaffe states that, “others who claim *queer* as a political identity—reject the heteronormative fantasy of adulthood. For them, conventional adulthood is not only inaccessible but undesirable. They thus develop a relationship to time itself that is decidedly queer” (Jaffe). In a way, both Sebastian and Charles are rejecting the norms of “adulthood” during this summer by reveling in the slowing of time and further succeed in their future by not having children they can call their own or be married. They are subverting the expectations of heteronormative adulthood and queering their timelines.

By setting up the novel as a traversal through memory, Waugh allows for additional moments outside of time that incorporate memory to seep into the narrative. Charles has few moments where readers see the perspective of his middle-aged self emerge onto the page, but, when it happens, it is impactful and serves as a way to show the power of emotion and memory and the influence of time. While Charles is visiting

Brideshead Sebastian's drinking worsens and it makes him question if Charles is still his friend or is tied to the family rather than him. Charles remembers, "Sebastian began to weep. 'Why do you take their side against me? I knew you would if I let you meet them Why do you spy on me?' He said more than I can bear to remember, even at twenty years' distance. At last I got him to sleep and very sadly went to bed myself" (Waugh 151). This passage is an example of alternative time. Charles is telling the reader about a moment in the past while injecting his current feelings from 20 years later—his present time—into the narrative. It is an outright manipulation of time and injection of memory and feeling that exhibit how deeply this event and the relationship with Sebastian influence Charles.

This moment also connects to queer time, because, in the description of a painful moment in time where Charles and Sebastian are arguing and Sebastian is upset at Charles, Charles pulls the reader out of time and into his present reminiscence where he omits part of the argument because of how painful that moment was. By doing so, Charles is disrupting linear time again and imposing a reflection from his older self. This disruption of linear time queers temporality in the way that Charles establishes a new timeline, one where he steps out of time to dive into memory with bringing his current self to that moment. In consideration of this moment, there is an additional aspect to it that must be considered. It is clear that this memory still troubles Charles, and it could be said to haunt him. In Hil Malatino's book, *Trans Care*, he draws a line, saying, "Haunting and love are very close, indeed" (Malatino 57). This is a blurred boundary that presents itself in the novel. Sebastian and his memory are essentially haunting Charles, but there

still seems to be affection present. The distance from the event and the influence of time allows for this type of queer haunting to occur.

In consideration of time, Julia is a character that has been worn down by the passage of time. Through her tumultuous relationships, loss of children, and shaking of faith, an encounter with Charles overtakes her with sadness. When Charles and Julia are out to sea, Charles sees Julia and thinks,

Time had wrought another change, too; [...] the years had been more than ‘the sound of lyres and flutes,’ and had saddened her. She seemed to say: ‘Look at me. I have done my share. I am beautiful. It is something quite out of the ordinary, this beauty of mine. I am made for delight. But what do *I* get out of it? Where is *my* reward?’ (Waugh 274)

This passage is significant in unpacking the presence of queer time. While Julia is not necessarily the queerest character in the novel, it is arguable that the way she experiences life is inherently queer. Julia does not have or follow a linear path in life or marriage and having children, a path typical of straight and reproductive relationships. Instead, she encounters and creates barriers including divorce, infidelity, loss of children, fertility issues, and more. Julia is worn down by the accumulation of disappointments in her relationships, which fill her with the sadness that Charles feels palpably from her.

The novel itself is marked by these relationships in Charles’ life. His ups and downs are influenced by Sebastian, Celia, Julia, his other friends, and family as he ages. When talking about Sebastian and Julia in relation to Charles, they are “forerunners,” whether it be for each other or for something greater. When talking with Julia, she says, “‘It’s frightening, [...] to think how completely you have forgotten Sebastian.’” Charles

responds, thinking of Sebastian: ““He was the forerunner.”” She says in response: ““That’s what you said in the storm. I’ve thought since, perhaps I am only a forerunner, too.”” Charles remarks—“Perhaps”—then thinks to himself: ““I had not forgotten Sebastian, He was with me daily in Julia; or rather it was Julia I had known in him, in those distant Arcadian days” (Waugh 348). In this conversation, both Sebastian and Julia are identified as types of forerunners, they are leading Charles to something else, something greater.

With Waugh’s intentions in mind, Sebastian and Julia are meant to be steppingstones to faith and a relationship with God, especially hinted at with Charles’ connection to religion in the prologue and epilogue and the argued for conversion at the conclusion of the main narrative. It is arguable that Sebastian and Julia are forerunners to a religious and queer life for Charles, a life that queers temporality. Charles lives his life without love and marriage, or children as cited above and sometimes, a part of a queer and/or Catholic timeline is living a celibate life or without marriage and children. Intentionally or unintentionally, Charles follows a queer and Catholic timeline all while stepping outside of linear time to observe and comment on his experiences, injecting his current understandings and his protection of certain parts of his past. He is queering his temporality by manipulating his presentation of his narrative, which the novel, as a whole, allows the reader to see.

Love travels and lasts differently than time. Love is meant, or supposed, to transcend time and linger longer than anything else. The relationship between Charles and Sebastian is one that is loving—in what way, readers will never know, but loving nonetheless—and that love never seems fully to fade. When Charles is with Cordelia and

hearing about how Sebastian is, Cordelia says, “‘She never loved him, you know, as we do.’ ‘*Do.*’ The word reproached me; there was no past tense in Cordelia’s verb ‘to love.’” (Waugh 354). Even though Charles is taken aback by the use of the present tense regarding his love for Sebastian, he does not deny it. Even after all of the years spent apart, Cordelia is still saying that her and Charles both actively love Sebastian, and Charles does not even question it. Having an ultimate love, a first love, one that is a forerunner, but perhaps overshadows and outlasts the other loves, is essentially queer, Catholic, and human. By being reminded of his present tense “love” of Sebastian, Charles is queering his relationship to time through his relationship with Sebastian. Through the unique structure of the novel, the reader is able to see that in the prologue—after all the events of the main narrative have happened—Charles is still emotionally affected even after all these years have passed. His emotions and experiences allow the reader to see his queered temporality and the greater emotional structure of the novel.

Through the intervention of Waugh and the structure of the novel, characters experience moments outside of time that lend themselves to queering time. Although, it can be argued that the structure of the narrative is, simply, a creative choice made by Waugh, I argue that it is a decision that emphasizes the significance of framing and time. By setting the prologue and the epilogue of the novel at the same time and having the main narrative be from the past, the novel begins with all the knowledge, feelings, and regrets that middle-aged Charles has. Through this decision, Charles steps foot outside of a linear timeline, and the readers are able to see the influence of his emotions and his memories. Charles, among other characters, begins to queer temporality.

Beyond the Page: An Application of Queer Theory

Through an emphasis on identity, the pressure of reproductive heteronormativity, and the structure of the novel, temporality is queered. The novel itself offers a unique approach to time that frames the narrative as an instance of exploring non-linear time. In fact, the reader encounters holy time, queer time, and a combination of both. I propose that Charles and Sebastian, and also Julia among other characters steps out of the traditional—or heterosexual—timeline in a way that queers temporality.

The novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, is structured in a way to allow characters to touch across time. By having the prologue and epilogue take place at the same time and the main narrative be comprised of the past, Charles, the narrator, enters the beginning of the story with all of the pain, regret, guilt, and emotion that he ends the novel with. By doing so, he lives out the theory brought to light in “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,” compiled by Elizabeth Freeman with contributing theorists. The session’s medievalist, Carolyn Dinshaw, discusses how she “focused on the possibility of touching across time, collapsing time through affective contact between marginalized people now and then” (Dinshaw et al. 178). In an application of this theory, Waugh is collapsing time through narrative structure, creating an alternate sense of chronology, one that challenges secular and straight progression. By having middle-aged Charles frame the narrative, the reader has a slanted view of the narrative before it begins because of the emotions and guilt that Charles feels about Brideshead Estate itself and the events that transpired there.

In *Time Binds*, Elizabeth Freeman identifies the connection between queerness and time. In her preface, she compares the queer time and the time of war, “whereas

queer time elongates and twists chronology, war simply forecloses it” (Freeman x). In *Brideshead Revisited*, both queer time and war time exist simultaneously, expanding and condensing time, the presence and darkness of war during the prologue and epilogue sets the stage and overshadows the queer time in the main narrative. Applying Elizabeth Freeman’s ideas adds an additional layer of consideration when reading her theory of queering as trailing behind. She writes,

I thought the point of queer was to be always ahead of actually existing social possibilities [...] Now I think the point may be to trail behind actually existing social possibilities: to be interested in the tail end of things, willing to be bathed in the fading light of whatever has been declared useless. (Freeman xiii)

Brideshead follows this idea of trailing behind, as starting at the end, has the reader and Charles, focusing on the ending.

In a way, all of the characters lavish in what “has been declared useless”: a life without children, wasting away at a monastery, or ruminating on the past. They queer their relationship to time by trailing behind, and not quite keeping up with the expectations of society or reproductive heteronormativity. Freeman states, “Queers have, it is fair to say, fabricated, confabulated, told fables, and done so fabulously—in fat and thin art, and more—in the face of great pain” (Freeman xxi-xxii), and Charles is no exception to this rule as he manipulates and speaks into existence the story of his life “in the face of [the] great pain” of losing all of his relationships, except perhaps his relationship to faith. Heather Love in *Feeling Backward* writes of the importance of examining and continuing to read these unhappy endings. She says in reference to Radclyffe Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness* and other tragic queer stories, “Despite

complaints about their toxicity, such tragic, tear-soaked accounts of same-sex desire compel readers in a way that brighter stories of liberation do not [...] they inspire” (Love 3). Love addresses the idea of progress and how there is a tendency to not want to study the unhappy endings to promote progress for queer people, but she argues that there is merit in looking at the tragedy while still wanting better for the queer community.

Mari Ruti in *The Ethics of Opting Out* and Sara Ahmed in *The Promise of Happiness* grapple with the theory of happiness. They theorize about what causes happiness or what achievements, objects, or goals are meant to provide happiness and then question them. Ahmed particularly sees the necessity of unhappy endings and realizes that unhappy endings are often more realistic, especially for queer characters in literature and in the real world. This concept and theory of happiness is also deeply connected to the promised happiness of reproductive heteronormativity, as in, if one gets married and has children, then one will be happy which is not always true, evidently seen through Sebastian, Charles, and Julia. Ruti notes that “By selling us the fantasy of eventual happiness—happiness that seems to await us just around the corner but that repeatedly eludes us—it causes us to pursue one goal after another” (Ruti 2-3). Ahmed echoes this point, writing, “The promise of happiness takes this form: if you have this or have that, or if you do this or do that, then happiness is what follows” (Ahmed 29), which can be applied to the goals enforced by reproductive heteronormativity. Ideals for what will provide happiness are engrained in society and culture and are evident in a novel that was written when the terms to describe these pressures had not yet been theorized.

These ideas and the theories of happiness can be taken from the pages of the novel and these theorists and applied to the world beyond the page. Readers can begin to

question the presence of happiness scripts and the achievements or goals that promise happiness. In that way, readers can question what promises happiness and how happiness is defined for themselves, taking a different approach to evaluating their own world. By reading *Brideshead Revisited* through the lens of queer theory and with an understanding of the pressures of reproductive heteronormativity, readers can see how temporality is queered and how one can queer their own timeline. Maybe, sometimes, the best way to start a story is with the end.

Conclusion

I hope, through this analysis and deep dive into *Brideshead Revisited*, that you can look at time a little differently. Queer identities and queer time help us to step out of linear time, to evaluate what exactly almost every human is chasing in this world. Is it happiness? Is that what we are chasing? Even if we are chasing it, Charles and the members of the Flyte family show us that in times of tragedy, of war, turbulent times—similar to what we live in today—a happy ending could be hard to come by. This is not to say do not have faith. It is to say: *have faith*. Have faith in the unhappy ending, of being free from the pressures of reproductive heteronormativity, to challenge the ideals that the world presses upon us from birth. Queer time affords us a spare minute to step outside of the linear timeline and to focus on the past, present, and the future. Charles, Sebastian, and Julia, through the narrative structure of their story, call scholars to re-evaluate what the world tells human beings will lead them to happiness. Instead, *Brideshead Revisited* invites us to make the decision for ourselves, to follow our own timeline—or God’s—if you will.

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