

LEXIS

Poetica, retorica e comunicazione nella tradizione classica

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***Brideshead Revisited* (1945) by Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966): The Benefit of an Arcadian Experience in Confronting the Human Tragedy**

For J. Hurtle, M. Aragay, S. Hampshire, E. Montforte, R. Andrés and R. Gilabert, kind colleagues, who always agree to resolve my doubts whenever I dare to enter the enchanted garden of English Literature.

ET IN ARCADIA EGO is the frontispiece of Book One of *Brideshead Revisited*, a novel written by Waugh in 1944, between February and June. He had been declared on leave shortly before the Normandy landing, and the book was published in 1945, at the end of the Second World War. The fact of having taken part in military actions in Crete and Yugoslavia made him experience personally the pain and misery of war and, above all, after so many hardships, it justifies the ostentatious luxury that permeates this story, whose background is an English family, both aristocratic and Catholic – he is a Catholic, too – in the interwar period. Book One is primarily about Captain Charles Ryder's nostalgia for a joyful past. He is on active service in the war and, therefore, the frontispiece has been unquestionably well chosen, although it demands from readers a minimal knowledge of a complex literary and artistic topic, whose accurate analysis is already available in many excellent studies¹. This article, for its part, will analyse how the topic has been used, freely and personally, in Waugh's novel, but I will begin noting a few points to keep in mind in order to more effortlessly follow my analysis.

The Latin noun phrase *Et in Arcadia ego*, "I also in Arcadia", appears for the first time as the title of a picture by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called il Guercino (1591-1666), painted in Rome between 1621 and 1623, probably at the behest of Giulio Rospigliosi, the future Pope Clement IX. The painting shows two shepherds looking at a human skull that rests on the remains of a wall on which is engraved the phrase in question, unanimously interpreted as a medieval *memento mori*, whose message is: "remember that you will die", one of the capital themes of Christian moral theology adapted to the classical pastoral world. Consequently, death, which cannot be avoided by humans, wants to make us note its presence even in blissful Arcadia. However, Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), also in Rome, painted two other versions of the same theme: the first insisting on the previous *memento mori*, whereas the second, probably painted about 1630, breaks with the moralizing version. We see this time four Arcadians – one of them a woman – who come across not a human skull but a tomb; they are looking at it calmly and read the same phrase, interpreted in this case as the epitaph chosen by the dead man to let us know that although he certainly died, he once enjoyed the pleasures others are now enjoying.

We have referred to the "blissful Arcadia" but this idea, as it is now known, comes above all from the work *Arcadia* (1504) by the Neapolitan humanist Jacopo Sannazaro (1458-1530), who tells us that Sincero, disappointed in love, leaves the

¹ Among others: Luque 2007; Jenkyns 1998, 1992, 1989; Dolç 1996; Verdi 1979; Panofsky 1936, 1955; Töns 1977; Rosenmeyer 1969; Snell 1953; Curtius 1953; Highet 1949; Blunt 1938; Weisbach 1930.

city to pursue an idyllic pastoral existence in Arcadia. However, Sannazaro's work is the result of a long process very well explained in the studies cited above, which basically starts with the *Idylls* of Theocritus, a Greek Sicilian poet (III BC), includes Virgil's *Eclogues* (I BC) and Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe* (II AC), and then continues, after Sannazaro, through many works from different times and countries. In any case, as a consequence of the shaping process of the theme, the eponymous poor mountainous region in the centre of the Peloponnese peninsula in Greece becomes a lost world of ideal beauty and happiness, inhabited by innocent and rustic shepherds, and sadly missed in difficult times. With regard to the first stages of this process, we could recall for instance ancient Rome and its constant political tensions. We find there intellectual circles like the *neóteroi* – of which Virgil was a member – that is to say, young and cultivated poets who miss the simple rustic life captured in the images of their poetry, although they renounce neither the Alexandrian refinements nor music nor life's pleasures. In this society in a constant political tension there are also those, such as the generals, who enriched themselves thanks to their military campaigns and built their suburban *uillae*, thus giving rise in Rome to the art of gardening. The aesthetics of Roman gardens is inspired by Hellenistic poetry, sculpture and painting, the latter characterized by landscapes depicting ports, promontories, lakes, mountains, rivers, trees, plants, shepherds, herds, etc. Finally, we note that the *uillae* inspired by this Hellenistic aesthetics led to the creation of a pleasant version of nature with all sorts of Mediterranean trees, plants and flowers. In short, a landscape which, with the inclusion of sanctuaries, tombs, statues of gods, heroes and telluric geniuses, recalls to us a divine Nature, a latent pantheism. These are the themes, then, along with a few additions developed below, that we should bear in mind to perceive the interpretative benefit of considering the Arcadian experience referred to by E. Waugh in *Brideshead Revisited*.

Guercino's painting – as noted above – depicts the ruthless presence of death even in the joyful, bucolic and idyllic world of those most Arcadian of humans, the shepherds. We know that biological death is an end not a beginning, but literature alters the chronological order of events and Waugh takes us, by means of recollection, from an initial scene depicting collective death to lost and coveted happiness. In effect, the Prologue to his novel introduces Charles Ryder, captain in the British Army during the Second World War, experiencing undoubtedly the most dramatic episode of his life: his soldiers, once strong and hopeful, are now disappointed and resigned; he is only thirty-nine but he feels old and fatigued; he also feels something dead within him as if he was a husband who suddenly realised that he no longer had any desire, tenderness or esteem for his wife; his relationship with the Army is definitely dead, it has known «the whole drab compass of marital disillusion» and now nothing remains but «the chill bonds of law and duty and custom» (12)². The unbearable routine of military life makes him entirely indifferent and he regrets noting

² All the quotations correspond to the following edition: Waugh 1962, and the numbers in brackets refer to it.

that the orders he receives are sometimes absurd and even humiliating³. These are a few of the gloomy circumstances used to define our character's mood. In contrast, readers can already guess the nature of the Arcadian experience that Captain Charles Ryder had long ago, to whose memory he will appeal in order to recover his lost happiness and hope.

War is – how could it be denied? – the murderer of all Arcadias and, above all, of the natural, physical one, turning beautiful, idyllic woods, fields and pastures into military camps (*pólemos* invades *phýsis*) or, worse, into lands gutted by constant bombardment, witnesses to the tragic and helpless death of thousands of soldiers. War is, indeed, the murderer of all our hopes and also of a peace of mind that human beings do not manage to create but sometimes have believed could be defined through the gentlest and best features of a humanized, Arcadian or bucolic Nature – obviously, the opposite of the indomitable Nature of Romanticism. Furthermore, the human and spiritual relationship with Arcadia cannot mimic the most destructive pattern of marriage, that is to say, a mere contract that turns love into the fulfilment of a duty or a sad reflexive routine, rather it should be always based upon passion and enthusiasm. An indifferent relationship with Arcadia would then be impossible because Arcadia itself is the difference. We could ask ourselves whether the truly asphyxiating atmosphere now described is that caused by the mustard gas with which the train carrying Captain Ryder's company is sprayed in a false attack, or rather the suffocation caused by a meaningless life. However, the trip will have an unexpected yet happy end for, although he does yet not know it, the camp has been now set up in the fields of a place called 'Brideshead' and, when he is informed:

... it was as though someone had switched off the wireless, and a voice that had been bawling in my ears... for days beyond number, had been suddenly cut short; an immense silence followed, empty at first, but gradually... full of a multitude of sweet and natural and long forgotten sounds: for he had spoken a name that was so familiar to me, a conjuror's name of such ancient power, that, at its mere sound, the phantoms of those haunted late years began to take flight (21).

Therefore, if we really want to regain Arcadian peace, we must switch off the wireless of the world, we must desire and be able to silence the noise around us that howls in our ears – above all, the noise of warfare – and pay attention to what we hear. Then, if within ourselves still remains, as if we had buried a precious treasure, the sediment of an Arcadian experience, we shall hear again long forgotten sounds, the first stage of an almost Platonic process, because the overcoming of this spiritual darkness will arrive through the memory or *anámnēsis* of a far off and now lost happiness unfamiliar with tragedy. And if, at the same time, we want to think of one of the historical contexts in which the theme of Arcadia was modelled, it is worth remembering, for example, that the generals of the Roman Army retired to their *uillae* escaping from the dangerous political tensions and intrigues of Rome and pursuing leisure following hard military campaigns, whereas in *Brideshead Revisited* Waugh does not seem to consider the Arcadian experience as a fair compensation but rather

³ About Waugh and war, see, e.g.: Lebedoff 2008; York 2004; St. John 1974.

as an inalienable human right that everybody should be permitted to enjoy before assuming the responsibilities of adulthood.

We have seen how the magic name pronounced by Charles's lieutenant awakens his memory but, now, he will also have the invaluable help of the visual contemplation:

Beyond... lay an exquisite man-made landscape. It was a sequestered place, enclosed and embraced in a single, winding valley... and between us flowed a stream –it was named the Bride... it became a considerable river lower down before it joined the Avon –which had been dammed here to form three lakes, one no more than a wet slate among the reeds, but the others more spacious, reflecting the clouds and the mighty beeches at their margin. The woods were all of oak and beech, the oak grey and bare, the beech faintly dusted with green by the breaking buds; they made a simple, carefully designed pattern with the green glades and the wide green spaces –Did the fallow deer graze here still?- and, lest the eye wander aimlessly, a Doric temple stood by the water's edge, and an ivy-grown arch spanned the lowest of the connecting weirs. All this had been planned and planted a century and a half ago so that, at about this date, it might be seen in its maturity. From where I stood the house was hidden by a green spur, but I knew well how and where it lay, couched among the lime trees like a hind in the bracken (21 f.)⁴.

The novelist hastens, then, to meet the conditions implicit in the Arcadian theme since Classical Antiquity: Arcadias are always exquisite and artificial, man-made landscapes. Here, human imagination is devoted to transforming wild or simply spontaneous Nature into a true work of art, in which everything is thought, planned – and here for obvious reasons also planted – in order to cause a great visual impact and, as a consequence, bring joy and peace of mind to those who contemplate it. Primal Nature, to put it philosophically, provides the matter (*hýle*) but the artistic mind, that now I envision adopting the Aristotelian hylemorphic system, provides the beautiful form (*kalé morphé*). Rivers, lakes, woods, trees, ivy vines, animals, meadows, and broad green spaces, have been wisely combined and, in accordance with the long tradition of panoramic British landscaped gardens, a Doric temple or some other beautiful building draws our eyes to gaze rather than wander. However, the most important attribute is that this Arcadia is a sequestered place, reserved to those who want to be initiated into a mystery that also entails duties. We have already mentioned Arcadia as an inalienable human right but, when the opportunity arises, when the initiator or *mistagogós* invites us to open our eyes and our mind to this new and pleasant experience, we shall have to utter an enthusiastic 'yes'. We shall have to act in the end almost as if we were the designers of this house hidden by a green wood and couched among the lime trees, who said 'yes' to the orders and requirements of the visionary owners, thus creating for them a habitat that favours a constant and direct relationship with an omnipresent Nature.

Later on we shall see that Charles Ryder will be initiated into the Arcadian mystery thanks to a romantic residue that Lieutenant Hooper's personality has unfortunately never had. Both were victims of «that stoic, red skin interlude which our

⁴ See, e.g.: Walter 2012; Berberich 2009; Coffey 2006; Breeze 2005; Schönberg 1990.

schools introduce between the fast-flowing tears of the child and the man» (14). The rigour of such a premature asceticism, which Western culture has always rated as stoic, disqualified Hooper for any romantic thought. Nor had Charles a happy childhood⁵ but, when Hooper's heart and sensibility dries up hopelessly and «he has not... sat among the camp fires at Xanthus-side», he is dry to all save poetry and weeps for «the speech on St Crispin's day» and for «the epitaph at Termopylae»; in his History classes there was room for «Lepanto... Roncevaux... Marathon... and the Battle in the West where Arthur fell», so that even now in his «sere and lawless state» (14 f.)⁶ his imagination takes him to ancient times. Consequently, the intentional twinning of the Greek and Medieval legacies, among others – in fact, the intentional romantic and medieval vision of the former – triumphs over the classical British opposition between medievalism and classicism, so evident for instance in E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View*.

We already know the mood of the protagonist and the historic context he is living in; therefore, it is time to present the English translation of the Latin phrase in which we recognize the topic. *ET IN ARCADIA EGO* will be the frontispiece of Book One, whose first chapter starts with the same words we read in the last lines of the Prologue. Hopper is not used to the magnificence and splendour of houses like Brideshead and, overwhelmed by the monuments he has contemplated, looks for Charles and tells him: «You never saw such a thing». The answer is literarily as predictable as it is inevitable⁷: «Yes, Hooper, I did. I've been here before» (22), that is to say: *et in hac Arcadia ego fui*.

The memory or *anamnesis* of that first visit now returns to his mind and his heart is moved. He had already been in Brideshead, more than twenty years ago, a sunny summer day of Theocritean tones: «on a cloudless day in June... and the air heavy with all the scents of summer; it was a day of peculiar splendour... » (23). He went there with Sebastian from Oxford, but the fact that he met his future *mistagogós* in a city did not hinder his entry into the Arcadian world; on the contrary:

Oxford, in those days, was still a city of aquatint... her autumnal mists, her grey spring-time, and the rare glory of her summer days –such as that day– when the chestnut was in flower and the bells rang out high and clear over her gables and cupolas, exhaled the soft airs of centuries of youth (21).

⁵ In fact, later on Charles will say: «I had lived a lonely childhood and a boyhood straitened by war and overshadowed by bereavement; to the hard bachelordom of English adolescence, the premature dignity and authority of the school system, I had added a sad and grim strain of my own. Now, that summer term with Sebastian, it seemed as though I was being given a brief spell of what I had never known, a happy childhood, and though its toys were silk shirts and liqueurs and cigars and naughtiness high in the catalogue of grave sins, there was something of nursery freshness about us that fell little short of the joy of innocence» (45 f.).

⁶ About the meaning of all these references, see, e.g.: Doyle 1988.

⁷ Think, for instance, of: Diderot, D. (1758). *De la poesie dramatique*: «Je vivais aussi dans la délicieuse Arcadie»; Jacobi, J. G. (1769). *Winterreise*: «Auch ich war in Arkadien»; Schiller, F. (1786). *Resignation*: «Auch ich war in Arkadien geboren»; Goethe, J. W. (1786). *Italienische Reise*: «Auch ich in Arkadien», etc.

No, this urban Arcadia was not an obstacle. The real danger was, during Eights Week, the unusual presence of a «rabble of womankind» that, in an overwhelmingly masculine world like the colleges, was considered such a discordant disturbance. Therefore, Sebastian advises Charles to avoid the «danger» and to run towards a natural, silent and pleasant environment where they will eat the fruits of the earth: «I've got a motor-car and a basket of strawberries and a bottle of Château Peyraguey... isn't a wine you've ever tasted... It's heaven with strawberries» (25). However, the text subtly tells us more. First of all, it would be impossible not to notice that, for many students at the colleges in nineteenth and a great part of the twentieth-century England, the Arcadian experience was that life of masculine companionship, favoured by the British education system based upon boarding schools, first, and colleges, afterwards. This companionship led them – I would dare to say inevitably and logically – first to an evident and almost exclusive homosocial experience, secondly to a homoerotic experience, that is to say, a high esteem for those with whom one lives and, in some cases, to a homosexual experience⁸ before the heteroerotic or heterosexual experience⁹. Sebastian will love only other men, whereas Charles's great love will be Julia, Sebastian's sister, but he will love her after having felt a high esteem for his friend. To sum up, we infer that the Arcadian experience is not only that desirable period of youthful innocence, disinhibition and anomy before assuming the responsibilities and duties of adulthood but also that period of friendship and companionship *par excellence* that resulted in a not uncommon tragedy: men who cannot reproduce this sort of relationship with their wives as a consequence of a sometimes insuperable distance from the opposite sex – once more, one of E. M. Forster's novels, *Maurice* for instance, would in my opinion suffice to explain this phenomenon.

With regard to Sebastian, no detail escapes the author: «dove – grey flannel, white crêpe de Chine, a Charvet tie» (24) and, later on, we shall read that his beauty is «arresting» (30). He is, then, the true Apollo of this story, a bright young man alien to the rigorous academic life, childish and innocent, with his teddy-bear always in his hands, fond of strawberries and good wines; in short, a young man well endowed to become a good initiator (*mistagogós*) into the Arcadian mystery. In fact, Charles opened his eyes to this new reality when Sebastian answered with a categorical «I» to the question he read in *Art* by Clive Bell: «Does anyone feel the same kind of emotion for a butterfly or a flower that he feels for a cathedral or a picture?» (30). For him, perhaps now giving in to that British tension between supporters of medieval or classical tradition, the natural – Arcadian – butterflies and flowers favourably compare with the medieval cathedrals. And with regard to the two friends' disinhibition, innocence and anomy, it is quite evident that wine, now and on many

⁸ About this theme, see *e.g.*: Christensen 2011; Valdeón 2005; Pugh 2001; Higdon 1994.

⁹ About this theme, in addition to *Brideshead Revisited* by Waugh, adapted for television by Charles Sturridge (1981) and for cinema by Julian Jarrold (2008), it is worth noting *Maurice* by E. M. Forster (1913-14, published in 1971), adapted for cinema by James Ivory (1987), of *Another Country* (1981), a stage play by Julian Mitchell, adapted for cinema by Marek Kaniévska (1984), or films such as *If* (1968), directed by Lindsay Anderson – screenplay by David Sherwin & John Howlett –, or *El último viaje de Robert Rylands* (1996), directed by Gracia Querejeta, a free adaptation of the novel *Todas las almas* (1989) by Javier Marías.

other occasions throughout the novel, that is, Dionysus's realm, becomes the necessary relief from excessive discipline and phlegm or simply a reaction against the imposed stoicism just described. Nevertheless, wine will also mean Sebastian's self-destruction for not seeing that it is not powerful enough to triumph over his family's siege, over their subtle but rigorous control that, so to speak, is not natural (*phýsic*) or Arcadian.

The two friends have already left behind Oxford and are driving towards Brideshead, because Sebastian wants Charles to meet his beloved Nanny Hawkins. The historian Polybius tells us that the ancient Arcadians, apart from their hospitable human character, could sing and dance since earliest childhood¹⁰. Having read Polybius or not, the novelist decides that these contemporary Arcadians – Charles, in particular – regret that they cannot transform their joy into a song: «It's a pity neither of us can sing» (25). They have not arrived yet but it is hot, they seek a shade and, under a clump of elms, they eat the strawberries, drink the wine, light Turkish cigarettes, «and the sweet scent of the tobacco merged with the sweet summer scents around us and the fumes of the sweet, golden wine seemed to lift us a finger's breadth above the turf and holds us suspended» (26). Therefore, the two friends resemble the *neóteroi* of Rome, as fond of Nature as of all sorts of luxuries and refinements, rather than the inhabitants of the wild Greek Arcadia or the shepherds of Theocritus's *Idylls*. Sebastian and Charles feel that their joy is holding them literally suspended but we may suppose that they are allegorically attesting that their way of life, simple and sophisticated, hierarchically rises above the rigorous academic life, whose negative aspects will continue to emerge throughout this first part:

“Just the place to bury a crock of gold” said Sebastian. “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” (26).

The protagonist will be saved by means of the *anámnēsis* or memory of lost happiness. This would be the reverse of what Francesca states in the fifth canto of Dante's *Divine Comedy*: «Nessun maggior dolore / che ricordarsi del tempo felice / ne la miseria» («There is no greater pain / than to remember another happy time / in misery»). *Nessun Maggior Dolore* is also the title of a poem by Antonio Machado that says: «¡Qué broma absurda y pesada / es la aventura de amor, / hoy sin amor evocada!... / ¡Dolor! ... ¿Dónde lo hay mayor / que recordar la pasada / alegría en el dolor?» («What an absurd and disgusting joke / is the adventure of love, / not being

¹⁰ Plb. 4: «Since the Arcadian nation on the whole has a very high reputation for virtue among the Greeks, due not only to their human and hospitable character and usages, but especially to their piety to the gods» (20.1 f); «For the practice of music, I mean real music, is beneficial to all men, but to Arcadians it is a necessity» (20.3-5); «For it is a well-known fact, familiar to all, that it is hardly known except in Arcadia, that in the first place the boys from their earliest childhood are trained to sing in measure the hymns and paeans in which by traditional usage they celebrate the heroes and gods of each particular place» (20.8 f.); «Arcadians, therefore, with the view of softening and tempering the stubbornness and harshness of nature, introduced all the practices I mentioned» (21.3) (Polybius, 1975, translated by W.R. Paton)

loved today but evoked!... / Pain! Where could you find it greater / than remembering the past / joy in pain?» – the English translations are mine). Well then, Sebastian is still alive and he has not asked to be buried in a tomb whose epitaph proclaims that he 'lived in' and 'enjoyed' Arcadia. However, in my opinion, it is quite clear that his desire to bury episodes of happiness in order to recover them in unfortunate times does not permit him to agree with the negative message of Guercino's painting but rather with the positive one of Poussin's *Et in Arcadia ego*. And one further remark: bearing in mind that we have broached the theme of death in wartime, perhaps we should think about those impressive rows of crosses in the cemeteries of soldiers fallen in the Second World War, a clear sign (*séma*, 'sign' and 'tomb' in classical Greek) of the repeated human failure that are all wars. How much better it is to bury memories of happiness in a summer afternoon enjoying Nature and its fruits than to bury bodies of friends and comrades who will be deprived for evermore of the joy they deserved!

We already know many things but Waugh has not yet told us how Charles met Sebastian. He will do this using once more an effective scheme of contrapositions – he took us before from war to happiness –, thus contrasting Charles's family and early acquaintances with the fortuitous appearance of Sebastian. In effect, Jasper, Charles's cousin is a man who likes to direct others' lives and does not believe in his cousin's personal initiatives; in short, he does not believe in life as a free experience, in which mistakes play an important role – human beings, young and old, make mistakes and learn thanks to them. Fortunately, however, Charles does not renounce organising his own university life and, consequently, forgets almost all his cousin's advice and orders. Jasper is literarily drawn as the least Arcadian man of the story and Charles can face up to him because of that romantic residue we recognize now in a clear sign of Arcadianism. Indeed, when Jasper calls on him «formally» (27) and advises him to leave the ground-floor rooms in order to avoid their genuine dangers, Charles ignores his instructions because he is delighted with the «gillyflowers growing below the windows which on summer evenings filled them with fragrance» (29). Jasper, on the contrary, does not even like the copy of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* with which Charles has decorated his room.

With regard to the academic life, Charles says that, despite their analytical rigour, he desires something more than his intellectual talks with his first acquaintances. «I felt at heart that this was not all which Oxford had to offer» (29). He needs, then, an anomic friend who strikes him with his «eccentricities of behaviour» and helps him fill a lack that he is beginning to feel. He first meets Sebastian at the barber's: «I was struck less by his looks than by the fact that he was carrying a large teddy-bear» (30), but it is also significant that the barber, a man «who, in his time, had had ample chance to tire of undergraduate fantasy» (30), values the charm and the youthful spirit of Sebastian, who is entirely different from his elder brother, «a very quiet gentleman, quite like an old man» (30). But the most significant point is that, when the worlds of the two future great friends meet, Charles's friends, gathered in his room and now filling his mind with «metaphysics» (31), are evidently indoors, whereas Sebastian's mates, drunk and alien to any serious reflection, are outside on the natural green grass – inevitably more Arcadian – of the college courtyard. Suddenly, Sebastian feels unwell. The window of Charles's room is open, he approaches

it and leans over it, and then not only Sebastian but also a whole world of disinhibition and anomy dare to vomit over the serious academic world. In other words, we might be attending a cathartic and iconoclastic act, imagined in this case by a man who, like Waugh, studied in Oxford's Hertford *College*¹¹. Nevertheless, we cannot forget the final outcome of this episode, for one of Sebastian's mates addresses Charles to make him see that the vomiting was the result of having mixed too many different wines: «Grasp that and you have the root of the matter. To understand all is to forgive all» (31). And Charles's answer is then a «yes» as categorical as the «I» that Sebastian said before, almost as if it were a «yes» in a wedding that will tie him to a new friend, and to a new and marvellous experience, too.

The day after, Charles's life goes on as usual because «I still frequented the lecture-room in those days» (32), although he now suspects that there is another wisdom not to be learnt in the lecture-rooms of any college. This wisdom and those who are fond of it protested yesterday in front of his window but today Sebastian wants to be forgiven, and the Arcadian presence of the flowers with which he has filled Charles's rooms portends a joyful future for both. Sebastian has invited him to a dinner party and a tiny and warning voice advises him not to accept, but:

But I was in search of love in those days, and I went full of curiosity and the faint, unrecognised apprehension that here, at last, I should find that low door in the wall, which others, I knew, had found here before, which opened on an enclosed and enchanted garden, which was somewhere, not overlooked by any window, in the heart of that grey city (32).

We are still in Oxford, «a city of aquatint» but, in order to reach the true Arcadia it is necessary to want and know how to find the low door – slightly hidden, then – beyond which there is a beautiful enclosed and enchanted garden. In other words, it is necessary to cross the threshold that separates two different worlds by means of an Arcadian initiation after some prior steps, leaving behind any scruple or hesitation. We do not find doors in Theocritus's *Idylls* or Virgil's *Eclogues* but, in this contemporary adaptation of the topic, it is quite clear that the image of the door highly stresses the will and daring needed to go beyond the limits¹². And, needless to say, the most daring thing is to be open to the possibility of a homoerotic relationship that it is recognized as such.

¹¹ About Waugh's personal and literary biography and everything related to his generation, etc. see, e.g.: Waugh 2011; Byrne 2009; Wykes 1999; Patey 1998; Wilson 1996; Hastings 1995; Stannard 1992, 1987; Carpenter 1990; McDonnell 1988.

¹² If we consider it from the perspective of the Western tradition, we could mention 'The Gates of Heaven' and 'St. Peter's keys' that will open them for those who have been good or have been forgiven by God. Or let us also think of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, in which some children, innocent enough to believe in magic, dare to cross the door of the magic wardrobe, thus reaching the bright world of Asland, the good lion who, being an allegory of Christ, dies and rises. In the *Roman de la Rose*, however, the poet must overcome the walls in order to enter the garden in whose centre there is a fountain with a rose within, the symbol of love; etc., etc.

Later on, Waugh uses again the image of the door to depict the end of Charles's Arcadian experience¹³, when Sebastian's mother literally expels him from Brideshead after having learned that Charles gave Sebastian enough money to continue to drink at least for a day, thus avoiding his family siege:

I was unmoved; there was no part of me remotely touched by her distress... But as I drove away... I felt that I was leaving part of myself behind, and that wherever I went afterwards I should feel the lack of it... 'I shall never go back', I said to myself. A door had shut, the low door in the wall I had sought and found in Oxford; open it now and I should find no enchanted garden. I had come to the surface, into the light of common day and the fresh sea-air, after long captivity in the sunless coral palaces and waving forests of the ocean bed. I had left behind me –what? Youth? Adolescence? Romance?... 'I have left behind illusion', I said to myself. 'Hence-forth I live in a world of three dimensions - with the aid of my five senses'. I have since learned that there is no such world, but then, as the car turned out of sight of the house, I thought it took no finding, but lay all about me at the end of the avenue (163 f.).

In Waugh's opinion, then, many reasonable adults may consider that the Arcadian experience is a sort of a golden cave where it is pleasant to remain for some time even as prisoners. We know that the end of the captivity arrives as soon as the end of adolescence, romance or, simply, illusion, and we thus live evermore in a world of three dimensions, full of responsibilities and duties, with the aid of our five senses. Nevertheless, Waugh – who first depicts the most negative aspects of military life and its harmful effects on people – warns us that such a world is also an illusion and, therefore, any Arcadian experience in our childhood or youth is worth being preserved against all the critical voices that find it dispensable and even harmful.

In any case, we see now that that door Charles found does not take him directly to an enclosed and enchanted garden but first to Sebastian's rooms where a splendid and refined dinner-party is waiting for him, although it starts with the simpler and more pastoral image of a nest in the centre of the table full of plover's eggs sent by Sebastian's mother from Brideshead. The guests are all detached young men but the novelist wants this Arcadian circle to welcome not only anomic guests but also marginal ones, so that, when they are eating the lobster Newburg¹⁴, the last guest arrives: Anthony Blanche. Mannered, eccentric, insolent and always ready to *épater*, he is not merely a person hated by most of his friends¹⁵ and, as a consequence, a minor character within Waugh's planning of roles¹⁶; on the contrary, all through the

¹³ See, e.g.: Kennedy 1990.

¹⁴ See, e.g.: Baldwin 2006-07.

¹⁵ Hated by his friends who humiliate him by throwing him into Mercury's fountain, although, for his part, he takes the opportunity to make some hurtful comments: «Dear sweet clodhoppers, if you knew anything of sexual psychology you would know that nothing could give me keener pleasure than to be manhandled by you meaty boys. It would be an ecstasy of the very naughtiest kind. So if any of you wishes to be my partner in joy come and seize me. If, on the other hand, you simply wish to satisfy some obscure and less easily classified libido and see me bath, come with me quietly, dear louts, to the fountain» (50).

¹⁶ About criticism and interpretation of Waugh's literary work, see, e.g.: Villar – Davis 2005; Schweizer 2005; Bényei 1999; Stannard 1997; Gale 1990; Doyle 1988; Heath 1982; Davis 1981, and about *Brideshead Revisited*: Murray 1990.

novel he will question the conventions and values of this conceited society¹⁷. In this respect, it is highly significant that, in order to *épater* the Oxford rowers, when the dinner-party is over, he recites from the balcony the following verses (243-8) of *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot:

And I Tiresias have foresuffered all / Enacted on this same divan or bed; / I who have sat by Thebes below the wall / And walked among the lowest of the dead. / Bestows one final patronising kiss, / And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit.

Anthony Blanche may seem to be a marginal figure, just as blind people are sometimes seen this way – it would be impossible not to think now of the Tiresias in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* – but, very probably, Waugh is telling us that marginal people are often those who from their distance best see the dark side of a self-satisfied and, ergo, blind society¹⁸.

Charles Ryder's initiation has almost ended; he has taken part in a sort of a pagan Eucharist in the course of which he has partaken of what Nature and man could provide him. However, Charles's attitude is still too serious and Sebastian takes him to the Oxford Botanical Gardens to see the ivies and these, if I may put it this way, will entwine him and tie him for evermore (*religio*) to the Arcadian creed, so that, when he returns to his rooms, he will be delighted only with the golden daffodils his friend left within. That dinner was the beginning of a new epoch in his life, although the details of that occasion merge with «so many others, almost identical with it, that succeeded one another that term and the next, like romping cupids in a Renaissance frieze» (32). The reference to the little cupids, supposedly shooting love arrows towards their victims, endows Charles's ritual step towards friendship and love (*philia* and *éros*) with the support of classical and Renaissance iconography and with the support of Greek and Latin erotic poetry as well. The details of this occasion are not clear in his mind but the love arrows have hit the target. And, still regarding this image, let us note that Anthony takes «formal and complimentary leave» of Sebastian by saying: «My dear, I should like to stick you full of barbed arrows like a p-p-pin-cushion» (35), so that I may dare to suggest that we are being told in fact that the

¹⁷ Later on, he is in fact the only one who, in the course of a conversation with Charles, dares to criticize Sebastian's family and Sebastian himself: «Tell me candidly, have you ever heard Sebastian say anything you have remembered for five minutes?... Conversation should be like juggling... But when dear Sebastian speaks it is like a little sphere of soap sud drifting off the end of an old clay pipe... and then – phut! Vanished, with nothing left at all, nothing» (56).

¹⁸ «He uses the myth to give order and meaning to the experience of Charles Ryder... Within this mythical pattern Waugh assigns a key role to one of his more fantastic creations, Anthony Blanche... he makes a direct connection between himself and the mythical prophet of Thebes... the rest of the novel shows a number of remarkable, and significant correspondences between the outlandish character in Waugh's novel and Tiresias as he appears both in myths and in T. S. Eliot's poem... the bizarre, apparently frivolous... experiences of Anthony Blanche... are integrally linked to a much more serious reality... His oddness... sets him apart from all ordinary, normal human experience... which transcends the natural conventions and parameters of normal English Society... He is an outsider, a foreigner» (Shaw 1993, 337-41)

target of Anthony's love arrows can be easily compared with St. Sebastian, seen in this case as an icon of homosexual love¹⁹.

The story goes on and the text now reminds us that the two friends were still driving to Oxford. They have just arrived and all the apparent details of the text again confirm the artistic nature of this private Arcadia: «classical lodges on a village green... an open park-land... a new and secret landscape... the dome and columns of an old house... beyond... receding steps of water». Charles is fascinated: «What a place to live in!» (36), whereas Sebastian feels that Brideshead will only be his when he and his friend are its only inhabitants without the company of the family, thus suggesting that his mother, brother and sisters do not live guided by natural impulses but by a wide range of social conventions that make them 'impure' – so to speak – in terms of the Arcadian mystery²⁰.

They have come to visit Sebastian's nanny and, if we associate Arcadian or bucolic literature – above all, Theocritus's *Idylls* – with shepherds of simple habits and pleasures, Nanny Hawkins, despite the obvious differences, would be the character that resembles them most. Lovely, motherly and surrounded by «a collection of small presents which had been brought home to her at various times by her children», she also provided moral standards – Sebastian says that he does not take her to Oxford to live with him because «she'd always be trying to send me to church» (38) – but, as an Arcadian who mutually recognizes another, Sebastian will never judge her. In fact, «Sebastian's nanny was seated at the open window; the fountain lay before her, the lakes, the temple, and, far away on the last spur, a glittering obelisk» (36), thus showing that she has the habit of contemplating the beautiful nature that surrounds her.

After taking leave of Nanny Hawkins but before leaving Brideshead, Sebastian, at Charles's request, shows him some halls and rooms of the house. He opens the shutters of the windows and «the mellow afternoon sun flooded in... the covered ceiling frescoed with classic deities and heroes, the gilt mirrors...» (39). Within the great mansion, then, there is rich pagan iconography that very soon will accompany and observe them. The chapel, on the contrary – that Sebastian shows him, too – should not in principle display this pagan style, and certainly it does not, but:

The whole interior had been gutted, elaborately refurnished and redecorated in the arts-and-crafts style of the last decade of the nineteenth century. Angels printed cotton smocks, ramble roses, flower-spangled meadows, frisking lambs... the altar steps had a carpet of grass-green, strewn with white and gold daisies (39 f.).

Consequently, considered from the perspective of Waugh's literary planning, it would be impossible not to notice the conscious Arcadian design of the sacred space, of the often imposing and gloomy churches. In other words – up to a certain extent, of course – the Creation is equated with the Creator and, on the other hand,

¹⁹ With regard to the homosexual vision of St. Sebastian, let us take into account for instance that Tennessee Williams published in 1954 in a collection called *In the Winter of Cities* a poem entitled 'San Sebastiano de Sodoma'. In any case, for further information about the process of transformation of St. Sebastian into an icon of homosexual love, see, e.g.: www.utpjournals.com/product/utq/693_parker.html.

²⁰ See, e.g.: Edwards 2011.

we should now inevitably mention that Gospel image of Christ as the good shepherd who takes care of his sheep and that I should like to illustrate by quoting these beautiful lines of the *De Profundis* by Oscar Wilde:

Yet the whole life of Christ... is really an idyll, though it ends with the veil of the temple being rent, and the darkness coming over the face of the earth, and the stone rolled to the door of the sepulchre. One always thinks of him as a young bridegroom with his companions, as indeed he somewhere describes himself; as a shepherd straying through a valley with his sheep in search of green meadow or cool stream; as a singer trying to build out of the music the walls of the City of God; or as a lover for whose love the whole world was too small. His miracles seem to me to be as exquisite as the coming of spring, and quite as natural.... such was the charm of his personality that his mere presence could bring peace to souls in anguish... and others who had been deaf to every voice but that of pleasure heard for the first time the voice of love and found it as “musical as Apollo’s lute” (1027)²¹.

Once again in Oxford, Charles receives «the last visit and Grand Remonstrance» of his cousin Jasper. «Duty alone had brought him to my rooms... at great inconvenience to himself» (41). His interventionist mood does not permit him to accept Charles’s new way of life. He criticizes him above all for his new friends and wasteful habits but, in front of him stands a transformed and revolted man. At this moment Charles is truly convinced that he must face up to the rigid and conservative mentality of the darkest Oxford that, needless to say, is no longer an Arcadian city. And, in accordance with Waugh’s plan, this is the right moment to proclaim the undeniable virtues of any Arcadian experience:

Looking back, now, after twenty years, there is little I would have left undone or done otherwise. I could match my cousin Jasper’s game-cock maturity with a sturdier fowl. I could tell him that all the wickedness of that time was like the spirit they mix with the pure grape of the Douro, heady stuff full of dark ingredients; it at once enriched and retarded the whole process of adolescence as the spirit checks the fermentation of the wine, renders it undrinkable, so that it must lie in the dark, year in, year out, until it is brought up at last fit for the table. I could tell him, too, that to know and love one another human being is the root of all wisdom (45 f.).

The statement is in my opinion of great relevance. *Brideshead Revisited* deals with the effect of divine grace on individuals²² and, therefore, some men and women will have to recapitulate and acknowledge a few sins, even serious ones, committed throughout their lives. Nevertheless, the aggressive moralists, fighting game-cocks of judicious maturity, should know that to consider the Arcadian experience as the wicked and dark postponement of a decent life *stricto sensu* is absurd. From the pure

²¹ Wilde 2003.

²² «In a 1947 memorandum for prospective MGM scriptwriters, Waugh unequivocally stated that the novel’s theme is ‘theological’ and that it deals with “the operation of grace”, which he defined as “the unmerited and unilateral act of love by which God continually calls souls to Himself”. Waugh further described the novel as “an attempt to trace the workings of the divine purpose in a pagan world, in the lives of an English Catholic family, half-paganized themselves” » (Beaty 1992, 146). See also: Wolfe 2011.

grapes of an Arcadian way of life can also be obtained an excellent wine, that is to say, that of persons who, precisely because they did not hastily ferment and remained in anomy, disinhibition and innocence, built their personality on solid foundations²³. Certainly they will sin, for this is unavoidable in any human being, but they will see very clearly that to know and love another human being is not an academic knowledge one can display but a treasure that deserves to be buried in the bosom of our personality to guarantee proper personal development²⁴.

And one further remark: his cousin Jasper regrets the high cost of the human skull «resting in a bowl of roses» that was «the chief decoration» of Charles's table. «It bore the motto "Et in Arcadia ego"» (43). Well then, the bowl of roses, the natural element on which the skull is displayed will make us first recall Guercino's painting²⁵ but, on the other hand, given that Charles is now facing up to a Jasper whose life is guided by rules and duties but forgetting joys and pleasures, it would be more logical to relate the presence of the skull with the philosophy of Poussin's picture. Charles would certainly know that death is waiting for him at the end of his life but his friends will always be able to say that 'he lived in' and 'enjoyed' Arcadia.

Summer vacation has arrived and Charles spends it in London at his father's, far from Sebastian. The friendly atmosphere he has lived in for several months entirely disappears. His father is in his late fifties but appears much older and, above all, the lack of communication between father and son is evident. At the dinner table, their «battlefield» (65), we attend a war the father wins every day because Charles's initiatives to leave the family home lack his financial aid. He now feels alone and sad and does not live in a sequestered and enchanted place but in a true prison. We have returned to war²⁶ – a different one, of course – and the tragedy of their daily and bloodless drama separates them. Arcadian men or women, on the contrary, always feel alive and accompanied by everything around them: persons, landscapes, the

²³ Virtues that most mature men no longer take into account: «How ungenerously in later life we disclaim the virtuous moods of your youth... we prefer to think, is all of our own gathering, while, the truth be told, it is most the last coin of a legacy that dwindles with time. There is no candour in a story of early manhood which leaves out of account the home-sickness for nursery morality, the regrets and resolutions of amendment...» (61). And this is in fact the first step towards the 'elegy' that appears at the beginning of chapter four: «The languor of Youth –how unique and quintessential it is! How quickly, how irrecoverably, lost!... the illusions, the despair... These things are a part of life itself; but languor -the relaxation of yet unwearied sinews, the mind sequestered and self-regarding... that belongs to Youth alone and dies with it. Perhaps in the mansions of Limbo the heroes enjoy some such compensation for their loss of the Beatific Vision... I, at any rate, believed myself vey near heaven, during those languid days at Brideshead» (77).

²⁴ In any case, about religion, faith and evil in Waugh's works, see *e.g.*: Myers 1991; Wirth 1990.

²⁵ Although there are other interpretations -risky ones, in my opinion- that go far beyond: «For Charles, to rest a skull in a bowl of roses is to evince an exquisite sense of the ephemerality of human existence and to display poetic intelligence of mystical imagery, since roses are not merely emblems of youth and beauty, they are also procession and altar flowers: the bowl in which the skull is set to rest amounts to an altar of repose, which lends the skull a quasi-sacramental value» (Chevalier 1992, 41).

²⁶ «Strife was internecine during the next fortnight, but I suffered the more, for my father had greater reserves to draw on and a wider territory for manoeuvre... He never declared his war aims, and I do not know to this day whether they were purely punitive – whether he had really at the back of his mind some geopolitical idea of getting me out of the country...» (70).

sound of the wind swaying the leaves of the trees, the sound of rivers or any streams, animals; in short, the omnipresent power of Nature (*Phýsis*) and its Spirit.

There is no doubt that one of the most striking episodes of this summer vacation is the dinner-party that Charles's father gives «to diversify the rather monotonous series of his son at home». The result, however, was «a gruesome evening», as said by the very host: «I doubt if any of our guests will count this as one of their happiest evenings». In fact, it would be difficult not to interpret the absolute boredom of «the little music afterwards» as the image and metaphor of a society that no longer knows how to enjoy its leisure and even behaves in a cruel and two-faced way – which is not an Arcadian feature, of course – if we bear in mind Charles's father comments about the young woman who played the cello: «You liked Miss Gloria Orme-Herrick?»... «No? Was it her little moustache you objected to or her very large feet?» (69-70) – therefore, should we not now remember what Polybius writes with regard to the ancient Arcadians' character and musical skills?

Needless to say, Sebastian will free Charles from the torture he is living at his father's. Being alien to the dark and responsible world in which the others live, Sebastian does not mind exaggerating the consequences of a not very serious accident in order to require the presence and help of his great friend. Charles receives, then, an alarming telegram that justifies his immediate departure. His father makes him see that an accident announced by the very victim cannot be as serious as he thinks and does not hide his obvious jealousy: «I see you have no such doubts. I shall miss you, my dear boy, but do not hurry back on my account» (72). Finally, he leaves and, at the railway station near Brideshead, Julia, Sebastian's sister, picks him up, a circumstance that seems to summon up something that Waugh does not want to keep silent:

She so much resembled Sebastian that... I was confused by the double illusion of familiarity and strangeness... Her dark hair was scarcely longer than Sebastian's, and it blew back from her forehead as his did; her eyes were his, but larger; her painted mouth was less friendly to the world (74).

I would dare to say that this deliberate physical resemblance between Julia and Sebastian is as significant as it is uncontroversial. In effect, Waugh seems to say openly what others might prefer to avoid. Charles will fall in love with Julia but his heteroeroticism is only possible after an earlier Arcadian and homoerotic stage, thanks to which he learnt to love. Later on, in Venice when the two friends stay at Sebastian's father's, we shall hear an intimate and revealing conversation between Charles and Cara, Lord Marchmain's lover. Cara perceives very soon the strong relationship between the two friends. She had already been told «of these romantic friendships of the English and the Germans». She does not consider them a Latin phenomenon, although in her opinion:

I think they are very good if they do not go on too long... It is a kind of love that comes to children before they know its meaning. In England it comes when you are almost men; I think I like that. It is better to have that kind of love for another boy than for a girl. Alex you see had it for a girl, for his wife (98).

The readers already know that the marriage of Sebastian's parents failed but, in spite of this circumstance, they could logically ask themselves why Lord Marchmain's experience should be worse than any other. However, Waugh might be attesting here – and, furthermore, by means of a feminine character – that, if for some young men this sort of friendship goes on too long, then their homoeroticism prior to their heteroeroticism and heterosexuality is entirely logical, and so is, if that should be the case, any permanent homoeroticism and homosexuality. In this respect, let us observe that, when later on Charles and Julia are planning their marriage, we shall still hear the former saying: «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» (288).

Having closed this brief parenthesis, let us remember that we are again in Brideshead after Charles's arrival. The two friends' Arcadian apotheosis is about to start and Waugh pays attention to every detail: «We dined in... the Painted Parlour... its walls were adorned with wreathed medallions, and across its dome prim Pompeian figures stood in pastoral groups» (75). Ergo, the most appropriate classical iconography welcomes them, although in order to go from the pastoral paintings to reality, Charles takes Sebastian in his wheelchair into the library, which was «on the side of the house that overlooked the lakes; the windows were open to the stars and the scented air, to the indigo and silver, moonlit landscape of the valley and the sound of water falling in the fountain» (76). And, for his part, the victim of a non-tragic accident that happened when he was playing croquet – «he cracked a bone in his ankle so small that it hasn't a name» (73) – now proclaims the triumph of his audacity: «“We'll have a heavenly time alone”, said Sebastian» (76). The house opens itself to the Arcadia and Arcadia enters the house in an uninterrupted stream of communication. We only lack seeing the two friends, happy and alien to the world of three dimensions, playing, laughing and enjoying the most natural and refined pleasures in their marvellous paradise:

If it was mine I'd never live anywhere else». «But you see, Charles, it isn't mine. Just at the moment it is, but usually it's full of ravening beasts. If it could only be like this always – always summer, always alone, the fruit always ripe, and Aloysius in a good temper». «It is thus I like to remember Sebastian, as he was that summer, when we wandered alone together through that enchanted palace; Sebastian in his wheel chair spinning down the box-edged walks of the kitchen gardens in search of alpine strawberries and warm figs, propelling himself through the successions of hot-houses, from scent to scent and climate to climate, to cut the muscat grapes and choose orchids for our button-holes; Sebastian hobbling with a pantomime of difficulty to the old nurseries, sitting beside me on the threadbare, flowered carpet with the toy-cupboard empty about us and Nanny Hawkins stitching complacently in the corner, saying, “You're one as bad as the other; a pair of children the two of you. Is that what they teach you at College?” Sebastian supine on the sunny seat in the colonnade, as he was now, and I in a hard chair beside him, trying to draw the fountain (77 f.).

Nevertheless, so that this Arcadian experience may take place, Waugh, insisting on what we have pointed out before, hastens to remove the last obstacle, that is, the female power of seduction that Julia embodies. Sitting at her side while she was tak-

ing him to Brideshead, Charles had already felt «a thin bat's squeak of sexuality» (74) that showed the way towards a new identity. He has not to assume it yet because Julia wants to leave and she is delighted to see the loyal friend taking care of her brother. Charles, however, must be very aware of that great power, for the novelist takes advantage now of an image taken from his personal military life, powerful enough in its turn to make us feel the great release any man or woman experiences when he or she has overcome an imminent mortal danger. Indeed, the day after his arrival, from the window of his room, Charles sees Julia leaving and he feels then a sense of liberation and peace «such as I was to know years later when, after a night of unrest, the sirens sounded the 'All Clear'» (76).

From now on, Waugh generously tells us the facts of the two friends' complete happiness. Above all they feel free in an environment designed not to allow the threat of a Nature or *Phýsis* that is beyond any human control; on the contrary, his Nature is beautiful, motherly and caring. We read before that the house lies on the grass like an animal but, at Sebastian's request, Charles also paints the walls of some rooms with romantic landscapes and «by luck and the happy mood of the moment... The brush seemed somehow to do what was wanted of it». He even wants him to paint «a Fête champêtre with a ribboned swing and a Negro page and a shepherd playing the pipes» (80). And, needless to say, they drink all sorts of wine and learn to value them. They decide to get drunk every night; they live enthusiastically every single moment, etc., etc.

However, when this marvellous stay at Brideshead ends, the tragedy, which is also a part of human life, will turn everything upside down: Charles will notice that he no longer can leave aside what is essential for Sebastian and his family: their catholic faith; he will meet his mother, father, elder brother and two sisters and will experience the harmful effects of his relationship with some of them on his previous friendship with Sebastian; having a conversation with Cara in Venice he will know to what extent hate explains the complex personality of both Sebastian and his father, for: «When people hate with all that energy, it is something in themselves they are hating» (99); we will witness the two friends' academic and spiritual fall after having lost the «anarchy» (102) of their first year and will see how this fall starts leading Sebastian to the abyss: «His year of anarchy had filled a deep, interior need of his, the escape from reality, and... he found himself increasingly hemmed in, where he once felt himself free» (103); Charles will be expelled from Brideshead; Sebastian will be slowly and relentlessly destroyed by his alcohol addiction; he will no longer be contented and Charles will clearly see that «his days in Arcadia were numbered» (123), finally living in Morocco, very ill, from where he will never return, not even on the occasion of his mother's death and funeral; Charles's and Julia's respective marriages will fail; they will live together adulterously but Julia will have to face up to strong remorse; Lord Marchmain will return to Brideshead, also very ill, to die at home and his children will pray that he accepts God's forgiveness and grace, which finally happens; and finally what may surprise us most: after her father's repentance and death, Julia will decide not to marry Charles because:

«the worse I am, the more I need God. I can't shut myself out from his mercy. That is what it would mean; starting a life with you, without Him» (324)²⁷.

The members of the family who, despite their faith, were intimate with paganism have now rejected it and have recovered the peace of mind and the love of God they needed so much. Charles, yet, in spite of having lost almost everything²⁸, will keep in the bosom of his personality the Arcadian experience he had long ago, that is, a treasure to be unearthed by his memory in tragic wartimes²⁹ in order to fully take advantage of it, perhaps in addition to the help of the Catholic faith, although Waugh is not explicit about it. To sum up, we read the words *Et in Arcadia ego* only in the frontispiece of Book One but, to a large degree, this phrase becomes a true nucleus of the novel. Let us consider, for instance, the fact that Charles and Julia, once again in Brideshead, in love with each other and expecting to get divorced from their respective spouses, appeal now to the recent memory of their love and they do it in the gardens, so that they can enjoy the beauty and peace that long ago was enjoyed exclusively by two young men. Nevertheless, these occasions will be only brief interludes of happiness, because Julia tragically feels the past and future pressing on a present that hardly resists their attack:

“A hundred days wasted out of two years and a bit... not a day's coolness or mistrust or disappointment”. “Never that”. We fell silent; only the birds spoke in a multitude of small, clear voices in the lime-trees; only the waters spoke among their carved stones...

²⁷ On another occasion Julia had already said to Charles: «I wonder if you remember the story mummy read us the evening Sebastian first got drunk... 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”» (212). And the title of book one is: «A twitch upon the thread » (215). «With each conversion, as a character submits to the will of God and acknowledges the obligation to fulfil the purpose for which he or she was created, chaos gives way to control and ironic perception is subsumed into the concept of a divinely ordered universe» (Beatty 1992, 146). With regard to Charles: «Although Waugh is not explicit about Charles's conversion, Hooper's remark to him in the Prologue about the 'R. C.' service – 'More in your line than mine' – suggests that by the time of the revisit he is already a Catholic or has at least become serious about religion» (154). In any case, Charles confesses his perplexity regarding Sebastian's faith and says: «I had no religion... The view implicit in my education was that the basic narrative of Christianity had long been exposed as a myth... religion was a hobby which some people professed and others did not; at the best it was slightly ornamental, at worst it was the province of complexes and inhibitions... No one had ever suggested to me that these quaint observances expressed a coherent philosophic system and intransigent historical claims; nor, had they done so, would I have been much interested» (83). About the religious aspects of the novel, see, e.g.: Johnson 2012; Wilson 2008; Meaney 2008; Lindroth 2005.

²⁸ When, in the Epilogue, Hooper tells him that Brideshead was not built to be partially occupied by the army, Charles replies: «No... not what it was built for. Perhaps that's one of the pleasures of building, like having a son, wondering how he'll grow up, 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, loveless, Hooper» (330).

²⁹ Charles tells Hooper that he sees himself as an actor performing a tragedy in accordance with a God's overall plan, just in the same way as the flame near the tabernacle burns again thanks to the tragedy of this wartime, in which the chapel has been reopened so that soldiers can pray within: «It could not have been lit but for the builders and the tragedians, and there I found it this morning, burning anew among the old stones» (331). In any case, there is no agreement regarding the extent of Charles's conversion; about this theme, see e.g.: Murray 1989.

I feared to break the spell of memories, but ... Julia... said sadly: "How many more? Another hundred?". "A lifetime". "I want to marry you, Charles... this year, next year, sometime soon. I want a day or two with you of real peace'. 'Isn't this peace?'. The sun had sunk now to the line of woodland beyond the valley; all the opposing slope was already in twilight, but the lakes below us were aflame; the light grew in strength and splendour as it neared death, drawing long shadows across the pasture, falling full on the rich stone spaces of the house, firing the panes in the windows, glowing on cornices and colonnade and dome, spreading out all the stacked merchandise of colour and scent from earth and stone and leaf, glorifying the head and golden shoulders of the woman beside me... "Marriage isn't a thing we can take when the impulse moves us... Plans, divorce, war... I feel the past and the future pressing so hard on either side that there's no room for the present at all" (265 f.).

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Abstract: As the frontispiece of Book One of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, the phrase *Et in Arcadia ego* announces the author's intention of making the classical Arcadian theme a key reference in a text that speaks of nostalgia for a joyful past in times marked by sadness and pain. However, an interpretation may be approached from several directions even within the classical tradition. Thus, without ignoring philological or artistic aspects of the topic, this article focuses on a close study of the author's most original message: the notion that a youthful Arcadian experience confers on young men and women a 'residue of happiness' able to sustain their future development and assist them in dealing with the challenges of personal tragedy.

Keywords: classical tradition, Arcadia, Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*.