

Juxtaposition and Correspondence: Application of the Double Plot Theory of William Empson to Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*¹

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Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* demonstrates two different plotlines over the narrative. Those plots are related to Charles Ryder's close, or even homoerotic, friendship with Sebastian and his relationship with Julia. What is curious is that this seemingly contrasted dichotomy does not allow readers to regard the story as a drama of personal development, or bildungsroman. The shift of his love objects from Sebastian to Julia does not demonstrate much personal development in the protagonist. This shift is horizontal rather than a progressive movement. The weights of those important characters to the protagonist are practically the same. E. M. Forster's *Maurice* prepares two different types of characters for Maurice. This transition is from platonic love to physical gratification. This movement is quite progressive. On the other hand, *Brideshead Revisited* is different from it. To pin down the reason for this, I thought that William Empson's double plot theory in his *Some Versions of Pastoral* would be a useful tool. In this paper, I shall look at Empson's double plot theory. After that, the paper deals with the structure of *Brideshead Revisited* and how applicable the double plot theory can be to the novel. Finally, I will consider Charles's two relationships with Sebastian and Julia with the aforementioned theory.

William Empson's Double Plot Theory

Taking Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* as an example, he demonstrates his understanding of how the structure works. He writes:

The two parts make a mutual comparison that illuminates both parties ('love and war are alike') and their large-scale indefinite juxtaposition seems to encourage primitive ways of thought ('Cressida will bring Troy bad luck because she is bad'). This power of suggestion is the strength of the double plot; once you take the two parts to correspond, any character may take on mana because he seems to cause what he corresponds to or be Logos of what he symbolises. The political theorising in *Troilus* (chiefly about loyalty whether to a mistress or the state) becomes more interesting if you take it as a conscious development by Shakespeare of the ideas inherent in the double-plot convention. (William Empson 34)

In the passages, the words 'juxtaposition' and 'illuminates/ correspond' are extremely crucial. The two parts of which the play consists as a formal entity 'correspond' to each other. Although he uses the term 'subplot' in other parts, it does not necessarily mean the subjugation of the term

to the 'main plot'. Instead of it, the subplot and the main plot are merely 'juxtaposed', with almost the same value, whilst they mutually influence each other. Shakespeare has succeeded in creating on stage a world which the audience might have considered as realistic, consisting of two separate groups of people: kings, queens and aristocrats on the one hand and commoners on the other. As for the above quotation, Pamela McCallum unravels Empson's intricate and complex theory. She writes: 'In *Troilus and Cressida* two separate and relatively independent plotlines are brought into contact through a sudden coincidence of the sexual and political spheres when Cressida is transferred to the Greek camp. What began as a private love affair is transformed into a public orgy' (Pamela McCallum 202).

Considering those two quotations, one could understand that if two separate elements are juxtaposed, they correspond to each other and that this correspondence could generate unexpected effects. Effects derived from two different aspects are more powerful than each handled separately and individually. Probably, the scientific term 'synergy' is the most appropriate to describe this type of effect. In another place, Empson speculates that Shakespeare's realistic depiction of 'this world' is pinned down by his deployment of the double plots. He illustrates the 'populace' while he describes royalty and aristocracy.

Structure of the Novel

Thus far, I have introduced Empson's double plot theory. I shall argue that his theory could be applied to interpretation and understanding of some aspect of *Brideshead Revisited* as well. Firstly, this paper shall begin the application of Empson's theory to the given fiction by considering its structure. As for this, in his *Brideshead Revisited – the Past Redeemed*, Robert Murray Davis closely scrutinises the three different versions of the text. He introduces the manuscript of *Brideshead Revisited* and calls it a '1944 version'. In 1945, it was first published with a structural alteration, and then reissued in a revised edition in 1960. Davis writes that the manuscript version, or the '1944' version, consists of three books. When it came to publishing the novel, Waugh structured it as two books. However, at the time of revision, he went back to the three-book structure. Davis demonstrates the table of contents in his book:

CONTENTS

Brideshead Revisited

PROLOGUE

SACRED AND PROFANE MEMORIES OF CAPTAIN CHARLES RYDER

Book One

ET IN ARCADIA EGO

Chapter One: *I meet Sebastian Flyte – and Anthony Blanche – I visit Brideshead for the first time*

Chapter Two: *My cousin Jasper's Grand Remonstrance – a warning against charm – Sunday morning in Oxford*

Chapter Three: *My father at home – Lady Julia Flyte*

Chapter Four: *Sebastian at home – Lord Marchmain abroad*

[End of Book One, beginning of Book Two, manuscript version]

Chapter Five: *Autumn in Oxford – dinner with Rex Mottram and supper with Boy Mulcaster – Mr. Samgrass – Lady Marchmain at home – Sebastian contra mundum*

[End of book 1, beginning of book 2, 1960 edition]

Chapter Six: *Samgrass revealed – I take leave of Brideshead – Rex revealed*

Chapter Seven: *Julia and Rex*

Chapter Eight: *Mulcaster and I in defence of our country – Sebastian abroad – I take leave of Marchmain House*

Book Two

A TWITCH UPON THE THREAD

Chapter One: *Orphans of the Storm*

Chapter Two: *Private view – Rex Mottram at home*

Chapter Three: *The fountain*

Chapter Four: *Sebastian contra mundum*

Chapter Five: *Lord Marchmain at home – death in the Chinese drawing-room – the purpose revealed*

EPILOGUE

BRIDESHEAD REVISITED²

The edition used in this paper is based on the 1960 version, and therefore it is the three-book structure. Chapters Six to Eight on the above table are in Book Two in the Penguin edition titled 'BRIDESHEAD DESERTED', and Book Two on the table is equivalent to Book Three in the Penguin.

Furthermore, interestingly, Davis counts the pages of each book in each edition and analyses them. He understands that 'Waugh seems to have considered physical and dramatic symmetry at the expense of chronological balance' (Davis 42).³ Davis continues his explanation as:

Waugh also had artistic grounds for using a structure that emphasizes two major movements in the novel and that is not extensively modified in the structural patterns of 1944 and 1960. The titles of the two books, "Et in Arcadia Ego" and "A Twitch upon the Thread," emphasize the contrast between the movements. (Davis 43)

In a number of places in his book, Davis refers to several significant and crucial words that represent approximately the same point. For example, after the paragraph from which I have quoted the above phrases, he mentions 'By contrasting with and complementing each other'. (Davis 43) In another part of the book, he writes as: 'The five chapters of book 2 in fact mirror the construction of book 1...' (Davis 105). Davis uses 'book 2' as 'Book Three' in the Penguin edition (based on the 1960 edition). One should note the verb 'mirror' there. He repeats the importance of 'contrast' and 'comparison' in other places in his book. The verb in question is also what reflects another object/ the other object. These references perfectly match with the definition of the double plot theory by Empson.

However, he proceeds and unfolds his arguments through the American edition. Therefore, one could expand his arguments through taking account of the British edition as well. As Davis points out, Book Two works as the turning point linking Book One and Book Three in the British edition. Davis uses the word 'mirror' as I have already quoted above. In the British version, the word 'mirror' would work much better than in the American edition, or the 1945 edition, for Book Two of the 1960 functions as a mirror through which Book One and Book Two reflect each other. If the first part represents an outward movement, the third part is to demonstrate a returning movement. It seems to be natural to contain a turning point. Furthermore, the three-book structure, in my opinion, perfectly fits the title *Brideshead Revisited* and the title for the epilogue.

In terms of the contents of those three books, the middle section also mediates the first and last sections. About the setting, mainly characters stay at Marchmain House, the townhouse of the Flytes. At the same time, the title for Book Two is 'Brideshead Deserted'. In fact, Marchmain house is to be sold and converted to flats and the engagement and marriage of Julia and Rex are described while Brideshead Castle is deserted. This section represents an unstable locus in the novel, casting shadow upon the proceeding Book. Julia's marriage is to lead to her affair with Charles in Book Three.

In Book Three, more than one setting appears in fact. Charles and his wife Celia are aboard on the way back to Britain from New York. Charles happens to see Julia. They have formed an adulterous relationship. This is also a very important aspect of the section but Brideshead Castle plays a very important role again. Just as in Chapter Three in Book One, Chapter Three in Book Three is also full of the reminiscences of the Arcadian setting. Charles and Julia alone talk near the fountain. This chapter contains a number of descriptions of the park/ gardens. For instance:

I had carried two garden cushions from the shelter of the colonnade and put them on the rim of the fountain. There Julia sat, in a tight little gold tunic and a white gown, one hand in the water idly turning an emerald ring to catch the fire of the sunset; the carved animals mounted over her dark head in a cumulus of green moss and glowing stone and dense shadow, and the waters round them flashed and bubbled and broke into scattered flames. (264)

After that, readers come across the following Acadian image again:

Then through the open window, as the light streamed out across the terrace into the dusk, to the fountain which in that house seemed always to draw us to itself for comfort and refreshment, I caught the glimpse of a white skirt against the stones. It was nearly night. I found her [Julia] in the darkest refuge, on a wooden seat, in a by of the clipped box which encircled the basin. (272)

Book Three is set at Brideshead Castle but there are slight differences too. Full of light is Charles and Sebastian's picnic scene in Book One. This is super-Arcadian. On the other hand, those descriptions of the garden and fountain, in Book Three, which should be Arcadian in Book One, are quite dark and sombre. While Book One features Charles's friendship with Sebastian, Book Three is mainly about his affair with Julia. Those different episodes are juxtaposed. However, one should not forget that with those books sharing the same pastoral and Arcadian setting, Book One, in spite of being set in an idealised place, contains a sober tone such as the motto 'Et in Arcadia Ego', which is the title of this book, whilst flickers and flashes of light come into Book Three despite the fact that it is such as night approaching, or perhaps death (including Lord Marchmain's death). Opposite aspects in those separate books permeate each other. Considering this, Empson's double plot theory may be illuminatingly applied. Separate scenes are juxtaposed but they influence and correspond to each other.

This structure also perfectly matches with one of the forms in classical music, a 'ternary form'. Basically, this form consists of three parts, the first and the third of which are the same melody or identical and the middle of which is a different tone and melody although based on the same theme. Thus, the melody at the beginning comes back again after a turn with a different tone and atmosphere. This is cyclical. Therefore, as has been seen thus far, this form is very similar to the structure of *Brideshead Revisited*. In addition, in terms of music, the effect caused by this type of cyclical movement in the ternary form should be noted. In my personal experience in listening to classical music, every time I reach the third part of the given musical form, despite its similarity of the first part, it sounds different. The feeling of return heightens my feeling and excitement because the third part, which is to be almost exactly the same, comes to assume a different tone albeit its similarity to the first. It could be understood that this type of juxtaposition should generate an unexpected effect. This could coincide with Empson's double plot theory to some extent.

The Two Relationships – Sebastian-Charles/ Julia-Charles

After the accumulation of the idyllic and pastoral moments in the first book, 'Et in Arcadia Ego', where the friendship between Charles and Sebastian is depicted, Book Two goes in another direction because it starts to cast more light on Julia. Julia marries Rex Mottram but their marriage life cannot be called a happy one. The main setting is the Flytes's townhouse, Marchmain House. In Book Three, Charles, who is married to the sister of his Oxonian friend Boy Mulcaster, and Julia form an intimate relationship. What is important here is that one should not only observe their affair but also the friendship between Charles and Sebastian. As far as my impression is concerned, the contrast between those two relationships (friendship and affair) is

worth considering. In another paper, I have already mentioned the homoerotic friendship between the protagonist and his aristocratic friend.⁴ In Book Two, Charles moves onto Julia. She should be the main character next to Charles, but a number of critics have commented that ‘Julia is a thoroughly unconvincing character’⁵ (Davis 16). As for this point, I would argue that Waugh did not consider characterisation of Julia as important because that was not his intention.

Charles’s love for Sebastian, which might be of a homosexual or homoerotic nature, shifts to his love for Julia. This type of transition is quite commonly discovered in school novel tradition, according to a number of critics. For instance, the author of *The Life of Evelyn Waugh*, Douglas Lane Patey, referring to *Brideshead Revisited*, points it out as well. He writes:

Such resemblance of brother and sister was in fact common in a class of tales about young men coming to maturity which, Paul Puccio has shown, provided an important source for *Brideshead*: the school novel, as practised from Thomas Hugh’s *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857) and *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) to Waugh’s own youthful favourite, Compton Mackenzie’s *Sinister Street* (1913). (Douglas Lane Patey 227)

According to Patey, ‘These stories were often designed as if to teach Thomas Arnold’s doctrine that the “friendships” formed among boys in youth “may be part of the business of eternity”; *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* takes as one of its epigraphs the lines from Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*: “men may rise on stepping-stones/ Of their dead selves to higher things”’ (Patey 227). He then continues as:

Often the schoolboy hero visits the sickroom of his closest friend, and eventually meets his family, his mother and especially his sister, whose physical resemblance to an already admired brother helps draw the hero from friendship to mature love and marriage. (Patey 227)

Patey’s comment, ‘Such resemblance of brother and sister was in fact common in a class of tales about young men coming to maturity’ is of great importance because Waugh’s novel is practically identical to the ‘tradition’ in school novels. In addition, the last part of the citation could be applied to *Brideshead Revisited* and perfectly fit into it. In fact, Julia’s resemblance to her brother ‘helps draw the hero from friendship to mature love’ (although ‘marriage’ is not guaranteed in Waugh’s novel because Charles and Julia’s relationship is adulterous, their own marriages do not work out, and at the end, Julia will break off their engagement). Thus, Charles’s ‘friendship’ and its shift to ‘mature love’ are reflected by the tradition of school tales and the sexuality that has been traditionally ‘nurtured’ at British public school. In addition, one should note that a certain sentence is used twice on p. 245 and p. 288; Charles says, ‘He was the forerunner.’ By saying this, he means that Sebastian is the forerunner of Julia. (In the latter, Charles means the same but Julia understands that she is also to be the forerunner of another person. She is afraid of being forgotten just as her brother by Charles. Perhaps, this ‘another person’ could be not a human being but God.) This would match with Patey’s analysis here.

However, the school novel tradition quite does not perfectly fit the novel in question in

terms of Charles's two relationships. His affair with Julia is not far from his old friendship with her brother especially because Julia seems to be a double of Sebastian or they seem to be interchangeable. On the one hand, in the given tradition, there is a transition from homosexuality/ homoeroticism to heterosexuality. In other words, more or less, the sexuality of boy characters in such novels is 'progressive' or transitional. The homosexual period is, in a sense, transient. Thence, it could be argued that this could be a bildungsroman. However, on the other hand, *Brideshead Revisited* forbids this type of progressive movement. Charles's homoerotic friendship is equivalent to his love for Julia.

The similarity of brother and sister is emphasised even at the beginning of the novel. In Book One, Julia is described as follows:

She so much resembled Sebastian that, sitting beside her in the gathering dusk, I was confused by the double illusion of familiarity and strangeness. Thus, looking through strong lenses, one may watch a man approaching from afar, study every detail of his face and clothes, believe one has only to put out a hand to touch him, marvel that he does not hear one and look up as one moves, and then, seeing him with the naked eye, suddenly remember that one is to him a distant speck, doubtfully human. (74)

The narrator is struck by their similarity but simultaneously he feels an uncomfortable, or less easily explained sensation. This feeling is described through a metaphor of the 'strong lenses'. I am not sure of whether this metaphor should be a well-wrought one or not but at least, it represents the oxymoronic and paradoxical mixture of 'familiarity and strangeness' that Charles has recognised in Julia. This encounter foretells their romance and affair.

As well as Julia's similarity to Sebastian, readers come across her lack of physical femininity. Charles describes her bodily features as follows:

She was thin in those days, flat-chested, leggy; she seemed all limbs and neck, bodiless, spidery; thus far she conformed to the fashion, but the hair-cut and the hats of the period, and the blank stare and gape of the period, and the clownish dabs of rouge high on the cheekbones, could not reduce her to type. (172)

What is striking in the above passage is that she does not possess typical femininity. What characterises her body is androgyny and boyishness. She does not seem to be a glamorous woman because her 'chest' (not written as 'bosom' either) is flat. The Julia in this part of narrative is, almost like a boy, in transition from androgyny to female sexuality. As long as the narrator says 'in those days', this reference accentuates her bodily change, but readers could hardly succeed in eliciting much information on her physical appearance after she has become a mature lady and when she is committing the adultery with Charles. In fact, Waugh spends a number of lines on describing characters' clothes rather than their physical appearance. Readers would have to picture her according to the image in her girlhood described by the narrator here. Therefore, it is the more difficult to tell Julia from Sebastian owing to her lack of female sexuality with an ample bosom. The two separate figures, man and woman, seem to be one but at

the same time, separate. Those characters with the same value are just juxtaposed, providing some reflection on each other. These two separate love affairs would be derived from the same source. The distinction between Sebastian's subjectivity and Julia's is not easy to specify.

In fact, in Book One, in Charles's life, Sebastian plays a very important role whereas in Book Two, he has almost completely disappeared. Accordingly, new light has been cast upon Julia's role. The narrator also recounts as:

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. (Ibid)

In Book Three, Sebastian's actual appearance practically never occurs. However, he appears or sneaks into Book Three in the form of some characters' report and Charles's reminiscence. The authenticity of the information on Sebastian is not completely confirmed. His presence in Book Three is less substantial and less tangible but this vagueness and unreliability of report accentuates the ghostly and spooky incessant presence of Sebastian as follows:

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.

'That's cold comfort for a girl,' she said when I tried to explain. 'How do I know I shan't suddenly turn out to be somebody else? It's an easy way to chuck.'

I had not forgotten Sebastian; every stone of the house had a memory of him, and hearing him spoken of by Cordelia as someone she had seen a month ago, my lost friend filled my thoughts. (288)

Sebastian's ubiquity appears to overwhelm Julia's presence. He haunts the Arcadian garden of Brideshead Castle.

This could be derived from his own biographical background. Martin Stannard judges Waugh's sexuality and persistently existing homosexuality. He considers that Waugh could not completely 'thrust away' his homosexuality. Stannard writes:

So fiercely had he fought for his 'masculinity' after his broken marriage that he had tried to thrust away all that was homosexual in him. It would not die.⁶ (Martin Stannard 58)

If Stannard's biographical description were adopted, it would lead me to conclude that for him, his homosexuality could not have been transient and a transition from homosexuality to heterosexuality. Those sexualities coexisted in him. Waugh's 'Sebastian' was not the past but the present even after his heterosexual relationship. In this case, it would be natural that Waugh was not interested in progressive movement/ transition but in coexistence and juxtaposition. Biographically, too, what he might have wanted to express seems to conform to the Empsonian

double plot theory.

As for Charles's relationships with Sebastian and Julia, on the surface, they seem to be influenced by the school novel tradition discussed, but it does not cover the structure of his relationships perfectly. In the school novel tradition, a transition from homosexuality/homoeroticism to heterosexuality can be observed, whereas in *Brideshead Revisited*, the shift from Sebastian to Julia is not progressive, seeming as if those two relationships were continuing synchronically rather than diachronically. This effect could be derived from the ambiguity of Sebastian and Julia's identity and subjectivity especially because of their physical similarity. In this sense, it appears that two separate plotlines on Charles's connection with the aristocratic brother and sister are juxtaposed. However, simultaneously, they influence each other. The novel does not allow a reader to read it simply as a bildungsroman. They are both now rather than the past, for, in my opinion, Waugh was facing a struggle regarding his sexuality.

Conclusion

To observe the double structure of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, this paper started with looking at William Empson's double plot theory. Empson explains that there are two different levels in interpretation of narrative. From that, he moves onto Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and demonstrates how two different story lines work. Once two separate settings and elements are simply juxtaposed, they begin to correspond with each other; they start to assume a different tone from each element or setting. Readers who assume that the said novel by Waugh should be also a bildungsroman would be puzzled because they cannot find any development in characters' personality. There is an invisible power that prevents readers from simply interpreting the novel as a personal development of the protagonist and drags down this upward movement. This could be explained, to some extent, by application of Empson's double theory to the fiction in question. As for its structure, the novel is constructed in a symmetrical way. The table of contents also shows, in the 1960 edition, that Book One and Book Two are paired through the presence of Book Two which works as a mirror. However, Book One and Book Two are not totally separate stories, but they influence each other. The Arcadian setting of Book One contains the element of death just like the classical reference to Arcadia while Book Three, despite its sombre tone, different from Book One, still exhibits some flickers of light. Furthermore, regarding Charles's relationships with Sebastian and Julia, they are paired but they are not independent of each other. Rather, they, again, correspond with each other. There was a school novel tradition in which a boy protagonist with a close friendship with his classmate starts to love his friend's sister. There, one could observe a transition from homoeroticism/homosexuality to heterosexuality. In a way, this shift could be similar to bildungsroman. However, Waugh's novel refuses this type of interpretation. It represses this kind of upward movement. The two relationships are merely juxtaposed but they respond to one another. Waugh might not be very much interested in the protagonist's personal development. The two different plotlines which contrast and correspond with each other generate the force to carry the story and the characters, while this force pushes down the upward movement.

On one level, the whole structure goes from Sebastian to Julia, but on another level, they

reflect each other just as the double plot theory of Empson's. Therefore, although seemingly, *Brideshead Revisited* follows the school novel tradition in which the hero starts with a homoerotic friendship with his closest classmate and turns to a heterosexual relationship with the said friend's sister, rejecting this type of bildungsroman, Waugh gives an equal value to both Sebastian and Julia, who are more or less interchangeable owing to their sexual ambiguity. Thence, the characters' presents seem to make a contrast and at the same time, to reflect and correspond with each other and so do Book One and Book Three through Book Two representing a mirror.

Before closing this paper, I wonder whether it is coincident that the narrator says 'Cressid' on p. 280. Cressida might symbolise lost romance suggesting Charles and Julia's relationship. She also represents adultery because despite her promise of ever-lasting love for Troilus, she apparently commits adultery (although it is not clearly explained in the play). In addition to this, William Empson uses Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* to explain the function of double plot. The juxtaposition of Empson's treatment of the Shakespearean play and the narrator's reference to Cressida seems to generate a very interesting effect indeed just as Empson's double plot theory itself.

Notes

¹ Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (London: Penguin Books, 1962). Subsequent references are to this edition.

² I have quoted this table from Robert Murray Davis's *Brideshead Revisited – the Past Redeemed*, pp. 40-1. He distinguishes the word 'book' depending on to which edition he refers. He uses Arabic numerals to number the books when he refers to the 1960 edition on the above table, but I stick to the style of my edition when I refer to the books.

³ Davis shows the statistics of the three editions. He writes: 'The 1944 structure has a rough page count of 84/ 119/ 117 for the three books; the 1945 edition is 201/ 117. Most symmetrical of all is the 1960 edition, 128/ 75/ 117, with a 5/ 3/ 5 division of chapters. Furthermore, this version includes the entire Oxford sequence in book 1 and puts in book 2 what is essentially reported, offstage action. However, this division leaves disproportionate gaps between books 1 and 2 (June – December of one year) and between book [sic] 2 and 3 (ten years).'

⁴ See my article 'Pastoral Revisited: Sexual Explorations in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*' in *Reading* 29 (2008), 25-36.

⁵ According to him, the given judgement is 'universal'. A number of critics have thought that the characterisation of Julia is not satisfactory.

⁶ About Waugh's homosexual experience, he writes about his first homosexual experience in a letter to his friend Nancy Mitford, although it is still very difficult to confirm his sexuality.

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