

# BRIDESHEAD REVISITED

**A UK Film Council, HanWay Films and BBC Films presentation  
Directed by Julian Jarrold**

**Produced by Robert Bernstein, Douglas Rae and Kevin Loader  
Screenplay by Andrew Davies and Jeremy Brock**

**A film review by Franco P. Visser**

'Be careful what you wish for, because your wish might just come true...' a dear friend once told me. How true those words are when having seen *Brideshead Revisited*, the film adaptation of the book with the same title written by Evelyn Waugh in 1945. Set in pre-war England the film tells the story of Charles Ryder (played by Matthew Goode), a first year student reading history at Hertford College, Oxford University and his 'entry' into the strange and turmoil filled world of the Marchmain peerage with their magnificent country seat, Brideshead.

Charles is both protagonist and narrator of the story. As a 'searching' and half 'lost' soul during his first-year studies, Charles meets the alcoholic Lord Sebastian Flyte (played by Ben Whishaw) while at University, a rather troubled and eccentric character in addition to being homosexual, and one who is not very interested in studying. Sebastian in turn introduces an impressionable Charles to his set of very gay college friends. A very 'intimate' relationship soon develops between Charles and Sebastian, and although the film hints towards a steamy relationship between the two, it is never actually shown or 'confirmed' on screen.

Through Sebastian, Charles is invited to Brideshead, the old and very beautiful châteaux-styled castle owned by Sebastian's parents, Alexander Flyte, Marquis of Marchmain (played by Michael Gambon) and Teresa Flyte, Marchioness of Marchmain (played by Emma Thompson). Sebastian's parents are separated, with Teresa his mother being the chatelaine of the estate. Sebastian's father lives in Venice, Italy with his new partner Cara (played by Greta Scacchi). The film introduces Teresa Flyte as a devout Catholic lady and mother, who acts rather strict and in an over-controlling manner in the lives of her four children. Everything that happens in the family's lives is referred back to, and based on her Catholic beliefs and no straying from the 'true path to salvation and eternity' is tolerated by the Marchioness. Alexander Flyte in contrast lives a relaxed and joyful life in Venice with Cara, having first converted to Catholicism in order to marry Teresa, and then reverting back to Anglicanism after they were separated.

Teresa Flyte, Marchioness of Marchmain rules her family's lives with an iron fist and will. It is especially Sebastian with his homosexual life-style and sexual preference that finds it extremely 'challenging' to live under his mother's influence and guidance. Charles is slowly but surely introduced and exposed to the central



characters of Brideshead and their strict and strange 'ways'. As an individual who professes to be an atheist, Brideshead and its inhabitants seem to be from a planet far removed from his own, Paddington, where he spends some of the holiday time away from the University with his widowed father. Charles spent the whole of his allowance while at University, and thus has to spend time at his father's house, and his father makes being under his roof a very uncomfortable experience for Charles. Through regular visits as 'orchestrated' by Sebastian, Charles can escape his father's dry and boring wit and he is drawn more into Brideshead and the Flyte family. Their religion becomes a point of particular interest to Charles, and causes him significant inner turmoil and confusion.

But then Charles falls in love with Lady Julia Flyte (played by Hayley Atwell), Alexander and Teresa's eldest daughter. The film leaves one unsure as to whether the 'intimate' relationship that Charles has with Sebastian is just a precursor to gaining closeness to Lady Julia, or whether Charles actually had feelings for both Sebastian and Lady Julia. Whatever the case may be, Sebastian soon discovers Charles' love interest in Lady Julia, and reacts by increasing his alcohol consumption and fleeing from Brideshead to Morocco. Lady Julia meanwhile gets married to Rex Mottram (played by Jonathan Cake), a wealthy, fortune seeking Canadian who happens to be Catholic. During one unfortunate evening at Brideshead Teresa, Lady Julia's mother makes it very clear to Charles that she cannot allow Lady Julia to marry Charles, a non-Catholic and a self-proclaimed atheist. Charles exits Brideshead and the family in total, until later in the film when he is called upon by Teresa, Marchioness of Marchmain at his father's house. She asks him to find Sebastian for her and bring him back to Brideshead as she is ill and dying. Charles travels to Morocco to discover Sebastian in a convalescent home, and Sebastian refuses to go back to England and Brideshead with him.

Charles soon meet up with Lady Julia again on a boat cruise after Charles got married and fathered two children. Their love is rekindled; they divorce their respective spouses and return to Brideshead with the intent to marry. Teresa, Marchioness of Marchmain has died by this time, and upon their arrival at Brideshead they find Lord Bridey Flyte (played by Ed Stoppard), Lady Julia's eldest brother to be in charge of the estate. Alexander, Marquis of Marchmain returns from Italy to Brideshead along with Cara as he is ill and dying. On his deathbed Alexander reverts

back to Catholicism and names Lady Julia as his heir. Now the picture seemed all but perfect due to the fact that Charles will get both Lady Julia and Brideshead, the estate that captivates him so much. Alexander, Marquis of Marchmain's deathbed scene is very moving, even for Charles, and after Alexander's death Lady Julia decides against marrying Charles, as it would constitute a grievous sin according to her now strengthened Catholic beliefs. Charles thus finally exits Brideshead and the family, having lost 'both' his loves and everything else he held dear. But alas, fate would intervene as Brideshead is soon used as an army base in preparation for the Second World War. The Flyte family abandoned the estate before the war, and Charles, as a high-ranking officer

stationed at Brideshead is left only with memories.....and guilt.

Brideshead Revisited is a very interesting film full of strange and wonderful dynamics. The worlds of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', and that of the believers and the non-believers are skilfully juxtaposed in Charles' journey and search for meaning and love. Charles' wishes were granted, but at the same time taken away from him in a cruel twist of fate, and due to Waugh's brilliantly designed story plot. The film reminds you that whatever you want and wish for comes with a price. And after being shown 'the goods of life' it is up to you to recognise the 'price' to be paid and to decide whether paying that price is worth it in the end. Skilfully designed, beautifully portrayed. Go and watch it!