U3A Pleasures of Reading Monday 15th July 2019

Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh

1. Charles Rider is enamoured of the wealth, beauty and privileged paradise, “very near heaven. “Yet beneath the surface glamor lie discontent, anxiety, resentment – chinks in the perfect armour of the Flyte family – that presage later problems. Can you identify some of those chinks?

2. What is the reason for Sebastian’s decline? Trace its beginnings and the role that Lady Marchmain plays.

3. Why does Julia marry Rex Mottram?

4. The overriding theme of the novel is Catholicism and the opening of one’s life to grace. At one point the inevitability as the “twitch upon the thread,” referring to how a fisherman gently wiggles the line of the catch. You might explore the role that religion (or its rejection) plays in the life (or ultimate fate) of the characters – Sebastian (with his teddy bear), Charles, Julia, Lady Marchmain and her husband.

5. Is Lord Marchmain’s death bed conversion genuine?

6. Critics have found Brideshead Revisited elitist, saying that the work champions the life of the aristocracy over the life of the middle class? Or is that an unfair assertion.

7. Does Charles’s conversion at the end feel convincing to you? Were you surprised?

8. Do you think that this novel presents an appealing view of Catholicism? Why or why not?

9. It would be a shame to read this book without noticing the beauty of Waugh’s writing, and drawing the connection between the beauty of his style and the message within. What sentence or paragraph
most stood out to you as a snapshot of both Waugh’s skill as an artist and the tone or them of the book?

10. Think about the way time is manipulated in Brideshead Revisited, particularly the way Charles reveals his marriage to Celia and his affair with Julia. We jump around a lot in time as the details become clear. What is the effect of this sort of narration?

11. Here’s another plot structure question for you: why is Lord Marchmain’s death the novel’s finale? Isn’t he a minor character? Who cares if he dies?

12. What shifts do you see - in theme, tone, style, plot structure. Or anything else – between Book one and Book Two of Brideshead Revisited?

13. Besides Charles, whose side are you on as a reader, and which characters just aren’t likeable? What do you think of Lady Marchmain for example? Julia? Brideshead? Lord Marchmain?