

Master thesis

A comparative study of Aesthetics, Ethics and Education in  
Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and Donna Tartt's *The  
Secret History*

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## Abstract

In this thesis, I conduct a comparative analysis of Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* and Donna Tartt's novel *The Secret History*. Central to my thesis is the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education in these two novels. Both novels present and assess the different ways in which this triad is imagined and carried out by the social groupings presented in the novels and through the individual characters. Further, each novel embodies a specific version of this relationship from which they conduct their representations and critique.

It has been important for my thesis to define exactly how I understand the terms aesthetics, ethics and education. The theoretical framework of my thesis has predominately been determined by the theorists and philosophers presented in the two novels. However, my understanding of aesthetics and how I use it in my thesis is also supported by John Dewey. John Dewey views aesthetics as something we can find in scenes and views of daily life (Dewey, 1980, p. 5-6). In the case of these two novels, it is predominantly explored in the daily life and setting of academia. I have presented ethics as the characters' "character", so to speak. I understand this largely to encompass their morality. Regarding education, I have utilised two different understandings of the word. I have referred to education in terms of traditional academic education but also as a learned experience. This allows for different understanding of education, like social and familial education.

My goal for this thesis is multifaceted. I consider the ethical repercussions for the characters as they try to achieve and uphold the aesthetics of learning they adopt. I also compare and contrast how these repercussions are framed by the narrative's different aspects of aesthetics, ethics and education. I intend to contest the view that aesthetics, ethics and education exist independently of one another in these two novels. This belief, especially that aesthetics and ethics can be separated, is presented and criticised in both novels. I argue that in both novels, education is presented as an aesthetic act that brings with it ethical consequences. I call this an aesthetic of learning. Both novels deploy their own aesthetic techniques through genre, intertextuality, plot, setting and so on to explore these ideas and practices. There is also an overarching concern with mimicry that plays a significant role in developing one's aesthetics

and character. This is demonstrated in each of the novels through the characters assuming roles and characteristics from each other as well as from where they draw aesthetic inspiration, i.e., through books and historical figures, adopting a specific fashion or style into their lives. Moreover, there is also a case of mimicry between the two novels, or more precisely, a consideration to be made of whether *Brideshead Revisited* acts as a model for *The Secret History* because of the many overlaps in character, backdrop and plot. There are undeniable similarities between the two novels despite them taking place during different periods and having different geographical settings, namely England and America, respectively.

## Abstrakt

I denne avhandlingen gjennomfører jeg en sammenlignende analyse av Evelyn Waugh sin roman *Brideshead Revisited* og Donna Tartt sin roman *The Secret History*. Sentralt i avhandlingen min er forholdet mellom estetikk, etikk og utdanning i disse to romanene. Begge romanene presenterer og vurderer de ulike måtene denne triaden blir forestilt og gjennomført av de sosiale gruppene som presenteres i romanene, så vel som gjennom de individuelle karakterene. Videre ser man at begge romanene uttrykker en egen versjon av dette forholdet, som de bruker til å uttrykke forskjellige framstillinger og kritikker.

Det har vært viktig for avhandlingen min å definere nøyaktig hvordan jeg forstår begrepene estetikk, etikk og utdanning. Den teoretiske rammen for avhandlingen min er i hovedsak bestemt av teoretikerne og filosofene som er presentert i de to romanene. Jeg støtter meg imidlertid også på John Dewey sin definisjon av estetikk i avhandlingen. John Dewey ser på estetikk som noe vi kan finne i dagligdagse episoder fra hverdagen. (Dewey, 1980, s. 5-6). I disse to romanene utforskes estetikk i stor grad i det daglige livet og i innstillingen karakteren har til academia. I avhandlingen min har jeg presentert etikk som karakterene sin "karakter", så å si. Jeg forstår dette i stor grad til å omfatte deres moral. Når det gjelder utdanning, har jeg benyttet to forskjellige forståelser av ordet. Jeg har henvist til utdanning i form av tradisjonell akademisk opplæring, men også som en lært opplevelse. Dette åpner for ulike forståelser av utdanning, som sosial og familiær utdanning.

Målet mitt for denne avhandlingen er mangfoldig. Jeg vurderer de etiske konsekvensene for karakterene når de forsøker å oppnå og opprettholde læringens estetikk som de adopterer i møte med academia. Jeg sammenligner og kontrasterer hvordan disse konsekvensene blir rammet inn av de ulike aspektene av estetikk, etikk og utdanning i fortellingen. Jeg ønsker også å utfordre oppfatningen av at estetikk, etikk og utdanning eksisterer uavhengig av hverandre i disse to romanene. Denne troen, spesielt at estetikk og etikk kan skilles, blir presentert og kritisert i begge romanene. Jeg hevder at i begge romanene blir utdanning presentert som en estetisk handling som medfører etiske konsekvenser. Jeg kaller dette en læringsens estetikk. Begge romanene bruker egne estetiske teknikker gjennom sjanger, intertekstualitet, plott, innstilling osv. for å utforske disse ideene og praksisene. Der er også et overordnet fokus på mimikry som spiller en betydelig rolle i utviklingen av estetikk og karakter. Dette vises i hver av romanene gjennom at karakterene tar på seg roller og henter

egenskaper fra hverandre. De henter også estetisk inspirasjon fra bøker og historiske figurer, og ved å adoptere en bestemt mote eller stil. Videre er det også et tilfelle av mimikry mellom de to romanene, eller mer presist, det blir gjort en vurdering av om *Brideshead Revisited* fungerer som en modell for *The Secret History*. Dette på grunn av de mange overlappene i karakter, bakgrunn og plott. Det er helt klart likheter mellom de to romanene til tross for at de finner sted i ulike tidsperioder og har forskjellige geografiske innstillinger, henholdsvis England og Amerika.

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# Chapter 1: Introductory chapter

## Scope of thesis

This thesis explores the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*. Both novels present and assess the different ways in which this triad is imagined and carried out by the social groupings presented in the novels, as well as through the individual characters. Each novel embodies a specific version of this relationship from which they conduct their representations and critique. My goal is therefore to consider the ethical repercussions for the characters as they try to achieve and uphold the aesthetics of learning they adopt, as well as compare and contrast how these repercussions are framed by the different aspects of aesthetics, ethics and education in the narrative.

I intend to contest the view that aesthetics, ethics and education exist independently of one another in these two novels. This belief, especially that aesthetics and ethics can be separated, is presented as well as criticised in both novels. I argue that in both novels, education is presented as an aesthetic act that brings with it ethical consequences, I call this an aesthetics of learning. Both novels deploy their own aesthetic techniques through genre, intertextuality, plot, setting and so on to explore these ideas and practices. There is also an overarching concern with mimicry that plays a significant role in developing one's aesthetics and character. This is demonstrated in each of the novels through the characters assuming roles and characteristics from each other as well as from the where they draw aesthetic inspiration, i.e, through books and historical figures, adopting a specific fashion or style into their lives. Moreover, there is also a case of mimicry between the two novels, or more precisely a consideration to be made of whether *Brideshead Revisited* acts as a model for *The Secret History* on account of the many overlaps in character, backdrop and plot. There are undeniable similarities between the two novels despite them taking place during different time periods and having different geographical settings, namely England and America respectively.

*Brideshead Revisited* was written by Evelyn Waugh during the second world war while he was serving in the military, and it was published in 1945. Waugh was an English journalist and novelist born to an upper-middle class family in London, he later went on to attend Hertford college at Oxford University. Before the publication of *Brideshead Revisited* Waugh



had written several satirical works of fiction like *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*, which criticised the social and cultural norms of the early 1900s, was especially concerned with the effect modernity had on society. Central in *Brideshead Revisited* is the importance put on tradition and history. *Brideshead Revisited* is about Charles Ryder, a Captain in the British military, who is looking back on his years spent at Oxford where he met the wealthy and aristocratic Sebastian Flyte who introduces him to an aesthetic and exciting world. As Charles is brought into Sebastian's life, he becomes acquainted with the rest of his family, including his sister Julia. The novel follows the characters over several years as they navigate the relationship with each other, as well as their own beliefs and ethics. A central part of this novel is how the characters reconcile their ethics, or rather their character, with their own personal desires, aesthetics and the rapidly changing world that they live in. Throughout the novel Waugh uses descriptive language and vivid imagery which solidifies the credibility of Charles as an artist. Charles's evolution into becoming an artist starts before arriving at Oxford, seeing that he as a child used to bicycle around the neighbourhood and admire the architecture (Waugh, 2011, p. 102). It is, however, at Oxford and later at Brideshead, that he is encouraged to cultivate his artistry.

In Donna Tartt's novel we also read about a young man arriving at college searching for aesthetic fulfilment and identity. *The Secret History*, published in 1992, follows Richard Papan as he transfers from his school in Plano California to Hampden College in New England as a result of an aesthetic reaction to the college's brochure. Hampden College is a liberal arts college in New England and vastly different from the college he attended in his hometown. Arriving at Hampden he becomes captivated by his surroundings but also by a group of Classics students, their teacher and ultimately the life they represent. Richard is inspired to become a part of this exclusive group but is initially rejected, only to be accepted once his outward appearance and impression fits in with the rest of the group. From this point on Richard is let into a world of the elite, the cultured and aesthetic, the world of Western philosophy and Greek traditions. But as the novel progresses it becomes clear that the lengths that Richard and the others in the group are willing to go to maintain their lifestyle and obtain aesthetic experiences have ethical consequences. Donna Tartt who grew up in a small town called Grenada in Mississippi, first attended the University of Mississippi before she transferred to Bennington College, a liberal arts college in Vermont. There she befriended other aspiring writers like Bret Easton Ellis, Jonathan Lethem and Jill Eisenstadt. It was also during those years that she started working on her first novel *The Secret History* which

eventually got published in 1992 and got rave reviews (Kuiper, 2023). There is a connection between Tartt's experiences at Bennington and the college life she depicts at Hampden. In Lily Anolik's podcast *Once Upon a Time... at Bennington College* (2021) Anolik, points out that at Bennington: "The self is a creation, the life a kind of performance art." This is a sentiment that is very much explored in Tartt's novel, especially through Richard. On the topic, Mark Shaw, a college friend of Tartt's who is mentioned in the acknowledgements of her novel, adds:

At the time we were there [Bennington], we lived in a referential universe, or at least I did. involving the Eiffel Tower restaurant in London which was the clubhouse of Ronald Firbank, Nancy Cunard, Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound and Evelyn Waugh. We were consciously emulating the 1920s bright young things which you can easily smell in *The Secret History* (Anolik, 2021).

The former student and friend of Tartt, confirms that there was a certain aesthetic explored at Bennington that also made its way into her novel. Before I examine the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education in these two novels I believe it is important to be clear in my understanding of these terms and how I will use them in my thesis.

## Definition of Terms

Aesthetics, ethics and education can be and have been interpreted in different ways, as has their relationship. I derive my understanding of these terms from how they are presented in the two novels. My thesis will explore a variety of definitions of and theories about aesthetics, ethics and education, along with the relationship between them. The overarching definitions I will use are as follows.

Aesthetics, as I understand it, is concerned in part with the philosophy of art. The characters discuss aesthetic subjects (art and literature) in both novels, and we learn about them as characters through their views about and responses to art. As an extension of this, aesthetics in these two novels also encompasses the lifestyles the characters adopt and express visually (through their clothing, rooms, tastes, etc.) based on their aesthetic principles and in response to works of art and their perceptible environment.

Ethics, in my discussion, is concerned with the characters' "character" so to speak. I understand ethics to be made up of the moral principles a person chooses to live by and the

morality of the choices they make. Understanding ethics as "character" will then allow me to discuss what effects art, aesthetics, education and so on have on someone's "character."

And lastly, my understanding of education is about gaining knowledge and about what is learnt. When I am referring to education, I am of course talking about the academic education the characters receive as well as the traditions of the institutions they attend. If education is a learned experience, we must also acknowledge that not all education is academic, and neither is all education exclusively tied to places of study (as I will go on to discuss later in my thesis). Though academic education is at the centre of this thesis I will also explore other forms of education that impact the aesthetic and ethical development of the characters (social education, familial education and religious education).

## Aesthetics, Ethics and Education

Aesthetics in *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Secret History* is in part concerned with the philosophy of art. There is undoubtedly an appreciation of Western aesthetics in both novels that explores the nature of beauty and art through the artworks mentioned by the characters. However, aesthetics is also explored as a lifestyle in these two novels, and it is demonstrated through the characters' tastes in food and wine, clothes, interior choices and aesthetic judgements. The aesthetic lifestyle in *Brideshead Revisited* is, at least during the university years, linked with decadence, lavishness, old money and youth. The aristocratic Sebastian introduces Charles, who comes from a middle-class family to the finer things in life and joins Sebastian and his "bad set" (Waugh, 2011, p. 53) in adopting a lifestyle that is reminiscent of the one led by Bright Young Things. The Bright Young Things' behaviour can be accounted for as a reaction to the various social, political and historical occurrences that happened during the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most important of these was the Great War which was responsible for the death of so many young men but which in turn taught the generation that had been too young to fight in the war to make the most of their lives, and to "seize the day" (Johnson, 2015). The fashion and the overall aesthetics of Sebastian and "the bad set" is, at least in the beginning of the novel, that of the dandy-aesthete. According to Milthorpe in *Evelyn Waugh's Satire: Texts and Contexts* (2016, p. 116) this aesthetics:

“... suggest[s] an ambivalence toward wartime corporate masculinity informed by wistful nostalgia for twenties aestheticism led by Waugh's Oxford friends Harold

Acton and Brian Howard, whose new dandyism was simultaneously modelled on the modernist tradition and the dandy-decadence of the eighteen nineties”.

One way that the relationship between aesthetics and ethics is presented in *Brideshead Revisited* is evident when Charles returns for his second year at Oxford, when he starts to attend the Ruskin School of Art and moves away from the style of the dandy-aesthetes.

We were instructed by a man of about my age, who treated us with defensive hostility; he wore very dark blue shirts, a lemon-yellow tie, and horn-rimmed glasses, and it was largely by reason of this warning that I modified my own style of dress until it approximated to what my cousin Jasper would have thought suitable for countryhouse visiting. Thus soberly dressed and happily employed I became a fairly respectable member of my college. (Waugh, 2011, p. 135)

This signals a shift towards a new aesthetic that is more restrained and traditional. With this change in outward appearance, we also see a change of ethics (character) in Charles as he becomes more responsible, while Sebastian in contrast starts to fall apart.

In *The Secret History* we also see a relationship between aesthetics and ethics represented through the characters’ outward appearance. While the clothes worn by Charles and Sebastian are representative of the fashion of modern society, they are also inspired by the past. This is echoed in Tartt’s novel as well. The Classics students that Richard is so drawn to for their “picturesque and fictive qualities” (Tartt, 1993, p. 17) wear English suits, tweed jackets, sleeve garters and old fashioned glasses, making them stand out from their peers, especially the pair of siblings who are often described as wearing white and whose clothes would in general be “thought to be suitable for country house visiting” (Waugh, 2011, p. 135), as Charles’s cousin Jasper put it. The clothes worn by the Classics students is suggestive of the interwar period of *Brideshead Revisited* and does not conform to the expectations of how a college student in America during the 1980s would usually dress. That being said, around the same time Tartt was writing her novel, ITV productions broadcast a televised adaption of *Brideshead Revisited* in 1981 featuring Jeremy Irons and Anthony Andrews that was hugely successful and watched by many (Rossen, 2022). It is evident then, that Tartt drew inspiration from the popular television series which in turn reinforces my argument that Tartt’s novel to a certain extent, models itself after Waugh’s. I have already touched briefly on this when I argued that there was a connection between Tartt’s experiences at Bennington and the college

life she depicts at Hampden. The influence of *Brideshead Revisited*, specifically the TV show, is also pointed out by another Bennington alumni Nancy Morowitz, she recalls:

It really took hold. Part of it was the Britishness of it. Part of it was the aesthetics of that time period, how beautiful it was. The wealth and the notion that it was really desirable to be an aesthete. And then of course the clothes, the flannels, the Eton crop haircuts. You really couldn't escape it. (Anolik, 2021)

This is just one example of the link that is drawn between *Brideshead Revisited* and Tartt's novel in the podcast. In Tartt's novel the Classics students' education is a central part of their aesthetics and while both novels are to some extent defined by their subject of study it is explored to a greater degree in Tartt's novel than in Waugh's. The Classics students are shown to reject modern culture and are uninterested in the world outside of academia (which is revealing of their ethics). Instead, they value literature, art and philosophy. This in turn is reflected in their outward appearance, which as I mentioned is reminiscent of the one adopted by the characters in *Brideshead Revisited* who represent the Oxfordian students during the interwar period. This would be an example of the Classics students being proactive in cultivating their life to encompass an aesthetic of learning.

Both novels have a first-person narrator who recounts their own experience of the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education, and both narrators show an aesthetic reaction to the physical representation of the university and to university life in general which demonstrates the relationship between aesthetics and education.

In comparison with *The Secret History*, in *Brideshead Revisited* the relationship between aesthetics and education is rooted less in whether the characters' field of study becomes a part of their aesthetic, although it is not irrelevant. Charles's choice of study, history, is linked to his identity as an artist, in particular when he becomes an architectural painter. Different subjects in *Brideshead Revisited* are also associated with different values, based especially on their past. Modern Greats, for instance, is considered especially bad. The relationship between aesthetics and education in Waugh's novel is also explored in a non-academic way. There is a social education that Charles receives when he first arrives at Oxford, one that is practiced through his relationship with Sebastian Flyte. An example of this would be Charles's actions when he returns to his rooms after having lunch with Sebastian and he readily gets rid of anything that does not fit into the aesthetics he sees presented by Sebastian and the others. It is as if in the beginning of their friendship Charles takes his cue on how to act from Sebastian,

disregarding his cousin Jasper's advice on how a young, respectable Oxfordian should act. In *The Secret History*, however, the relationship between aesthetics and education has everything to do with the characters adopting what they study into their aesthetic and making it a part of their lifestyle. This is especially evident in their attempt to perform a Dionysian ritual in reaction to a lecture held by their professor, Julian Morrow.

Ethics comes into play in both novels in terms of what motivates the characters in pursuing this aesthetic lifestyle found at university. In Tartt's novel, for example, adapting an aesthetic lifestyle based on the Classics students' academic interests, results in them murdering someone. This emphasizes the relationship between these three concepts. Questions about what is morally acceptable or responsible when it comes to crafting and upholding an aesthetic of learning are answered by considering who makes ethical judgments and on what basis. Moreover, ethical questions are also raised by how characters respond to different events, good and bad. In Waugh's novel for instance the reader cannot help but question Charles's blind loyalty to Sebastian when he helps him maintain a life that supports his excessive drinking despite noticing that it is actually hurting him. There are religious, financial and aesthetic motivations and considerations to reckon with in relation to the question of what shapes character. In both novels, the characters' development over time, their childhood, education and surroundings are all contributing factors in determining the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education.

The two novels present different models of how aesthetics, ethics and education interrelate. As I previously stated mimicry is an important part of this triad. In *The Secret History* the Classics students discuss the concept of mimesis and how Aristotle argues that art objects that are painful to view, such as corpses, can become delightful when they are accurately depicted. (Tartt, 1993, p. 41)

The view that Aristotle presents, and which is supported by the Classics students' teacher is that art imitates nature and that mimesis, or imitation, is central to the creation of art and in particular to tragedy. In turn, tragedy and death present themselves as something beautiful. *The Secret History* does take the role of a sort of modern tragedy, incorporating different practices from the Aristotelian tragedy. For instance, Aristotle argued that tragedy is an imitation of people better than we are and that tragedies that depict people who is inferior is not really tragic (Aristotle, 1996, p. 24-25). To the Classics students then there is nothing *really* tragic about the first murder as the victim (a farmer) is viewed as inferior.

“It’s a terrible thing, what we did,” said Francis abruptly. “I mean, this man was not Voltaire we killed. But still. It’s a shame. I feel bad about it.” “Well, of course, I do too,” said Henry matter-of-factly. “But not bad enough to want to go to jail for it.” Francis snorted and poured himself another shot of whiskey and drank it straight off. “No,” he said. “Not that bad. (Tartt, 1993, p. 220)

Instead, the real tragedy views itself when they kill Bunny and friends turn on friends because as pointed out: “What one should look for are situations in which sufferings arise within close relationships” (Aristotle, 1996, p. 23). Moreover, their teacher, Julian, is likened to Aristotle. This is done by the Classics students, but it is also cultivated by Julian himself when he justifies his teaching methods on the account that he believes a great diversity of teachers is harmful for young minds. He says, “I know the modern world tends not to agree with me, but after all, Plato had only one teacher, and Alexander.” (Tartt, 1993, p. 32). From this we can deduce that, arguably, one cannot detach education, even the teaching of art and aesthetics, from ethics.

While the characters in *The Secret History* seem to believe that art imitates life, I argue that what they practice is actually that life imitates art. This is a central point in my thesis, present in both novels and particularly linked with the characters’ life at university. In *The Secret History*, the ethical consequences of this are alluded to in the book’s epigraphs, one from Nietzsche and the other from Plato. Both comment on the Classics students’ fatal decision to perform a Dionysian ritual. The first epigraph is from Nietzsche:

I enquire now as to the genesis of a philologist and assert the following: 1. A young man cannot possibly know what Greeks and Romans are. 2. He does not know whether he is suited for finding out about them. —FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (Tartt, 1993, p. vii)

Nietzsche argues in *The Birth of Tragedy* that young people do not have the maturity or life experiences to fully understand the ancient Greeks. Knowing the outcome of the Dionysian ritual and its aftereffects, this seems to ring true. The second epigraph is from Plato:

Come then, and let us pass a leisure hour in storytelling, and our story shall be the education of our heroes. —PLATO, *Republic*, BOOK II (Tartt, 1993, p. vii)

In Socrates’ dialogue with Adeimantus in *Republic*, they consider their traditions of education. The Greeks were conscious of having to educate both the body and the mind.

Socrates, however, argued that you should always begin educating the mind and the character and that this should start with fiction.

‘And we shall begin by educating mind and character, shall we not?’

‘Of course’

‘In this education you would include stories, would you not?’

‘Yes’

‘These are of two kinds, true stories and fiction. Our education must use both, and start with fiction’

‘I don’t know what you mean’

‘But you know that we begin by telling children stories. These are, in general, fiction, though they contain some truth. And we tell children stories before we start them on physical training.’ (Plato, 2007, p. 68)

By this Socrates means that, while the stories are fictitious, they contain some truth in that they indicate the way of the world and make the reader or listener reflect over their own conscience. He continues his discussion with Adeimantus by arguing that they should be careful with what stories they tell or give them to read as they are tender and impressionable. As such “our first business is to supervise the production of stories, and choose only those we think suitable, and reject the rest.” (Plato, 2007, p. 69). As a result, most poetry was banned in Socrates’s ideal Republic. The epigraph from *The Republic*, then, essentially tells us that literature and aesthetics hold educational value and ethical consequences.

In both Tartt’s and Waugh’s novels there are two alternative visions of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics: one that they are separate, the other that they are interrelated. The connection between aesthetics and ethical judgments is made in both books. In *Brideshead Revisited*, for instance, we see a rejection of modern art which speaks to Charles’s traditional values and a rejection of American culture. This rejection of American culture is somewhat mirrored in *The Secret History* which is after all an American novel. The characters gravitate towards Western European culture and art, and Richard, the novel’s narrator, specifically mentions a longing for England (Tartt, 1993, p. 10). As a big reader and love of literature Richard is prone to view things through a literary lens and so when he discloses that his favourite novel is *The Great Gatsby*. It is not hard to see how life has imitated art as Gatsby, an American, adopts English and especially Oxfordian, affectations.



An important essay that supports the idea that life imitates art was Oscar Wilde's essay *The Decay of Lying* where he argues that life imitates art far more often than art imitates life (Wilde, 2010, p. 22). While Wilde is not specifically mentioned in *Brideshead Revisited* his philosophies are present between the lines. Oscar Wilde who championed the idea of art for art's sake is represented in the value put on beautiful objects and the appreciation of a lavish lifestyle. Arguably he is also represented in the character Anthony Blanche, a flamboyant dandy who is often associated Harold Acton. Acton was a member of the Bright Young Things, and influential to them were people like Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater. This same debate is present in *The Secret History* too and is one of the ways in which Tartt's novel "mirrors" *Brideshead Revisited*. The flamboyant dandy stereotype is found in *The Secret History* through Francis Abernathy, who at one point in the novel is compared to Alfred Douglas, also known as Bosie who after all was one of Wilde's close friends and lovers. Later in my thesis I will use the models and traditions of the beforementioned authors and philosophers to build on the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education.

The narrative style of each of the novels enables them to present and critique, or at any rate give an account of, the different models of the interrelationship between aesthetics, ethics and education I have discussed in the previous section. I will therefore compare the narrators, plot lines, genre and characterisation in these two novels.

The structure of the two novels is similar in that they are both told in the first person, past tense. They are retellings of the narrators' past, focusing largely on their time spent at university. *Brideshead Revisited* covers a longer period than *The Secret History* and gives a more detailed account of life after university than Tartt's novel. In *The Secret History*, it is unclear exactly how much time has passed from the events of the book's ending to Richard's retelling of it. This type of narration allows the argument to be made that Charles and Richard are storytellers, and in turn take part in aesthetic practice. Charles views things from the perspective of a visual artist, illustrated by the way that describes people and his surroundings, showing that even early on in the novel he views the world, and in turn Oxford, through an artistic lens. This applies to Richard as well, but it is practised specifically through literature. Intertextuality, though present and important in *Brideshead Revisited* as well, is a particularly important part of the narration in *The Secret History* as it not only establishes the erudition of Richard and the other Classics students, but it is also used to show how Richard is prone to perceive things through literature. This is partly what makes Richard an unreliable narrator.

Consideration of the plot line also shows how aesthetics, ethics and education interrelate. The plot of *Brideshead Revisited* is more concerned with the evolution of becoming an artist, of moving from being aesthetically inspired in school, to learning a profession, to losing fulfilment in that profession. *The Secret History*, meanwhile, is more about the decline of character that occurs when you have “a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs” (Tartt, 1993, p. 5).

Waugh’s and Tartt’s novels are both university novels, a genre whose aim is to give an account of academic life. University novels, however, are more typically about the lives of lecturers, teachers and tenures than students. I argue that these two novels therefore show an aesthetic that is linked to youth and nostalgia which are specifically prominent in the university novel that centres on the life of the student. One of the chapters in *Brideshead Revisited* is named *Et In Arcadia Ego*, referring to Nicolas Poussin’s pastoral painting of the same name. This is one of the ways in which this novel promotes its pictorial approach to storytelling. This reference to pastoral tradition and Arcadia is made in direct comparison to their early period at Oxford and Brideshead Castle. The view of Oxford as a youthful Arcadia fits the Classics students’ view of Hampden College as well, but the pastoral mode is more evident in Waugh’s. *The Secret History* also experiments with different genres to develop the link between aesthetics, ethics and education. As has already been mentioned, narrative techniques from Greek tragedy are employed to a certain extent but another genre that Tartt draws from is Gothic literature.

The way the narrators view other characters is quite telling of their aesthetics as well, since this impacts their ethical judgements of people. Their reaction to events that transpire around them is also revealing of their ethics; this is shown, for instance, through Richard’s account of Bunny’s death. One of the main things that draws Richard to the Classics students is their aesthetics. He is drawn to them by their appearance: “At close range, though, they were an arresting party—at least to me, who had never seen anything like them, and to whom they suggested a variety of picturesque and fictive qualities” (Tartt, 1993, p.17) He then goes on to describe their looks and clothes in great detail, revealing the importance he puts on an aesthetic appearance. The picturesque and fictive qualities they possess are ones one would associate with an aesthetic of learning (as discussed earlier): tweed jackets, tortoiseshell glasses, white button-up shirts and neckties. This shows a clear link between aesthetics and education, which is further linked to ethics when taking into consideration that Richard lied to

his employer to get an advance of his paycheck so that he could go and buy clothes that would make him fit in with the rest of the Classics students.

In *Brideshead Revisited* aesthetics and ethics are explored in particular through Charles's artistic journey and perhaps especially through his characterisation of the Flyte siblings, in particular Sebastian and Julia. Both narrators are therefore drawn to characters by their outward appearance and presentation, revealing that they place particular importance on aesthetics. The question that rises from this observation, however, is whether Charles and Richard view people as whole, complete beings or simply as aesthetic objects.

## Theories and Methods

In my thesis, I will conduct a comparative analysis of two works which is rooted in a narratological approach. The theoretical framework will predominately be determined by theorists and philosophers mentioned in the two novels, as it is natural to consider the theory and philosophy of the figures too whom the characters themselves respond and discuss whether they successfully incorporate their teachings into their own lives. I have already discussed the theorists I will take my cue from in a previous section but I also intend to incorporate a discussion that builds upon John Dewey's theory from *Art as Experience*. This came out in 1934 and in it Dewey argued that:

The arts which today have most vitality for the average person are things he does not take to be arts: for instance, the movie, jazzed music, the comic strip, and, too frequently, newspaper accounts of love-nests, murders, and exploits of bandits. For, when what he knows as art is relegated to the museum and gallery, the unconquerable impulse towards experiences enjoyable in themselves finds such outlet as the daily environment provides (Dewey, 1980, p. 5-6)

Dewey here essentially says that in order to understand aesthetics one must consider the events and scenes of daily life and not assume that art is only something that belongs in museums. This is absolutely applicable to the characters in Waugh's and Tartt's novels but especially to *The Secret History*. Aesthetic appreciation is subjective and to them the everyday events and scenes they encounter at college elicit an aesthetic appreciation. Dewey saw aesthetics as both doing and undergoing or rather, producing and experiencing (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2021). Other than how Dewey's philosophy fits into my understanding of aesthetics as a lifestyle, there are other considerations that make a discussion

on his philosophies relevant for my thesis. For instance, Dewey's book came out in 1934 and is therefore arguably representative of the viewpoints that opposed the "art for art's sake" movement explored in *Brideshead Revisited*. This makes it relevant to discuss whether Charles's aesthetic fits into Dewey's understanding or if it changes to reflect that of the "art for art's sake" movement.

A focus on narratology allows me to consider how themes, settings, characters and plots are given aesthetic form. These themes and settings include education, while character and action are very much concerned with ethics, which also allow me to consider the consequences of the characters' actions. A narratological approach will also allow me to consider developments in character, attitude and lifestyle over time, which is another key issue of my thesis.

In the course of this thesis, I employ close reading as a methodological technique. This allows me to engage directly with the aesthetic forms of the two novels and to consider them against the aesthetic positions explored in the novels. Earlier I mentioned that aesthetics and ethics go together. Close reading, however, has been accused of wanting to keep aesthetics and ethics separate from each other. This view is set out by Widdowson in his book *Literature* (1999). He argues that the twentieth-century Anglo-American critical tradition has a specific regard for "the literary works themselves." (Widdowson, 1999, p. 49) and that this is demonstrated in three ways.

This is manifest, first, in an obsessive concern with 'the text itself', nothing more nor less; second, in the deployment of literary texts as icons of human value against twentieth-century cultural barbarism; and third, in a 'scientific', 'objective', 'disinterested' (Arnold's word) critical close-reading of 'the words on the page' (Widdowson, 1999, p. 49)

However, some contest this view of close reading, which is also frequently claimed to be that of the influential New Critics. Among these is Annette Federico who in *Engagements With Close Reading* (2016) argues that the New Critics have been misunderstood and that they did not assume that literature has nothing to do with the real world or with morality (Federico, 2016, p. 40). She goes on to state that:

On this point the new critics have often been misunderstood, and opponents who assume that their focus on the autonomous work of art represented a throwback to "art for art's sake" couldn't be more wrong. The new critics argued forcefully that it is

because literature has important use and relevance to the world that the critic has a public role to play in setting standards and aiding reader's appreciation and understanding

(Federico, 2016, p. 40)

I share the opinion of Federico as I argue that aesthetics and ethics go together, both in close reading as a method and in my two novels. In Waugh's and Tarrt's novels the belief that they are separate is both presented and questioned, but by applying Federico's view on close reading, I am able to take into consideration the aesthetics of the novels in connection with history, ethics and so on.

In her book *Faculty towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents*, Elaine Showalter echoes Federico's sentiment when she argue that the university novel as genre should comment on moral and social issues. This understanding of the university novel supports the idea that aesthetics and ethics are concerned with each other, making Federico's definition of close reading appropriate and helpful in my thesis. In developing my own understanding of the university novel as a genre and what it encompasses, I have taken my cue from Elaine Showalter's book and Janice Rossen's *The University in Modern Fiction*. Rossen argues that university novels are: "...social documents, but they are also fiction: private fantasies writ large across cultural norms, expectation and values" (Rossen, 1993, p. 3). She claims that the university novel is especially concerned with the university's power, inclusion and exclusion (Rossen, 1993, p. 3-4).

Showalter actually goes on to comment on this in her book, finding Rossen's claim too clear-cut. She adds:

The best academic novels experiment and play with the genre of fiction itself, comment on contemporary issues, satirize professional stereotypes and educational trends, and convey the pain of intellectuals called upon to measure themselves against each other and against their internalized expectation of brilliance. (Showalter, 2005, p. 4)

Frow argues in his book *Genre* (2005, p. 65-66) that genre should not be considered as something that restricts a text as one specific thing. He allows, for instance, for the understanding that what start out as genres take on over time a more general meaning, becoming modes. To illustrate this he, fittingly for my thesis, uses tragedy and pastoral traditions as examples.

... tragedy moves from designating only a dramatic form and comes to refer to the sense of the tragic in any medium whatsoever; pastoral modulates from the georgic or the eclogue into a broader form which can be applied to any genre that deals with an idealised countryside populated by simple folk.” (Frow, 2005, p.65-66 ).

Tragic and pastoral modes are present in both my novels and prove Frow’s point. Frow further argues that genre is not something that exist solely in a text, or in the readers’ understanding of the text. Instead it is “ ... a shared convention with a social force” (Frow, 2005, p. 102). Conventions and expectations of a text categorized within a specific genre shape our reading of a text but there is also room to look at the text more broadly (Frow, 2005, p. 103). This is what I will proceed to do with the university novel.

In Abrams and Harpham’s *A Literary Glossary of Terms* (2015, p. 3) the academic novel, university novel and campus novel are all filed under one entry. They also single out *Brideshead Revisited* as a varsity novel which is considered to be predominantly a British genre that focuses on undergraduates’ lives at Oxbridge colleges. Abrams and Harpham’s decision to put these genres under one entry is representative of the observation I have made in my own research, that the terms are used somewhat interchangeably. However, there are slight differences to them which to some critics are important distinctions. Anténe (2015), for example, makes the claim that novels such as *Brideshead Revisited* do not fall under the genre of the campus novel, but relate instead to the Bildungsroman which “features the protagonist’s university experience within their narrative,” (Anténe, 2015, p. 6). While it is not my intention to contest Anténe’s claim in this part of the thesis, nor to go through the different characteristics belonging to the campus novel, varsity novel, academic novel or university novel, it is illustrative of the many overlaps within the tradition. With this in mind I am justified in my decision to use “university novel” when referring to Waugh’s and Tartt’s novels, since even though they might not fall under the strict sense of the genre, they give me a collective term to use when I am referring to the novels and the literary tradition they represent.

## Contribution to Existing Scholarship

Comparing *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Secret History* allows me to support my claim that education is treated as something with aesthetic value. I contribute to existing scholarship on the discussion of what the campus novel encompasses as a genre and draw attention to the

possible intertextuality between the two novels. While there are several examples of critics analysing the relationship between aesthetics and religion in Waugh's novel (for example Delasanta and D'Avanzo 1956), I take a different approach in considering the relationship between education and aesthetics in Waugh's novel. I focus especially on the role education and academic institutions have as sources of aesthetic inspiration, and the ethical consequences this has on the characters. I compare and contrast this with Tartt's novel, which at the current time of writing has not been done before in much detail or depth. What is different with my comparative technique is that I bring together aesthetics, ethics and education to compare two novels that to different extents value an aesthetic of learning. I show how this triad is interconnected when I analyse characters, themes, setting, plot, and so on. I also contribute to further research on *The Secret History* which is widely read (and which has enjoyed a resurgence in popularity) but has attracted significantly less research than *Brideshead Revisited*. However, a recent article by Simone Murray, "Dark Academia: Bookishness, Readerly Self-fashioning and the Digital Afterlife of Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*" (2023) gives a thorough and informative account of *The Secret History*'s resurgence in popularity since its publication in 1992, and of the subculture (arguably built on the early literary traditions of the university novel) that *The Secret History* has played a significant role in advancing. I will build on this research by comparing Waugh's and Tartt's novels which are at opposite ends of the timeline of the university novel. With a gap of forty-seven years between the publication of the two novels they arguably show deeply set traditions in the university novel genre, as well as an ability to adapt with the changing times. Subsequently this makes the development of the university novel a natural point of discussion in my thesis. My triad of aesthetics, ethics and education fits well into the genre of Dark Academia as Murray points out that: "DA is an online phenomenon based less upon a coherent set of beliefs than a particular aesthetic: bookish; university-based; Eurocentric; and dandyish" (Murray, 2023, p. 349) My thesis will go on to consider the ethical consequences of these aesthetics much more carefully and compare and contrast them to Waugh's novel.

## Structure of Thesis

My thesis is made up of five chapters. In the next chapter, "Chapter 2: Aesthetics, Ethics and Education On-Campus," I start the comparative analysis of Waugh's and Tartt's novels with a focus on the academic institutions. My intention with this chapter is to look at the characters' mindset towards attending university and their first impressions of the institutions they attend,

respectively Oxford and Hampden. This will set me up for discussing when, how and why their experience of attending university goes from one kind of aesthetic experience to another. To achieve this I have divided the chapter into three subchapters called “The first meeting with University life,” which focuses on what the title of the subchapters alludes to, as well as the importance of the social connections made in both the novels and their impact on the characters aesthetically and ethically. In the second section, “The Curricula and Academic Traditions,” I discuss the characters’ attitudes and experiences of their studies and how these influence and are influenced by their aesthetics. I will also look at their mindset towards their studies as well as consider the role their teachers play in their education. Part three, “The Dorms and Architecture,” is about the characters’ surroundings, how they are influenced by their environment and in what way their own spaces reflect their aesthetic style.

The next chapter, “Chapter 3: Aesthetics, Ethics and Education Off-Campus” builds on the previous chapter in that it mirrors similar topics and is also divided into three parts. It handles the same issues seen in the previous chapter but is now focused on life outside of the academic institution. In the first subchapter “Castles and Country Houses,” I take the premise from the earlier chapter about how the characters’ environment impacts their aesthetics away from academic settings. In both novels, the characters seek refuge from their everyday life on campus grounds at large estates in the countryside. In *Brideshead Revisited* there is Brideshead Castle and in *The Secret History* there is the country house that belongs to one of the characters’ aunts. Both these estates play important roles in the novel’s plot as they act as a sanctuary of sorts for the characters where they isolate from the outside world and are free to explore and develop interests as well as the relationship with each other. In the second section, “The Different Types of Education,” I again mirror the structure of the last chapter but instead of focusing on traditional, academic education I will discuss the other types of education present in the novels. These are, among others, social and familial but I will also discuss cultural education which are closely linked to the liberal arts but which are found in other places than in an academic space. This is discussed in relation to a trip to Italy that happens in both novels but which takes place under vastly different circumstances. In the final part of this chapter, “Time and The Changing of Seasons,” I am interested in the topic of time, institutional and seasonal time, and how it impacts the narrative. I discuss the novels’ reversals, as the point where, as discussed in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the characters’ fortunes turn from good to bad – or, more specifically, the point where the characters become disillusioned with the notion of the university as a youthful Arcadia and a place of aesthetic fulfilment.



Chapter 4, “The Future and The Narration,” is divided into three subchapters as well. First, in the section “A Look to the Future” I consider the characters’ future, where (it is alluded to at least) life takes them after the university years, I will discuss any character development that might have happened and where we leave them in terms of occupation. This is important as it will allow me to discuss the role aesthetics, ethics and education has had on their character, such as what have they gained or lost as a result of how they aspire for an aesthetic lifestyle and how they view education. Then, in “Narrating The Past” I will discuss and compare the narrative devices used in the novels as well as look at the different literary modes the novels employ and the importance of allusions and intertextuality. In this chapter, I will also take the opportunity to discuss the kind of narrators Charles and Richard are and what they convey through their narratives in terms of inclusion and representation of the female characters. This will bring with it a discussion of how inclusive these two novels are, and a question of what it is that they represent if the novels are predominantly concerned with the white male college experience and western culture. “Genre and critique,” the last part of this chapter, will discuss where these two novels fit in the genre of Academic novels.

Finally, in the fifth and last chapter, “In Conclusion,” I will reiterate the main points of my thesis as well as discuss the conclusions I have come to about Waugh’s and Tartt’s novels concerning the interconnection between aesthetics, ethics and education.

## Chapter 2: Aesthetics, Ethics and Education On-Campus

In the following chapter I will explore the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education and how this relationship is presented and cultivated by the characters in *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Secret History*. This chapter will mainly focus on staying inside the walls of academia, while the next chapter will consider education, aesthetics and ethics in the outside world. My intention is to explore whether there is an aesthetic element to the characters’ education that is specifically linked to the academic institutions they attend, but also what ethical challenges this presents. Since chapter 3 will examine aesthetics, ethics, and education away from campus, I therefore make a distinction between on and off campus to explore the forms of aesthetics, ethics and education that are in play at the different locations. In Waugh’s novel, the academic setting is Oxford University (Hertford College), one of the most prestigious schools in the world, while Tartt’s academic backdrop is a fictitious liberal arts college in Vermont called Hampden College which is widely understood to be based on

Bennington College where the author herself studied. Interestingly in both Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and Tartt's *The Secret History* the majority of the story unfolds outside of campus grounds, especially in *Brideshead Revisited*. So, by education I am referring to the curricula, the representative figures, the space themselves (dorms and classrooms) as well as the routines and lifestyles of teaching and studying. Aesthetics is not just philosophy of art it is also recognized as a set of ideas and values a person has, an attitude and lifestyle. Aesthetics then in this chapter is associated with the outward presentation of the academic institutions: the space itself, its teachings and its representatives.

## The First Meeting with The University

In *Brideshead Revisited* Charles Ryder arrives at Oxford University during the 1920s, a time which was still very much affected by the financial, political, and social changes brought on by the First World War. Charles belonged to the generation that was too young to fight but old enough to remember the repercussions of it. As a reaction to the previous dark years, the Roaring Twenties brought with them an age of indulgence and social mobility that was rooted in the promise of a better future to come. In Britain this new age of indulgence, excess and nihilism was pioneered by a group of young people based in London who were referred to as the Bright Young Things by the tabloids (Johnson, 2015). Waugh gives an exaggerated illustration of these young people in his satirical novel *Vile Bodies* and while *Brideshead Revisited* is vastly different in both format and nature there is something similar between the mindset and philosophies of the Bright Young Things and the 'bad set' of aesthetes at Oxford that Charles is introduced to through the enigmatic Sebastian Flyte.

Charles's first impression of Oxford is undeniably one of admiration and aesthetic appreciation. Moreover, this description of Oxford reveals Charles as someone with an artistic perspective

Oxford, in those days, was still a city of aquatint. In her spacious and quiet streets men walked and spoke as they had done in Newman's day; her autumnal mists, her grey springtime, 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. It was this cloistral hush which gave our laughter its resonance, and carried it still, joyously over the intervening clamour (Waugh, 2011, p. 25).

Charles figuratively paints a picture of Oxford to the reader as he personifies the university, referring to it as “her”. Words like “aquatint” for instance stand out as particularly visual and suggest that Charles has the outlook of a painter already in the beginning of the novel. More than anything *Brideshead Revisited* is celebrated for the picture it paints of the nostalgia of a time passed at one of the most revered universities in the world. In the first chapter Charles manages to incite a sense of nostalgia even for the reader who has no personal familiarity with the university, and he does that largely by engaging in a language that is lyrical and wistful. As pointed out by Evans (2010, p. 1) Waugh describes a delicate-seeming beauty in the quotation above, and in *Brideshead Revisited*, the Oxford he describes is the one of legends, longings and aspirations.

Richard, the narrator in *The Secret History* mirrors Charles’s aesthetic reaction to his university and while Charles was figuratively painting a picture, Richard goes on to describe an actual picture of the university.

Even now I remember those pictures, like pictures in a storybook one loved as a child. Radiant meadows, mountains vaporous in the trembling distance; leaves ankle-deep on a gusty autumn road; bonfires and fog in the valleys; cellos, dark windowpanes, snow. Hampden College, Hampden, Vermont. Even the name had an austere Anglican cadence, to my ear at least, which yearned hopelessly for England and was dead to the sweet dark rhythms of the little mission towns. For a long time I looked at a picture of the building they called Commons. It was suffused with a weak, academic light—different from Plano, different from anything I had ever known—a light that made me think of long hours in dusty libraries, and old books, and silence. (Tartt, 1993, p. 10)

In this quote a couple of things stand out. One, Richard is attracted to the college because it is evocative of an Anglican aesthetic style. If we understand Anglican as a descriptor of a certain aesthetics associated with Oxford (as the Church of England has a long history with Oxford) then it supports my suggestion that an aesthetic of learning is associated with a “English” or Anglican aesthetics. There are also very apparent similarities in how the two narrators describe the universities. They use similar aural and visual descriptions in their portrayal of their universities. Some examples of these similarities would be the mention of an autumnal setting as well “cloistral hush” in Waugh’s novel and “Anglican cadence” in Tartt’s. What we can interpret from this is that, arguably, Tartt presents Hampden College as a version of an Oxford College, at least Waugh’s vision of an Oxford college. This in turn supports my claim that *Brideshead Revisited* acts as a model for *The Secret History*. Another

thing we can gather from the description of Hampden College is that Richard romanticises studying, imagining himself spending long hours in a beautiful library. And so, whereas he initially attended college with the hope of securing an affluent future for himself in Plano, we see his priorities change when he applies to Hampden College. One could argue that Richard chooses education for education's sake – playing on The Aesthetic Movement's term “art for art's sake” - because you do not get an education in literature, and you definitely do not choose to major in Ancient Greek to secure a job or prospects that will make you wealthy.

In Janice Rossen's book *The University in Modern Fiction: When Power is Academic* (1993) she discusses the university as a nurturing place to grow and dream for the characters in Waugh's novel as well as in E.M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*.

... the University as a symbol of youthful arcadia, where a unique place and time intersect to provide their heroes with a spiritual rebirth of such magnitude that it continues to resonate throughout the rest of their lives. Yet at the same time, this nostalgia for all the benefits of the enchanted University setting can seem a bit forced, and the place itself can seem excessively idealized. These heroes would naturally prosper as undergraduates, Furbank's depiction of the University being reasonably true - but it becomes problematic whether the novels' readers themselves might not experience envy rather than delight in glimpsing this inner world of privilege (Rossen, 1993, p. 93)

In this quotation Rossen brings up an important point that is present in both *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Secret History*. The principal character and narrator in both novels is enamoured with the university setting and the world of privilege they find there. This leaves the reader questioning the ethics of the characters when they strive to uphold this idealized world when the illusion of an Arcadia, which is explicitly evoked in *Brideshead Revisited*, starts to crumble as the novel progresses.

Settling in at Oxford Charles feels unfulfilled. He falls back in with the same circle he associated with in his schoolboy days. While he enjoys their company well enough, he feels as though he is not experiencing all that Oxford has to offer (Waugh, 2011, p. 33-34). Charles refers to these friends as “grey figures”. This characterisation is important as it essentially draws an “us vs. them” divide between these “grey figures” who represent an aesthetic style and ethics that is rejected by Charles, and the one he associates with Sebastian and eventually adopts himself. I will refer to the latter as belonging to the “bad set”.

The “grey figures” are described as: “A small circle of college intellectuals, who maintained a middle course of culture between the flamboyant 'aesthetes' and the proletarian scholars...” (Waugh, 2011, p. 33). The word 'aesthetes' is marked by apostrophes to signify some kind of irony or even distaste here by the narrator. Charles is essentially saying that while the “grey figures” might view themselves as aesthetes, Charles finds this characterisation disingenuous and contrived. There are other characters who evoke the aesthetics and ethics of the “grey figures” as well, among them Charles’s cousin Jasper. Jasper takes on a role of a guardian or teacher of sorts and tries to steer Charles in what he believes is the right direction, telling him what he should study and what to wear. Consequently, Charles views the “grey figures” as studious and dull.

Charles’s disappointment in life at Oxford turns into excitement, however, when he encounters Sebastian, even though he has known of Sebastian by sight and by reputation long before he actually met him. As Collins, one of these grey figures, reveals a penchant for modern aesthetics, much to Charles’s vexation, Sebastian reveals himself to be the antithesis of that, and discloses to the group that he would feel the same emotion about a butterfly as he would a cathedral or picture, much to Charles’s delight (Waugh, 2011, p. 34). This presents itself as antithetical to having a modern aesthetic as the answer to Clive Bell’s question is supposed to be rhetorical, the answer should be no. However, as pointed out in Laura White’s article “The Rejection of Beauty in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*” Sebastian, and in turn Charles, rejects Bells idea that “art alone creates aesthetic emotion.” (2006, p. 184). Subsequently rejecting Bell’s philosophy of art which is linked with post-impressionism, a movement within modern art. (The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023) This similarity in aesthetic ideology is an important point in Charles and Sebastian’s relationship and is telling of the ideology’s ethical dimension. Arguably, Sebastian and Charles evoke Dewey’s view of “everyday aesthetics” as Dewey believed that art should inspire an emotional response in the viewer (Leddy, 2021) and that art is not something that is restricted to the museums or high culture (Dewey, 1980, p. 5-6). As Sebastian “feels” the same way for a butterfly as for a cathedral, he exemplifies Dewey’s belief that:

In order to understand the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd—the fire-engine rushing by; the machines excavating enormous

holes in the earth; the human-fly climbing the steeple-side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red-hot bolts (Dewey, 1980, p. 4-5).

In Charles's and Richard's case the "sights that hold the crowd" and the "fire-enging rushing by" are the aesthetics they associate with learning, which are represented in the buildings, dorms and clothing. Dewey refers to aesthetic reactions as "an experience" and he explains it as: "the basic condition is felt relationship between doing and undergoing as the organism and environment interact." (Dewey, 1980, p. 211). This understanding of aesthetic response fits perfectly with my argument that education and learning can be considered beautiful.

There is an interesting relationship between modern and historical aesthetics that is explored in these two different models of aesthetics and ethics presented through the "grey figures" and the "bad set" in *Brideshead Revisited*. Seemingly the former calls upon a conservative and studious lifestyle and a modern aesthetic, while the latter is rooted in a free spirited, hedonistic lifestyle and a historical aesthetic. Waugh actually spoke of a hollowness in modern British society that according to him stemmed from a failure of taste (Heath, 1982, p. 34). He linked this hollowness to another word, "bogus", which he often used in connection to modern society. It encompasses aesthetic value but also ethics as it illustrates what he believed was an insincerity and a lack of morals in society (Heath, 1982, p. 34). The word "bogus" is similar to the word "bosh" which is used by Cordelia, one of Sebastian's sisters, and by Charles in relation to modern art (Waugh, 2011, p.197). This is arguably not a coincidence. While it is tempting, it is difficult and inaccurate to argue that the "grey figures" represent a modern aesthetic which is therefore considered bad, and the "bad set have a historical aesthetic and is therefore considered good by Charles. We do after all observe him adopt and value some modernity and aspect of modern life. We also see the "grey figures" hold on to old traditions and views that Charles condemns them for. So, while the division between the value of modern and historical aesthetics is not clear cut, we can summarize that Charles and the aesthetes value art that has a cultural history and think of modern art as "great bosh" (Waugh, 2011, p. 197) while he and the "bad set" still show interest in modern society in the form of reading contemporary literature, like Alodus Huxley's *Antic Hay*.

An example of the set's bad behaviour is presented already in the first chapter when Charles and Sebastian interact for the first time. Charles is in his room, spending a quiet evening with the "grey figures" when Sebastian and his "bad set" return from a party. They are drunk, disruptive and unconcerned about getting in trouble. This scene shows the contrast between the two groups and the aesthetic and ethics they represent. The grey figures enjoy an

uneventful evening, while the “bad set” is out on campus grounds engaging in a more carefree, hedonistic lifestyle. After a dramatic first meeting with Sebastian that ends with him emptying his stomach inside Charles’s room, Charles is invited to a luncheon at Sebastian’s as an apology. This gives Charles an opportunity to join ‘an inner circle’ of aesthetes, ‘a bad set’ according to his cousin (Waugh, 2011, p. 51). The exclusivity of being invited into Sebastian’s circle excites Charles. Meeting people like Anthony Blanche – whom he admittedly does not really like but still is fascinated by – shows the reader the importance Charles puts on outward appearance both in terms of fashion and reputation. Throughout the novel Charles pays particular attention to detail when he describes the characters’ clothes and appearance. It becomes a literary device in that fashion along with literature and art provides symbols and motifs of the aesthetic lifestyle and ideology that the characters, especially ‘the bad set’ of aesthetes, value. Anthony Blanche telling the group he has been reading *Antic Hay* by Aldous Huxley for instance is not a coincidence. *Antic Hay* very much reflects the same lifestyle of ‘the bad set’.

Using allusions and intertext to convey a particular aesthetic or ethical judgement is used to an even larger extent in Tartt’s novel. Tartt uses classical intertext and literary references and allusions throughout the novel and it affects the story in two particular ways. When the characters casually quote Greek philosophers and dramatists to each other as well as others it’s safe to say that there is a certain pretentiousness to it. The pretension of the Greek class, and especially of Henry, who is Julian’s star pupil, becomes particularly evident during Richard’s first class with the group as Henry makes a point to quiz Richard on which classical texts he has read to determine his character.

“How long have you studied the classics?” said a voice at my elbow. It was Henry, who had turned in his chair to look at me.

“Two years,” I said.

“What have you read in Greek?”

“The New Testament.”

“Well, of course you’ve read Koine,” he said crossly. “What else? Homer, surely. And the lyric poets.” This, I knew, was Henry’s special bailiwick. I was afraid to lie. “A little.”

“And Plato?”

“Yes.”

“All of Plato?”

“Some of Plato.”

“But all of it in translation.”

I hesitated, a moment too long. He looked at me, incredulous. “No?” I dug my hands into the pockets of my new overcoat. “Most of it,” I said, which was far from true.

“Most of what? The dialogues, you mean? What about later things? Plotinus?”

“Yes,” I lied. I have never, to this day, read a word by Plotinus.

(Tartt, 1993, p. 36-37)

From this exchange we also see an example of how education interrelates with aesthetics and ethics. Richard feels judged by Henry and so in order to be accepted by him he lies about what he has read. This is revealing both of Richard’s ethics and of Henry’s. Henry, like Julian, judges a person on how much of a devoted classicist he is. The reader definitely gets the impression that Henry is looking down on Richard for not having read as much as him. Richard in turn responds to this by lying about what he has read.

In short, Tartt uses references and allusions to solidify the elitism of the Classics students, to draw a picture of just how educated and cultured they are. Other examples would be when Camilla is quotes Aeschylus’ *Orsestia* in Greek by memory during that same first class (Tartt, 1993, p. 40), or when Henry tells Richard the morning of the first night spent at the country house that he is translating *Paradise Lost* from Greek into Latin for his amusement, as he is “...interested to see what [he] will wind up with” (Tartt, 1993, p. 91) The other effect of Tartt’s allusions and references is that they comment on a specific situation or character. Richard for instance reveals that *The Great Gatsby* is one of his favourite books:

I read *The Great Gatsby*. It is one of my favorite books and I had taken it out of the library in hopes that it would cheer me up; of course, it only made me feel worse, since in my own humorless state I failed to see anything except what I construed as certain tragic similarities between *Gatsby* and myself. (Tartt, 1993, p.78)

Richard comparing himself to *Gatsby* is fitting and aids in explaining his personality to the reader: they are both characters who are trying to fit into a world that is not usually for people like them. They are both American men who want to fit into the stereotypical mould of the Oxfordian elite. In Pauw’s thorough article on the use of intertextuality in Tartt’s novel he suggests that “Allusions to post-classical works are not scattered at random, but consistently attributed to certain characters rather than others” (Pauw, 1994, p. 151). Bunny whose interest



in literature is quite nonchalant compared to the others is not connected to any literary allusions according to Pauw (1994, p. 151).

Rossen (1993, p. 94) uses Oxbridge novelists as an example in her book, but we could have just as easily changed it to Waugh and Tarrt as what she is discussing – the impact university life and the ‘ambiance of college life’ has on the characters and their relationship – is very relevant in a discussion of these two novels in particular.

These novelists generally use Oxbridge as a setting for romantic, adolescent infatuation and then alter the character of these friendships later, with the passage of time; these relationships, which are initially intense, are deeply affected by the ambiance of college life, which evokes a welter of associations related to passion. It encompasses the sensual pleasures which are characteristic of youth, itself the traditional time and season for passion (Rossen, 1993, p. 94).

Both novels explore the narrator’s desire to develop relationships with other people that are fulfilling both aesthetically and ethically. As Rossen points out in the quotation above the university setting offers a fitting place for these relationships to unfold. I would argue the same applies for Tarrt as she assuredly models Hampden College on depictions of universities like Waugh’s Oxford.

It should be mentioned here that for people like Sebastian, and Charles as well to a certain extent, their future is not dependent on how well they do academically. For people of the same social classes as Sebastian and Charles do not need to attend college to *learn* a vocation or to become qualified for a job. Their lives are arguably more dependent on how well they do socially at Oxford. That Sebastian meets Charles after leaving dinner with the Bullingdon club is also quite telling of the emphasis that is put on social class and elitism outside of academic achievements, but also an indication of how the University facilitated this culture of elitism as the private club famously only accepted male students from the wealthiest families. Who they become acquainted with within the college, what organization they join or what party they are invited to are all contributing factors of the ‘social education’ so to speak that happens within the university. This argument is further supported by one of Charles’s discussions with his cousin Jasper where he makes his concern over the changes he sees in Charles after becoming friends with Sebastian known.

‘You can’t be doing any work. Not that that matters, particularly if you’re making something of your career elsewhere - but are you? Have you spoken at the Union or at

any of the clubs? Are you connected with any of the magazines? Are you even making a position in the O.U.D.S.? (Waugh, 2011, p. 52-53)

The economical element of attending college and the way it influences the aesthetic of studying is even more prominent in *The Secret History*. Hampden College, the fictitious college of *The Secret History* is set to, does not have the same prestige as Oxford in *Brideshead Revisited*, but that is not to say that it does not have a sense of illustriousness to it. Richard seems deeply unhappy about his situation before he transfers to Hampden. Similar to Charles his initial meeting with college life is disappointing, and he seems to just be going along with life unhappily, until by a trick of fate, as he puts it, a brochure about Hampden College falls out of his jacket, concluding he must have kept it because he found it beautiful. On the brochure the college is described as follows:

Hampden College, Hampden, Vermont. Established 1895. (This alone was a fact to cause wonder; nothing I knew of in Plano had been established much before 1962.) Student body, five hundred. Co-ed. Progressive. Specializing in the liberal arts. Highly selective. "Hampden, in providing a well-rounded course of study in the Humanities, seeks not only to give students a rigorous background in the chosen field but insight into all the disciplines of Western art, civilization, and thought. In doing so, we hope to provide the individual not only with facts, but with the raw materials of wisdom." (Tartt, 1993, p. 10)

Hampden College is a private college that is highly selective. Richard is a middle-class Californian who transfers from a small college where he majored in pre-med and only took Ancient Greek so that he could sleep late on Mondays. This makes the change to Hampden all the more dramatic. While eventually learning to like it and even excel at it, choosing to study Ancient Greek seems like quite the academic jump when he switches his major to literature. Richard's motivation in choosing Pre-med at his previous school was money, so suddenly applying to a private, selective, liberal arts school because he finds the brochure pretty is quite an impulsive act.

Initially Richard is not able to take Ancient Greek when he enrolls at Hampden as the teacher Julian Morrow only accepts a limited number of students into his class: five to be exact, six with Richard. Richard is warned that Julian chooses his student more on a personal than an

academic basis, clearly choosing students that reflect his own aesthetics. Richard is deterred, but only slightly.

... the more I heard about him, the more interested I became, and I began to watch for him and his little group of pupils around campus. Four boys and a girl, they were nothing so unusual at a distance. At close range, though, they were an arresting party—at least to me, who had never seen anything like them, and to whom they suggested a variety of picturesque and fictive qualities (Tartt, 1993, p. 17).

This is the same experience we see Rossen discuss, about the undergraduate who get drawn into an ‘inner circle’ within the college, like Charles was with Sebastian and ‘the bad set’. Rossen argues that there is a sense of excitement with communal life that is a part of attending university.

Further, the presence of other people can add to the deliciousness of having been chosen and singled out to be part of some "wild" set, or the best friend of some dazzling, seemingly unattainable person (e.g., Sebastian in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, Jennifer in Rosamond Lehmann's *Dusty Answer*) (Rossen, 1993, p. 94).

Having almost given up on trying to get into the Greek class Richard finds a renewed enthusiasm after interacting with some of the students from the class. He is encouraged to go and talk to Julian once more about joining their class. As a result of this interaction Richard goes to his employer, asks for an advance, heads into town and spends a lot of the money on new clothes. And interestingly when Richard comes back to ask about the class, Julian lets him in this time to talk to him. The importance of clothes and giving the right impression is affirmed by Julian in that this time, when Richard is dressed, according to Julian's taste, like the other in the class, he is allowed in the Lyceum to have a what seems like an unofficial interview where every word is carefully chosen. This arguably confirms that there is an aesthetic component of Richard being accepted into the ancient Greek class, which in turn questions the ethics of Julian as a teacher.

Another conclusion one can draw from Richard's impulsive shopping spree and its outcome is that there is an economic component to the aesthetics of studying. Richard receives financial aid and has to work alongside his studies to make ends meet. This is not something that the other students in the Greek class have to contend with, and in a way, it is as if Richard admires them for that very reason. Richard wants to be able to have the same carefree attitude towards education as the rest of them but does not have the financial means to do so. A

student who is free to explore their interest, to choose their subject regardless of whether there is an applicable use for it in the work force, is privileged. The student who is free to study whatever they find interesting usually also has the freedom to enjoy and romanticise the late nights and struggles of being a student without having to deal with the real anxiety of how they will be able to pay their tuition and loans after their studies. In this, Richard provides a singular contrast to the other characters in *The Secret History* as well those in *Brideshead Revisited*. Richard for instance is not able to travel home during the winter break due to his finances, so while the others leave the college to spend the break with their friends and family Richard is forced to take a bad paying job and rent an insufficient room with someone that ultimately leads him to get seriously ill.

So there is definitely a theme of class present in both novels that especially effects the relationship between ethics and education. In *Brideshead Revisited* for instance Charles and Sebastian get in trouble but are essentially let off the hook because of their stature and connection to the university. They get into a car accident, after a party and since Sebastian was driving the repercussions would be worse for him. Charles and another member of the “bad set”, Boy Mulcaster, are excused after pleading guilty and paying a fine but Sebastian risks jailtime. However, Sebastian is helped by his family’s status and connection to evade any real consequences. There is no hesitation to lie about Sebastian’s situation as long as it keeps him out of trouble and the public eye. They summon Rex Mottram, who is the fiancé of Sebastian's sister, Julia. Rex urges Sebastian to use his stature and connections to get out of trouble.

appeal to the magistrate's good nature not to wreck a young man's career for a single boyish indiscretion. It'll work all right. We shall need a don to give evidence of good character. Julia tells me you have a tame one called Samgrass. He'll do. Meanwhile your story is simply that you came up from Oxford for a perfectly respectable dance, weren't used to wine, had too much, and lost the way driving home (Waugh, 2011, p. 153)

Appealing to the magistrate not to ruin the future of a young, promising man for his “boyish indiscretion” shows how ethics is connected to education. This concern with protecting a young, man’s future and a willingness to disregard bad behaviour under the guise of boyish indiscretion, speaks to the reprehensible ethics of society as a whole, but also of the university. It exposes the aesthetics of learning, which I have argued is strongly associated with Oxford, of having elitist qualities. In Deslandes’s book *Oxbridge Men* (2005) he

discusses masculinity and the undergraduate experience at the Oxbridge Colleges in the time period 1850-1920. In his introduction he also points to the *Brideshead Revisited's* TV adaptation as causing a resurgence in the aesthetics of the Bright Young Things in the 80s. It also illustrated the longstanding association of masculine privilege and male elitism at Oxford.

Oxbridge continues to be associated with masculine privilege, exclusivity, and male elitism, a fact reflected in the brief and somewhat limited revival of the 1920s “bright young thing” aesthetic that appeared at Oxford in the wake of the BBC’s airing of *Brideshead Revisited* in the early 1980s. While this revival clearly represented a tendency to romanticize a partially mythic past, it also reflected the endurance of these traditional associations. (Deslandes, 2005, p. xi)

## The Curricula and Academic Traditions

Charles directly comments on his reasons for staying around Sebastian and his group, specifically naming the First World War as having made him have to grow up early and stating that now he has found Sebastian and his group of fellow aesthetes, he is finally allowed a freedom he has not had before.

Descent or ascent? It seems to me that I grew younger daily with each adult habit that I acquired. 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 its 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 (Waugh, 2011, p. 55)

In the quotation above we also see Charles mention gaining a premature dignity in his childhood and alluding to attending an authoritarian school before arriving at Oxford. This describes a model of schooling that represents one version of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in the novel, which contrasts with the one he finds at Oxford through Sebastian. This previous school model is one that is represented through his cousin Jasper and the rest of the “grey figures”. For the lack of a better word Jasper and the “grey figures”

represent a boring aesthetics to Charles that is modern and tedious. Once more we see a dichotomy of modern and historical but now the focus is on how they are presented as different models of learning. Since Charles is a history major who actually wants to be a painter, he puts little importance on academic achievements. His efforts in school are motivated by his desire to remain at Oxford, at least in the beginning. During his second term he keeps up with the History School but in his second year he joins the Ruskin School of Art as well which points to a connection between art and history. Charles's desire to become a painter is connected with him being a history painter. Later in the novel Charles becomes an architectural painter and thus becomes a historical painter of sorts as his job is in essence to preserve a historical record of the buildings many aristocratic families were forced to leave in the interwar period due to social and political upheaval. Interestingly though, there are not any scenes in Waugh's novel where the characters are taught unlike in Tartt's novel. The closest scene where anyone being taught by someone is when Jasper tries to steer Charles in the right direction in terms of getting him to acclimate to life at Oxford. (Waugh, 2011, p. 31)

In *The Secret History*, the narrator Richard, though a literary major, takes an extensive load of classes in Ancient Greek. In fact, Julian insists that he drop most of his other classes. Not only does this isolate Richard further in an already quite isolated environment (living on campus), but it also explains why the subject of Latin and Ancient Greek culture bleeds into his and his fellow students' lives: they adapt what they study into their own lives eventually and the lines get blurred. The other students attempt to put their studies into practice by carrying out a Dionysian ritual, but it has a disastrous outcome when they end up killing a local farmer. The truth of this is supported in the first epigraph that Tartt includes. The epigraph, which I mentioned in my introduction, is from Nietzsche, he argues that young people "cannot possibly know what Greeks and Romans are" and more foreboding he argues that whoever tries, might not be suited for it (Tartt, 1993, p. vii). Suggesting that they don't have the self-awareness or preparedness to handle the subject matter. It becomes clear towards the end of the novel that they do not.

Another example of Julian adopting philosophies and traits associated with Ancient Greek philosophers is illustrated by him referring to the classroom as the "Lyceum," which was the name of Aristotle's school. There are examples throughout the novel of Julian adopting different parts of both Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies in his teaching. For instance, we could argue that he follows Plato's sentiments in *The Republic* in that to a certain degree he censors what the Classics students should study. He recognises that art, music and poetry are

important parts of one's education, but they are also powerful tools of teaching and thus need to be censored (Plato, 2007, p. 69).

This is linked perfectly with how Julian justifies that it is better to have one tutor than many – like Plato and Alexander – and to know one book intimately, than many superficially (Tartt, 1993, p. 32). With this in mind, the second epigraph that Tartt includes: “Come then, and let us pass a leisure hour in storytelling, and our story shall be the education of our heroes. — PLATO, Republic, BOOK II ” (Tartt, 1993, p. vii) can be read as a critique of Julian's teaching method. The story presented in *The Secret History* then can be interpreted as a warning about the potential dangers of a Platonic approach to education.

For Aristotle, his other pedagogical influence, the starting point for both ethics and aesthetics is the aspiration to achieve “the good”. Examples of this is illustrated in *Nicomachean Ethics* for instance, which begins with the following sentence: “Every art, and every science reduced to a teachable form, and in like manner every action and moral choice, aims, it is thought, at some good: for which reason a common and by no means a bad description of the Chief Good is, “that which all things aim at.” (Aristotle, 2021). From this we understand that Aristotle believes in an inherent human drive towards seeking “the good” which applies both to knowledge and morality. There is also a similar argument made in *Poetics* where he goes sets out to argue that “to inquire into the structure of the plot as requisite to a good poem” (Aristotle, 2013) here he proceeds to argue that a good plot is determined by the ethical nature of the characters. This strive towards “the good” however, is not reflected in Julian. There are only a few instances in the novel where a lecture serves as the backdrop, and only one where Julian is actively teaching. What Julian is lecturing on in this class however is not randomly chosen by Tartt. The lecture is on the "madnesses induced by the gods: poetic, prophetic and finally Dionysian." (Tartt, 1993, p. 42) Julian views the latter as the most mysterious by far and his lecture covers the appeal in human nature to enter an altered state of mind. Julian proceeds to discuss the various methods employed by the Greeks to access different states of consciousness and mentions drink, prayer and fasting as commonly used. Julian is talking approvingly about the Dionysian rites arguing that it is dangerous for a person to ignore the irrational in oneself.

The more cultivated a person is, the more intelligent, the more repressed, then the more he needs some method of channeling the primitive impulses he's worked so hard to subdue. Otherwise those powerful old forces will mass and strengthen until they are

violent enough to break free, more violent for the delay, often strong enough to sweep the will away entirely. (Tartt, 1993, p. 43)

The way that Julian is talking during the lecture show how he draws a line between us and them. Julian use words that signal a collectiveness. He says, "The Greeks, you know, really weren't very different from us." (Tartt, 1993, p. 42). *Us* here does not include the other members of the faculty or other students at Hampden. He is referring those who are currently in the room, people he approves off for their shared interests and values. Julian is using a language that invites a collectiveness that encourages the group to consider themselves as comparable to him, this in turn provides them with an air of entitlement.

In this scene, it's crucial to pay attention to Richard's response to Julian bringing up Dionysus. His response show discomfort at the idea of tapping into a state that is associated with the cult of Dionysus and he is reminded of the play *The Bacchae*.<sup>1</sup>

I thought of the Bacchae, a play whose violence and savagery made me uneasy, as did the sadism of its bloodthirsty god. Compared to the other tragedies, which were dominated by recognizable principles of justice no matter how harsh, it was a triumph of barbarism over reason: dark, chaotic, inexplicable. (Tartt, 1993, p. 42-43)

At this point in the novel, while he still not fully welcomed in by the group and do not know their values (and ethics if you will) he recognizes that due to its violent nature, it might not be the best idea to rouse forth a Dionysian frenzy.

Julian is an incredibly important figure for the novel's plot overall and to the characters. It is therefore interesting to consider the lack of a professor figure in Waugh's novel. The closest we get are Mr Samgrass and the "grey figures" and as I have already discussed, these are rejected and disregarded by Charles as well as Sebastian and the "bad set". This again speaks to the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in *Brideshead Revisited*.

This is contrasted in *The Secret History*, as Richard, by joining the Greek class, becomes a part of a set, an inner circle within the college which, inspired by their teacher Julian, has an air of exclusivity. The exclusivity of being part of the Greek class however was not what drew Richard to Hampden initially, he came to Hampden to study literature. This makes the following admission from Richard thought-provoking.

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<sup>1</sup> Dionysus is also known by his Roman name Bacchus which *The Bacchae* is derived from.



To be honest, none of us, not even the brightest of us, were destined for academic achievement in subsequent years, Francis being too lazy, Charles too diffuse, and Henry too erratic and generally strange, a sort of Mycroft Holmes of classical philology. Camilla was no different, secretly preferring, as I did, the easy delights of English literature to the coolie labor of Greek (Tartt, 1993, p. 251-252)

Naturally the question that follows is why do not Richard and Camilla just take English literature? Why don't any of them just choose a major they could excel in? It is tempting to mention aesthetics as a possible answer here. The entire novel is filled with classical motifs, symbols and metaphors which substantiate an aesthetic ideology built on Greek culture, from ties with people hunting deer on them, to Camilla's name. Is being an English literature major simply too ordinary? The short answer seems to be yes. It is not just Richard who is enthralled by Julian or by the feeling of being a part of something special. While there seems to be a genuine interest in the Classics and philosophy the other Classics students are also motivated by being a part of an exclusive group. This is perhaps most evident through Bunny as he is the worst of the students academically and is seen to copy the others work or scramble to be able to finish a paper on multiple occasions. He is not motivated by a genuine interest in doing well academically, but rather the prestige of being included in Julian's class. Richard's description of the "coolie labour of Greek" however stands in contrast to Julian viewing their lessons as "a glorious kind of play" (Waugh, 2011, p. 34). This shows a difference in both ethics and aesthetics as both Richard and Camilla "secretly prefers the easy delights of English literature". Using the word "secretly" here also seems important as it suggests that preferring English literature over Greek poetry is something to be ashamed about. It is not unwarranted to conclude that this is a sentiment that Julian might have instilled in them.

Widdowson cites Matthew Arnold's definition of literature as "the best that has been known and said in the world" in his book *Literature* (1999, p. 4) where he argues that there is a difference between literature and 'Literature' in that the latter signifies a universal collection of literary texts that holds both aesthetic and moral value, making them worth studying as they become : "a universal resource of formal and ethical models for humankind" (Widdowson, 1999, p. 4). Possibly an obvious question that should follow this is whether "the universal resources of formal and ethical models for humankind" is perhaps not as universal as it claims to be? What is recognized as *the best* is subjective and as history and literature has customarily been written by men of a certain social status, the model might not apply to

everyone. In *Literature* (1999, p. 42) concerning the introduction of literature as a subject and it becoming synonymous with English, Widdowson offers:

In England,<sup>11</sup> the earliest instruction in the English language and literature was offered by University College, London in the 1820s (the first Professor being appointed in 1828), with some emphasis on the moral and 'liberalising' study of literature. This was followed by other London and provincial university colleges in the following decades (not, however, by the 'old' Oxbridge universities until much later in the century). Even so, the syllabus was very variable, and the 'English subjects' could include language and philology, history, geography and economics, as well as literature.

This perception of English being synonymous with literature and (later) connected to the Oxbridge Universities is found in the appreciation the characters in *The Secret History* have for Anglo-American literature but is also illustrated by Tartt herself in an interview where she says "I thought literature was English. Books seemed to speak to me in English accents." (Kaplan, 1992). Arguably it is also illustrated by Richard as he transfers to Hampden to become be an English major and states that he "yearned hopelessly for England" (Tartt, 1993, p. 10) Literature, or English as it has come to be referred to, was not readily accepted into the universities. Oxford for one denied the proposal by a royal commission to include English in their syllabus during the 1850's but by 1873 the subject was included into the university and later it even had an Honours School of English Language and Literature (Widdowson, 1999, p. 43). However, English was still disregarded by many and up until the First World War thought of as a soft subject, fit for women but not for the 'superior intellect' of men who were more suited for mathematics or the Classics (Widdowson, 1999, p, 43). We can see this sentiment echoed in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* as well when Charles's cousin warns him off English as he 'lays down the rules of conduct' when arriving at Oxford.

...even today I could repeat much of what he said, word for, word. '...You're reading History? A perfectly respectable school. The very worst is English literature and the next worst is Modern Greats. You want either a first or a fourth. There is no value in anything between. Time spent on a good second is time thrown away. You should go to the best lectures Arkwright on Demosthenes for instance - irrespective of whether they are in your school or not... (Waugh, 2011, p. 31)

While on the subject of Waugh, we should do well to bring up that the First World War

brought with it a need for national unity and that in English Literature they found a sense of national identity which led to English literature finding its place in the university. We should also note in the quotation above that “Modern Greats” (respectively Philosophy, Politics and Economics) is thought of as the worst subject to study, next only to English literature. This shows a further rejection of modernity.

## Architecture and The Dorms

In both novels there is an importance put upon the interior and exterior of the academic institutions, as well as the buildings in the outside world. As we saw with Richard transferring to Hampden, a college’s outward appearance could be a determining factor for some, as it inspires a desire for learning. Charles’s aesthetic appreciation of architecture is more prominent to the reader when he is outside the college, more specifically when he is at Brideshead Castle since that is the place where Charles is first seen to be sketch and paint with any serious intent. He mentions the time spent at the estate as an aesthetic education (Waugh, 2011, p. 101) and it is also there he is praised and recognised as an artist. I will come back to his experience there in the following chapter but for now I will focus on Charles’s experience inside the college walls.

Charles himself dates his interest in architecture back to when he was a child, so his evolution into an architectural painter is understandable. There is however a surprising lack of description of Oxford by Charles. To compare the lack of architectural description of Hertford College with the immensely detailed ones of Brideshead Castle is quite telling. Among other things, it shows us that Charles’s artistic inspiration happens mostly outside of Oxford. In terms of Oxford’s architecture, there was a surge of students coming to Oxford after The Great War which became problematic in terms of finding space for everyone. This resulted in the years between 1860 and the outbreak of the Great War seeing a significant architectural expansion. Hertford College, Charles’s college, was one of them (Brockliss, 2016, p.444). The architectural style of the new Hertford College was designed by Thomas Graham Jackson who favoured a more eclectic approach that drew inspiration from the Italian renaissance rather than the Middle Ages and was thus considered similar in style of that of late Elizabethan and Jacobean Oxford. His designs were in turn different from those of his contemporaries working in Oxford at the time who were mostly dedicated to the gothicizers (Brockliss, 2016, 445-446).

In Deslandes's book *Oxbridge Men* (2005) he actually points out that at Oxford the undergraduates used their rooms to express individual taste that belong to specific sets or types.

Rooms, personal possessions, and individual tastes were often connected with particular "sets" or "types," which included, among others, the rowing man, the dressy man, the dramatic man, and the gambler. Stories and articles about them thus provided undergraduates with opportunities to address variety in what could be a fairly homogeneous population. While variations over time certainly existed, four stock characters dominated throughout the Victorian and Edwardian periods: the aesthete, the athlete, the reading man, and the "blood" or sporting man. (Deslandes, 2005, p. 72)

The start of Charles's artistic education is perhaps reflected in the interior of his rooms. Charles makes drastic changes to his rooms after meeting Sebastian for luncheon. Brockliss mentions that undergraduates during this time at Oxford made an effort in making their rooms suggest that they were people worth getting to know (Brockliss, 2016, p. 444). This is definitely a sentiment that Charles follows when he visits Sebastian and one he adopts himself afterwards. On entering Sebastian's rooms, he observes:

His room was filled with a strange jumble of objects - a harmonium in a gothic case, an elephant's-foot waste-paper basket, a dome of wax fruit, two disproportionately large Sèvres vases, framed drawings by Daumier - made all the more incongruous by the austere college furniture and the large luncheon table. His chimney-piece was covered in cards of invitation from London hostesses (Waugh, 2011, p.38)

The interior of Sebastian's rooms, cluttered and eccentric at the same time as being extravagant and exotic, is reminiscent of the sentiments of the British aesthetic movement led by Oscar Wilde. In both *Brideshead Revisited* and in *The Secret History* there is a rejection of the modern and a love for excess and luxury and the comforts of the past. In Waugh's novel this is shown through the appreciation of art and traditions of previous periods in time. Particularly interesting, as well as telling of the connection between the influence of social circles affecting one's aesthetic style, is the following quotation where Charles return to his rooms after his luncheon with Sebastian only to find his room, which had previously been

decorated to his liking, to now be lacking. The first meeting with Sebastian and ‘the bad set’ has changed him.

When at length I returned to my rooms and found them exactly as I had left them that morning, I detected a jejune air that had not irked me before. What was wrong? Nothing except the golden daffodils seemed to be real. Was it the screen? I turned it face to the wall. That was better. It was the end of the screen. Lunt never liked it, and after a few days he took it away, to an obscure refuge he had under the stairs, full of mops and buckets. (Waugh, 2011, p. 41)

This impulsive act and need for a sudden change brought on by an interaction with other people is similar to the scene in *The Secret History* where Richard, after talking to students from the Greek class, has a sudden need to go out and buy new clothes that are similar to those worn by the others in the Greek class. For Richard the awe of attending a beautiful college and having a place of his own is a contributing factor to the aesthetics of studying, more so with him than with Charles.

The dormitories weren’t even dorms—or at any rate not like the dorms I knew, with cinderblock walls and depressing, yellowish light—but white clapboard houses with green shutters, set back from the Commons in groves of maple and ash. All the same it never occurred to me that my particular room, wherever it might be, would be anything but ugly and disappointing and it was with something of a shock that I saw it for the first time—a white room with big north-facing windows, monkish and bare, with scarred oak floors and a ceiling slanted like a garret’s (Tartt, 1993, p. 11-12)

Another thing we can discern from comparing Richard’s room to Charles’s is their difference in character. Overall, Richard’s room is more modest and less eccentric than Charles’s, in fact it is almost closer to an aesthetic closer to the “grey figures’s” than to that of the “bad set’s”.

In this chapter I have looked at the different academic institutions in Waugh and Tartt’s novels and discussed the connection between social life and aesthetic values. I have concluded that an aesthetics of studying has an economic component to it, that having wealth or coming from an affluent family contributes to the characters’ experience of aesthetic. I have examined the different ways in which aesthetics, ethics and education interrelate in the novels and shown the importance of mimicry in both novels but also between the two novels.

By discussing the architecture of the different colleges as well as the student's rooms I have argued an importance is put on the institutions being aesthetically pleasing as well as an emphasis put on how the characters decorate their rooms. The curricula and academic traditions presented in the two novels also shows that the characters' choices in what they study are ultimately affected by their personal aesthetics. The next chapter will trace a similar pattern to this one but while this chapter focused on the academic institutions and the characters', and specifically the narrators', first impressions and reactions to university life, the next chapter will focus on the relationship between aesthetics, ethics, and education off campus. I am in particular interested in whether they carry with them the ideologies of the aesthetic of learning that they have cultivated while on campus and how it is presented to the outside world. I am also interested in looking into the other types of education that the characters might receive off campus that are not a traditional, academic education.

### Chapter 3: Aesthetics, Ethics and Education Off-Campus

In this chapter, I will explore how the students in *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Secret History* spend their time away from campus. This will allow me to consider the impact the educational institution has on their personal aesthetics, ethical values in the outside world while they are still students. I explore how the characters' studies shape the way they perceive and interact with the outside world, and how in turn the external world, reshapes their relationship with their studies. Furthermore, is there a form of "education" to be gained beyond the one they receive from the academic institutions they attend, and what does that look like? I want to reiterate here a point I made in my introduction, that education is a learned experience, meaning not all education is academic. Other forms of education that impact the aesthetic and ethical development of the characters, can be social, cultural and familial education.

In this chapter, I present on-campus and off-campus life as distinct spheres that I compare and contrast through their different aesthetic, ethical, and educational rules and practices.

However, by incorporating the concept of seasons, I can treat both on-campus and off-campus experiences as integral components of a comprehensive system where both spheres follow the natural seasons. Spring, summer, autumn, and winter represent different cycles in life, like birth, maturation, aging, death, and so on. The first two sections will focus on the buildings that are important to the characters and the different types of education. I round off the chapter by discussing the effects that seasons, semester breaks, and vacations have on the

characters. This will enable me to focus on the effects time spent away from the colleges has on the characters' perceptions and judgements of their studies as well as their institutions upon their return. The next chapter will then focus on the impact their studies and the time spent as students have on their future.

## Castles and Country Houses

Charles spends most of the first summer vacation at Brideshead, having been summoned there by Sebastian. Brideshead Castle and the summer Charles and Sebastian spend together become an important point of reference for the rest of the novel. This stay at Brideshead is formative of Charles's artistic development it is also as a time that is used to "anchor" the conflicts in the novel. The other visits to Brideshead will not be conveyed as idyllic or harmonious after this first visit. This is largely due to Sebastian feeling intruded upon by his family monitoring him and inserting themselves in his friendship with Charles. Charles's reaction to Brideshead this first visit is an important part of the novel that illustrates one model of the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education off-campus. The line between aesthetics and education is directly commented upon by Charles himself when he concludes that just being a guest in Sebastian's family home is an education in aesthetics. This is an example of where education is understood as a learned experience and not strictly connected to an institutional education.

It was an aesthetic education to live within those walls, to wander from room to room, from the Soanesque library to the Chinese drawing, adazzle with gilt pagodas and nodding mandarins, painted paper and Chippendale fretwork, from the Pompeian parlour to the great tapestry-hung hall which stood unchanged, as it had been designed two hundred and fifty years before; to sit, hour after hour, in the shade looking out on the terrace.

(Waugh, 2011, p. 101)

In other words, it is an educational experience off-campus. However, the quotation also reveals how Charles's institutional education is applied in the outside world. The quotation reveals a concern with history, expressed through his comment on the unchanged tapestry wall. His development as an artist is further supported at Brideshead by him painting on the panel doors in the office (Waugh 2011, p. 103) and by the Flytes' recognition of him as an authority on art. Sebastian's brother Bridey and his sister Cordelia stop by during their stay

and during the dinner the topic often veers to religion, Charles makes it clear that he is not religious. However, when Bridey reveals that the chapel on the estate might close, he sees Charles as an authority on "good art" and wants his opinion.

You are an artist, Ryder, what do you think of it aesthetically?'

'I think it's beautiful,' said Cordelia with tears in her eyes.

'Is it Good Art?'

'Well, I don't quite know what you mean,' I said warily. 'I think it's a remarkable example of its period. Probably in eighty years it will be greatly admired.'

'But surely it can't be good twenty years ago and good in eighty years, and not good now?' 'Well, it may be good now. All I mean is that I don't happen to like it much.'

'But is there a difference between liking a thing and thinking it good?'

(Waugh, 2011 p. 116)

There are several things to gather from this quotation that express the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education off-campus. Again, there is a connection drawn between aesthetics and history in that Charles comments on how art is appreciated differently once it becomes representative of a time period. This again speaks to his aesthetics as being linked to history and in turn to the institutional education he receives at Oxford. We actually see this sentiment echoed in Dewey's *Art as Experience* when he discusses architecture as a form of artistic expression (Dewey, 1980, p. 231). Dewey recognizes that an aesthetic appreciation of architecture is largely grounded in history. He argues that there are ethical considerations when appreciating architecture, as it is symbolic of a person's hopes and struggles.

Another thing that stands out is Bridey's question of whether there is a difference between liking a thing and thinking it is good. Bridey is talking about art in this instance, but we can understand this in a figurative sense as well. I would argue that Charles tends to view people either as aesthetically pleasing or not and to him Sebastian is very much aesthetically pleasing. Thus, the last sentence in the quotation above encompasses or foreshadows Charles's view of Sebastian. If this is the case, then this brings with it a consideration of the connection between aesthetics and ethics in Sebastian and Charles's relationship. One should also recognize that what they are contemplating is the aesthetic value of a religious building and while, as I mentioned in my introduction, my thesis is not about the relationship between aesthetics and religion, it undoubtedly plays an important role in the novel.



To Charles Brideshead Castle does not only provide the opportunity to practice his craft as illustrated by how he is set to sketch the fountain (Waugh, 2011, p. 101) and paint the panels in the office (Waugh 2011, p. 103) but the time spent there also helps him develop his artistic style. The following quotation points out exactly what and who those influences are.

Since the days when, as a schoolboy, I used to bicycle round the neighbouring parishes, rubbing brasses and photographing fonts, I had nursed a love of architecture, but, though in opinion I had made that easy leap, characteristic of my generation, from the puritanism of Ruskin to the puritanism of Roger Fry, my sentiments at heart were insular and medieval. This was my conversion to the Baroque. Here under that high and insolent dome, under those coffered ceilings; here, as I passed through those arches and broken pediments to the pillared shade beyond and sat, hour by hour, before the fountain, probing its shadows, tracing its lingering echoes, rejoicing in all its clustered feats of daring and invention, I felt a whole new system of nerves alive within me, as though the water that spurted and bubbled among its stones, was indeed a life-giving spring. (Waugh, 2011, p. 102)

He explains that he was influenced, like the rest of his generation to move from the puritanism of John Ruskin (1819-1900) to the puritanism of Roger Fry (1866-1934). Fry was a champion of modern art and contributed to awakening an interest and understanding of modern art in England. His exhibitions of post-impressionist paintings gained a lot of publicity, albeit mostly unfavourable, but it did make him influential among certain younger artists (Chilvers, 2004, p. 269) which is what Charles refers to when he made "the easy leap, characteristic of his generation" to Fry. But he does reject this art movement fairly quickly. It was Fry's reproduction of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* after all that he gets rid of when he returns from that first luncheon with Sebastian (Waugh, 2011, p. 33). In what can only be read as a reaction to the time spent away from campus with Sebastian, Charles joins the Ruskin School of Art when he returns to Oxford for his second year. Ruskin came from a more traditional and Romantic school and, like Charles, had a love for architecture, especially the Gothic, as he mainly created iterations of landscapes and architectural objects. As an art critic, he was especially concerned with the relationship between art, morality and social justice (Chilvers, 2004, p. 260-261) so we see a clear development in Charles's aesthetics from when he first arrived at Oxford and when he returns to it for his second year. This is perhaps not solely but largely due to the "education" he receives off-campus.

Francis's country house in *The Secret History* is to Richard what Brideshead Castle was to Charles in that it symbolizes acceptance and belonging. Richard desperately wants to be a part of this group of young, wealthy and educated youths. He is finally accepted into the "inner sanctum" when Camilla and Francis invite him to come to Francis's aunt's country house. This symbolizes a change in their dynamic and from this point on he is slowly let into the group. This house becomes a symbol as it is presented as a sanctuary of sorts to the group. It illustrates the idea of the aesthetic lifestyle which Richard is chasing, the one reserved for the cultured, educated and wealthy. As with Brideshead Castle, this house is an integral part of the plot but also a crucial part of the characters' development. The country house is the place the group goes to when they want to get away from their everyday life and the people in it. This sentiment is one that we saw echoed in Waugh's novel. Spending their weekends at the country house reads as though they are removing themselves from college life on campus, consciously isolating themselves further from their peers. As a result, it gives the impression that they are above the frivolity of the normal college experience, of the kind I discussed in the previous chapter. Almost every description of the other students at Hampden is negative. In that sense, we could argue that both Richard and Charles's perception of someone is dependent on their aesthetic value. An example of this is provided through his description of Judy Poovey, his college neighbour.

Judy Poovey lived a couple of doors down from me and seemed to think that because she was from Los Angeles we had a lot in common. She cornered me in hallways; tried to make me dance at parties; had told several girls that she was going to sleep with me, only in less delicate terms. She had wild clothes, frosted hair, a red Corvette with California plates bearing the legend JUDY P. (Tartt, 1993, p. 49)

Here, Richard's distaste for Judy and the world she represents is palpable. Though he denies any connection with her, there are times when Judy and Richard are friendly. For instance, Judy provides Richard with the jacket from Brooks Brothers that he wears to lunch with Bunny. As I discussed in the previous chapter Richard, unlike the others, has financial restrictions that keep him from becoming equal with the others, making him dependent on opportunities provided by the likes of Judy. It is telling of Richard's character, then, that when he arrives at lunch with Bunny, he lies about where he got it from. Moreover, when Camilla approaches him at the party about coming with them to the country house he denies being friends with Judy so as to not be associated with the aesthetics and ethics she represents (Tartt, 1993, p. 82). The scene of the party and the country house contrasts two very different

aesthetics present in the novel. The party evokes the modern 1980s through its character descriptions and pop culture references. The country house and the Classics students evokes a more classical and seemingly Gothic aesthetics.

In Waugh's novel, there are mentions of some Gothic ornaments and paintings, but it is not used in reference to Brideshead Castle itself, nor does the novel evoke a Gothic mode. At the country house in *The Secret History*, however, and throughout the novel, the references to Gothic traditions and aesthetics are unambiguous and Richard's description of the building upon arriving at the country house cannot be read as anything but evocative of Gothic tradition.

It was dark and I couldn't see a thing. My fingers finally closed on the door handle and only then, as I was climbing out of the car, the moon came out from behind a cloud and I saw the house. It was tremendous. I saw, in sharp, ink-black silhouette against the sky, turrets and pikes, a widow's walk. (Tartt, 1993, p. 84)

The moon peeking out from clouds with a dramatic building silhouetted against the sky reads as particularly Gothic. The gothic novel has gone through significant transformations since its inception. However, the genre still has certain stock features that demonstrate a fascination by objects and practices that are portrayed as negative, irrational, immoral, and fantastical (Botting, 1996, p. 2). An example of this is how the dark gloomy castle motif has evolved into the dark, gloomy house in later fiction (Botting, 1996, p. 3).

Richard sleeps for most of the ride to the country house. When he wakes up it is like he is waking up in a different time period. The scene of arriving at the country house is a hard contrast from the party Richard left. It aids in emphasising an "us versus. them" mentality, similar to the one I argued in the previous chapter that Charles creates when distinguishing between the "grey figures" and the "bad set".

Walking into the library, I took in my breath sharply and stopped: glassfronted bookcases and Gothic panels, stretching fifteen feet to a frescoed and plaster-medallioned ceiling. In the back of the room was a marble fireplace, big as a sepulchre, and a globed gasolier—dripping with prisms and strings of crystal beading—sparkled in the dim. There was a grand piano, too, and Charles was playing, a glass of whiskey on the seat beside him. He was a little drunk; the Chopin was slurred and fluid, the notes melting sleepily into one another. A breeze stirred the heavy, moth-eaten velvet curtains, ruffling his hair. (Tartt, 1993, p. 84-85).

In this quotation, there is certain historicity to pick up on. In particular, the gasolier chandelier and Charles M<sup>2</sup> playing Chopin stands out. Like Waugh's narrator, we know Richard is responsive to historical aesthetics, and I would argue that the country house and Hampden College both draw upon an aesthetic of history and Gothic traditions. Unlike Charles, however, Richard and the others are not history majors, they study Greek and the Classics, and they are particularly interested in adopting Classical practices into their lives. Notably, there is a nuanced relationship between the Classical and the Gothic represented in the novel, since the two are usually thought of as contrasts: the Classical often representing the rational and Gothic the irrational.

I would, however, argue that there is a link between the Gothic and classical in this novel. The classical tradition they try to practice is a Dionysian ritual, and Dionysus is after all connected to wine, chaos and altered states of mind and the gothic novel is also concerned with altered states of mind and madness. *The Secret History* is also a highly intertextual novel, and as I argued in the previous chapter, this is largely due to the fact that the characters themselves are studying language and literature. The contrast between Classical and Gothic, campus and country house then is not as clearly defined as it appears. There is however a difference in the characterisations between Brideshead castle and Francis's country house. Because while there are Gothic ornaments referenced at Brideshead, the novel is not evocative of a gothic mode. Instead, there is a distinct connection to pastoral literature. As mentioned earlier, the Baroque is also evoked as Brideshead's architecture introduced Charles to the movement.

While Richard might not know at this point that the others are attempting a Dionysian ritual, he does take part in activities that read as particularly Dionysian in nature. Altered states of mind are a big part of the novel: the characters are often drunk, high, just waking up or going to bed. The latter is particularly prominent with Richard as illustrated in the car ride to the country house and while they are at the house they spend the majority of their time outside, drunk.

The weekends at Francis's house were the happiest times. The trees turned early that fall but the days stayed warm well into October, and in the country we spent most of our time outside. Apart from the occasional, halfhearted game of tennis (overhead volley going out of court; poking dispiritedly in the tall grass with the ends of our rackets for the lost ball) we never did anything very athletic; something about the

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<sup>2</sup> As there are two Charles in my thesis, Charles Ryder (*Brideshead Revisited*) and Charles Macaulay (*The Secret History*), Charles Macaulay will from here on be referred to as Charles M.

place inspired a magnificent laziness I hadn't known since childhood. Now that I think about it, it seems while we were out there we drank almost constantly—...

(Tartt, 1993, p. 97)

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that Richard showed a particular discomfort at the thought of the Dionysian activities that feature in Euripides' play *The Bacchae* when Julian was lecturing about the Dionysian mystery. While at this point Richard is not participating in any particularly sinister activities, or even aware that the other students are attempting a bacchanal, the reader should be mindful of how Richard's character is starting to change the closer he gets to the others. Additionally, the quotation above illustrates another noteworthy similarity between the two novels, which becomes clearer if the reader compares Richard's account of staying at the country house with Charles's description of his days spent with Sebastian at Brideshead:

The languor of Youth - how unique and quintessential it is! How quickly, how irrecoverably, lost! The zest, the generous affections, the illusions, the despair, all the traditional attributes of Youth - all save this - come and go with us through life. 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; perhaps the Beatific Vision itself has some remote kinship with this lowly experience; I, at any rate, believed myself very near heaven, during those languid days at Brideshead. (Waugh, 2011, p. 99).

"The happiest of times" and "I, at any rate, believed myself very near heaven" strike one as particularly similar. Furthermore, in Tartt's quotation, Richard speaks of a magnificent laziness he has not known since childhood. This is mirrored in Waugh's quotation through "the languor of youth," but also in a previous quotation I discussed in chapter 2 where Charles speaks of re-experiencing a happy childhood (Waugh, 2011, p. 55), which is arguably also what Richard is going through. I would argue that this speaks to the relationship between aesthetics and ethics as these sanctuaries, which are so aesthetically pleasing to the narrators, seem to extract feelings of contentment and belonging. The importance put on childhood and youth in both novels seem to emphasize a certain innocence in the characters. This is especially the case in *Brideshead Revisited*, where Sebastian, in particular, struggles with losing his youth and the expectations that follow.

In Waugh's novel, we see Brideshead as a place of aesthetic education for Charles and while there is definitely aesthetic appreciation coming from Richard in response to the country house they are not the same. To simplify one could argue that while Charles received an educational experience from Brideshead in an off-campus setting, the Classics students *apply* their educational experience to an off-campus setting.

Unbeknownst to Richard when he arrives at the country house, the five students Henry, Francis, Bunny, Charles and Camilla are trying to perform a bacchanal in the hopes of achieving a Dionysian frenzy. Henry's reasoning was that, aside from having a special interest in Greek culture and the Dionysian mysteries, he was inspired by Julian's lecture on the possibility of reaching an altered state of mind, that "the appeal to stop being yourself, even for a little while, is very great" (Tartt, 1993, p. 182) and they are even encouraged by Julian to try to achieve it. In practice, this meant that they would get drunk around the house while wearing chitons, singing Greek hymns and trying various different drugs and concoctions in hopes of inciting an altered, euphoric state of mind. The idea of an altered state of mind is represented through the heavy focus on sleep and dream motifs but especially in how often they indulge in mind-altering substances, alcohol being the most frequent.

"We tried everything. Drink, drugs, prayer, even small doses of poison. On the night of our first attempt, we simply overdrank and passed out in our chitons in the woods near Francis's house."

"You wore chitons?"

"Yes," said Henry, irritated. "It was all in the interests of science. We made them from bed sheets in Francis's attic." (Tartt, 1993, p. 183)

This exchange, and especially the information that they wore chitons, is an example of the importance the group places on aesthetics, as it is essentially an example of them trying to recreate history, play pretend, and look the part, so to speak, even if Henry argues that it was for the sake of science. It brings up the question of whether the preppy, English fashion they tend to wear on campus is simply all of them playing the role of Oxfordian academics. After all, in chapter two we saw how Richard changed his clothes and demeanour to placate Julian's tastes and preferences for his students. So, their overall mindset is similar regardless of location but it manifests itself in different ways. As I will discuss later in this chapter, we will see the characters in both Tartt and Waugh's novels become disillusioned with life on campus.

When Henry, Francis, Charles and Camilla finally succeed, they end up killing a farmer during their trance-like state and it is their reaction, in particular Henry's reaction, and how they choose to deal with it afterwards that reveals their questionable ethics and how their education and aesthetic lifestyle is a partly to blame for that. We are at the core of the discussion about aesthetics, ethics and education.

Richard was not included in this ritual because they did know whether they could trust him yet, and Bunny was omitted from their final experiment because he did not take it seriously enough. This exclusion of Bunny is arguably the catalyst for the misfortunes that follow. It is after all because Bunny feels left out by the group that he starts antagonizing them, which in turn ultimately causes his death. Up until this point, I have mainly discussed how the student's education in both novels subsequently affects and is in turn shaped by their experiences away from college. I now turn to consider how their away-from-college experiences proceed to influence their subsequent relationship to their studies.

From this point on in the novel there is a shift in how we perceive the Classics students. Henry refers to the murder as "'A minor thing, really. An accident.'" (Tartt, 1993, p. 181) which reads as quite disturbing to the reader. Henry is talking about the murder in a very matter-of-fact tone but there is a shift in tone when he tells Richard about the trance-like state, he and the others were in. He seems animated while talking and disgruntled when Richard does not respond to the parts he wants him to, focusing on the wrong details.

"It worked."

"I don't think I understand what you mean when you say 'it worked.'"

"I mean it in the most literal sense."

"But how?"

"It was heart-shaking. Glorious. Torches, dizziness, singing. Wolves howling around us and a bull bellowing in the dark. The river ran white. It was like a film in fast motion, the moon waxing and waning, clouds rushing across the sky. Vines grew from the ground so fast they twined up the trees like snakes; seasons passing in the wink of an eye, entire years for all I know" (Tartt, 1993, p. 186)

The pace of the conversation picks up when Henry is talking about what it was like, as exemplified above, but then becomes annoyed with Richard when he in turn asks about the sexual nature of the ritual. Henry dismisses him. It should be mentioned here that, in a sense, Henry is to Richard what Julian is to Henry, an educational aesthetic and ethical model. Richard is, amazingly, still very much in awe of Henry at this point, and looks to him as a leader, despite everything that he has been told. In terms of ethics, this is quite telling as Richard places being a part of the group ahead of questions of right and wrong.

That Henry is motivated to try to perform a bacchanal as a result of Julian's lecture shows how intertwined their education becomes with their ethical judgement. The domino effect that occurs from murdering the farmer has lasting consequences and the outcome acts almost as a cautionary tale of what happens when you let the lines between fiction and reality blur, or when you do something just for the sake of aesthetics. The aesthetics of studying the Classics have taken over and left the group with a dubious ethical compass. Due to their isolation and disinterest in the outside world, they become desensitized to violent, ancient Greek practices (murder and incest for example) and instead are enamoured by the idea of leading a life rooted in the ancient world and living for the sake of aesthetics.

The country houses in both novels contribute to the narrator's education, both personal and social, and in both novels the influence of their institutional education is extended. There are however differences of emphasis and constitution. For instance, the social education in *The Secret History* consists of friends rather than family. In *Brideshead Revisited* the consequence of this social education is the development of Charles's artistry. In *The Secret History* however it results in a ritualistic "performance" with disastrous consequences.

## Different Types of Education

I have previously mentioned that the characters receive a social education of sorts through their interaction with peers and friends. This happens off-campus as well and, as we will see in this chapter, their interactions and relationships will change as the outside world provides them with different experiences, situations, dynamics, and problems. This will in turn impact their aesthetics and ethics.

As presented in the previous section, Richard's relationship with the classics group changes when he is invited to Francis's country house. He is initiated into the group and, in turn, develops closer and more personal relationships with each of them. However, it is not until Henry reveals to Richard that they have attempted and essentially succeeded in performing a bacchanal that we see the ethical effects of these relationships. As discussed in chapter two, what initially attracted Richard to taking the Classics class was the aesthetics Julian and the rest of the group represented. Richard's reaction to Henry's admission that they killed a farmer shows how he has changed from that first lecture with Julian where he admits to feeling uneasy at the thought of the *Bacchae*. This essentially shows how Richard relinquishes



his earlier morals and ethical character for the sake of aesthetics. The time spent at the country house then provided a place for the Classics class to implement their studies in practice, allowing them to exercise a different, more practical and creative type of education than the one they receive on campus. However, this also shows that even off-campus, outside of a school environment, their interests are still connected to an aesthetic of learning. This is implemented in different environments as well.

One of these different environments is Italy, which some of the students travel to in both novels. This trip to Italy showcases a different type of education, as well as the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, in both novels and as such provides a valuable point of comparison (as well as supporting my claim that *Brideshead Revisited* acts as one of the aesthetic models for *The Secret History*). In Waugh's novel, Sebastian invites Charles to come with him to visit his father in Venice and naturally Charles accepts. Sebastian has come up with a plan that will get them both there and while in Venice he plans on living off his father. In *The Secret History*, it is Henry and Bunny who take the trip, but under completely different circumstances and with a completely different outcome. Charles and Sebastian's trip is one of leisure. Charles is excited to be in a city with so much art and culture and Sebastian just seems to be happy to be around Charles.

While the trip to Italy can be seen as an extension of Charles' education in aesthetics, which he initially experienced at Brideshead, it also offers the opportunity for him to further his ethical education. In my introductory chapter, I mentioned that there are religious, financial and aesthetic motivations and considerations to contemplate concerning the question of what shapes a character in Waugh's novel. Sebastian and Charles's trip to Italy exemplifies this perfectly.

Charles genuinely care for Sebastian but that does not mean that he cannot also be attracted to the *idea* of Sebastian and the life Sebastian represents at the same time. Sebastian at this point in the novel is still a young, wealthy, educated man from an aristocratic family and Charles reaps the social, financial and aesthetic benefits of befriending him. Sebastian is given money for him to travel to Venice in first class, although he ends up downgrading his tickets to third class so that both of them can travel. This is only one example of many that show the financial difference between them and in turn also their social standing. It also shows that Charles appears to be somewhat financially reliant on Sebastian, at least during this summer.

Travelling to Italy is especially symbolic of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, as Italian art and influences at Brideshead are pointed out and admired by Charles, as seen with the fountain he is set to sketch. This is particularly interesting when one considers that Catholicism's origins can be traced back to Italy, and a big part of the novel is the conflicted relationship different characters have with Catholicism. Certainly, the trip to Italy allows Charles to see how much Catholicism plays a part in how Sebastian views himself and the world around him. For instance, seeing how Sebastian greets his father and their overall relationship, compared to his relationship with his mother, illustrates the inner conflict that Sebastian is going through. His father who has renounced his religion and is essentially considered an outcast, stands in contrast to his mother, who is a devout Catholic and with whom Sebastian has a strained relationship. These observations would not be possible while still on campus as Sebastian has been hesitant to let Charles and his family meet as he is afraid to lose Charles to them, in particular to his mother. After meeting his sister Sebastian does after all disclose to Charles that "I wouldn't love anyone with a character like mine." (Waugh, 2011, p. 98). This suggests that Sebastian is struggling with a degree of self-loathing that likely stems from these conflicting feelings toward religion. It is, however, Charles's conversation with Cara, Lord Marchmain's mistress, that provides the most insight into Sebastian's character and the struggles he is facing. "Sebastian is in love with his childhood. That will make him very unhappy. His teddy bear, his nanny and he is nineteen years old..." (Waugh, 2011, p. 130)

Sebastian has an immature nature that is very evident from the start of the novel and in a sense it is one of the things that Charles is attracted to as he could not enjoy his childhood, as discussed in chapter two. I would argue that Sebastian is very aware that people find his assumed innocence charming. But Cara's warning foreshadows that it is unsustainable for him to continue like this which is affirmed by him having "... a good mind not to take Aloysius to Venice" (Waugh, 2011, p.91) Leaving Aloysius, the teddy bear he carries around, behind signals leaving behind a piece of his childlike self. Aloysius surely symbolizes Sebastian's innocence and youth and the consequences of this parting read as foreboding, especially as Cara follows it up by pointing out that Sebastian is drinking excessively which is different to how Charles is drinking. This implies that Sebastian is using alcohol as a means to cope with his issues. In Waugh's the trip to Italy does not only further Charles's aesthetic education that began at Brideshead Castle but also functions as a means for Charles to gain deeper insight

into Sebastian's character. Moreover, it educates Charles on the intricacies of upper-class life in a way that differs from his experiences on campus.

In Tartt's novel, it is Henry and Bunny who make the trip. The circumstances surrounding their journey are also quite different from in Waugh's novel. Bunny finds Henry, Francis and the twins dazed, dishevelled and bloody after the bacchanal. Though initially startled at their appearance he relaxes when Camilla announces that they hit a deer and lies about what they have just gone through. Bunny accepts this narrative for now but eventually becomes suspicious of what exactly happened that night as he reads about the death of a farmer in the newspaper. Bunny's character is opportunistic and at times spiteful, so when he notices that Henry, Francis and the twins are uncomfortable with his taunts about what happened that night farmer he persists with the provocations. This results in the others wanting to placate Bunny to make him less likely to tell people about that night. And this is also what makes Henry bring Bunny to Italy.

The fact that both authors chose to have their characters vacation in Italy is another example of Waugh's novels providing a model for Tartt. Italian culture in Waugh's novel was perhaps more indicative of the catholic themes and culture. In Tartt's novel, however, the motivation for Henry and Bunny going to Italy, Rome more precisely, is connected with its relationship with Latin and Italian literature, While going to Italy was a way for Henry to placate Bunny it can also be argued that he, like Charles in Waugh's novel, wanted the trip to be an aesthetic experience and learning opportunity. The decision to travel to Italy in particular was only made after Henry was given the option between Jamaica and Italy. The fact that Henry chooses Italy supports the idea of their education being tightly bound together with their aesthetics, maybe more so in *The Secret History* than in *Brideshead Revisited*

The instant dismissal of Jamaica is telling. During a dinner early in the novel Bunny relates to Charles that he once tried to get Henry to go with him to Jamaica but that he would not on account of the country not having any culture. (Tartt, 1993, p. 56) What Henry means by this is that the country does not have a culture that he finds valuable or interesting. Henry, even though he is supposed to be a learned, scholarly figure comes across as narrowminded because there is culture in Jamaica, but because it is not rooted in Western culture it is considered of less value. However, one should also consider whether this ignorance is not entirely Henry's fault, he could be a product of a larger educational system which values and focuses on a Eurocentric culture, and Henry is after all Charles's protegee.

Another point of comparison between Waugh and Tartt's novel is the financial component of these travels which reveal that there is a difference in class and how that impacts some of the characters' opportunity to have an aesthetic experience. In Waugh's novel, we see how readily Charles downgraded his ticket to be able to bring Charles along with him to Venice. It is also treated as self-evident that they can live off Lord Marchmain's money once there. So essentially, Charles is the one who provides these experiences for Charles. This is also the case with Bunny and Henry, but while Charles is willingly providing for Charles, Henry is motivated by the fear that Bunny will cause issues for them if he is feeling left out or disliked. This results in Bunny taking advantage of the group by having them buy things and be subservient to him. After an incident where Bunny reads Henry's diary, confirming his suspicions on what happened the night of the bacchanal they are both distraught and Henry leaves him in Italy, while he goes home to warn the others of the new developments. The aftermath is chaotic and for Bunny, this revelation has dire consequences.

In the end, vacationing in Italy becomes symbolic of the aesthetics and culture valued by the students. It offers an opportunity for aesthetic education but also gives insight into the characters' relationships and in turn their ethics. It can be argued that both trips foreshadow a deterioration in the future. Respectively Sebastian's (as a result of his drinking) in Waugh's novel and the classics group in Tartt's.

Overall, travelling also gives the characters new information about each other. Placing them in a different setting that is off campus shows a different side to them that would not be readily seen on campus. Off-campus, the characters are less constricted by the aesthetic form they want to represent. Arguably in meeting and interacting with the outside world, pretences are harder to uphold and the view of the Arcadian youth, the hedonistic and carefree scholar cracks.

Another form of education that is not academic but that explores the characters' ethical judgements and perhaps gives insight into how their aesthetics develop is parental education, or lack thereof. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Charles's mother died in the great war and according to Charles, his father has been "rather odd in the head ever since" (Waugh, 2011 p. 49). One "rather odd" conversation between the two of them finds place just before Charles is summoned to Brideshead castle by Sebastian. In the extract below, Charles's father has a somewhat bizarre reaction when Charles discloses that he does not have the money to go to the theatre after his father suggests he should do so.

'Well, father,' as I told you, I haven't much money to spare for theatre-going.' 'My dear boy, you must not let money become your master in this way. Why, at your age, your cousin Melchior was part-owner of a musical piece. It was one of his few happy ventures. You should go to the play as part of your education. If you read the lives of eminent men you will find that quite half of them made their first acquaintance with drama from the gallery. I am told there is no pleasure like it. It is there that you find the real critics and devotees. It is called "sitting, with the gods". The expense is nugatory, and even while you wait for admission in the street you are diverted by "buskers". We will sit with the gods together one night. (Waugh, 2011, p. 82-83)

In the previous chapter I mentioned that Waugh attributed ‘'bogus’' to a hollowness in society, but there is another contributing factor to this hollowness according to Waugh and that is the reluctance of fathers to educate their offspring (Heath, 1982, p. 34). Charles's father is contradictory in what he is saying in the excerpt above and other instances in the novel as well. In the quotation above he is saying that Charles should not let money rule him, at the same time, going to the theatre is something that would be reserved for those with money, even if his father also mentions “sitting with the gods” referring to the cheaper seats in a theatre.

Additionally, it is interesting that he says that Charles should go to the play as a part of his education as this directly recognizes the theatre as a place of learning which is associated with distinguished men and high culture. I would argue that this also exemplifies how there is a financial component to the education received off campus as well as on campus as I argued in the previous chapter. Overall, Charles's father gives little to no parental education to Charles as he seems rather disinterested in his son and in turn it is perhaps one of the reasons why Charles is so interested, not only in Sebastian but in his family. His father's lack of interest in the relationship between education and ethics is also exemplified in how it was Jasper who took it upon himself to guide Charles when he first arrived at Oxford seeing as his father offered him none (Waugh, 2011, p. 29). Contrastingly Sebastian has a good relationship with his father, as illustrated when he and Charles travel to Italy. Further, it is the fact that his mother, a devoted Catholic, is trying to educate Sebastian that ultimately drives him to drink, as he is confronted with expectations that he is not able to meet leaves him feeling guilty and ashamed as his ethics do not align with his mother's.

In *The Secret History*, there is also a clear absence of parental guidance and education, parents are mentioned briefly and unfavourably by the Classics group. To Richard his parents are seemingly a sore reminder of his old life in Plano and on several occasions, he tries to evade questions about them or flat-out lies about his family. This can only be interpreted as a dissatisfaction with his upbringing and origins. Bunny in particular gives Richard a hard time about his family's lack of esteem and Richard's attempts at hiding it, going out of his way to make Richard feel inadequate as seen during their dinner when Richard wears the wrong jacket. Richard, like Charles in *Brideshead Revisited*, has a particularly strained relationship with his father, but whereas Charles is ignored and treated with apathy, Richard's father is mean and even goes out of his way to make it hard for Richard to attend Hampden by not filling out forms that would allow him financial aid.

My father was mean, and our house ugly, and my mother didn't pay much attention to me; my clothes were cheap and my haircut too short and no one at school seemed to like me that much; and since all this had been true for as long as I could remember, I felt things would doubtless continue in this depressing vein as far as I could foresee. In short: I felt my existence was tainted, in some subtle but essential way. (Tartt, 1993, p. 6)

Seemingly from this quotation and from Richard's descriptions of his home and childhood, it appears that what he is looking for in Hampden is something that is fundamentally different from his upbringing in Plano, California. Arguably, his life in Plano and his childhood home have been a miseducation, one that he intends to correct by attending Hampden. Richard points out in the excerpt above that his clothes were cheap and his haircut unflattering. This is another example of the value he puts on aesthetics and perhaps also explains where this value comes from.

Another good example of the impact parental figures has on a character's aesthetic and ethics as well as an integral part of the novel's plot, is illustrated through Henry's relationship with Julian.

Henry's relationship with Julian differs from the others. As discussed previously, Julian is idolized by the others but more so by Henry than by anybody else. There is a sense of camaraderie between the two as well as one of master and prodigy. Henry's view of Julian speaks volumes of how blurred the lines of academic professionalism are with Henry's personal life. Like Richard, Henry views the world through a literary lens but perhaps less

generally: Henry's lens is tinted by the Classics and especially the Greeks. Henry is a brilliant scholar but values the cold and pragmatic way of the Greeks, not unlike Julian. In considering Julian, Richard sums up the ethics that is at both Julian and Henry's core. "I suspect that Julian's cheery, Socratic indifference to matters of life and death kept him from feeling too sad about anything for very long" (Tartt, 1993, p. 485).

To Henry, then, academia is not only a part of his aesthetics and ethics, but it is also an integral part of his personal life and linked ambiguously to Julian. Henry looking to Julian as a paternal figure is the result of Henry admiring Julian from an academic standpoint as well as an ethical one. Traits shared with or adopted from Julian give us another example of a person modelling their life after someone else like Richard does with the Classics group and what Tartt might have done with Charles and Sebastian from Waugh's novel. A quote from Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* comes to mind here: "Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation." (Wilde & Douglas, 1997, p. 59). As I have established, there is a continuous theme of mimicry in Tartt's novel this perhaps gives rise to the question of whether art and aesthetics can be false and deceptive. In this section, I have discussed how time spent away from campus impacts the characters' aesthetics and ethics. Additionally, I considered what other types of education they have experienced outside of academia and found that cultural education and ethical education are linked to financial situations and familial relations. In the following section, I will look more closely at time, institutional and seasonal, and how it impacts the narrative.

## Time and The Changing of Seasons

The campus novel is thus named because a majority of the plot takes place on campus. However, as these two novels show, it is usually not exclusively set on campus. I have argued that the characters experience education both on and off campus. That even off campus, at places like the country houses, they utilise their education, and experiences other types of education. On-campus and off-campus then are not separate spheres but parts of a larger system represented by the cycle of seasons. In both *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Secret History* we see that setting a scene during a specific season contributes to enhancing certain moods or ambiances that the authors want to communicate. During the winter vacation, while Bunny and Henry are in Italy, and the twins, as well as Francis, have gone home to their respective families, Richard stays behind at Hampden. Richard is still at this

point in the novel unaware of the drama that is transpiring between the group and Bunny. He is more concerned with finding a way to earn money over the vacation so that he can come back in the spring semester.

Having lied about his financial situation he is left alone and isolated at Hampden. He takes a job off campus in exchange for living quarters but, when he arrives, the space is an old warehouse with poor living conditions. Still, Richard stays as he cannot afford anything else, and his pride is keeping him from asking his friends for help. During this winter Richard experiences a different kind of isolation than the one he collectively took part in while at Francis's country house. In Elaine Showalter's book on the campus novel *Faculty Towers*, she mentions that:

“Winter in the university is different from winter elsewhere, although it is a time of darkness, it also a time of respite and escape... In a certain kind of British, or Anglophile, academic novel, such as Snow's *The Master's*, Byatt's *Possession*, or Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*, winter is a time of heightened privacy, inwardness, even eroticism.”

(Showalter, 2005, p. 11)

Richard does experiences the winter spent at the warehouse as a time of heightened privacy and inwardness as the ones closest to him have all gone home or are vacationing elsewhere. In the previous chapter, we saw that snow was one of the things that drew Richard to Hampden when he was looking over the brochure of the college. “Radiant meadows, mountains vaporous in the trembling distance; leaves ankle-deep on a gusty autumn road; bonfires and fog in the valleys; cellos, dark windowpanes, **snow**.” (Tartt, 1993, p. 10 emphasis added) The excerpt is heavily painted with seasonal motifs. After almost freezing to death one night Richard is miraculously found by Henry just in time to save Richard. Winter often lends itself as a symbol of death and struggles in literature and Tartt's novel is no different. The setting of winter also works well with Tartt's allusions to the Gothic genre in that there is a bleakness to the winter often found in Gothic literature as well. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, altered states of mind are continuously explored by Tartt. It is illustrated through Richard during the winter vacation as he, in a hypothermic state, experiences hallucinations seeing shadows and hearing voices. “I sat up in bed and, to my horror, saw my doorknob turning stealthily in the moonlight: “Who's there?” I said loudly, and it stopped. I lay awake in the dark for a long time.” (Tartt, 1993, p. 134).



After Henry helps Richard to the hospital, they decide that Richard is to stay with him in his apartment. While Richard, at the time, views this as a gracious gesture from Henry it is a calculated move from Henry. Coming back early from Italy Henry is aware that he needs to get Richard on “his side” before Bunny has the chance to talk to him about the bacchanal and what he learned from his diary. Henry makes it so that the murder is something that Richard himself manages to puzzle out.

Henry manipulates Richard by homing in on his desire to belong to this group of young and wealthy scholars. He praises Richard’s intelligence and confides in him about what happened the night of the bacchanal, knowing that this will keep him pliable. (Tartt, 1993, p. 181) However, he also makes him complicit in the crime and essentially derails Richard’s future. Tensions rise when the spring term starts and Bunny is back tormenting the other characters now that his suspicions are confirmed. It is also at this time that the illusion of Hampden and campus as Arcadia starts to crumble in Tartt’s novel. Interestingly it happens in the spring semester which usually is associated with new beginnings and hope.

Eventually, a collective decision is made by the group to kill Bunny and this is where the real tragedy shows itself, as friends turn on friends (as I mentioned in my introductory chapter,). Bunny is killed in the spring while taking a walk. The act of the murder itself is not described but it is however implied that he was pushed down a ravine by Henry and died on impact. The idea was that it would look like an accident and that someone would eventually find him and conclude his death to be an accident.

What happens next reads, appropriately, like a Greek play, this in turn supports my argument that the characters live their lives in relation to artistic models.

THE SNOW in the mountains was melting and Bunny had been dead for several weeks before we came to understand the gravity of our situation. He’d been dead for ten days before they found him, you know. It was one of the biggest manhunts in Vermont history—state troopers, the FBI, even an army helicopter; the college closed, the dye factory in Hampden shut down, people coming from New Hampshire, upstate New York, as far away as Boston. (Tartt, 1993, p. 1)

The season, a natural force beyond the characters' control, intervenes in their plans and creates chaos, and like in a Greek play the characters are not able to escape their fate. Additionally, Hampden as a youthful arcadia is intruded upon by law enforcement and media. But even when things look like they might sort themselves out as the group evade further

suspensions, they are still not able to return to the dynamic or routine they shared before as their relationships are tainted by what they have been through. The last thing that might have held the illusion together falls apart when a letter from Bunny makes its way posthumously to Julian's desk, enabling Julian to understand what happened to him. Though perhaps not as visible as some of the other characters, Julian has played an important role throughout the novel. He essentially is the cornerstone for the classics group and their relationship with him far surpasses that of mere teacher and student. When Julian is confronted with the truth and subsequently chooses to remove himself from the situation and leave the school altogether to protect his name it is viewed as a massive betrayal to all of them but perhaps especially to Henry who was closest to Julian. Henry shows an uncharacteristic amount of emotion and resentment towards Julian when he finds out he has left them, calling him a coward. (Tartt, 1993, p. 585) It becomes clear to the reader, however, that this reaction is not born out of animosity but rather out of hurt and a sense of betrayal and disappointment. This disappointment derives from the fact that he has not proven ultimately to be the embodiment of the ancient Greek philosophers and culture or of the virtues that in Henry's mind are associated with that.

After spending the summer together at Brideshead and Italy, the return to Oxford is hard for both Sebastian and Charles and something seems to have changed. The excitement and newness seem to be gone. The youthful Arcadia that it once was is now overshadowed by the gloomy change of season and the thought of leaving behind the languor of youth affects them both (Waugh, 2011, p. 99). This is shown in the following quotation.

'It is typical of Oxford,' I said, 'to start the new year in autumn.' Everywhere, on cobble and gravel and lawn, the leaves were falling and in the college gardens the smoke of the bonfires joined the wet river mist, drifting across the grey walls; the flags were oily underfoot and as, one by one, the lamps were lit in the windows round the quad, the golden lights were diffuse and remote, new figures in new gowns wandered through the twilight under the arches and the familiar bells now spoke of a year's memories. The autumnal mood possessed us both as though the riotous exuberance of June had died with the gillyflowers whose scent at my windows now yielded to the damp leaves, smouldering in a corner of the quad. It was the first Sunday evening of term.

'I feel precisely one hundred years old,' said Sebastian

... I feel middle-aged. That is infinitely worse. I believe we have had all the fun we can expect here.' We sat silent in the firelight as darkness fell.

(Waugh, 2011, p. 132-133)

In their case, it seems that the time spent off campus has influenced their mental outlook on returning to Oxford and their studies for the worse. This is vastly different from Richard's experience. Whereas Charles and Sebastian dread going back to Oxford and college life, Richard is the exact opposite, he is willing to work in horrible conditions to earn money to afford to attend Hampden and is essentially clinging to life on campus.

In Waugh's novel, we see the disenchantment of Oxford start the moment they return from their summer spent at Brideshead and Italy, but it is not until Sebastian is sent down that they both leave Oxford for good. Sebastian is spiralling further into a darkness that Charles cannot reach and starts drinking heavily. After Sebastian is sent down from school Charles decides to leave Oxford as well. He confronts his father that he wants to become an artist and that he does not see any reason to continue at Oxford.

Father, do you particularly want me to take my degree?'

'I want you to? Good gracious, why should I want such a thing? No use to me. Not much use to you either, as far as I've seen.' 'That's exactly what I've been thinking. I thought perhaps it was rather a waste of time going back to Oxford.' ... 'I only thought that if I was not going to take up one of the professions where a degree is necessary, it might be best to start now on what I intend doing. I intend to be a painter.'

(Waugh, 2011, p. 187)

This happens right after Sebastian has been sent down and thus reaffirms the idea that Charles's university experience is tied to Sebastian. It also suggests he does not view his education at Oxford as a utility. Neither is it as linked to his aesthetics anymore, as is the case for the characters in *The Secret History*. The quotation above illustrates my point on the cycle of season. That on-campus and off-campus is part of this holistic system. The system shows that the opportunity of education is not removed once the characters move away from campus. Nor do they experience less or more aesthetic and ethical influences and experiences. They are simply different and provide different influences and experiences dependent on the season.

This chapter has considered the effect time spent away from campus has had on the characters. Both narrators showed to have an aesthetic experience linked to a building off-

campus. In Waugh's novel it is Sebastian's family home, and in Tarrt's novel it is the country house belonging to Francis's aunt. Their meeting and reaction to these houses were not unlike their reaction to their respective universities. Interestingly, the country houses also contributed to the narrator's education, both personal and social. Further, their stays there showed the influence of their institutional education as well. However, it was emphasised and practiced differently. In *Brideshead Revisited* it resulted in the development of Charles's artistry, while the attempt of a bacchanal at the country house resulted in tragedy in *The Secret History*. When considering the other types of education the characters might receive off campus I found that they experience that cultural education and ethical education are linked the characters' financial situations and familial relations. I also considered the impact the changing seasons, vacations and new semesters have on the characters and found that Charles and Sebastian during their summer break thrived while Richard during the winter break dreaded leaving campus. This revealed a difference in motivation and values between the two narrators. This chapter also highlighted the dangers of isolating oneself with one group of people.

## Chapter 4: The Future and The Narration

In the two previous chapters, I focused on exploring how aesthetics, ethics and education intersected with each other in both an on-campus and an off-campus setting. I demonstrated that aesthetics, ethics and education not only influence one another but they also shape the way the characters, especially the narrators, perceive art, morality and the process of learning. Additionally, I argued that while the on-campus setting allowed for the characters to learn more about their chosen subject, they also learn more about life and art through their social interactions. In the off-campus setting we saw how the students applied their academic education to the outside world, with fatal consequences in the case of *The Secret History*. We also saw how the characters, in an off-campus setting, sought out alternative environments where they could continue to foster an aesthetic of learning that they adopted when they first arrived at their respective colleges. This chapter will continue to have the triad of aesthetics, ethics, and education as its core, but whereas the previous two chapters were particularly concerned with the characters' student years and with the setting of the novels, this chapter will examine the students' future lives after college and the narration of the two novels. I chose to focus on the narration of the novel as it takes place from the future, which is the topic of my next section. More importantly however, the narration itself embodies a specific

interaction of aesthetics, ethics and education that aligns with the themes I have explored throughout my thesis.

First, I will focus on the characters' future as this will allow me to consider the role aesthetics, ethics and education have had in changing them over time. This will include, for instance, what have they gained or lost while pursuing an aesthetic lifestyle, and how their views on education have changed. Secondly, I will discuss the narrative style implemented in both novels and pay particular attention to the different literary modes the novels invoke and the importance of allusions and intertextuality. This allows me to argue that the style of narration reflect the ethics (character), education and aesthetics values of the narrator. Another important part of this chapter will be to discuss the kind of narrators Charles and Richard are. For instance, what do they convey through their narratives in terms of inclusion and representation of the female characters. I suspect there is a gender bias that is linked to my main themes of aesthetics, ethics and education in both novels. These are valuable factors to consider for when I move onto the last section of the chapter. In that section I examine the genre in a wider context, this will assist my analysis of aesthetics, ethics and education in these two novels.

## A Look to the Future

In both novels there is a discernible moment at which their narrators become disillusioned with their academic experiences. In Waugh's novel Charles comments on this when he and Sebastian return to Oxford after the summer spent at Brideshead and in Italy, where he mentions an "autumnal mood" possessing the both of them (Waugh, 2011, p. 132).

When Charles recalls his past at Oxford towards the beginning of the novel, it is a summer's day during Eights Week. He points out the scent coming from the gillyflowers under his window to draw a picture of the idyllic setting (Waugh, 2011, p. 25). Charles compares his return to Oxford to that day in Eights Week through mentioning the death of the gillyflowers, whose scent has now given way to that of damp leaves. This emphasizes the change that has taken place, both in their surroundings and in themselves. Charles further emphasizes his disillusionment when he points out that he feels middle-aged, which to him is more grievous than being a hundred as Sebastian felt. This is also illustrated by his comment that he believes that they have had all the fun that they can expect at Oxford (Waugh, 2011, p. 133). This signals the start of a change in both of them. The result of this change in Charles manifests

itself in his interest in pursuing art more seriously, while in Sebastian it is more destructive as he clearly finds the change harder to deal with and starts to escalate his already excessive drinking. I would argue that Charles's aesthetics and ethics are starting to change. He is moving from the hedonistic lifestyle of the dandy aesthete to a more traditional and proper lifestyle. As I pointed out in chapter two, Charles changes the way he dresses as a result of attending Ruskin's school of art, (Waugh, 2011, p. 135) However, it is not until Sebastian is sent down from Oxford that Charles also decides to leave Oxford. The ease with which Charles decides to leave Oxford when Sebastian is dismissed speaks volumes about the significance he places on their friendship. This highlights how deeply Charles values Sebastian but also how little he values his education at Oxford in the end. Charles does not see any reason why he should continue to work towards a degree as a history major at Oxford as he intends to pursue a career as a painter. Still, Charles's education is undeniably linked with his aesthetics and the connection between the two is palpable even in the future.

Furthermore, that Charles first studies history and later becomes an architectural painter is not random. In the third and last part of the book there is a significant jump in time, and we now meet Charles as an established artist, although he is no longer in contact with Sebastian. Charles does, nonetheless, comment immediately on the effect that Sebastian's absence has had on him:

For nearly ten dead years after that evening with Cordelia I was borne along a road outwardly full of change and incident, but never during that time, except sometimes in my painting - and that at longer and longer intervals - did I come alive as I had been during the time of my friendship with Sebastian. I took it to be youth, not life, that I was losing. My work upheld me, for I had chosen to do what I could do well, did better daily, and liked doing; incidentally it was something which no one else at that time was attempting to do. I became an architectural painter.

(Waugh, 2011, p. 291)

As discussed in the previous chapter there is a concern with time. Charles has spent formative years with Sebastian at Brideshead and he associates that period in his life, his youth, with newness, vitality, happiness, excess and freedom. As a result, his middle age is viewed in opposition to this.

The disdain Charles shows his elders, in particular his father, his cousin Jasper and Mr Samgrass suggest that perhaps youth and the representation of youth is a part of his aesthetic

ideology. After all, we already established in chapter two that one of the things that drew Charles to Sebastian was that he represented a happy childhood that he himself had not experienced. As Charles experiences the passage of time, in short, his aesthetics and ethics undergo changes. We should also recognise that Charles is narrating the story from the perspective of a man in his middle-age looking back on his youth and pre-war days. It is not improbable then that he is romanticising this period in his life. I will return to this in the next part of the chapter when I explore the narration of the novel. Since his last visit to Brideshead, during which he painted his first commissioned piece, to the future we are now in, a shift has taken place, not only in Charles but in society as well which is heading towards war.

This, as pointed out by Charles, has left Englishmen with a newfound nationalism that has allowed Charles to turn his passion into profit. His aesthetic inclination and artistic temper that was fostered at Oxford under Sebastian's attention and influence is now a very real and appreciable thing.

More even than the work of the great architects, I loved buildings that grew silently with the centuries, catching and keeping the best of each generation, while time curbed the artist's pride and the Philistine's vulgarity, and repaired the clumsiness of the dull workman. In such buildings England abounded, and, in the last decade of their grandeur, Englishmen seemed for the first time to become conscience of what before was taken for granted, and to salute their achievement at the moment of extinction. Hence my prosperity, far beyond my merits; my work had nothing to recommend it except my growing technical skill, enthusiasm for my subject, and independence of popular notions  
(Waugh, 2011, p. 292).

The importance Charles puts on tradition and history in his art is evident in the quotation above, it also reveals a connection between his aesthetics and education. It is noteworthy that a novel that is set and written at the height of modernism and modernity is so grounded in history and tradition. The point made by Charles about Englishmen gravitating towards art that incites a sense of nostalgia and nationalism, could very well be comment on the novel itself. Waugh's subject matter, as well as his writing style, reflects the same tone and ethical perspective as that of his narrator. The last line of the quotation above is particularly fitting, if not a little clairvoyant, to how the public have responded to Waugh's novel after its publication as well.

In order to consider how Charles's future is informed by his aesthetics, ethics and education (and vice versa) it is productive to reflect on how he finds his way back to Julia after their estrangement. Charles has not seen Julia in years when he reconnects with her on the voyage back to England. Both are unhappily married and seek comfort in their familiarity with one another. Julia has always been of interest to Charles but now meeting in their adulthood, and with Sebastian out of his life, Julia becomes an important and much needed line to his old life and Brideshead, since as years have passed he has felt the loss of " ... something I had known in the drawing-room of Marchmain House and once or twice since, the intensity and singleness and the belief that it was not all done by hand - in a word, the inspiration." (Waugh, 2011, p. 293) Julia's reappearance holds a lot of promise especially considering that throughout the novel Charles has made a point to comment on the resemblance between Sebastian and Julia, as is made especially apparent the first time he meets Julia.

She so much resembled Sebastian that, sitting beside her in the gathering dusk, I was confused by the double illusion of familiarity and strangeness ... Because her sex was the palpable difference between the familiar and the strange it seemed to fill the space between us, so that I felt her to be especially female, as I had felt of no woman before. (Waugh, 2011, p. 95)

Charles's observation in this quotation makes it clear yet again that he tends to view situations like this through the eyes of an artist, as I pointed out early in chapter two. Julia therefore serves as a stand-in of sorts to Sebastian. As is often the case with Charles he views Julia, like Sebastian, as an aesthetic object. Throughout the novel it becomes clear that Charles presents the characters he meets as if they are good or bad works of art. Julia and Sebastian for instance read as good works of art while characters like Cordelia, Anthony and Mr Samgrass are bad art.

Charles was in search of love (Waugh, 2011, p. 37) when he first came to Oxford and found it in Sebastian. Love here does not necessarily mean a romantic relationship, it can easily be understood to mean that he is in search of fulfilment and passion in different forms, but the implication of a romantic relationship however is conspicuous. During the voyage, Julia questions Charles on why he chose to marry his wife, Celia, to which he responds that he was, amongst other things, motivated to marry as a result of missing Sebastian. The following exchange acknowledges Charles's love for Sebastian. "“You really loved him, didn't you?” ‘Oh yes. He was the forerunner.’” (Waugh, 2011, p. 332-333). The word forerunner is particularly interesting as it implies that there is successor, who is clearly understood to be



Julia. The idea of a forerunner brings to mind the concept of art as a replacement of religion. The end of the novel suggests that Charles converts to Catholicism so I would argue that art can be seen as a forerunner for religion to Charles. Moreover, Charles views Sebastian and Julia as aesthetic objects, raising the question of whether they are temporarily fulfilling something that ultimately only religion can provide for him.

It seems that throughout the novel Charles has been looking for love in one way or another. It is also plausible to argue that to him love is not something that is eternal. Oxford for instance is not a true Arcadia to him, if we understand Arcadia to be something that is unchanging. It brings us back to what Charles said about Sebastian being a forerunner. In the following passage he reiterates this to Julia and makes the argument that what and who we love informs our aesthetic and ethics. He also states that the thing or the person we love will continue to change.

'It's frightening,' Julia once said, 'to think how completely you have forgotten Sebastian.'

'He was the forerunner.'

'That's what you said 'in the storm. I've thought since, perhaps I am only a forerunner, too.' 'Perhaps,' I thought, while her words still hung in the air between us like a wisp of tobacco smoke - a thought to fade and vanish like, smoke without a trace -

'perhaps all our loves are merely hints and symbols; vagabond-language scrawled on gate-posts and paving-stones along the weary road that other have tramped before us; perhaps you and I are types and this sadness which sometimes falls between us springs from disappointment in. Our search, each straining through and beyond the other, snatching a glimpse now and then of the shadow which turns the corner always a pace or two ahead of us.'

I had not forgotten Sebastian. He was with me daily in Julia; or rather it was Julia I had known in him, in those distant Arcadian days. (Waugh, 2011, p. 393)

There will always be a forerunner as one goes forth in life, so Julia's concern that she might just be another forerunner to Charles is valid. When she calls off their engagement, Charles is left looking for another love. This again brings me to the point of how the novel explores the extent to which art can replace religion. This is discussed further in an essay by Laura White in "The Rejection of Beauty in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*", where she argues that Waugh rejects a key premise of the modernist aesthetic, namely that art can act as a substitute for religion (White, 2006, p. 182).

Charles's time at Oxford, and the traditional, academic education that he received there is present in his work as an artist. This is in spite of the argument he makes to his father that he does not need to attend school to become an artist. (Waugh, 2011, p. 187) After Oxford and Sebastian, Charles is removed from the more dandified aesthetics he explored with Sebastian and the rest of "the bad set". Instead, he settles into a lifestyle more similar to the grey figures he resented while at school.

In *The Secret History*, a traditional, academic, college education is valued more by the students as an aesthetic act than in *Brideshead Revisited*. However, the implications of not finishing his education have more severe consequences for the narrator in *The Secret History* than the rest of the student characters. Importantly the distance from the "then" of being a student to the "now" of the future is shorter in *The Secret History* than in *Brideshead Revisited*. One can argue that "the future" in *Brideshead Revisited* is something which the characters live through, whereas in *The Secret History* it is a projection – something that is still to come rather than a period of time that has passed. The effect this has on the pace and the structure of the novel is that we as readers are not privy to Richard's future the same way we are Charles's as there is essentially less time and space to see the consequences play out before the novel's ends.

Similar to Charles and Sebastian, the Classics group becomes disillusioned with their college experience and their own "bad set" when the consequences of what they did to the farmer and Bunny follow them to Hampden College. Their "Arcadia" starts to fall apart and the aesthetic lifestyle they practiced is replaced by fear and paranoia when Hampden is intruded upon by law enforcement and media as mentioned in the previous chapter. However, it is not until Julian abruptly leaves that Richard finally realizes that he can never really be a part of the world that is introduced to him by the Classics department.

why, I asked myself, oh, why, had I been so foolish, why hadn't I picked something and stuck with it, how was it that I could currently be at the end of my third year of college and have basically nothing to show for it? What made me angrier was that none of the others seemed to care. To them, I knew, this didn't make the slightest bit of difference. What was it to them if they had to go an extra term? What did it matter, if they failed to graduate, if they had to go back home? At least they had homes to go to. They had trust funds, allowances, dividend checks, doting grandmas, well connected uncles, loving families. College for them was only a way station, a sort of

youthful diversion. But this was my main chance, the only one. And I had blown it. (Tartt, 1993, p. 583)

It is at this point that Richard's self-preservation kicks in and he recognizes the situation for what it is. Already in chapter two I concluded that an aesthetic of studying is present in Tartt's novel, and that this aesthetic has an economic component to it. I argued that the student who is free to explore their interests and to choose their subject regardless of its applicability in the future is privileged and it is this realization that Richard comes to as well. Simultaneously, he also realizes that he does not fit into this category as the quotation above demonstrates. Up until this point Richard has treated his education at Hampden College in the same manner as the other Classic students - and indeed Charles and Sebastian in *Brideshead* - as a "youthful diversion". When faced with the consequences of Julian leaving and how it might affect his education, and in turn his future, Richard starts to view education in utilitarian terms again and not as just something that is a part of his aesthetics.

As I pointed out in chapter two, Richard says that none of them was "meant for academic achievement in subsequent years" (Tartt, 1993, p. 251-252). This prediction, however, is not entirely accurate. After Julian's departure and everything else starts to fall apart, Richard is propelled into a future in academia. Paradoxically, Richard is the only one who graduates from Hampden with a diploma, as Francis points out with some incredulity (Tartt, 1993, p. 614). After Henry's suicide Richard reveals in the epilogue that he went on to study the Jacobean dramatists.

It was an obscure specialization, but the candlelit and treacherous universe in which they moved—of sin unpunished, of innocence destroyed—was one I found appealing. Even the titles of their plays were strangely seductive, trapdoors to something beautiful and wicked that trickled beneath the surface of mortality: *The Malcontent*. *The White Devil*. *The Broken Heart*. I pored over them, made notes in the margins. The Jacobeans had a sure grasp of catastrophe. They understood not only evil, it seemed, but the extravagance of tricks with which evil presents itself as good. I felt they cut right to the heart of the matter, to the essential rottenness of the world. (Tartt, 1993, p. 615)

In this, we can discern a connection between aesthetics, ethics and education. As I have consistently argued, Richard has a tendency to associate literature with his own life. His inclination to study Jacobean dramatists illustrates an attempt to process the things he and the

others did. For that reason I would argue that it is Richard's conscience that urges him to study the Jacobean dramatists. According to Michael Alexander's book *A History of English Literature* (2013) the Jacobean tragedy often explores the themes of revenge enacted by someone who seeks to avenge a wrong involving both murder and sexual honour (Alexander, 2013, p. 142). It is not difficult to discern that the Jacobean tragedy share characteristics with the plot in *The Secret History* as Richard and the Classics students are punished by the consequences of the role they played in the aftermath of the bacchanal and Bunny's murder. Alexander (2013, p. 142) recognizes the Jacobean drama as a horror-Gothic drama that is the ancestor to the horror-Gothic fiction of the late eighteenth century. Gothic fiction, as I discussed in chapter three, is often referenced by Richard – both through his narrative style, and his references to themes and motifs that is typical of the horror-gothic fiction genre. Not unlike how Charles's aesthetic and ethics is revealed through his art and narration, Richard's aesthetics and ethics is revealed through his studies and choice of career in the end of the novel.

The future presented in the epilogue carries with it a tone of sombreness, not unlike the one witnessed in *Brideshead Revisited*. There is no silver lining or bittersweetness to it. Arcadia is gone and their lives seem to have a greyish tint to it now. The genre of the narration has become more tragic than Arcadian. The epilogue provides a look into the fates of the remaining characters, all of whom are tragic in their way, but it is Henry in dream form who drives home the point on the last page of the novel.

I looked at him. There was so much I wanted to ask him, so much I wanted to say; but somehow I knew there wasn't time and even if there was, that it was all, somehow, beside the point. "Are you happy here?" I said at last. He considered this for moment. "Not particularly," he said. "But you're not very happy where you are, either."  
(Tartt, 1993, p. 629)

The dream suggests that Richard is dissatisfied with how everything ended and the passage above reflects the hopelessness Richard is left with after he realizes the dangers of compromising his ethics for the sake of an aesthetic experience. What is also interesting about the quotation above is that it mirrors Julia's view in *Brideshead Revisited* on how the past and the future affect the present. "Sometimes said Julia, 'I feel the past and the future pressing so hard on either side that there's no room for the present at all.'" (Waugh, 2011, p. 362). In this quotation Julia says she feels overwhelmed by memories and experiences of the past but also by the uncertainties and possibilities of the future. This renders her unable to find contentment

in the present. This is a sentiment that is very much echoed in the end of Tarrt's novel through Richard in the quotation given above.

In this section of the chapter, I have explored how the characters' views on aesthetics and ethics, developed during their university years, have evolved alongside their changing perspectives on education. Both narrators become disillusioned with the university experience when they are confronted with the repercussions of choices they have made. Money, which has been a clear motif in both novels. It is also an important point in my thesis that shows itself to be a crucial factor in the characters' academic futures. Charles, who comes from an upper middle-class family, does not factor in his finances and job prospects when he decides to leave Oxford. He is free to end his education and focus on his vocation as an artist instead. It was, after all, more a social education than an academic one, as I pointed out in chapter two when I discussed the different motivations for the narrators to pursue higher education. Richard, on the other hand, realizes that while he wants to be like the others he is not. He does not have the financial security to quit his education when Julian abandons the group, leaving their academic futures in disarray. He changes his major from Classics to English. While the motivation for this is to secure himself better prospects in the future, it also reads as a rejection of the Classics group. In the next section of this chapter, I will examine the way aesthetics and ethics are expressed through the narrative of the novels. My intention in turning to this now is that by focusing on the narrative I will be able to argue that the devices and style used in the novels reveals the ethics (character), education and aesthetic values of the narrators.

## Narrating the Past

As I mention in my introductory chapter, this thesis is a comparative analysis that takes a narratological approach. In a sense the thesis has had a focus on the narrative throughout. I have largely focused on themes, characters and settings to this point. However, I now turn my focus more specifically and intentionally to the narrators and the narratological devices used to highlight the nexus of the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education. My main focus will be on the narrative voice, narrative time and narrative distance. Additionally, I will also consider the structure through the use of intertextuality.

As I have emphasized throughout this thesis, there are several similarities between the two novels, which I largely attribute to the model Waugh's novel might serve for *The Secret*

*History*. Another similarity between the two novels is presented through their approach to narrative time. Both novels are told in the first person, past tense and the narrators recount their past, focusing largely on their time spent at university. The novels cover different expanses of time: *Brideshead Revisited* covers a longer period in the narrator's life than *The Secret History*. In Waugh's novel we have an approximate timeline of the events that take place in the novel. It spans from Charles's arrival at Oxford as a young man, until he is retelling the story of many years later as an officer during the second world war. In Tartt's novel it is unclear exactly how much time has passed from the events of the books ending to Richard's retelling of it. Both Richard and Charles retell their story from somewhere in the future and their narrative style is undoubtedly affected by the outcome of the events that transpired during their university days as well as what happened when they left university. Charles and Richard, in short, are storytellers and it is through their style of storytelling that they reveal their ethics, aesthetics and education at the time of their narration. As storytellers, however, they seem to have different techniques which are rooted in their individual aesthetic practices. As previously illustrated Charles views things through the eyes of an artist, while Richard perceives things through a literary lens. As a result they employ different aesthetic models and allusions, which reflect their ethical and aesthetic development over time.

As I have pointed out frequently in this thesis, intertextuality is a particularly important narrative device, and it is especially prominent in Tartt's novel. The models and allusions used to establish the aesthetics and ethics in *The Secret History* are demonstrated in the literary genres, books, fashion and figures that are referred to by the Richard. Richard admits at the very beginning of the novel that his fatal flaw is: "... a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs". (Tartt, 1993, p. 5) If we understand the picturesque to be related to aesthetic ideals and fulfilment then Richard's morbid longing is for a life surrounded by literature, culture, wealth and history and he looks to education at Hampden college as the way to obtain that. The "morbid longing" speaks to his deep-seated desire to live according to his aesthetic ideals and what that would mean to him, while "at all costs" is straightforward. This part of the quotation can also be argued to be connected to the money motif that runs through both novels. The phrase "I would/could kill for ..." is used as an exaggeration to show extreme desire. Richard reveals at the beginning of the novel the lengths he is willing to go to in order to attain and protect the picturesque. The picturesque in this quotation is understood to be their finely constructed, academic and aesthetic lifestyle. As discussed in the previous chapter this implies that their aesthetic lifestyle is quite erudite and detached from

the real world. It is also quite violent as demonstrated through their justification of the murders they commit.

By admitting that his fatal flaw is “a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs” – which refers to the idea of hamartia - Richard paints himself as a tragic hero. In Greek tragedies the hero is inherently good and skilled but due to one significant flaw within himself, a fatal flaw, tragedy, pain and suffering occur as a direct result. This sets the tone for the narration of the novel as a modern tragedy of sorts. Whether Richard *actually* fits this description, however, is doubtful, since his reliability as a narrator should be questioned. Throughout the novel Richard's voice and actions comes across as quite passive which makes sense when one considers that we do not know the context in which Richard retells the story. Since the overall plot fits that of a crime thriller, he could well be speaking to someone in law enforcement as well as a friend. Either way it makes sense that Richard might downplay his involvement and take on a more innocent role. Richard's “literary lens”, his tendency to associate literature with his own life, undermines his credibility as a narrator. This is exemplified in the previous chapter of this thesis where I discuss the Richard's first impression of Francis's country house. He describes the scene with allusions to the gothic. Richard also openly admits he is not always truthful and that he might not remember things correctly. This should make the reader distrustful of Richard but instead it invokes sympathy or at least a degree of understanding. An example of this is found in the following quotation below. “On leaving home I was able to fabricate a new and far more satisfying history, full of striking, simplistic environmental influences; a colorful past, easily accessible to strangers” (Tartt, 1993, p. 5). This implies that Richard has not had those things in the past, and he evokes sympathy with the reader.

When Charles and Richard recounting events and feelings it is at times difficult to discern whether they are communicating their own views and feelings in the present time as they are narrating it, or as the young person currently in the story. One of the times where it is clear that it is Charles, the narrator, who is talking is in the opening of the third and last part of the novel, where he says: “My theme is memory, that winged host that soared about me one grey morning of wartime. These memories, which are my life - for we possess nothing certainly except the past - were always with me.” (Waugh, 2011, p. 291). Here he is reminding the reader that his past is made up of his memories. He personifies them as a “winged host” which suggest they are fleeting and as a result they are not always to be trusted. Like Richard he is an unreliable narrator, but he is not manipulative. His unreliability stems from his own

changing attitudes, memory and the possibility that he might be romanticising his youth. Charles narrative is undoubtedly affected by the war, and part of his unreliability as a narrator can be deduced to do with him looking to his past as a comfort, embedding the narrative with a nostalgic narrative.

In the previous part of this chapter, I also mentioned that it is Richard's conscience that drives him to study Jacobean tragedies. I would argue that the connection between how these two models, the Classical and the Jacobean tragedy, relate to each other is through cause and effect. It is a preoccupation with adopting Classical ethics and aesthetics that results in both the farmer's and Bunny's murder. Further, it is Richard's reflections and conscience that drives him to want to study the Jacobean tragedies, where a prominent feature of the genre, as discussed earlier, is that people get punished for their crimes. Further, in the quotation about the Jacobean dramatists provided earlier, Richard attributes his interest in the Jacobean dramatists to their ethics: "they understood not only evil it seemed but the extravagance of tricks with which evil presents itself as good". The quotation encompasses quite a bit of narrative irony. I would argue that through their education, the Classics group have presented something evil as something good. Richard however, failed to understand the "extravagance of tricks" until it was too late. Consequently, I would argue that with Richard, as was the case with Charles, the aesthetic models they adapt into their narratives reflect their ethics. I would then argue that, intertextuality is a result of education as well as ethics and aesthetics. It is an important and prominent narrative device in the novels. I have argued throughout my thesis that there is a possibility of an intertextual relationship between Waugh's and Tarr's novels on account of their many parallelisms. Comparing the cast of characters in the two novels affirms this argument further. While this thesis has focused heavily on Charles and Richard, this has largely been due to how their narrative in particular informs the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education. The characterisations they have made about the other characters in their respective novels, help to discern their aesthetics and ethics. Forgoing a comparison between Charles and Richard I believe that there are other characters who exhibit remarkable resemblances, and perhaps support the idea that there is a specific cast of characters in academic novels.

This part of the chapter has looked at how the narrative informs the character aesthetics and ethics and I have paid particular attention to the different literary modes the novels invoke and the importance of allusions and intertextuality. In the following part I will focus the traditions of the academic novel and how these two novels fit or does not fit into the genre.



## Critique and Genre

The academic novel is known by many names, campus novel, varsity novel and university novel to name a few. In my research I have found that these carry different distinctions for different people. To some, the academic novel and the campus novel are distinguished by their focus, where the former centres on faculty and the latter focuses on students. (Williams, 2012, p. 561-562), while others attribute the nationality, on whether it is a British or an American novel to determine exactly what kind of academic novel it is (Abrams & Harpham, 2015, p. 3). In my introduction however I argued that I will use the academic novel when referring to Waugh's and Tartt's novels. Showalter states that the academic novel has flourished since about the fifties as a reaction to the surge in people attending universities post war (Showalter, 2005, p. 1). I also want to reiterate another point made by Showalter in my introduction, that the best academic novels consist of different genres (Showalter, 2005, p. 4). As I touched on in the previous chapter there is an interconnection between different genres in both novels namely, gothic, classic, tragedy and satire inform the narrative as a whole. Both authors fit Showalter's description of what a good academic novel should be, then, as they draw on different literary traditions in their novels. While Jeffrey J. Williams recognizes *The Secret History* as strictly a campus novel as it revolves around campus life and present the life of young students (2012, p. 561) he also supports the sentiment that the academic novel is made up by different genres as he points out that the setting of academic novels provides a distinct opportunity to:

... merge with the murder mystery because they depict a world insulated from everyday concerns and that assumes ease and leisure—instead of a country house, they represent the academic manor. Their drawing a realm apart probably enhances rather than dampens the attraction for their audience (Williams, 2012, p. 563).

The reader of *The Secret History* will recognize this merge of the murder mystery as a fundamental part of the novel. It is this particular element of the novel that also have allowed for another sub-genre in the academic novel to emerge in recent years which have given the genre a renaissance of sorts. Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* is considered to be a foundational text in the Dark Academia genre (Murray, 2023, p. 350). The genre is particularly interested in Gothic and Classical allusions as seen represented in Tartt's novel, however, is not only a literary genre as it is generally thought to be an online subculture. Murray discusses in her essay how dark academia went from an online subculture to be the

subject of a *New York Times* feature, and she attributes it largely to the covid restrictions that had students studying from their bedrooms and looking to social media to provide a surrogate campus experience, even pre-covid the sub-genre represented a nostalgic idealisation of campus life. (Murray, 2023, p. 350-351) The aesthetics of learning which the characters in the two novels practice are a prominent feature in the Dark Academia genre. We could argue that with this genre there is a new interest in the British aesthetics movement's ideology of art for the sake of art. However, there is also criticism connected with this and the dark academia aesthetics as a whole. As pointed out earlier in this thesis there a preoccupation with Western and European culture in the novels. Murray also identifies the lack of inclusion as one of the key criticisms of the genre, she adds:

The 2020 showcasing of DA for mainstream audiences quickly amplified a number of critiques that had long circulated about the movement, most prominently its reflexively Eurocentric and racially exclusionary conception of art and knowledge.<sup>19</sup> DA is, in the main, as profoundly white and Anglo as an old-time Ralph Lauren catalogue (Murray, 2023, p. 351)

I would argue that *that* is the whole point of Tartt's novel. While it allows itself aesthetic indulgences it can also be read as a cautionary tale of the dangers of elitism, of putting aesthetic over ethics. The characters are not meant to be likeable; they are immoral characters in an aesthetic world.

In both novels there is also a sibling pair that the narrators get especially close to, and the similarities between these two pairs in particular demonstrates my theory that Tartt follows a model made by Waugh. It is Sebastian and Julia from Waugh's novel and Camilla and Charles M from Tartt's novel. The narrators are very much in awe of, and attracted to these siblings whose appearance and mannerisms are so similar to each other. With Sebastian and Julia, because of their similarities they become almost interchangeable to the narrator as discussed earlier in this chapter. In Tartt's novel the sibling pair are twins, and the Camilla becomes a love interest for Charles. Sebastian and Charles M most prominent similarities is shown through the mental struggles they both try to fix through substance abuse, resulting in both of their characters to go through a rapid decline mentally as well as physically. They become paranoid, erratic and volatile as the events in the novel progresses. Charles fuelled by the guilt and fear of being found out that he was complicit in two murders. Sebastian feeling torn between who he is and his family expectations of him becomes too much, and he is unable to handle the pressure which causes him to isolate with Charles, but which eventually

becomes strained ones Charles starts to move and function in the outside world of academia. Sebastian's fear of being left behind and losing his innocence, is what ultimately drives Charles away. And as mentioned, there is also a parallel between Julia and Camilla. The first and most obvious parallel being that they are the sister of one of the male students in the novel which they both resemble uncannily. They are also a love interest for the narrator. In the next part of this chapter, I will look closer at what the description of these women informs us of in terms of what kind of narrators the Charles and Richard are. This will allow me to discuss the place of where the female character fit into the academic novel.

In terms of inclusion and representation I would also like to point out how the female characters are represented in Waugh's and Tarrt's novels. The lead characters in the academic novels have largely been represented by male characters. There are of course exceptions Like Mona Awad's *Bunny* (2019) and Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* (2005) to name a few but they do not negate the overall trend. There are however as seen with Tarrt's novel, women writers that write about Academia, but they tend to make their lead character males as seen with novels like Willa Cather's *The Professors House* (1925) and Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952).

Julia and Camilla do, as I mentioned in the previous part of this chapter, share similarities that support a possible intertextual relationship between the novels. The similarities are particularly clear in how they are characterised by the narrators and how they are comparable to their brothers. The first time Richard sees Julia for instance he is struck by the familiarity of her.

Her dark hair was scarcely longer than Sebastian's, and it blew back from her forehead as his did; her eyes on the darkling road were his, but larger; her painted mouth was less friendly to the world. She wore a bangle of charms on her wrist and in her ears little gold rings. Her light coat revealed an inch or two of flowered silk; skirts were short in those days, and her legs, stretched forward to the controls of the car, were spindly, as was also the fashion. Because her sex was the palpable difference between the familiar and the strange it seemed to fill the space between us, so that I felt her to be especially female, as I had felt of no woman before (Waugh, 2011, p. 95)

Charles is particularly interested in her appearance and likeness to Sebastian, as is expected of him. Like I mentioned earlier Charles, view people as good or bad art and he does this regardless of gender. However, in consideration to the representation of the female characters

in Waugh's novel it is easy to recognize that they do not reflect the same aesthetic ideology as the male characters. Waugh does not provide a female character that share their aesthetics of learning, or even pursues a higher education. One could argue that this is just a sign of the times, however women had been allowed to attend some university lectures since 1866 at Oxford (Evans, 2010, p. 27). Waugh does however comment upon the controversy of letting women into the masculine sphere at Oxford in the beginning of the novel when Charles and Sebastian disapprovingly remark their presence using language that is belittling them. Charles describes the women to be "twittering" and "fluttering" (Waugh, 2011, p. 26) suggesting that their presence is annoying, and Sebastian comments that the presence of women at the university strange and unwanted (Waugh, 2011, p. 27). Julia however is different from these women both to Charles and to Sebastian. She is presented both as an aesthetic object as well as individual with her own set of aesthetic and ethical values. Being viewed as an aesthetic object is something that Charles projects onto Julia, not who she necessarily is as illustrated when discussing the possibility of her being the forerunner to his conversion to Catholicism. She shows herself to be an individual with her own ethics when she calls off her engagement with Charles due to her religious beliefs as well as her guilt.

In Tartt's novel there is a similar dichotomy, between what Richard puts on Camilla versus who Camilla actually is. I believe this is present in both novel as a result of Charles and Richard being unreliable narrators. Camilla is undoubtedly also viewed as an aesthetic object by the narrator, but I would argue that she also shows that she does have her own autonomy. Tabitha Gresty argues in her essay "Ambition, Fantasy and belonging within Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*" that "Camilla does not belong because she is simply an object to be desired, with no intellectual force." (Gresty, 2021,p. 4). I disagree with this and find the characterisation unfair. While I can agree with Gresty that looking to belong is a prominent theme in the novel I don't believe Camilla does not belong because she is a woman. Any objectification of Camilla is telling of the male characters' ethics rather than of her intelligence which Gresty seems to allude to when she says that Camilla is not Richards intellectual equal and exits "only to be physically attractive to him" (Gresty, 2021, p. 5). I would argue that while Richard does view Camilla as an aesthetic object, as supported in the following quotation: "She was a living reverie for me: the mere sight of her sparked an almost infinite range of fantasy, from Greek to Gothic, from vulgar to divine." (Tartt, 1993, p. 107). She can still have agency in the group while also being the object of someone's desire. Camilla is not any less interested or skilled than say Richard in the classics class, whom we

both saw in chapter two prefer the coolie labours of English, rather than Greek and Classic studies. While I do disagree with Gresty I also recognize that Richard have romanticised view of Camilla. but the point I want to reiterate is that that does not mean necessarily inform an accurate depiction of Camilla. As I have said before, I do not believe that any of the characters in Tartt's novel are particularly moral characters, but I do believe that Camilla has her own set of ethics and aesthetics like the rest of them.

In this chapter I have paid particular attention the characters' future and how it informs their aesthetics and ethics. I demonstrated that the theme of money is very much present in their future and is crucial factor in the characters academic careers. Additionally, I saw how the characters became disillusioned with their university experience and how that impacted their futures. Focusing on the characters future has allowed me to discuss the how and why the characters ethics and aesthetics evolve. In the second part of this chapter, I explored the narrative style of the two novels where I focused on the aesthetic models the characters have drawn upon throughout the novel and how that has affected Charles and Richard narrative style. I made the argument that Richard and Charles both presents as unreliable narrators and attributed this to their aesthetics inclinations as well as nostalgia in *Brideshead Revisited* and self-preservation in *The Secret History*. In the third part and final part of this chapter I first discussed the academic novel as a genre before I went on to elaborate on the sub-genre Dark Academia where *The Secret History* is considered an important and influential text. Lastly, I discuss the lack of women scholars in the academic novel genre which opened the discussion on whether the female characters in Waugh's and Tartt's are merely aesthetic objects or if they have individual aesthetic and ethical judgements.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have conducted a comparative analysis of the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and education in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*. My motivation for writing this thesis was initially inspired by my interest in the academic novel as a genre, in particular about the thematic overlaps in the genre. I noticed how Waugh and Tartt had some undeniable similarities despite their novels taking place during different time periods and having different geographical settings. However, the most prominent similarity to me was the importance the characters put on aesthetic living and how this in turn impacted their ethics – or as I understand ethics, their character. This made me want to consider how aesthetics, ethics and education relates to one another.

It has been important for my thesis to define exactly how I understand the terms aesthetics, ethics and education. The theoretical framework of my thesis has predominately been determined by the theorists and philosophers presented in the two novels. However, my understanding of aesthetics and how I use it in my thesis is also supported by John Dewey. John Dewey views aesthetics as something we can find in scenes and views of daily life (Dewey, 1980, p. 5-6). In the case of these two novels, it is predominantly explored in the daily life and setting of academia. I have presented ethics as the characters' "character", so to speak. I understand this largely to encompass their morality. Regarding education, I have utilised two different understandings of the word. I have referred to education in terms of traditional academic education but also as a learned experience. This allows for different understanding of education, like social and familial education.

My goal for this thesis was multifaceted. I considered the ethical repercussions for the characters as they tried to achieve and uphold the aesthetics of learning they adopted. I also compared and contrasted how these repercussions are framed by the narratives' different aspects of aesthetics, ethics and education. I contested the view that aesthetics, ethics and education exist independently of one another in these two novels. This belief, especially that aesthetics and ethics can be separated, is presented and criticised in both novels. I argued that in both novels, education is presented as an aesthetic act that brings with it ethical consequences. I call this an aesthetic of learning.

This I believe offers a valuable framework for exploring not only these two novels but others in the academic novel genre more generally. I would personally be interested in developing this approach further in the future to compare more American and British novels in the genre to explore how gender influences and is impacted by the understanding of aesthetics, ethics and education.

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