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Brideshead Revisited

A play

Roger Parsley

Adapted from the novel by
Evelyn Waugh

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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BRIDESHEAD REVISITED

First presented by the SNAP Theatre Company at the Gordon Craig Theatre, Stevenage on 3rd February, 1993, with the following cast:

Charles Ryder	Andrew Loudon
Sebastian Flyte	David Willoughby
Julia Flyte	Lisa Turner
Cordelia/Effie/Celia	Miranda Moss
Hooper/Mulcaster/Brideshead	Brian Orrell
Nanny/Lady Marchmain/Cara	Shirley Hafey
Blanche/Mr Ryder/Lord Marchmain	Barney Long
Aloysius	Laurence

Directed by Andy Graham
Designed by Mark Viner
Choreographed by Josette Bushell-Mingo
Music composed by Stuart De La Mere

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ACT I

1943

SCENE 1	The grounds at Brideshead

1923

SCENE 2	Mr Ryder's house
SCENE 3	Charles's rooms at Oxford
SCENE 4	Sebastian's rooms at Oxford
SCENE 5	Near Brideshead
SCENE 6	Brideshead
SCENE 7	Charles's rooms at Oxford
SCENE 8	Mr Ryder's house
SCENE 9	Brideshead
SCENE 10	Brideshead
SCENE 11	The roof of Brideshead Castle
SCENE 12	Venice
SCENE 13	Charles's rooms at Oxford
SCENE 14	London
SCENE 15	Brideshead
SCENE 16	Sebastian's rooms at Oxford
SCENE 17	Mr Ryder's house

ACT II

SCENE 1	Brideshead
SCENE 2	Brideshead
SCENE 3	Charles's Paris studio
SCENE 4	Brideshead
SCENE 5	Sebastian's house in Fez
SCENE 6	Marchmain House, London

Years later

SCENE 7	An ocean liner
SCENE 8	An art exhibition
SCENE 9	Brideshead
SCENE 10	Mr Ryder's house
SCENE 11	Brideshead
SCENE 12	Brideshead
SCENE 13	Brideshead

1943

SCENE 14	The grounds at Brideshead

CHARACTERS

Charles Ryder
Sebastian Flyte
Julia Flyte
Cordelia Flyte
Brideshead Flyte
Boy Mulcaster
Anthony Blanche
Mr Ryder, Charles's father
Lady Marchmain
Lord Marchmain
Cara, Lord Marchmain's lover
Celia Ryder, Charles's wife
Rex Mottram, Julia's fiancé
Hooper, a soldier
Ma Mayfield
Effie
Jasper, Charles's cousin
Nanny Hawkins
Mr Samgrass
Kurt
Father Phipps
Policeman
Aloysius, Sebastian's teddy bear

The action takes place in 1943 and in flashback to twenty years earlier

AUTHOR'S NOTE

As this play consists largely of a journey into the past by the central character, Charles Ryder, it is suggested that in production a dream-like quality be explored, especially in the inter-scene sequences: sometimes giving the effect of shadows moving, at others the feeling that one scene has simply slipped easily into another. The setting has thus to be as flexible as possible — using drapes, levels, screens, moveable flats, etc. However, the stage directions and scenic indications should be taken as starting points or suggestions only — the director and company should find their own way. In the original production, music was specially composed to support the style employed, but of course, there are many ways of approaching this aspect, too; some of the works of Thomas Tallis and/or Edward Elgar might be found useful.

In the original production there was a cast of seven (M4, F3). The characters have been grouped below to show how the necessary doubling was achieved, but the play could obviously be performed by a cast of anything up to 22 (M14, F8).

M1: **Charles Ryder**
M2: **Sebastian Flyte**
M3: **Hooper/Boy Mulcaster/Jasper/Father Phipps/ Brideshead Flyte/Kurt**
M4: **Mr Ryder//Anthony Blanche/Lord Marchmain/ Rex Mottram/Policeman/Mr Samgrass**

F1: **Julia Flyte**
F2: **Cordelia Flyte/Effie/Celia Ryder**
F3: **Nanny Hawkins/Cara/Ma Mayfield/Lady Marchmain**

For Alison

ACT I

SCENE 1

The grounds of Brideshead Castle. 1943

Music. As the house lights go down, we become aware of the sound of lorries passing, and we see the sweep of their headlamps

We can also see Charles Ryder, standing with a clipboard in his hand. As the sound of the lorries fades, a Light comes up behind a gauze showing us the Flyte family as if in a photograph. Charles smiles wryly. This image then fades, and the Lights change to a representation of early dawn. The music fades as Charles speaks

Charles Hooper! Hooper! Where the hell are you?

Hooper enters, doing up the buttons of his greatcoat. He too, has a clipboard

Hooper Sorry. Call of nature, I'm afraid. Couldn't be helped. Right. Better make a start, I suppose. (*He examines the notes on his clipboard with the aid of a torch*)

Charles You should have started half an hour ago. It should all be ready for checking by now.

Hooper Ah, yes. Well, you see I had a bit of a rush getting my gear together this morning — you know how it is. It was pretty dark last night when we got here. Things got a bit ... mislaid.

Charles How you ever managed in business I'll never know, Hooper.

Hooper Well, it's different in business.

Charles Yes. It must be.

Hooper Looks like a decent place, this time.

Charles What?

Hooper Decent billet.

Charles Is it?

Hooper I've been looking round. It's just sort of parkland here, of course,

could be anywhere. But beyond those trees there's a big house. We'd better check it over, later. Massive grounds.

Charles Where are we? Do you know yet?

Hooper South. Must be south; the train took all day. Anywhere better than Glasgow, though. Next to that lunatic asylum. You know, I really thought we were going to have a go at Hitler, get an overseas posting, this time, didn't you? All this waiting. Still, as I say, this looks like being decent.

Charles Good.

Hooper You've been in since the start, haven't you?

Charles Three and a half years. We were all volunteers at the beginning. Special Reserve unit. Started, trained together. Then the delays, the postings here and there. Never any action. One way and another the originals have nearly all gone. You know, Hooper ... all this waiting has aged me.

Hooper It's the enthusiasm that goes, isn't it?

Charles I was in love at one time.

Hooper In love?

Charles With the army — with the idea of doing something ... something positive; making a statement about life ... about my life. There was reason ... a cause — a calling. I must say the voice is very faint now.

Hooper Still, better just to get on with it. (*Pause*) You know, there's something a bit odd about this place.

Charles Odd?

Hooper Well, it's called a castle — at least, there's a sign saying so down at what I suppose must be the main gate — but there are no battlements or towers or anything. Just a sort of dome on top. Now why's that, I wonder?

Charles A dome? What's the name? The name on the gate?

Hooper Brideshead.

Music

Yes ... that was it. Brideshead Castle. Have you heard of it?

Charles (*distantly*) Brideshead ...

Hooper Means something to you, does it?

Charles It was part of my life. Perhaps the whole of my life. It's called Brideshead because there's a stream — The Bride. Rises a couple of miles away at a farm called "Bridesprings". It's dammed below the house to make three lakes.

Hooper That's right. There is some water down there.

Charles (*slowly; shaking his head*) Do you know, this place was planned one hundred and fifty years ago — the house, the trees, the parkland — to have reached its maturity now? Now, when it's crawling with billeted corporals, no doubt casting their cigarette stubs into the fountain!

Hooper If you've been here before you're in for a bit of a shock, I should imagine. Must have been some place. Round the front they've put up tents and huts and a lorry turn-round, and there's a new tarmac road driven through the trees. It's a bit of a mess — from the outside, anyway. And there's a queer thing, too — there's a sort of Catholic Church attached to the house. I looked in ... there was some kind of service going on. Just a padre and one old lady.

Charles (*to himself*) The chapel ...

Hooper Did you say you'd been here? Is that how you know about it?

Charles Yes ... I've been here ... I know all about it ...

Music

Twenty years ago, it must be ... twenty years ...

The Lights fade on Hooper and he exits

Charles begins to take off his army greatcoat under which he has his undergraduate clothes

At the same time, the Lights come up behind the gauze to reveal Charles's father

Scene 2

Mr Ryder's house. 1923

Mr Ryder Charles ... Charles!

Charles Father? Sorry. Just changing.

Mr Ryder We need to speak ...

Charles Yes, well actually I wanted to ask you something, too. Won't be a second.

Mr Ryder I've been talking about you — I happened to meet your future warden at the Athenaeum. I wanted to talk about the Etruscan notions of immortality; he wanted to talk about extension lectures for the working-class; so we compromised and talked about you. I asked him what your allowance should be.

Charles Ah well, actually that's what I wanted to ——

Mr Ryder He said, "Three hundred a year; that's all most men have." I thought that a deplorable answer. I had more than most men when I was up. I toyed with the idea of giving you six hundred, but I reflected that, should the warden come to hear of it, it might sound deliberately impolite. So I shall give you five hundred and fifty.

Charles Thank you very much.

Mr Ryder Yes, it's indulgent of me, but it all comes out of capital, you know. Well, anyway, that's what I wanted to tell you. I only wish I had some words of wisdom for you, but... I haven't. Your cousin Jasper has been at Oxford for two years, as you know.

Charles Thank you.

Mr Ryder He tells me you will have ground floor rooms.

Charles Yes, I believe so.

Mr Ryder I should change them. People start dropping in. They leave their gowns there and come and collect them before hall; you start giving them sherry. Before you know where you are, you've opened a free bar for all the undesirables in the college. Well, good luck, Charles.

He exits

Scene 3

Charles's rooms at Oxford. Night

Music. The gauze lifts, the Lights change, and Charles walks into his university room, sits and begins reading. There is the sound of approaching male laughter. A bell tolls

Mulcaster staggers on

Sebastian (*off*) Here, hold up, Mulcaster, old thing. I'm about done ...

Mulcaster Come on, or we'll never make it.

Sebastian staggers on holding his teddy bear, Aloysius

Sebastian Plenty of time. Don't have to be in House till Tom stops ringing. Feeling a bit wobbly down below — must go steady. Aloysius is anxious that I don't make an exhibition of myself: you see his look of disapprobation?

Mulcaster All right. Steady, by all means. But at least move.

Sebastian Do you know, I feel most uncommonly unwell. Here. (*He gives Aloysius to Mulcaster*) I don't think Aloysius should see this. I must leave you a minute ... (*He is sick into Charles' s window*)

Mulcaster Oh, you ass, Flyte! You might have chosen the flower-beds! Well, at least you'll travel lighter. Come on. (*He puts his arm around Sebastian and begins to move him off*)

Charles comes to the window. Mulcaster turns and comes back to him. Sebastian stares at Charles

Terribly sorry, old chap. The wines were too various. It was neither the quality nor the quantity that was at fault. It was the mixture. Grasp that, and you have the root of the matter. To understand all is to forgive all. (*He starts to stagger off towards Sebastian*)

Sebastian returns to the window, looking intensely at Charles. He hands him a card

Sebastian That's where I am, and who I am: do come and see me tomorrow. Please?

Mulcaster Come on!

Sebastian (*taking Aloysius from Mulcaster*) Come on, Aloysius. It's all right. All over, now ...

Sebastian and Mulcaster stagger out

Scene 4

Sebastian' s rooms at Oxford

Music. The Lights cross-fade as Charles walks towards Sebastian' s room

Sebastian enters

Sebastian Ah! Come in, come in.

Charles walks in

I knew you'd come. Aloysius thought you wouldn't. Sorry about last night. Am I forgiven?

Charles Yes, of course.

Sebastian Thank you. Charles, isn't it? I found out! We're having plovers' eggs. Mummy sends them from Brideshead. They always lay early for her. I'm hoping Blanche may drop in, too — do you know him? That means that there are five each and two over, so I'm having the two. I'm unaccountably hungry today. Ah, Blanche!

Anthony Blanche enters

Come on, we've got plovers' eggs!

Blanche My dear, I'm afraid that I shall be unable to do justice to them. I've been lunching with my p-p-preposterous tutor. He thought it very odd my leaving when I did. I told him I had to change for f-f-footer.

Sebastian This is Charles Ryder. We met ignobly, but I am forgiven. Ryder — Anthony Blanche.

Charles Hallo.

Blanche Hallo, dear one. (*To Sebastian*) How absolutely charming! (*He glances through the window*) Oh my dears, my dears! Rowists! All sweatered and muffled on their way to the river! I must speak to them. (*He grabs a megaphone and stands on the window-ledge*)

"I, Tiresias, have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same d-divan or b-bed.
I, who have sat by Thebes below the wall,
And walked among the 1-1-lowest of the dead!"

(*He steps back into the room*) How I surprised them! All boatmen are Grace Darlings to me! Do you know, I really think a walk by the river would lift the spirit somewhat. Do you mind?

Sebastian (*laughing*) Of course not. Have fun!

Blanche Oh I will, I will! My dear. (*He embraces Sebastian*) I should like to stick you full of barbed arrows, like a p-pin-cushion. (*He turns to Ryder*) And where do you lurk?

Charles Ground floor, front quad.

The next line is said with particular meaning and shared looks with Sebastian

Sebastian has already found it!

Blanche Intrigue, intrigue! I shall come down your burrow and ch-ch-chivy you out like an old s-s-stoat!

Mulcaster appears at the window, steals Aloysius from a chair and flings him into the room, hitting Sebastian

Sebastian Mulcaster! We'll get you for that!

Music. A students' mêlée begins, with a chase ending in a rugby scrum, during which Charles and Sebastian sit on Mulcaster and pull his trousers down. During some of this horseplay, there is a moment, held for a couple of seconds, where Charles and Sebastian are holding each other, and look deeply into each other's eyes — they are in love. Blanche, very much on the fringe of things, sees this with some jealousy registering in his face. Finally, Mulcaster, Charles, and Sebastian are left lying about, exhausted

Blanche Well, what fun and games! No-one else for a riverside stroll?

They indicate not

Well, then ... (*He turns to Charles*) I think it's perfectly brilliant of Sebastian to have discovered you! Farewell, farewell.

He exits

A clock chime is heard

Mulcaster Oh, Christ! I've got a lecture!

He exits awkwardly, pulling up his trousers

Charles and Sebastian laugh at him

Charles Oh!
Sebastian What?
Charles I've got one, too!

They laugh again, then the mood changes

Sebastian Must you go?

Charles Well, I ought to.
Sebastian Don't go, Charles. Come with me.
Charles Where?
Sebastian I've got a motor-car and a basket of strawberries and a bottle of Château Peyraguey — which isn't a wine you've ever tasted, so don't pretend — it's heaven with strawberries. Will you come?
Charles What, now?
Sebastian Yes, now ...

Again they share that look

Charles Where are we going?
Sebastian To see a friend.
Charles Who?
Sebastian Name of Hawkins. Oh — the motor-car is Hardcastle's. Better return the bits to him if I kill myself — I'm not very good at driving. Hardcastle's in my college. Leads a double life. At least, I assume he does. He couldn't go on being Hardcastle, day and night, always, could he? Or he'd die of it. He says he knows my father, which is impossible.
Charles Why?
Sebastian No-one knows Papa. He's a social leper. Hadn't you heard? Don't sit there looking like a dummy! Come on!

Sebastian grabs Charles's hand and they exit running

Music as the Lights change to:

Scene 5

Near Brideshead

A green cloth is spread over a raised area of the stage

Sebastian and Charles enter immediately and fling themselves down on to the "bank". Charles turns to Sebastian. They smile at each other, then both lie back

Charles Oh ... this is blissful! Summer scents everywhere ... strawberries, wine ... the sun ... it's as if the very air has been touched by heaven!

I feel as if I've been lifted a finger's breadth above the turf, and held suspended ...

Sebastian Just the place to bury a crock of gold. I should like to bury something precious in every place where I've been happy, and then, when I was old and ugly and miserable, I could come and dig it up and remember. (*Pause*) Sit up. I'll show you something. (*He points*) You see? The woodland that curves around the hill over there? You can just see the dome above the trees ... and some of the house ...

Charles Is that ... Brideshead?

Sebastian (*nodding*) Well?

Charles What a place to live in!

Sebastian You must see the garden front and the fountain. It's where my family live.

Charles Where your family live?

Sebastian Yes, but don't worry. They're in London. (*Pause. He looks at Charles*) You do want to see it, don't you?

Charles Oh, yes — I do, I do ...

Sebastian Come on, then!

He again takes Charles by the hand and drags him off

Music. The Lights cross-fade quickly to:

Scene 6

Brideshead

Sebastian and Charles come straight back on

Sebastian Everything's shut up. This way. I want you to meet Nanny Hawkins. That's what we've come for. She lives right up in the dome ... (*He indicates that they should be quiet as they step into the room*)

Nanny Hawkins is sleeping, hands lying open, a rosary in her lap

(*He calls softly*) Nanny! Nanny Hawkins!

Nanny (*waking*) Well, this is a surprise.

Sebastian kisses her

Who's this? I don't think I know him.

Sebastian A friend from Oxford, Nanny. Charles Ryder.

Charles Pleased to meet you.

Nanny How do you do. You've come just the right time. Julia's here for the day. Such a time they're all having — the whole family! It'll be October before we're settled down again. It's dull without them. Father Phipps was here on Thursday and I said exactly the same to him.

Sebastian D'you say Julia's here?

Nanny Yes, dear. You must have just missed her. It's the Conservative Women. Her Ladyship was to have done them, but she's poorly. Julia won't be long: she's leaving immediately after her speech, before the tea.

Sebastian I'm afraid we may miss her again.

Nanny Don't do that, dear: it'll be such a surprise to her seeing you — though she ought to wait for the tea. I told her, it's what the Conservative Women come for. Now, what's the news? Are you studying hard at your books?

Sebastian Not very, I'm afraid, Nanny.

Nanny Ah, cricketing all day long, I expect, like your brother. He found time to study, too, though. He's not been here since Christmas, but he'll be back for the Agricultural, I expect. Did you see this piece about Julia in the paper? She brought it down for me ... (*Reading*) "The lovely daughter whom Lady Marchmain is bringing out this season ... witty as well as ornamental ..." Well that's no more than the truth, though it was a shame to cut her hair. I said to Father Phipps, "It's not natural." He said, "Nuns do it", and I said, "Well surely, Father, you aren't going to make a nun out of Lady Julia?" The very idea! Ring the bell, dear, and we'll have some tea.

Sebastian Oh, we can't stop. Sorry, Nanny. Have to get back to Oxford, you see ...

Nanny And miss Julia? She will be upset when she hears. It would have been such a surprise for her. Ah, well ...

Sebastian kisses her

Will you come again before the holidays?

Sebastian I don't know, Nanny.

Nanny Well, it was nice to see you. Now you look after yourself and don't forget your studies.

Sebastian I won't, Nanny.
Nanny Goodbye, Mr Ryder.
Charles Goodbye.

They come out of the room

The Lights fade on Nanny and she exits

Sebastian Poor Nanny. She does have such a dull life. I've a good mind to bring her to Oxford to live with me, only she'd always be trying to send me to church.
Charles Sebastian —
Sebastian We must go quickly before my sister gets back.
Charles (*stopping him*) Which are you ashamed of, her or me?

Pause

Sebastian (*looking at Charles*) I'm ashamed of myself. I'm not going to have you get mixed up with my family. They're so madly charming. Oh, Charles — all my life they've been taking things away from me. If they once got hold of you, they'd make you their friend not mine, and I won't let them.

They exchange glances

Charles All right. But am I not going to be allowed to see any more of the house?
Sebastian It's all shut up. We came to see Nanny. On Queen Alexandra's day it's all open for a shilling. (*A slight pause*) Oh, well ... come and look if you want to. It's only corridors and rooms, really. But there's the chapel. You must see that.

Organ music plays as the Lights change

They enter the chapel. Sebastian dips his fingers in the stoup, crosses himself and genuflects. Charles copies him

Why did you do that?
Charles Just good manners.

Sebastian Well, you needn't on my account. What do you think of our chapel?

Charles It's ... like a monument to art nouveau.

Sebastian It was Papa's present to Mama.

The music ends

Julia enters the chapel

Sebastian pulls Charles into a shadow on one side

(*Whispering*) Julia.

They watch as Julia genuflects, crosses herself, then exits

Sebastian emerges from the shadow, followed by Charles

I'm sorry. I haven't been very nice this afternoon. Brideshead often has that effect on me. But I had to take you to see Nanny. Why do you look at me like that?

Charles I don't know ... it's just that you're so very mysterious about your family.

Sebastian I rather hoped that I was mysterious about everything! And anyway you seem so ... inquisitive.

Charles Perhaps I am rather curious about other people's families — you see, it's not a thing I know about. There's only my father and myself.

Sebastian You don't know what you've been saved. There are lots of us. Look them up in Debrett. I say ... it's half-past five. We could get to Godstow in time for dinner, leave the car, and then walk back by the river. Wouldn't that be best? Yes?

He links arms with Charles and leads him off

Come on!

They exit

The Lights cross-fade to:

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