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Evelyn Waugh and *The Waste Land*

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the hypertextual relationship between Evelyn Waugh's fiction and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land (1922).* Drawing on Gérard Genette's theory of hypertextuality, it argues that Waugh's novels – *Decline and Fall* (1928), *Vile Bodies* (1930), *A Handful of Dust* (1934), and *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) – not only allude to Eliot's poem but also mirror its fragmented structure and thematic concerns: spiritual desolation, cultural collapse, and the existential yearning for meaning. Each novel is read alongside a specific section of *The Waste Land*, allowing for an interpretation of Waugh's oeuvre as a sustained, intertextual response to modernist anxiety. The paper suggests that Waugh constructs his own narrative wasteland – a fictional world woven from repetition, allusion, and recurring figures – where satire coexists with deeper reflections on faith, redemption, and human frailty. Like Eliot, Waugh leaves room for fleeting glimpses of hope. This ongoing dialogue with *The Waste Land* offers fresh insight into Waugh's place within the modernist tradition.

Keywords

Evelyn Waugh, T. S. Eliot, modernism, hypertextuality, intertextuality

Evelyn Waugh i *Ziemia jałowa*

Abstrakt

Artykuł podejmuje próbę prześledzenia relacji hipertekstualnej między prozą Evelyna Waugha a poematem *The Waste Land* T. S. Eliota. Wychodząc od koncepcji hipertekstualności Gérarda Genette'a, autorka wskazuje, w jaki sposób powieści *Decline and Fall* (1928), *Vile Bodies* (1930), *A Handful of Dust* (1934) oraz *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) nie tylko odwołują się do poematu Eliota, lecz także przejmują jego strukturę oraz podejmują pokrewne tematy: duchowej pustki, kulturowego rozpadu i egzystencjalnego głodu sensu. Każda z analizowanych powieści zestawiona zostaje z konkretną częścią *The Waste Land*, co pozwala odczytać dorobek Waugha jako spójną, intertekstualną odpowiedź na modernistyczne lęki i diagnozy. Autorka przekonuje, że Waugh tworzy własną „ziemię jałową" – świat utkany z powtórzeń, literackich aluzji i powracających figur – w którym satyra splata się z głębszymi pytaniami o wiarę, zbawienie i ludzką kondycję. Mimo gorzkiego tonu, w tej prozie, podobnie jak u Eliota, odnaleźć można przestrzeń na chwilowe przebłyski nadziei. Interpretacja ta ukazuje, że prowadzony z *The Waste Land* dialog nie tylko odsłania nowe sensy w twórczości Waugha, lecz także rzuca światło na jej miejsce w szerszym pejzażu literatury modernistycznej.

Słowa kluczowe

Evelyn Waugh, T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, modernizm, hipertekstualność, intertekstualność

In *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Gérard Genette defines hypertextuality as "any relationship uniting a text B (hypertext) to an earlier text (hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (1997: 5). This concept highlights how new works often transform or reimagine existing ones – through allusion, parody, imitation, or reinterpretation. While a literary work can always be read independently,

its meaning is often deepened when viewed in light of the text it draws from.

Evelyn Waugh's fiction is consistently marked by extensive literary allusion, with T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* emerging as one of the most prominent intertextual sources. Waugh's engagement with Eliot is not confined to isolated references; it runs through his entire body of work and invites interpretation as a sustained hypertextual dialogue. This paper argues that each of Waugh's major novels can be meaningfully linked to a specific section of *The Waste Land*, and that his recurring motifs – fragmentation, spiritual emptiness, cultural decay – reflect and rework the themes of Eliot's poem. By tracing these correspondences, I aim to show how Waugh constructs his own narrative wasteland in response to modernist anxiety.

Waugh, in his oeuvre, shares his critical views on modern civilization. His characters often fail to mature, as genuine maturity would require the loss of their easy, unexamined existence. The inhabitants of his fictional world – particularly in the early satires – are, as Jeffrey Heath observes, "ends in themselves, savagely autonomous; like Eliot's wastelanders, they do not want to sprout" (1982: 9). Yet unlike Eliot's figures, Waugh's characters remain unaware of what they fear. They exist within a society afflicted by a profound malaise, but they lack the insight to confront it. Even his protagonists (until Charles Ryder) remain woefully unenlightened, trapped in superficial lives. While following the lives of Waugh's characters, one cannot help but repeat after Uncle Theodor from *Scoop,* who sings "Change and decay in all around I see".[1]

[1] The line comes from a Christian hymn, *Abide with Me*, which is traditionally sung at funerals. Waugh's use of the line in the scene is rather ironic, since Uncle Theodor, described as the gayest of all characters, sings the song at the top of his voice while gazing out through the window in the morning. Quite shockingly, this is his way of "relieving fits of depression" (2000c: 17). However, the narrator comments that "decay rather than change was characteristic of the immediate prospect" (2000: 17), clearly expressing his view of the surrounding world.

Heath's comparison of Waugh's fictional realm to Eliot's *The Waste Land* is not surprising. It is well known that Waugh was fascinated by Eliot's modernist writing (Lodge 1999). The disjointed narration and rapid scene changes characteristic of *The Waste Land* are mirrored in *Vile Bodies*, while *A Handful of Dust* takes both its title and epigraph directly from the poem. Waugh makes this intertextual connection even more explicit in *Brideshead Revisited*, when Anthony Blanche theatrically recites passages from *The Waste Land* through a megaphone from Sebastian Flyte's balcony. As Jeffrey Manley observes, this moment has become emblematic enough to be highlighted in *The Guardian*'s discussion of Eliot's poem (2016). Allusions to *The Waste Land* – both overt and subtle – can be found throughout Waugh's novels. According to intertextual theories (Allen 2000: 1-5), which hold that every literary work is inherently connected to prior texts, such references might appear to be mere homage or passing allusion. However, the relationship between Eliot's and Waugh's texts extends far beyond that.

My research proposes that Waugh created a unified fictional realm across his oeuvre. He returns to the same thematic material with a consistent, though evolving, authorial voice. His fiction presents a sustained meditation on the decline of modern civilization. This world is held together by reappearing characters, recurring motifs, and literary allusions to canonical texts – all elements that also define *The Waste Land*. What I aim to show in this paper is that Waugh constructed his own version of Eliot's wasteland, and that this deep intertextual relationship conditions how his novels should be read and understood.

Quite interestingly, each of Waugh's early novels seems to be a rendition of a specific part of *The Waste Land*. Although the connections between Waugh's writing and Eliot's poem have been widely discussed by critics such as Heath (1982) and Stannard (1993), the idea that each novel can be related to a particular section of the poem has not yet been fully explored.

Waugh's first novel, *Decline and Fall*, might be seen as a kind of prologue to his fictional world, as it introduces pre-

liminary versions of the typical events and characters that reappear throughout his oeuvre. The novel opens with a hopeful vision of life in Oxford, but the surrounding world soon proves quite different from what it initially seems. Paul, the novel's protagonist, is quickly drawn into a society to which he does not truly belong, yet one he nevertheless strives to join. People are depicted as self-absorbed, lacking both moral standards and spiritual depth. Everything around them is artificial. Llanabba, the school where Paul becomes a teacher, does not genuinely educate the boys. The only real interest shown in them comes when their parents visit. In a way, then, the boys do learn something: they absorb the rules that govern this society – the daily performance of keeping up appearances. People in this world are unaffected even by events as serious as death. Horrific situations are presented in a lighthearted tone, and the characters seem incapable of compassion or remorse.

The subject matter depicted in *Decline and Fall* may be seen as corresponding to the first part of Eliot's poem, "The Burial of the Dead", which blends nostalgic reflection on the past with a threatening, almost fatalistic prophecy of a journey into the desert waste, where one will see "fear in a handful of dust". In a similar manner, Paul's memories of his Oxford days are intertwined with his growing disillusionment with the modern world. The speaker in the poem wanders through a London full of ghosts and asks one of them about the fate of the corpse he has "planted" (Eliot 2017: l.70) in his garden. Paul resembles this speaker, as he too must navigate a world populated by figures who seem more dead than alive. He becomes involved with Margot Beste Chetwynde – who notably reappears in Waugh's later novels – and joins her circle of ghost-like people. They drift from party to party across London without direction or purpose, lacking any spiritual depth.

Paul may also be seen as a lone wanderer, unaware of the true nature of the world around him – namely, that Margot runs brothels. The motif of death recurs throughout *Decline and Fall*, but it is never treated seriously. It is either trivialized, as in the

case of poor young Tangent, who is shot in the foot on sports day, or used as a means of escape, as when Paul fakes his own death to avoid prison. By the end of the novel, Paul resembles a ghost himself: he retains his name but assumes a false identity. His life has come full circle, returning him to where he began – though now as a different version of himself. Interestingly, the only person aware of Paul's deception is the reader, which subtly echoes the final line of "The Burial of the Dead", where the speaker addresses the reader directly: "You! Hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frère!" (Eliot 2017: l.74).

Vile Bodies, as the most modernist of Waugh's novels, shares formal similarities with *The Waste Land*. Both texts possess a unique, almost cinematic quality, with narration that jumps from one episode to another. Sentences are often short and abruptly cut off. Additionally, both works incorporate footnotes, which play a significant role in shaping the reader's understanding. As Lodge puts it, *Vile Bodies* "might be described as a kind of comic prose equivalent to *The Waste Land*", for its montage of voices, rapid shifts, and panorama of post-war disorientation (1999).

I would like to propose that this affinity extends beyond form to subject matter: *Vile Bodies* appears closely related to the third part of Eliot's poem, "The Fire Sermon." The title, borrowed from a Buddhist discourse on lust, signals the section's preoccupation with themes of love and sex. Eliot weaves numerous allusions to Renaissance culture into this sequence, creating a stark contrast between the depth of true feeling – capable of transforming death and suffering into symbols of renewal – and the emptiness of modern, degraded sexuality. Tiresias appears as a witness to the emotionless encounter between the typist and the clerk, embodying the poem's vision of physical intimacy drained of meaning.

Yet "The Fire Sermon" is not entirely without hope. Two scenes – the fisherman by the river and the image of St. Magnus Martyr church – offer fleeting glimpses of transcendence, suggesting possible escape from the moral impasse of the modern

world. The sequence closes by bringing together Eastern and Western visions of sin and redemption. The fire may allude to the Buddha's sermon, where burning symbolizes passion, aversion, delusion, and the roots of suffering. At the same time, the section quotes from St. Augustine's *Confessions*. "To Carthage then I came" refers to Augustine's youthful indulgence in lust, while "O Lord Thou pluckest me out" expresses his cry for deliverance. Here, fire evokes not only suffering but also purification, invoking purgatory and the hope of redemption.

The very beginning of *Vile Bodies* introduces the reader to a group of people on a sea voyage. Among them is a religious choir composed of girls named after virtues, though they are far from embodying those qualities. After the journey ends, Adam's autobiography is confiscated by a customs officer, who cites great writers and philosophers such as Dante and Aristotle – along with their works – as examples of texts deemed undesirable by society. Culture appears to be regarded as something dangerous and subversive.

The names and titles mentioned by the officer are not coincidental. Waugh's use of intertextuality – like Eliot's – is highly deliberate, as previously discussed. Dante's *Purgatorio* explores the nature of sin, vice, and virtue, emphasizing that the root of each sin is a form of love that is perverted, disordered, or deficient. Eliot, too, alludes to *Purgatorio* in *The Waste Land* (2017: ll. 293–295), which further deepens the connection between his poem and Waugh's novel. The seventh terrace of suffering in Dante's work relates to lust, a motif central to both Eliot's and Waugh's texts. The reference to *Purgatorio* also resonates with the fire of redemption described in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, which Eliot invokes in "The Fire Sermon". In Dante's poem, however, the earthly paradise follows the final terrace – a realm of peace that remains inaccessible to the societies portrayed by either Eliot or Waugh. Their characters inhabit a numb, emotionally stunted world, filling their days with luncheons and parties yet feeling nothing.

Dante's work is perceived as "dirty" precisely because it represents everything this society seeks to suppress. Symbolically, it cannot be permitted to enter the country with Adam, as belonging to this world requires a rejection of the moral standards Dante's vision upholds. The other confiscated text is a collection of philosophical writings referred to as "Aristotle, Works of" – Aristotle, whose thought, importantly in this context, is concerned with the proper use of language, logic, and moral reasoning. Taken together, the rejection of these texts underscores the novel's satirical portrayal of a culture that refuses to engage with the foundations of ethical and intellectual life.

Significantly, the scene with the customs officer occurs at the end of a sea journey. Due to the use of similar motifs, it may be seen as a reworking of the situation depicted in "The Fire Sermon." In Eliot's poem, dirty, stagnant water becomes a symbol of moral and cultural decay. In Waugh's novel, water functions as a border between hope and modern society – it seems that all morality and virtue are left behind at the customs office, symbolised by the confiscation of Adam's books.

Interestingly, what is not confiscated are the angel's wings – a prop used by members of a female evangelical choir – simply because they have already been worn. The customs officer asks one of the "angels", Chastity, about her wings:

> have you worn them?
> 'Sure'
> That's all right then (Waugh 2000b: 19)

The fact that it is "all right" to bring in the wings only if they are worn suggests that they no longer represent any actual virtue. What is also striking is that Chastity, like the wings and despite her name, embodies none of the value it implies: she later becomes a prostitute.

The perception of great literature as something to be avoided is one of the earliest signs of the cultural decay portrayed in *Vile Bodies*. Throughout the novel, it is clear that people prefer

reading gossip – which is often far from the truth – over engaging with anything meaningful. The role of literature is diminished; the only character shown reading is Nina's father, and even he barely remembers who he is. For him, the written word is ultimately meaningless.

In contrast to "The Fire Sermon", *Vile Bodies* presents marriage not as a potential path to redemption but as a means of social advancement. Adam and Nina's wedding is repeatedly announced or cancelled depending on Adam's financial situation at a given moment. As in *The Waste Land*, sexual encounters are devoid of emotion. After sleeping with Adam, Nina remarks, "All this fuss about sleeping together. For physical pleasure I'd sooner go to my dentist any day" (Waugh 2000b: 121). In this fictional world, sleeping with someone – or even cheating on one's spouse, as Nina does with Adam – carries no emotional weight. The lack of genuine love is further underscored by a disturbing scene in which Adam effectively sells Nina to Ginger to pay his hotel bill. Shockingly, Nina accepts this without protest.

Religion in *Vile Bodies* is represented by two priest characters, neither of whom offers any help or comfort; both seem to despise others and are interested only in their own well-being. The hotel owner, meanwhile, plays a role similar to Eliot's Tiresias. She is a silent observer of the surrounding scandals, suicides, and affairs. Just as in "The Fire Sermon", Waugh's novel ends with the symbol of lust: one of the former choir "angels", Chastity, has become a prostitute, and Nina is pregnant with Adam's child – even though she is married to Ginger. Unlike Eliot's poem, however, *Vile Bodies* offers no hint of redemption or purifying fire. The inhabitants of Waugh's wasteland are doomed to irreversible moral decay.

The relation between *The Waste Land* and *A Handful of Dust* merits extensive discussion. However, for the purpose of this section, I shall focus only on the most striking resemblances. In the case of this novel, since both the title and the epigraph are taken directly from Eliot's poem, it is natural for the reader to anticipate a number of textual similarities. Lodge stresses how

explicit this gesture is, noting that by drawing on Eliot's line "I will show you fear in a handful of dust", Waugh aligns his novel with Eliot's vision of cultural collapse (1999).

A Handful of Dust, like *The Waste Land*, presents the modern world as a place of decay. Society is devoid of spirituality and morality. Eliot's poem and Waugh's novel both portray the disintegration of meaningful relationships between people. In *A Handful of Dust*, Waugh creates a vision of a society focused only on itself. His description of the world may seem humorous, but it is, in fact, a rather bitter portrayal of people preoccupied with their own concerns. They fill their days with endless parties and loveless affairs; however, none of this seems to fill their inner void. They attempt to suppress their emotional and moral emptiness, but they do not succeed.

The spiritual emptiness of the characters in *A Handful of Dust* may be seen as a clear reference to the second part of Eliot's poem, "A Game of Chess". Many members of Waugh's depicted society may be compared to chess pieces. Chessmen follow the rules of the game, just as the inhabitants of Waugh's world must behave according to the rules imposed by their society. The men in *A Handful of Dust* are, like the chess king, rather passive. They have little or no influence on their lives; they react more than they act. Women, on the other hand, are mostly presented as strong personalities. They are the chess queens of this society, as they are able to manipulate others to achieve their goals.

Brenda, Tony's wife, is focused only on herself. She treats everything, including her husband, as a means to an end. Brenda pays no heed to other people's feelings or wishes. She constantly neglects her son and derives a sort of pleasure from nurturing her husband's guilt after a single instance of misbehaviour. By exaggerating Tony's one night of drinking, she manages to present herself as a victim in the marriage she wishes to end.

Brenda's sister, Marjorie, is just like Brenda. She dominates her husband, Allan, to the point where he does not even react

to her cheating. As he tells Tony "Why last year Marjorie was going everywhere with that ass Robin Beaseley. She was mad about him at the time but I pretended not to notice and it all blew over" (Waugh 2000a: 129).

Mrs. Beaver is another of the "chess queens" of the novel. Her son is completely dependent on her and does whatever she asks him to. "Chess men" are actually mentioned in the novel in Mrs. Beaver's conversation with one of her clients:

> I think it [the affair with Brenda] will do the boy [Beaver] a world of good […]. I've felt for a long time a lack of something in him, and I think that a charming and experienced woman like Brenda Last is just the person to help him. […] to tell you the truth I felt something of the kind was in the air last week, so I made an excuse to go away for a few days. If I had been there things might never have come to anything. He's very shy and reserved even to me. I'll have the chess-men done up and sent round to you this afternoon (2000a: 59).

It turns out that Mrs. Beaver has not only the chess pieces "done up", but her son's affairs as well.

The second part of Eliot's poem, "A Game of Chess", is preoccupied with social differences. The sequence opens with a description of a beautiful woman sitting on a chair which resembles a "burnished throne", a reference to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, and ends with the conversation of Cockney women in a pub. Irrespective of their background, women seem to experience an inner void and lack of love. In Eliot's world, relationships between people do not offer any consolation. Women fear pregnancy and labour, which may be seen as a prevailing fear of new life. Their behaviour emphasizes the state of society, which is, above all, characterized by emotional emptiness.

Eliot's portrayal of relationships seems to be echoed in Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*. In the society presented both in the poem and in the novel, marriage is not perceived as sacred. People's attitudes toward the institution are no different from their

attitudes toward meaningless affairs. Marriage in this world no longer signifies stability and meaningfulness in human relationships. Quite the contrary – it becomes, like any other relationship in this decaying society, a means of achieving convenience. In both Eliot's and Waugh's worlds, love and passion are replaced by lust. Relationships are governed by social rules and resemble some sort of game. However, in this social game, people do not truly need partners, as they are not able to cooperate or even fully acknowledge others. The inhabitants of these worlds are too preoccupied with themselves to be real partners. Ludmila Gruszewska, commenting on Eliot's poem, writes: "In a world where people refuse to cooperate, to establish true communication with each other, each act of anticipation confirms the insignificance of the other person rather than the mental togetherness of the two players" (1994: 19). Even though this passage describes the "Game of Chess" sequence, it could equally be applied to Waugh's fiction.

In the sequence from Eliot's poem, the couple seems to be together only out of sheer routine. They spend their days playing cards, trying to suppress their need for real emotional contact. Everything is planned meticulously, as if filling each minute were a way of silencing their yearning for closeness. This is well presented in the following passage:

> 'What shall I do now? What shall I do?'
> 'I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
> 'With my hair down, so. What shall we do to-morrow?
> 'What shall we ever do?'
>
> The hot water at ten
> And if it rains, a closed car at four.
> And we shall play a game of chess,
> Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door
> (Eliot 2017: ll.131–139)

In *A Handful of Dust*, Tony and Brenda's relationship bears a striking resemblance to that of the couple in the poem. They,

too, plan their days and live almost according to a schedule. Their relationship is not based on true feeling or even a bond. They almost seem unable to spend time together alone: Brenda either has guests over for the weekend or goes to London on her own. However, what differentiates them from the couple in the poem is their indifference. Brenda, unlike the woman in the poem, is not affected by the state of her life. She, as one may observe many times throughout the novel, does not care much about anything beyond herself. The woman in the poem is truly shaken – or even terrified and lost – in the situation she finds herself in. It might thus be assumed that her mental state is in fact an indication of her awareness of her unfortunate fate in the decaying society. Brenda lacks such insight.

The way Brenda behaves suggests that for her, there is no difference between marriage and an affair. She treats both her husband and her lover in the same way. Even her kissing of each of the men is presented in the exact same words: "she rubbed against his cheek" (Waugh 2000a: 19). The first time the phrase is used, it gives the impression of Brenda's affection. However, the repetition of the same words after her adulterous kiss with Beaver makes the phrase disturbing. Tony is also not described as a loving husband; he simply "had got into a habit of loving and trusting Brenda" (Waugh 2000a: 126). Tony does not share any sort of emotional bond with Brenda. He is far more passionate about his house, Hetton Abbey, than he is about his wife. It is convenient for him to "love" Brenda, as it fits with his vision of life. Similarly, his "habit" of "trusting" Brenda simplifies his life. He seems to prefer not to know certain things in order to preserve his trouble-free life, even if that life may be nothing more than a false appearance. Feelings in this world, therefore, are yet another part of the routine – nothing more. The inhabitants of the fictional world of *A Handful of Dust*, just like Eliot's Wastelanders, lead a death-in-life existence. They are stuck in a world of distorted values, where nothing matters.

Brideshead Revisited, in turn, is a nostalgic narrative pre-occupied with the longing for what is gone. The word "nostalgia"

is formed from two Greek roots – *nostos*, meaning return, and *algos*, denoting pain. The "return" may refer both to a return *to* something and a return *of* something. The desire to return to a place or moment that, in reality, cannot be revisited provides the foundation for the entire narrative of *Brideshead Revisited*. The act of telling the story arises from the hopeless longing to return, or at least to provide a substitute for returning. The second meaning of nostalgia – a return of something – is, in Charles's case, equally doomed to disappointment. The past cannot be evoked as a time of presence, simply because it is past.

Charles describes the presence of remembering as a false moment of beginning in two ways. First, it is cast as a time of rebirth: "the first leaves of spring were unfolding" (Waugh 1975: 11). What is striking, however, is that this is a rebirth that brings no new life. Second, it is a time of new beginning, of heading toward a new station, but "on this morning of our move, I was entirely indifferent to our destination" (Waugh 1975: 15). From the very beginning, Charles narrates the story in a disheartened tone. Moreover, the initial description of the surroundings in *Brideshead Revisited* offers no insight into the story that is to follow. The present setting is shapeless, devoid of meaning – a sort of wasteland:

> The camp stood where, until quite lately, had been pasture and ploughland; the farmhouse still stood in a fold of the hill and had served us for battalion offices; ivy still supported part of what had once been the walls of a fruit garden; half an acre of mutilated old trees behind the wash-houses survived of an orchard. The place had been marked for destruction before the army came to it. Had there been another year of peace, there would have been no farmhouse, no wall, no apple trees (Waugh 1975: 12).

The tone of the novel seems to be inspired by Eliot's poem. *The Waste Land* is an allegory of a barren and decaying modern world, narrated by the almost invisible figure of Tiresias, who searches for meaning in contemporary reality. He symbolizes

the quest to make sense of a disoriented and fragmented existence. Modern life is presented as a negation of vitality – there is no love, no spiritual connection, and no genuine communication between people. In *Brideshead Revisited*, the world presented by Ryder is little different from Eliot's Wasteland. The entire narrative may be read as a quest for meaning, shaped by a profound longing for the past. Many of the characters resemble Eliot's Wastelanders: they are hollow, lacking substance, and afraid to confront reality.

In terms of narration, *Brideshead Revisited* appears to be structured in a way that echoes what Eliot referred to as "the mythical method", a term he introduced in his review of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, titled "Ulysses, Order, and Myth". Eliot writes:

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. […] It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art, […] And only those who have won their own discipline in secret and without aid, in a world which offers very little assistance to that end, can be of any use in furthering this advance (2005: 167).

The mythical method is evident throughout the structure of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which consists of "parallel[s] between contemporaneity and antiquity". Eliot's extensive use of intertextuality appears to be an attempt to articulate and regain, through textual means, a sense of control over the chaos of the modern world. Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* expresses a similar longing for the past. Narratively, the novel follows the logic of the mythical method by interweaving past and present to comment on contemporary experience. The quests depicted in both *The Waste Land* and *Brideshead Revisited* share a common goal: to

discover meaning amid the disorder of modern life – philosophically, ethically, and culturally. The quest itself becomes a key element of the mythical method and thus creates another point of connection between the two texts.

It is not only the atmosphere of nostalgia that links the two works. Waugh's version of the modern wasteland has its own Fisher King: Sebastian. The Fisher King, or Wounded King, in Arthurian legend is the last guardian of the Holy Grail. His wounds can be healed only by a noble knight who succeeds in the Grail quest. Moreover, the connection between the Fisher King and his land is so strong that the kingdom suffers as he does, withering and growing more barren over time. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot especially emphasises the aspect of the legend in which the land becomes as infertile as its wounded ruler and is doomed to collapse. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Sebastian may be seen as a Fisher King figure for several reasons. First, in Charles's eyes, Sebastian represents a kind of Holy Grail: he embodies everything Charles longs for – family, love, and art. Moreover, Brideshead as a place may be likened to the Fisher King's land, as it, too, appears to reflect Sebastian's deterioration. Brideshead resembles a kind of paradise when Sebastian is present, but without him, it gradually loses its Arcadian quality and begins to resemble the barren landscape of the Grail legend. Sebastian and the Fisher King are alike not only in their deep connection to their "land", but also in being wounded and unable to move forward on their own. While the Fisher King's wound is physical, Sebastian's is spiritual – rooted in emotional and existential pain. Significantly, Sebastian, like the Fisher King, constantly requires the help of others to carry on. When he sustains a physical injury, he calls on Charles. However, when Charles fails to recognise the deeper nature of Sebastian's suffering, Sebastian pushes him away. Instead, he begins travelling and eventually spends several years tending to the unhealing wounds of an unsympathetic figure, Kurt.

The Sebastian–Kurt relationship is the reverse of the Charles–Sebastian one. The difference, however, lies not only in

the shift of roles – placing Sebastian in a more responsible position – but also in the emphasis on the surrounding modern world's decline. The friendship between Sebastian and Kurt lacks the trouble-free, paradisiacal atmosphere of Sebastian's earlier relationship with Charles. Instead, it offers a bleak portrayal of modern individuals' desperate need for closeness – an experience that also characterises Eliot's Wastelanders. Sebastian's eventual retreat to a monastery also recalls Eliot's poem, but in a more hopeful tone, suggesting the possibility of spiritual rebirth. This evokes the moment in "The Fire Sermon" where the "inexplicable splendour" (Eliot 2017: l.265) of St Magnus Martyr is described. Furthermore, over the course of the novel, it becomes clear that Sebastian, by bringing Charles into his home and indirectly guiding him back to religion, reveals to Charles his true Holy Grail: faith. By the end of the novel, the Brideshead chapel is once again in use, which may be interpreted as a symbol of the land's spiritual renewal after a period of barrenness.

The fifth part of *The Waste Land*, "What the Thunder Said", like the final section of *Brideshead Revisited*, deals with the ultimate quest. In Eliot's poem, the wanderer moves through a tragic and terrifying vision of death – a cemetery of civilisation – towards a chapel. He is accompanied by a mysterious figure, a clear allusion to Christ. The chapel, however, is empty. The sound of thunder may symbolise the approach of life-giving rain, and the words uttered by an unknown voice seem to offer advice on how the land might be saved. This reading of the poem is notably hopeful and optimistic. Similarly, in the final part of Waugh's novel, Charles returns to Brideshead. On his way, he passes an asylum with cheerful inmates, who appear to be the counterparts of Eliot's Wastelanders – lost and unaware of what surrounds them. The asylum thus becomes Waugh's version of the cemetery of civilisation. Yet the novel, like the poem, ends with a ray of hope: Charles, like the wanderer, reaches the chapel.

The correlation between Waugh's writing and Eliot's *The Waste Land* is a topic that merits more extensive discussion than is possible in this paper. The comparison with selected Waugh novels above is intended to highlight the influence of a hypotext that seems to unify his fictional world. Each novel, like a section of Eliot's poem, can be analysed individually; however, when read together, they form a more complex portrait of society and its problems.

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