

# EVELYN WAUGH STUDIES

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## REVIEWS

### Myth and Architecture

*Novel Houses: Twenty Famous Fictional Dwellings*, by Christina Hardyment, Bodleian, 2020. 250 pp. \$40.

Reviewed by Jeffrey Manley

This attractive and informative book is the latest example, dating back over the last five years, of books devoted to narratives about the connections between houses in novels, their authors, and in some cases the dwellings of those authors. The others are *Writers' Houses* (2015) by Nick Channer (reviewed in *EWS* 47.1, Spring 2016), and *House of Fiction* (2017) by Phyllis Richardson.

In this case, Christina Hardyment limits herself to twenty novels written in the UK and the USA, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Horace Walpole and *Castle of Otranto*) to the present day (J. K. Rowling and *Harry Potter*). Her previous writings have also mostly related to seemingly non-literary themes in literature, such as gardens, child care, servants, household procedures, trails, nature and the Thames.

Each book is considered over about ten pages, and must involve the “enduring fame of the imaginary place in which it is set” (3). In some cases, the fictional dwelling may have been inspired by a real one that is also discussed, but Hardyment is not primarily interested in matching fictions to places. It is rather an enquiry into what made twenty authors interest themselves in “literary architecture” (5), creating from a combination of experience and their own imaginations dwellings that expressed what they wanted to say.

Many of the books and houses selected have also been treated in one or both of the other recent volumes on this topic, but some are uniquely considered in her own book. One of the author/house pairings that is considered in all three books is that of Evelyn Waugh and Brideshead Castle. All three agree that Waugh’s primary inspiration for the Flyte family who lived in Brideshead Castle was the Lygon family who lived at Madresfield Court in Worcestershire, and take that structure as their primary architectural point of discussion.

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Hardyment's *Brideshead* chapter focuses on the story of Charles Ryder's discovery of and love affair with Brideshead that, she writes, "endows him with three gifts, graded in their importance" (172). The first is its Arcadian setting, where he can enjoy Sebastian's extended happy childhood in idyllic surroundings that the motherless and city-bred Ryder was effectively denied. Secondly, a vocation, which the Flytes help him to discover and develop. This is his talent for architectural painting that Lady Marchmain and later Bridey put to use in decorating the castle and then recording Marchmain House, the family's London mansion, before it is pulled down. Lastly, religious faith, which Ryder is notably lacking at the beginning, but after the experience of initially mocking the Flytes' adherence to Roman Catholicism, Charles comes to understand what their religious beliefs mean to them. His conversion comes after witnessing Lord Marchmain's death and Julia's reversion. Most of the chapter is devoted to the support of these contentions and accurately cites references in Waugh's novel or biographic works to confirm them.

On another point, however, Hardyment falls into error. She writes

Evelyn Waugh *explicitly* describes Brideshead as being modeled on Castle Howard. When an *excerpt* of the book appeared in the November 1944 edition of *Town & Country* magazine, he *approved* its being headed by an illustration by Constantine Alajalov showing Captain Ryder standing in front of the ancient seat of the *Catholic* Howard family. (177; emphasis added)

This sentence contains four errors. Waugh himself nowhere describes Brideshead as having been modeled on Castle Howard. The *Brideshead* text that appeared in *Town & Country* was an abbreviated serial version of four episodes, not an excerpt. Waugh not only did *not* approve it (or its accompanying illustrations) but had made it clear that no abbreviated version should appear. It was published against his wishes in circumstances where he was effectively out of reach in wartime Yugoslavia during late 1944 when the text was being edited for the serial and published in the USA. The shortened serial version appeared only in the American market, as Waugh

managed to block its subsequent reprint in the UK.<sup>1</sup> As to the Howard family, who have lived for generations at Castle Howard, they are in fact Protestants, not Roman Catholics.

To be fair, Hardyment's essay would have been written well in advance of the appearance of the *EWS* article, and the cited Alajalov drawing that illustrates the serial version does indeed look remarkably like Castle Howard, but the artist relied wholly on Waugh's description in the novel itself. There is no indication of any suggestion or advice from Waugh that he should base it on Castle Howard.

Moreover, Hardyment is not the first literary scholar to fall into error on some of these points. For example, in his 1989 book on the literature of WWII, Paul Fussell makes this statement referring to Waugh's posting in Yugoslavia: "[On 20 November 1944] Waugh was reading the proofs of *Brideshead* for its serialization in the American luxury magazine *Town and Country*" (*Wartime*, New York: OUP, 1989. 223). In fact, the proofs Waugh was reading and editing in Yugoslavia were the uncorrected page proofs for the book to be published in 1945, not the magazine serial as Fussell asserts. The first installment of the abbreviated text of the *Town & Country* serial had already been published by the time Waugh received the page proofs of the book in Yugoslavia on 20 November 1944.

More recently, one of the other recent books on houses in literature, Richardson's *Novels in Fiction*, makes the same mistake. After an accurate and well-written description of how the novel related to the Lygon family and Madresfield, she writes:

Much of the description [of Brideshead Castle] was probably inspired by Castle Howard (where the 1981 television adaptation was filmed), a favorite building of Waugh's. (316)

The caption beneath a photograph of Castle Howard reads: "The baroque extravagance of Castle Howard, near York, informed much of the architectural detail of Waugh's *Brideshead*" (314).

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<sup>1</sup> See "*Brideshead* Serialized: 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Publication in *Town & Country* Magazine," *EWS* 50.2, Autumn 2019, 2-27, and "Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead* and Castle Howard," *EWS* 50.3, Winter 2019, 2-29, both by Jeffrey Manley.

There is no source cited in *Novels in Fiction* for these conclusions. They seem to be treated as accepted fact.

While not citing her own source for the conclusion that Castle Howard must have been the model for Brideshead Castle, Hardyment may have been misled by the equally unsupported conclusions in these previous books. Aside from that one misstep, her discussion of *Brideshead* is up to the high standards of the rest of the book.

That said, the essays are a bit uneven in quality. Those relating to the primary theme of one author, one novel, one house are clearly superior. Among the best of these would be Horace Walpole/*Castle of Otranto*/Strawberry Hill, Walter Scott/*Waverley*/Abbotsford, Arthur Conan Doyle/Sherlock Holmes/221B Baker Street, John Galsworthy/*The Forsythe Saga*/Robin Hill, F Scott Fitzgerald/*The Great Gatsby*/West Egg, and Mervyn Peake/*Gormenghast*. Indeed, the essays on Scott, Fitzgerald and Peake may be the best short essay introductions to those authors' work I can recall ever having read. Although I have never managed to get beyond p. 25 of *Titus Groan* and am not tempted to try again, I now feel that I know much more about why others like the books, and while I have read *Gatsby* multiple times, Hardyment's essay makes me want to read it yet again.

The weakest essays are those where the author gets bogged down in a summary of the plot and the characters to the point where there is not sufficient room to discuss their connection to the houses. This is particularly a problem with Jane Austen and *Mansfield Park*. There are too many characters and personal relationships discussed and little room is left for explaining the importance of Mansfield Park and its parsonage to Austen's cottage and her brother's house at Chawton. The same thing happens with Emily Brontë and *Wuthering Heights*, as well as Charles Dickens and *Bleak House*. Indeed, Bleak House was a poor choice for a Dickensian fictional dwelling place since Miss Haversham's Satis House in *Great Expectations* must be the most well known example of Dickens' use of a fictional dwelling. And the combination of Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre* might have proved a better subject than her sister's *Wuthering Heights*. The essays of Phyllis Richardson on Dickens and Charlotte Brontë tend to bear this out.

It was no surprise to me that I found the essay on J. R. R. Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings* hard going. I had the same experience with those books as I did with Peake's *Gormenghast*

novels, but in this case, unlike Gormenghast, there is too much material covered in the essay and not enough of a single house on which to focus. It is rather an entire world of fanciful places and characters than one house and one character. While I was expecting to have the same reaction to J. K. Rowling and the Harry Potter saga, in that case Hardyment is able to assert control over the materials and writes a quite coherent and enjoyable essay.

It is to be regretted that neither the book under review nor the other two earlier books on this subject found room to include an essay on Anthony Powell's *Dance to the Music of Time* or the novels of Barbara Pym. Both of those writers have created numerous architectural structures of interest in their fictional works. In Powell's case, probably the most successful is Stourwater Castle, the Wagnerian home of Magnus Donners. In addition, his company's headquarters in London -- the Donners-Brebner Building, inspired by the Shell-Mex building on the Southbank -- might also have been included in an essay on Powell's fictional houses. These buildings appear in several of Powell's *Dance* novels and are the setting for some important scenes. Barbara Pym is also quite adept at creating interesting dwelling places. The flat in Pimlico that provided the setting for her novel *Excellent Women* would have been a good choice. The fictional building is closely based on the one Pym occupied in the relevant period. The building is not striking in any way but is representative of run down urban dwelling spaces during the austerity of post-war Britain. Its location, layout and condition are set out in minute detail and contribute to some important elements of the plot. Its very banality and dreariness evokes that period as few others have done, at least not with Pym's satirical humorous touch. Either Powell or Pym would probably have been a better choice for Hardyment's book than the repetitious articles on Austen and Dickens which dwelt more on character and plot summaries than on architectural themes.

The book under review contains a useful gazetteer that offers information on location and entrance arrangements (where applicable) for the houses that are the subject of the essays. In the case of *Brideshead Revisited*, it offers information for both Castle Howard and Madresfield Court, including e-mail addresses. Its gazetteer description of Castle Howard as "matching" Waugh's description of Brideshead is an improvement on the reference to it in the text as an "explicit model" for that structure. Where a fictional counterpart of a house has been destroyed or was wholly imaginary, useful substitutes are offered. For example, in the case of *The Great Gatsby*, the original Long Island structure thought to have inspired Fitzgerald (called Beacon

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Towers) has been torn down, but Hardyment offers a tour of the area in which it stood as an alternative. And in the case of Marvyn Peake's Gormenghast, which was wholly imaginary, Hardyment offers some alternatives on the island of Sark where Peake lived for several years.

The book is well produced on high quality paper with a sewn binding. It is also well edited; I found no typos. The illustrations are inserted near the relevant text. There are helpful and accurate notes explaining the source of quoted text, and sometimes explicating parts of the text, and there is what seems to be an excellent index. The size of the book also recommends it, since it is not too large to carry on a trip or even a walk when the sites it describes are being sought out by the reader.

## NEWS

### **John H. Wilson Jr. Evelyn Waugh Undergraduate Essay Contest**

Submissions are welcome for the John H. Wilson Jr. Evelyn Waugh Undergraduate Essay Contest. Essays (normally limited to 20 pages or 5000 words) are invited on any aspect of Waugh's life or work and will be judged by the *Evelyn Waugh Studies* editorial board. The winning essay will be published in the journal, and the author will receive a prize of \$500. Deadline: 31 December 2020. Email submissions to [jpitcher@bennington.edu](mailto:jpitcher@bennington.edu) and [yuexi.liu@xjtlu.edu.cn](mailto:yuexi.liu@xjtlu.edu.cn).

### **Forbes' "8 Best Books to Transport You Overseas"**

*Brideshead Revisited* appeared as England's contribution, with its recreation of the past compared to our own nostalgia for a pre-pandemic era.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/katherineparkermagyar/2020/03/19/stuck-at-home-here-are-the-8-best-books-to-transport-you-overseas/?sh=7c8e72bf7957>

### **3-Volume Set of *Stones of Venice*, and a 6-Volume Set of *Modern Painters***

Offered by Justin Downes ([jd@downes.com](mailto:jd@downes.com)): "I bought the books as a young man at the auction of contents of Combe Florey House. Each volume contains Waugh's bookplate though he seems not to have read Ruskin as many pages are uncut! I am looking for £1100 for both sets and can obviously guarantee the provenance."

### **1<sup>st</sup> Editions of *Vile Bodies* and *Black Mischief*, *inter alia*.**

Offered by Martin Crane ([family.cranel@virginmedia.com](mailto:family.cranel@virginmedia.com)): "We are in the process of downsizing which unfortunately means that many of my books have to go. These include 11



books by Waugh, including first editions in dust wrappers of *Vile Bodies* and *Black Mischief*. Other books by him are mostly first editions in protected dust wrappers. Before I send them to an auction house I wonder if any of your members might be interested. If so, I can let you have a list of what I have.”

## **“Hope in Darkness”**

Gerard Kilroy published a piece on *Brideshead Revisited* in *The Tablet*, again asserting its didactic “central theme” over earlier “gluttony.”

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/18241/the-stones-of-brideshead-evelyn-waugh-s-classic-novel-asserts-hope-in-darkness>

Hannah Betts addressed *Brideshead Revisited*'s abiding impact in *The Telegraph*, for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its publication.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/75th-anniversary-enduring-appeal-brideshead-revisited/>

## **12 Ways You can “Upgrade” Your Love Life during a Crisis, Based on *Brideshead Revisited***

Alessandra Conti and Cristina (Conti) Pineda refashion Charles Ryder’s filtering of conscience, responsibility, and anti-materialism.

<https://www.yourtango.com/experts/matchingup/ways-upgrade-your-love-life>

## Waugh as Pandemic Cheer

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2020/may/evelyn-waugh-brideshead-revisited-vile-bodies.html>

## Harry's Bar, Venice, Locked Down

<https://www.standard.co.uk/reveller/bars/venice-harrys-bar-restaurant-closing-coronavirus-a4441341.html>

Alexander Waugh appeared on a podcast for *The Spectator*, tackling persistent misreading of *Brideshead Revisited*.

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/podcast/the-75th-anniversary-of-brideshead-revisited>

## “The Flyte Club”

A paean to *Brideshead Revisited* was published in *The Economist*, focusing on the lasting effects of Britain's oscillation between its feudal past and inevitably confused entry into postmodernity.

<https://www.economist.com/books-and-arts/2020/06/11/published-75-years-ago-brideshead-revisited-set-off-a-lasting-cult>

In the *National Review*, Madeleine Kearns quickly banishes Waugh's “religiosity” as “niche,” while proceeding to praise *Brideshead Revisited*'s manipulation of time.

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/06/book-review-brideshead-revisited-time-and-grace/>

## **The Teddy Bear Movement**

<https://www.centralwesterndaily.com.au/story/6722024/orange-businesses-and-homes-join-teddy-bear-hunt/>

## **Empty Churches and the Closing of the Marchmain Chapel**

<https://denvercatholic.org/priests-without-people/>

## **On Ronald Knox's Conversion**

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/davearmstrong/2020/04/ronald-knoxs-conversion-to-catholicism-in-brief.html>

## **On the Euphemisms of Dying, and *The Loved One***

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/suspendedinherjar/2020/05/how-we-talk-about-death/>

## **Nancy Mitford's Townhouse Up for Sale**

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8269477/Georgian-townhouse-Mayfair-home-Mitford-sister-Nancy-goes-sale-7-5m.html>

## **International Literary Properties Acquires Waugh's Estate**

<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/ilp-acquires-12-literary-estates-eight-figure-deal-1205093>

## **Sir Oswald Mosely and Diana Mitford's House Up for Sale**

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8273573/Georgian-country-house-owned-fascist-Sir-Oswald-Mosley-goes-sale-2-3m.html>

Matt Johnson, of the band *The The*, and His Pinfold-esque Post-Op Experience

Anyway, what followed was one the weirdest episodes I've experienced in many years and – as my friends and family can testify – I have a high capacity for weirdness. Let's just say the general atmosphere experienced inside my morphine-drenched mind in those post-op days was like a combination of the space station in Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, the hospital in Lars Von Trier's *The Kingdom*, the gloomy foreboding of David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* and perhaps some of the general paranoia from Evelyn Waugh's *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*.

<https://bestclassicbands.com/matt-johnson-the-the-surgery-throat-6-6-20/>

## **Daisy Waugh Longlisted for "Comedy Women in Print" Prize**

<https://www.beyondthejoke.co.uk/content/8635/helen-lederer-prize>

## ***Scott-King* and COVID**

<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/eric-feltens-downtime-an-ovid-for-the-age-of-covid>

In *The Spokesman*, Prof. Charles Andrews of Whitworth University recommended *Decline and Fall*, mostly because it's funny, in a time of "uncertainty and disorientation."

<https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2020/jun/11/read-with-your-friends/>

## **Waugh in America**

<https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2020/04/17/what-evelyn-waugh-saw-america-anglo-american-romance>

In *The Sunday Times*, Alex Massie used Paul Pennyfeather's ranking of the school system ("Leading School, First-rate School, Good School and School") in order to add a new "blended school" category at the bottom.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/scotland/blended-schools-are-sure-to-be-bottom-of-class-sxc638j58>

## **Evelyn Waugh Society**

The Waugh Society has 190 members. To join, please go to <http://evelynwaughsociety.org/>.

The Evelyn Waugh Discussion List has 78 members. To join, please visit

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Evelyn\\_Waugh](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Evelyn_Waugh).

The Evelyn Waugh Society is also on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/evelynwaughsoc>.

The Waugh Society is providing an RSS feed: <http://evelynwaughsociety.org/feed>.

And the Waugh Society's web site has opportunities for threaded discussions:

<http://evelynwaughsociety.org/forums/>.

## **Submission Guidelines**

Essays as well as notes and news about Waugh and his work may be submitted to *Evelyn Waugh Studies* by mail or email to [jpitcher@bennington.edu](mailto:jpitcher@bennington.edu) and [yuexi.liu@xjtlu.edu.cn](mailto:yuexi.liu@xjtlu.edu.cn). Submissions should follow MLA style and be no more than 5000 words in length. Since most readers will be familiar with Waugh's work, authors should minimize unnecessary quotations and explanatory references. All submitted essays are first screened by the Editors and if deemed acceptable for publication are then sent to Associate Editors for further review. Authors should expect to be notified of the editor's final decision within twelve weeks of submission.

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## **End of *Evelyn Waugh Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 1**

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