

AP English Literature and Composition *Brideshead Revisited*:
Paper topics

1. The languor of youth. Many people admire this novel because of its Oxford sequence (including visits to Brideshead and to Venice). What is the larger purpose of the Oxford section, and how does style (imagery, syntax, diction) support theme, while allowing for (foreshadowing?) the darker shifts that are ahead in the rest of the novel?
2. Overall shifts in style. How does Waugh's style support his theme? Choose three prominent sequences in the novel (Oxford, Venice, shipboard, death of Lord Marchmain, prologue, etc.) and demonstrate how Waugh uses style to support ideas, while maintaining a single, credible point of view. Critics who don't like the novel consider its prose purple; these critics miss the point: how does the lush writing serve the larger purpose?
3. Modernist style. While Levin in Tolstoy's 1872 novel *Anna Karenina* articulates his coherent philosophical stand and his desires, Charles in Waugh's 1945 novel does no such thing. How does the novel convey Charles's conversion, following more Williams' dictum "No ideas but in things" than a more romantic straightforward articulation of ideas.
4. Catholic motifs and conceits. How do networks of symbolism work to create a coherent message about the role of the Church in modern life? Address difficulties in the symbolism and help the reader resolve questions.
5. Characterization. Consider the four Marchmain children and their differing relationships to Catholicism. What do these differences suggest about the novel's relationship to religion?
6. *Brideshead* and *Purgatorio*. Just as *Purgatorio* is about love misdirected, love of unworthy objects, insufficient love, and excessive love, *Brideshead* also uses these features to suggest the characters' paths. Examine several characters, their relationships to the seven deadly sins, and how the novel treats them ultimately.
7. *Brideshead* and *Gatsby*. Aloof first-person narrator (secret protagonist?) tells 1920s story of beautiful but doomed main character. Of what use is a comparison between *Gatsby* and *Brideshead*? What do the novels teach us about each other? While *Gatsby* sticks to the story of its eponymous character, *Brideshead* moves past Sebastian to fulfill a further idea. What do the differences between the novels teach us about their purposes?
8. The modern world. What does the novel have to say about modernity? Consider WWI and/or WWII, the destruction of country houses and/or city estates, Hooper, Rex, or any other aspects of the novel that seem relevant to ideas of the modern world. For contrast, consider Brideshead, the fountain at Brideshead, the Church, Oxford, Nanny Hawkins, Lunt, or any other emblems of an older world. Consider, too, places or people where the extremes converge and what happens as a result.