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Metaphorical value in the narrative of a conversion: The sacred and profane memoirs of Captain Charles Ryder in *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh

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ABSTRACT

Ordinary language has difficulty transmitting certain spiritual experiences, such as mystical ecstasy or the process of conversion. These experiences, which cannot be expressed in words, and which involve both the spiritual and the corporeal, are called ineffable. But the literary tradition is full of examples in which these incommunicable truths are expressed linguistically: from St. Augustine to C.S. Lewis, from St. John of the Cross to John Henry Newman, many authors have expressed their mystical or conversion experiences through metaphor. Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* presents the action of divine grace on the characters, as seen through the eyes of the narrator as he undergoes his conversion. The intention of this article is to discover how the use of metaphor succeeds in expressing the action of divine grace in a conversion, providing important insights into the way poetic language can communicate the ineffable experience of the intimate encounter with divinity. To this end, the article analyses three metaphors of novel, (the twitch upon the thread, the balking horse and the hut collapsing under the avalanche) taking into consideration literary theory and what it says about metaphor.

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1. Introduction

Certain spiritual experiences are difficult to communicate in ordinary language. Some of these experiences, such as conversion, we call ineffable, because they cannot be accurately described by the literal meaning of the vocabulary available to us. On the other hand, so called theological or religious language is not a special type of language specialised exclusively in expressing spiritual beliefs or experiences, but a specific use of ordinary language to refer to these beliefs or experiences, as well as the language used in sacred texts, worship, and prayer (Harrison 2007, 128).

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Thus, we have recourse to the figurative sense of language and to a special elaboration of expressions in order to communicate what escapes the grammatical scheme of language. One of these special elaborations of expression is the metaphor, which has been used throughout the history of religious literature by numerous authors who approach this type of experience.

The English author Evelyn Waugh converted to Catholicism in 1930 at the age of twenty-seven. Fifteen years later, in 1945, he published *Brideshead Revisited*, his most notable work, which presents the action of divine grace on the characters as seen through the narrator, Charles Ryder, an agnostic who, after a twenty-year relationship with the Catholic Flyte family, kneels before the tabernacle and prays.

The novel is subtitled *The Sacred and Profane Memoirs of Captain Charles Ryder*, and depicts, in the first person, the narration of the protagonist's life leading up to his conversion and unfolds events very similar to Evelyn Waugh's own experience. The literary genre of memoir is one of the ideal ways of expressing a conversion narrative. Both Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions* and John Henry Newman's *Apologia pro vita sua* are paradigms of this type.

The intention of this article is to discover how the use of metaphor succeeds in expressing the action of divine grace in a conversion, thus providing some important insights into the way poetic language can communicate the ineffable experience of the intimate encounter with divinity. To this end, the article analyses three central metaphors (the twitch upon the thread, the balking horse and the hut collapsing under the avalanche) as literary representations of the doubts and certainties present in the process of conversion, taking into consideration literary theory and what it says about poetic language and metaphor.

These three metaphors have been selected from among the many images used by Evelyn Waugh in his novel—from Aloysius (Sebastian's teddy bear) to the light in the tabernacle at the end of the book—for the main criterion of unity. All three appear in the final third of the book, during the events at Brideshead surrounding the death of Lord Marchmain, who, after a life away from the Catholic faith, repents and receives the sacraments. These events cause the protagonist to struggle with doubts and certainties in the process of coming to faith. These struggles—between logical agnosticism and supra-rational belief, between the comfortable superiority of disbelief and the overflowing superabundance of grace—are masterfully represented by the chosen metaphors.

Ever since Aristotle in his *Poetics* defined it as follows: 'Metaphor consists in transferring to one thing a name which designates another, in a translation from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or according to an analogy' (Aristotle 1965, 1457b 6-9), many authors throughout the ages have tried to understand or classify this figure of rhetoric so widespread in literature. Some of the most notable studies on metaphor in recent times are due to Paul Ricoeur (1980) and, in Spain, to Tomás Albaladejo (2019).

The conclusions reached by the study following the analysis of the three metaphors are revealing, as it is evident that the author transfers his creative intention to the text through the precise selection of successful literary elements. Thus, the reader gains access to the fictional world and recreates it, and an effective

literary communication is achieved. In this way, the reader's deep understanding of the novel, through the imagination, contributes to a deeper understanding of reality.

On the other hand, the analysis of symbolic elements makes it possible to understand realities that are difficult to express in ordinary language. In this way, Waugh, touched by grace—which he himself has experienced in his own conversion—invites the world to understand his experience and brings readers closer to God through the work of art: both those readers who are open to God's grace and those who are unaware of the experience of mystery.

The structure of the research will follow an itinerary centred on the author's intention and the analysis of metaphors in the novel. First, we will present the notion of metaphor in light of studies on this figure of rhetoric. Secondly, we will study Evelyn Waugh's intention and motives in the creative process and the literary resources with which he composes the novel. Thirdly and finally, we will analyse three of the most significant metaphors used by Evelyn Waugh in *Brideshead Revisited*, doing so through literary theory in relation to poetic language and metaphor. In this way, we will test whether the use of literary symbols in the novelistic narration of a conversion contributes to a deeper understanding of this indescribable experience.

Literature is a communicative process from creation to reading, and it is conditioned by context. It is therefore understandable that the weight of the circumstances surrounding the author at the moment of creation is greater than that of the circumstances surrounding the reader at the moment of reception. This is so because the literary work arises from the author's artistic will, and because the fictional world created is definitive in time, whatever the reader's attitude at the moment of reading (Chico Rico 1988, 214).

The novel we are discussing was written during the Second World War, and one can think of the problem in Anglican England of publishing a novel that openly discusses the conversion to Catholicism of one of the captains of its army. Moreover, Evelyn Waugh, at the age of forty-two, had achieved great prestige thanks to his satirical and worldly works. Nevertheless, this story was received by the public—both Catholic and non-Catholic—with the same enthusiasm as the previous ones. Much of this success is due to Waugh's masterful use of metaphor to transmit the conversion of the protagonist.

In reading *Brideshead Revisited* we do not find an explicitly apologetic text, nor a pious style, as Evelyn Waugh presents the enthusiasm of the convert with poetic subtlety and transmits the ineffability of grace through a precise use of metaphor. Thus, the novel can be interpreted as an aristocratic love story—with a rather unhappy ending—by readers unaccustomed to the hagiographic genre or to internal struggles between grace and spiritual deafness.

But Evelyn Waugh creates the poetic world of *Brideshead* according to beliefs, experiences, and desires. Subsequently, the reader recreates, in a hermeneutic exercise, that world, contributing his or her beliefs, experiences and desires thanks to the polysemy of literary language. In this way, the author achieves a diverse reception of the same text by different readers, caused by the intentional ambivalence of literary language and metaphorical value. The reader of faith (Montserrat Roig 2021,

145), from his religious conviction, will interpret the work as a novel of conversion. This result is achieved by the selection of literary and polysemic expressions that are subject to the sometimes arbitrary interpretation of the reader.

2. Notion of metaphor: theoretical approach

Metaphor is the rhetorical-poetic figure that has received most attention throughout the history of the study of communication. Metaphor does not operate exclusively in literary language but appears very often in ordinary language. Its communicative power is so great that many authors point to it as a necessary instrument for knowledge of the world and of human beings. In order to try to fully understand the power of this figure, we will approach it from the three linguistic-literary disciplines that have dealt with it best and most ably: rhetoric, semantics and hermeneutics.

These three disciplines will help us to interpret the metaphors that Evelyn Waugh uses to refer to the narrator's conversion. Each of them studies the notion of metaphor from a different axis—functional, significant, and interpretative respectively—but causal and complementary at the same time. We understand the final work as an independent whole, a fictional world with its own keys and structures created by the author. In order to access that world, the reader has to interpret the words present in the text, which mean more than the sum of the meaning of each one of them. For this reason, the analysis that we will carry out begins in rhetoric but requires semantics and hermeneutics.

Many disciplines have focused on the study of metaphor in recent decades: from stylistics to cognitive linguistics, from philosophy, psychology, anthropology, medicine, cognitive science, economics, and biology (Longa and López 2011, 519). But we believe that rhetoric, semantics, and hermeneutics are the most appropriate for the study of a literary work and the expression of experiences of the spirit that cannot be expressed in words. Some issues are not well expressed in concepts, which the intellect employs when articulating discourse, but instead need to be conveyed through images (what metaphor, in essence, is) that communicate most eloquently and directly to the heart.

The approach to this figure through rhetoric, semantics and hermeneutics will help us to understand how the three metaphors analysed work as symbols of the same reality—the overflowing presence of divine grace in the process of conversion—because through them, we can embody an ideal content that cannot be expressed in any other way. Baldwin, in his *Dictionary of Philosophy* (2010), defines an aesthetic symbol as an object which, apart from its own immediate meaning, also suggests another, especially of more ideal content, which cannot be expressed with literal linguistic concepts. The aesthetic symbol is the object of a perceptual and imagined intuition that suggests or embodies an ideal meaning. This intuition is expressed by Waugh in *Brideshead Revisited*, among other resources, through the three metaphors we will analyse.

Traditionally, rhetoric has been the discipline that has studied the essence and functioning of metaphor and, as indicated above, its definition has been fixed since Aristotle.

As a rhetorical device belonging to the category of tropes, metaphor is framed in Quintilian's *Quadripertita Ratio* (1970: 1.5.38-41), within which it is based on *immutatio* or substitution, so that it consists of both the present expression and the absent expression, as well as the relationship between the latter and the former, the former being the one which, in the interpretation, establishes the direction towards the latter, towards the absent but imagined sign. (Albaladejo 2019, 560)

According to Quintilian, and to rhetoric in general, metaphor is a movement of substitution, and, in this way, we can think that it does not matter so much which element appears in the text, the real one or the imagined one, as they are interchangeable. It seems that the metaphor does not add any information to the discourse but is simply a resource that attracts the attention of the receiver, an ornament consisting of an expression that substitutes another.

The new term, in its figurative sense, replaces an absent word which could have been used in the same place in its proper sense. This substitution is made by preference and not by constraint when there is a suitable word of its own; it is then called a trope in the strict sense. (Ricoeur 1980, 73)

This 'preference' of which Ricoeur speaks refers to the aesthetic use of language, which is valuable and essential in the creation of the literary text. The poetic value of the text is based on its capacity to astonish the reader, thanks to the will to beauty intended by the author. Rhetoric studies the aesthetic use of metaphor and its classification in rhetorical devices, without dwelling on the motivation of the author who creates the metaphor or the reader who interprets it. In the present study, the use of metaphor goes beyond a simple aesthetic preference, since its use is necessary for the understanding of an ineffable experience.

But rhetoric is not the only discipline that is concerned with metaphor, since semantics, the branch of semiotics that deals with the meaning of signs, also studies it in depth. Semantic study 'deals with the relation of the sign to the things denoted, that is, with the relation between language and the world' (Ricoeur 1980, 108). Let us now consider the following: the complete meaning of an expression, which is greater than the sum of the meanings of the words that form it, can also be displaced by another word or by another expression.

Thus, to paraphrase Ricoeur, the semantic study of metaphor is concerned with the relationship between the figurative sign (or present expression) and what it denotes or signifies (what the absent expression refers to). In other words, it is concerned with the relationship between the figure, or metaphorical symbol, and the understanding of the world. The semantic study of metaphor analyses a broader meaning than a substituted word, since sometimes the expression present in the text refers to a more complex absent expression, or even one that is difficult to explain in words, as is the case here. 'What are figures of speech in general? They are the forms, features or turns of phrase, more or less notable and with a more or less happy effect, by which the discourse, in the expression of ideas, thoughts or feelings, departs more or less from the possible simple and common expression' (Fontanier 1968, 179).

Those ideas, thoughts, or feelings which are incommunicable—such as those experienced by the protagonist of *Brideshead Revisited* in his conversion process—due

to the absence of words to signify or denote them, can be expressed by metaphor. To do this, the author, during the creative activity, gives an imaginary value to the expressions present in the text which is equivalent to the real value of the absent expressions.

In order for the reader to restore the real value to the present expression—to the metaphorical symbol of the text—so that literary communication is effective, it is necessary that the author, in the creative phase, has adequately established the structures of the fictional world and that the links between the present and the absent expressions are indissoluble. To complete the study of metaphor, it seems appropriate to review what hermeneutics has to say about metaphor.

Hermeneutics, understood as the interpretation of texts, emphasises the intervention of the reader, who is the target of the text and who must understand it in order for communication to be effective. If there are expressions present in the text that metaphorically replace other, absent expressions, the reader's task is to interpret them in accordance with the author's intention.

And if the text is literary, the question of interpretation works in the same way: the author creates the fictional reality through literary language and creates a poetic world that will be recreated by the reader. 'This interpretative activation drives the identification and understanding of the metaphor, its hermeneutic elucidation, and allows, starting from the expressed element, for making the semantic leap to the absent element, as a replica of the leap that has been made in the metaphorical creation towards the present element' (Albaladejo 2019, 569).

The value of metaphor, from the hermeneutic point of view, acquires a much greater breadth of meaning, because it implies the reader's interpretation of a whole set of factors that make up the literary world created by the author. 'Hermeneutics is nothing other than the theory that regulates the transition from the structure of the work to the world of the work. To interpret a work is to unfold the world of its reference' (Ricoeur 1980, 298). Among these factors, the author's intention when creating the work and the portion of reality he wishes to capture in the literary world stand out. The study of these elements will help us to analyse and interpret the chosen metaphors.

Therefore, the use of such metaphors as a symbol of the reality that author wishes to express—the doubts in the conversion and the overflow of grace—helps to convey and conceptualise reality—both visible and invisible. So, the imaginative use of literary language contributes to communicating to the reader experiences that would be difficult to convey through ordinary language.

López Quintás (2008, 62) calls this function of reconstruction of the reader, this participation in the creative imagination, the function of re-creation. The text produced, created by the author is the link between author, work, and reader, which in turn create an artistic environment.

The study of these rhetorical elements within hermeneutic analysis finds its justification not only in the participation of author and reader in the two-way process of symbolic creation and interpretation, but also in the contextual component in which these elements are interpreted. Various cultural factors determine the way

in which the metaphorical process is activated and constitute a code for literary communication between author and reader.

In hermeneutics metaphor is a challenge. Identifying the metaphor and unravelling its workings is an interpretative task of the steps taken in its creation: focusing on the present expression as a source to arrive at the absent expression in the context of the literary world created by the author is part of the symbolic beauty of metaphor (Albaladejo 2019, 575).

3. Author's intention

The author's motivation and intention appear in the preface written by Waugh himself for the 1959 edition, in which he explains:

This novel, which is here re-issued with many small additions and some substantial cuts, lost me such esteem as I once enjoyed among my contemporaries and led me into an unfamiliar world of fan-mail and press photographers. Its theme—the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters—was perhaps presumptuously large, but I make no apology for it. (Waugh 2016, Preface ix)

Evelyn Waugh's motivation is to talk about a group of high society characters, whom he knew very well, and the action of divine grace on them. The next question is why. What was the intention of Evelyn Waugh, an author of great renown and famous for his satirical character, to 'lose the little respect he had enjoyed among (his) contemporaries' (Waugh 2016, 11). The author was forty years old. He was disenchanted with the army service—as is the protagonist, Charles Ryder—he wanted to get out of to continue writing. Family responsibilities weighed him down and he had had a project in mind for some time: to write an intimate novel, in the first person, that brings the experiences of a young English convert to the public who usually read his works.

Much has been written on this question, and we find it necessary to refer not only to the major biographers, but also to several studies dealing with the specific issue of conversion in *Brideshead Revisited* (Falcetta 2014; Heady 2011; Johnson 2012; Mooneyham 1993). Waugh had converted to Catholicism at the age of twenty-seven, but none of his novels had dealt with religion. Apparently, he had not yet assimilated what it meant to be Catholic and had not translated his faith into all dimensions of his life. In a dialogue in the novel between the protagonists—Charles and Sebastian—this situation can be understood more clearly when Charles expresses that Catholics seem 'just like other people' and Sebastian replies, '... that's exactly what they're not—particularly in this country, where they are so few... they've got an entirely different outlook on life; everything they think important, is different from other people' (Waugh 2016, 80).

Waugh, after conversion, had continued to write satirical novels that said nothing of his new faith, and this weighed heavily on him at a time in his life when he was aware that nothing was going right. Thus, at the end of January 1944, he wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for War, requesting a three-month leave of absence, and a week later he began the work for which he already had a clear outline (Stannard 1992, 98-99). What was Evelyn Waugh's ultimate purpose? Was he only

seeking coherence between his literary career and his Catholic faith, or were his intentions with this work also to evangelise through the didactic and persuasive power of literature? Were the three classical aims of Literature—*docere, delectare* and *movere*—placed at the service of Christ?

The narrative took the form of a personal novel or memoir, and critics received the work as a veiled autobiography of the author, which displaces but does not disguise his experiences. The author tried to draw attention away from himself with the opening note: ‘I am not I: thou art not he or she: they are not they’. But there are many elements that coincide between the author and the protagonist: both are the same age and show the same indifference to religion in their youth; both study at Oxford, but do not graduate; and both encounter students belonging to high society.

Protagonist and author, in their forties and disenchanted with the life of action provided by the army, experience an epiphany: Ryder converts to Catholicism; Waugh writes the work that marks the before and after in his career: ‘I think perhaps it is the first of my novels rather than the last’ (Waugh 1976, 566). He considers that he has finally found his vocation after fifteen published works, perhaps too late (Patey 1998, 223).

Evelyn Waugh states in one of his letters the intention of the work, outlined in the preface, defined here much more clearly.

There are passages of buffoonery, but the general theme is at once romantic and eschatological.

It is ambitious, perhaps intolerably presumptuous; nothing less than an attempt to trace the workings of the divine purpose in a pagan world, in the lives of an English Catholic family [...] The story will be uncongenial alike to those who look back on that pagan world with unalloyed affection, and to those who see it as transitory, insignificant and, already, hopefully passed. Whom then can I hope to please? Perhaps those who have the leisure to read a book word by word for the interest of the writer’s use of language, perhaps those who look to the future with black forebodings and need more solid comfort than rosy memories. For the latter I have given my hero, and them, if they will allow me, a hope, not indeed, that anything but disaster lies ahead, but that the human spirit, redeemed, can survive all disasters. (Waugh 1980, 185)

The theme of the novel is romantic and eschatological at the same time. The author knows that it is an ambitious task to deal with the subject of God in a pagan world and that he will find many detractors. And he also knows that he is writing for those readers who only want to enjoy his pen and for those who need a hope for the future in such dark times—the hope that the redeemed human spirit can overcome any disaster.

Evelyn Waugh, like the protagonist narrator, Charles Ryder, has understood that faith and life cannot occupy watertight compartments. Charles Ryder, the artist in pursuit of beauty, understands the search for love throughout the novel leads him—in an ascending path from lesser loves to greater love—from human loves to the love of God. But it is not until the end of the work, in his maturity that—just like the author—he understands the purpose of his life (Patey 1998, 224).

The eschatological theme is justified by the need for hope at the time the novel is written. In the winter of 1944, despite the success of the Popular Front against Nazism, expectations were grim: it was a time of disillusionment and misery,

dwindling rations and increasing discomfort. In these times, a flash of happiness was needed, and it was provided by the appearance of the novel, thanks to its wit, its colour, and its reminder of better times. It was not frivolous entertainment, however, but in harmony with the gravity and concern of the most terrible hours. ‘The essential subject of the book was not youthful irresponsibility, youthful and mature love, the pageant of fashion, the splendour of aristocratic society, but certain Last Things: how to face death, the Christian Truths, the world-wide claims of the Catholic Church’ (Sykes 1977, 337).

Following the novel’s reception, Waugh’s detractors criticised his conversion to Catholicism, perceiving it as a move connected with his social ambitions (Sykes 1977, 336-339). However, the critical reception of the work was mainly enthusiastic: ‘It came mostly from friends, it is true, but these friends contained a considerable proportion of people with claims to high and inalienable critical standards, Henry Yorke, Graham Greene, Desmond McCarthy, Osbert Sitwell and John Betjeman’ (Sykes 1977, 337).

In the decades prior to the appearance of *Brideshead Revisited*, and apart from authors such as G. K. Chesterton or the Benson brothers, among the great English novelists there was the convention of using the religious motif only as a background detail, or as a feature in the portrait of one of their characters: ‘Evelyn was doing something which seemed in England to have gone out of fashion for ever; he was making religion the central point of a story about contemporary English life, and approaching his theme with respect and awe’ (Sykes 1977, 338).

The use of an agnostic protagonist narrator is a wise move, as the novel is written to be read by a large number of non-Catholics. These readers will find the young Charles Ryder’s stance on the Catholic faith familiar: ‘Sebastian’s faith was an enigma to me at that time, but not one which I felt particularly concerned to solve’ (Waugh 2016, 77). Charles Ryder is a character to whom non-believers—but also believers—can relate, and all will understand how he achieves faith, because, as another of his biographers acknowledges, the novel’s metaphors work (Patey 1998, 225).

‘Conversion is like stepping across the chimney piece out of a Looking Glass world, where everything is an absurd caricature, into the real world God made; and then begins the delicious process of exploring it limitlessly’ (Pearce 2001). This is how Waugh speaks of his own conversion (also through metaphors), and we can see the analogous relationship with the world of the novel. The situation facing Charles Ryder, like the one described by the author, is that of the passage through the chimney before he sees the wonders that conversion offers him in the process of exploring the real world limitlessly. The expression of these wonders is so complex that it must be translated through metaphorical imagery.

4. Metaphorical analysis

The novel *Brideshead Revisited* is the narrative of a conversion. The narrator, the first-person protagonist, transmits all these moments of contact with grace through figurative language, with the use of metaphors, as these ineffable experiences are not communicable through literal language. To illustrate the point of this study, we will

analyse the three metaphors that have the greatest weight in the work. We will see in all three that the link between the present expression—the metaphorical symbol—and the absent expression—the ineffable experience. In all three cases we will try to analyse the text in a hermeneutic exercise from the point of view of a believing reader and a non-believing reader—since Waugh was writing for the general public through the literary game of the polysemy in poetic language.

4.1. *A Twitch upon the Thread*

The first metaphor is a paraphrase of another metaphor used by G. K. Chesterton in *The Innocence of Father Brown* (Chesterton 2006), a collection of detective stories featuring the peculiar and lucid priest, Father Brown. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Lady Marchmain, Sebastian Flyte's mother, reads aloud from this work by Chesterton to her children after dinner at the end of Book I, in an attempt to distract everyone from Sebastian's drunkenness.

The story she selects from the book is entitled 'The Queer Feet' (Chesterton 2006, 60). In it, Father Brown encounters the thief who has stolen the silverware, his antagonist Flambeau. By analogy with the Gospel image of the 'fisher of men', he relates in metaphor how he cast the hook at Flambeau and how, the bait having been taken, he could let the reel run until the line reached the end of the world. Then all it took was a tug on the line to bring him back.

Book III of the novel is entitled *A Twitch upon the Thread*, and corresponds to the idea of the providential gift of grace. In it, Cordelia, Sebastian's younger sister, reminds Charles Ryder of the reading by her mother. He responds:

'Still trying to convert me, Cordelia?'

'Oh, no. That's all over, too. D'you know what papa said when he became a Catholic? Mummy told me once. He said to her: "You have brought back my family to the faith of their ancestors." Pompous, you know. It takes people different ways. Anyhow, the family haven't been very constant, have they? There's him gone and Sebastian gone and Julia gone. But God won't let them go for long, you know. I wonder if you remember the story mummy read us the evening Sebastian got drunk – I mean the *bad* evening. "Father Brown" said something like "I caught him" (the thief) "with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread."' (Waugh 2016, 206)

Waugh takes as his present expression the metaphor used by Chesterton, which is accepted in English literary culture, and which in turn refers to the metaphor used by St. Mark in his Gospel. This metaphor is used by Jesus, who chooses Simon and his brother Andrew, both fishermen, to leave their nets and follow him: 'Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men' (Mk 1, 17) (New Catholic Bible 2020). In this way the present expression Chesterton uses is itself embedded in the Catholic literary tradition. Thus, Father Brown has caught the thief, but his intentions are not penal or condemnatory; rather, throughout the various stories, as a priest his main concern is that Flambeau should repent and become a good man.

Returning to Waugh, the present expression speaks of the invisible thread holding the thief, and how the fisherman's tug will prevent him from continuing to wander

away. The absent expression refers in the reading, thanks to the right hermeneutic action, to God, who does not let those who have gone stray too far away.

The author superimposes all the images in an impeccable play, so that there is not much room for reaching alternative, incorrect interpretations. The mixed present and absent expressions (*fisherman/fish* and *God/Flyte family*, through *Father Brown/thread/Flambeau*) function immediately with analogical value. The absent expression refers to the way in which divine grace acts on men by attraction, by love, and how men, even if they have moved away from their faith, will sooner or later return inexorably attracted by it.

For Catholic readers, the absent expression refers to a very seductive message: the hope of salvation, of grace, is a gift freely given and such justification is the work of the love of God. He does not wait for man to be innocent to love him, but cleanses him, offers him anew a son's life, which implies a transformation, and which not only elevates, but also moves man to seek God and to love him. 'Sanctifying grace—received in Baptism—is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love' (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [CDF] 2011). And the present image, which represents this message, is very reassuring, for the invisible thread allows one to move away, but not to be lost forever.

And for non-Catholic readers, a deep understanding of this message can be a door of hope for conversion, as it is for the protagonist, as it was for the author himself, because: 'Life there, or anywhere, was unintelligible and unendurable without God' (Waugh 1955, 3–9). In these cases, we are not speaking of habitual grace, a stable and permanent disposition, but of 'actual grace which refers to God's interventions, whether at the beginning of conversion or in the course of the work of sanctification' (CDF 2011). 'The preparation of man for the reception of grace is already a work of grace' (CDF 2011). Grace brings about conversion and sustains faith and charity: 'since he who completes his work by cooperating with our will began by working so that we might will it' (St. Augustine as quoted in CDF 2011).

In this case, the metaphorical image helps to reveal to non-Catholics the effect of grace by its visual value: a fisherman, a rod, a hook, a thread, a fish. The fisherman's intention to cast the rod exactly there, combined with the fish's willingness to take the bait.

The metaphorical process, activated by the author during literary creation and interpreted by a non-Catholic reader, generates an image that could lead, beyond *delectare*, also to *docere*, and both together lead to *movere*: 'The notion of *docere* constitutes a translation of the rhetorical persuasive process, supported by *delectare* as an instrumental purpose—both oriented to *movere*—to the poetic domain' (Chico Rico 1988, 188). This can already be seen in Aristotle's *Poetics* (Aristotle 1965, 1449 b, 24–28), in Horace's *Epistola ad Pisones* (Horacio 2003) and in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (Quintilian 1975). The author expresses his aesthetic intention and his educational intention, so that the reader interprets them with full awareness of literary communication and can be moved to act.

Thus, the author uses the activation of the metaphorical process to achieve an effective communication with the reader in cases where the portion of reality to be

expressed in the text is excessively complex, mysterious, or even is a portion of reality unknown to a special type of reader.

4.2. The balking horse

The second metaphor analysed is the one used by Charles Ryder after the conversation with Cordelia about Sebastian's illness and sanctity, in the last chapters of the novel:

That night I woke in the darkness and lay awake turning over in my mind the conversation with Cordelia. How I had said, 'You knew I would not understand.' How often, it seemed to me, I was brought up short, like a horse in full stride suddenly refusing an obstacle, backing against the spurs, too shy even to put his nose at it and look at the thing (Waugh 2016, 291).

The author activates the metaphorical process during literary creation with the present expression—the horse stopping in its tracks—which refers to the absent expression, Charles's inability to understand why Sebastian suffers and why his suffering can be considered a sign of sanctity:

I thought of the youth with the teddy-bear under the flowering chestnuts. 'It's not what one would have foretold,' I said. 'I suppose he doesn't suffer?'
'Oh, yes, I think he does. One can have no idea what the suffering may be, to be maimed as he is—no dignity, no power of will. No one is ever holy without suffering. It's taken that form with him.' (Waugh 2016, 290)

The inability to understand may occur for two interrelated reasons in the context of the novel: firstly, because the agnostic Charles is unfamiliar with the concept of holiness; and secondly, because the unbaptised Charles does not possess the gift of sanctifying grace and, at the narrative time in which this metaphor is used, the unconverted Charles has not received the gift of the necessary actual graces.

It is very clever of the author to present this metaphor and the next one to be analysed as appearing in the dream, because in this way he makes their presence in the text more verisimilar. Dreams appear in us as images, just like these figures so rich in meaning; and it is the moment of awakening, that instant between sleep and wakefulness, which supposes a certain suspension of the senses, which helps us to understand these dreams that are narrated through scenes.

The present image is revealing: the galloping horse stops in front of an obstacle that it refuses to jump. The reader's interpretative freedom can link the literary sense of the leap over the obstacle that would make it possible for the gallop to continue, with the absent expression that refers to the conversion that makes it possible for Charles to understand.

And so, Charles wakes up in the middle of the night, as in numerous biblical passages relating episodes of revelation, and reflects on his inability to understand, and relates it to the horse stopped in its tracks at the obstacle it refuses to overcome, even when spurred on, too fearful even to examine the difficulty.

In order to fully interpret this suggestive image, we believe it is important to identify the rider who spurs the horse in the present expression, which probably refers in absence to the actual grace, already mentioned, and which designates divine

intervention as the origin of conversion. But the fear of looking the obstacle in the face prevents Charles from continuing the gallop towards this understanding: ‘God’s free initiative demands man’s free response, for God has created man in his image by conferring on him, along with freedom, the power to know him and love him. The soul only enters freely into the communion of love’ (CDF 2011).

The actual grace that leads to conversion has to be a free act of the human will. And Charles is afraid to jump. He knows the renunciations that this implies, renunciations for which he is not yet ready. It seems no coincidence that *Ryder* is a homophone of *rider*, so presumably the protagonist’s will is already spurring his resistance.

This metaphor seems to have been created by the author for any kind of reader, either Catholic or non-Catholic. Since Evelyn Waugh lived through the process of conversion, he can express with full knowledge many of the fears of such an experience. In this case, the metaphor can bring the reader closer to the feeling of fear that can arise from such a decision. The reader easily moves from the literal sense to the figurative sense, from the imaginary to the real, from the present expression to the absent expression, once the metaphorical process has been activated.

Or as Albaladejo (1991, 78) states: ‘Thus a communicative interaction takes place in fiction whereby the author places the reader in a specific position of reception of a fictional nature and the reader accepts this artistic-communicative approach and shares the presuppositions of this relationship.’

4.3. The hut

The study of the third metaphor is supported by the relationship of contiguity in the text with the metaphor we have just analysed, because Charles Ryder’s reflection on the revelatory awakening in the middle of the night continues in this way:

And another image came to me, of an arctic hut and a trapper alone with his furs and oil lamp and log fire; everything dry and ship-shape and warm inside, and outside the last blizzard of winter raging and the snow piling up against the door. Quite silently a great weight forming against the timber; the bolt straining in its sealing the door, until quite soon when the wind dropped and the sun came out on the ice slopes and the thaw set in a block would move, slide, and tumble, high above, gather weight, till the whole hillside seemed to be falling, and the little lighted place would open and splinter and disappear, rolling with the avalanche into the ravine. (Waugh 2016, 291)

For the creation of this metaphorical process, the author proposes the present expression of the hut on the mountainside which, threatened by the weight of the accumulated snow against the wooden walls, explodes into a thousand pieces when the thaw arrives. Another notable element of the present expression is the solitary trapper, warm and dry inside the illuminated hut, sheltered from the cold and darkness outside.

In this case the absent expression is not superimposed as in the other two cases, but the first words of the fragment: ‘And another image came to me’, reveal that this metaphor is linked to the previous one thanks to the copulative conjunction. Thus, the absent expression can be interpreted as the protagonist’s voluntary reluctance to

respond to the call to conversion. The present element of the previous metaphor, expressed in the horse's fear of jumping over the obstacle, is transferred here to the hunter's fear of the dark and cold outside. The absent expression can be interpreted as Charles's fear of conversion, since in his discernment there are objections that imply a renunciation of the first order. The clearest example is the renunciation of his marriage to the divorced Julia.

In both examples there are three key elements: the subject who fears (horse and hunter), what is feared (*obstacle, cold and darkness*) and the force that pushes to overcome the fear (*spurs and avalanche*). But in the first metaphor, despite the spur, the horse does not jump; in the second, the snow avalanche bursts the hut. The difference in the latter is that the literal or denotative meaning of the present expression does not leave room for a connotative interpretation of the absent expression that refers to the free intervention of the protagonist's will, as is the case in the previous metaphor. In the former, the horse is afraid to look the obstacle in the face, even to brush it with his nose; in the latter, the hut splinters into pieces after the avalanche and we assume that the hunter, despite his fears, is exposed.

Sykes writes of this metaphor and its questionable hermeticism as the only occasion on which Waugh uses his Arctic voyage in literature. The overwhelming image of human littleness at the mercy of the immense power of nature can be identified with man's feeling of insignificance in the presence of God's infinite love and the action of His grace which enables conversion:

Anything else? There is one singularity of the book which may be mentioned. This is the only one by Evelyn in which he made use, and good use too, of his adventures in the Arctic Circle. As said already, his prose in *Brideshead Revisited* relied much on metaphor. In the last part of the story the master metaphor is of the arctic trapper or explorer in his hut threatened by the accumulating snow and the inevitable avalanche. (Sykes 1977, 350)

That renouncement Charles Ryder knows he faces during his discernment is resolved in the break-up conversation with Julia Flyte, immediately after the scene of the hierophany (Abellán-García and Encinas 2021, 188), when Charles kneels and prays for forgiveness for the sins of Lord Marchmain, his lover's dying father, at the end of Book III.

'Now we shall both be alone, and I shall have no way of making you understand.' 'I don't want to make it easier for you,' I said; 'I hope your heart may break; but I do understand.' The avalanche was down, the hillside swept bare behind it; the last echoes died on the white slopes; the new mound glittered and lay still in the silent valley. (Waugh 2016, 319)

Here, in the present expression, the threatening avalanche has done its worst, the echo has ceased and the snow glistens in the silent valley; there is no trace of the hut in which the hunter sheltered. The absent expression to which it refers can be interpreted as the protagonist's total surrender to the power of divine grace that favours conversion and the free will of the convert, favourable at last to allowing grace to act upon him. Grace overcomes evil, represented both in this work and in life itself by lovelessness, loneliness, pain, and death.

Evelyn Waugh has arranged this metaphorical play in two time frames that complete a thematic-temporal arc. This arc begins at the end of chapter four and ends at the end of chapter five and is an almost complete clarification of the events that took place during the resolution of the third book. The reader interprets the final questions through the didactic use of the metaphorical process. Literature, in its poetic plenitude, unfolds its functions of *docere* and *delectare*, both oriented towards the most important in the author's intention, which is *movere*.

5. Conclusions

In his novel *Brideshead Revisited*, Evelyn Waugh presents the narrative of a conversion in which divine grace intervenes. This accumulation of experiences, which he himself has lived through, is difficult to communicate through the literal sense of language, so he uses three fundamental metaphors that refer to grace, the fear of renunciation and the infinite love of God.

The author shapes the imaginary world in the novel with a clear creative intention and translates it into the written text with a precise selection of literary elements. In order to create the fictional world, it is necessary for the author to correctly link the present expressions, or metaphorical symbols, with the absent notions that refer to the real world. The reader recreates the imaginary world through the correct interpretation of these literary elements and so, the literary communication is effective.

Thanks to the solidity of the world created through the text, the literary work of art is coherent, plausible, and meaningful for the reader. The reader, through imagination, recreates the fictional world, which refers to the real world, and can incorporate it into his or her total knowledge of the world (Novitz 1987, 117).

The analysis has revealed the relationship between author and readers and between them and the work, combined with the relationship of certain elements of literary communication with the context, and determines that the selection of symbolic elements makes it possible to understand realities that are difficult to express in ordinary language. In this way, Waugh, touched by grace, transmits that God is something great and alive, invites the public to understand him (Delgado de la Rosa 2021) and succeeds, through the work of art, in bringing all readers closer to divine grace: both those who are open to it and those who are as yet unaware of the experience of the mystery.

In the first part of the study, we looked at the author's extra-literary motivation for creating this work (to unify his public and private life around his status as a Catholic). We have also looked at the justification for the artistic selection of certain elements around which the narrative centres (the conversion of Charles Ryder, Evelyn Waugh's *alter ego*). During the study, we have referred to the critical reception of Waugh's life and work.

In the second part of the study, we have looked at the creation of the metaphorical process and the analysis of three very fruitful metaphors in the literary resolution of religious and spiritual elements, specifically the action of grace on the protagonist and his doubts about conversion.

Finally, we can conclude that the special treatment of literary language in Evelyn Waugh's creation of the poetic world enables the readers' interpretation of the work to achieve the desired communicative efficacy. The author—motivated by a desire to educate and delight, but, above all, to move—can transport the reader into the poetic world, and the reader achieves a profound understanding of ineffable experiences through the masterful use of metaphor.

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