DECADENCE AND RESILIENCE:
A STUDY OF THE ARISTOCRATIC NOVEL IN ENGLISH
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

by

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The aristocratic novel in the twentieth century depicts the successes and failures of the aristocracy’s efforts to come to terms with the social realities brought about by contemporary egalitarianism. Although several of the novels discussed are written by aristocrats, the aristocratic novel as such refers to novels about the aristocracy as a social grouping. Seven authors are selected to represent fictional treatment of a class in crisis, struggling between decadence and resilience: V. Sackville-West, Evelyn Waugh, Nancy Mitford, Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane, L.P. Hartley and Emma Tennant.

Sackville-West faces and chronicles the inevitable decay of her class, yet cannot refrain from mourning its gracious past. To her, the manor house symbolizes an ancient idyllic symbiosis between aristocrat and worker.

To Evelyn Waugh, the aristocracy embodies the finest achievements of inherited English culture. He regards its decline as the crumbling of Christian civilization itself. Resilience against the rising proletariate lies in faith and a chivalrous other-worldliness associated with the old Catholic aristocracy.

Mitford uses comedy to defend the ideals of service and honour which she sees undermined by vulgarity and mercantilism. She resists her opponents with lethal swipes of raillery.

Bowen and Keane deal with the decline of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy. The heirs of the ascendancy have to cope with the paralysing bequest of a more vital past. Ironically, resilience lies in breaking with their heritage.

Hartley appears to criticize the class structure, but his work reveals a fascination for the captivating myth of patrician life.

Tennant, representing an aristocracy which has profited from the resurgence of wealth in Thatcherite Britain, is unsparingly caustic on the condition of her class. Her satiric writing presents an ethical resurgence that goes beyond the mere financial recovery of her society.

The genre examined suggests a primal need among urbanized citizens for the myth of an heroic order. In the finest aristocratic novels, admiration for an imitable superior order is used to rally a consciousness of a venerable ethical establishment. What is threatened or lost is not merely wealth and privilege, but aristokratos - government by the best.
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THE COUNTESS OF COTELEY

The Countess of Coteley!
Wife of the Eleventh Earl,
Mother of four fine children,
Three boys and a girl.
Coteley Park in Sussex,
Strathrar on the Dee,
Palace Gardens, Kensington,
Aged thirty-three.

Look at the Countess of Coteley!
Here you see her when
She was at her zenith and the year was nineteen-ten.

Is she happy, would you guess?
The answer to the question is, more or less.

For she’s never heard of Hitler, and she’s never thought of war,
She’s got twenty-seven servants, and she could get twenty more.
She never sees a paper, and she seldom reads a book,
She is worshipped by her butler, tolerated by her cook.
And her husband treats her nicely, and he’s mostly on a horse,
While the children are entirely in the nursery of course.
So no wonder she is happy, for she hasn’t got a clue,
To the future that is waiting, and the funny things she’ll do
About ... thirty-seven years from now.

When you see her in this flashback it is rather hard to guess
That she’ll be a sort of typist in the W.V.S.
She will learn to woo her grocer: she won’t have a cook to woo,
But a Czechoslovak cleaner may pop in from twelve to two.
Speaking worldlily she’ll dwindle. She will change her book at
Boots,
And lecture on Make-do-and-Mend to Women’s Institutes.
She will lose the Earl quite quietly, and her young will leave

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the nest,
She never knew them very well, so that is for the best.
And Coteley, Strathrar, Kensington will vanish with the rest
About ... thirty-seven years from now.

Now the National Trust has Coteley, which is quite a handy dodge,
And she'll make a flat of part of what was once the keeper's
lodge.
She will seldom dress for dinner, she will dote on Vera Lynn,
She will take in the New Statesman, but she won't be taken in.

Here you see her in this flashback looking decorative but dumb,
For she hasn't got an inkling of the jolly days to come!
Though the distances she'll travel are incredible to tell,
And the quandaries she'll cope with will be absolutely hell,
She'll emerge in Forty-seven having done it rather well!

Will she be happy, would you guess?
The answer to the question is ... Y-e-s.

Joyce Grenfell
INTRODUCTION

THE ARISTOCRACY AND LITERATURE

The twentieth century has been a century of crisis for the aristocratic community of Great Britain, and indeed of Europe. A community which has taken privilege for granted, whose very existence has been based on the concept of privilege, has found that it has had to re-evaluate its position in society. It has suddenly been challenged to justify itself. This makes the aristocratic novel in the twentieth century an interesting topic for investigation. One is faced on the one hand with a pervasive awareness of the obsolescence of this ancient institution, a consciousness among the aristocrats of decadence, decline, possible extinction, and on the other hand with an irrepressible vitality, an indomitable resilience, an admirable adaptability.

As the twentieth century, the age of democracy, of human rights, the century during which the egalitarian ideals of the eighteenth-century philosophers have finally become the norm rather than a revolutionary threat, draws to a close, a moderate hereditary power is still enshrined in the British political system in the form of the House of Lords, a considerable part of the British aristocracy are still enormously rich and continue to live lives of great privilege (albeit sometimes with an increasing sense of being under siege) in palatial establishments such as Chatsworth, Blenheim Palace, Woburn Abbey and the like, and a member of the British aristocracy, Lady Diana Spencer, has emerged as the most photographed and probably the most famous woman in the world. In spite of the concerted efforts by a succession of Labour Governments since 1945 to abolish or at least drastically reduce the wealth of the aristocracy, Gerald Grosvenor, 6th Duke of Westminster, is still the richest man in Britain next to the Queen\(^1\), with assets estimated in the early 2000s.

\(^1\)The wealth of the Queen has been increased so successfully in the last decade by means of sound management that on the eve of the twenty-first century, the monarchy is estimated to be richer than ever before, with the Queen ranking among the ten richest people in the world in terms of her personal wealth.
1980s to be in the region of 400 million pounds. Nancy Mitford, novelist, historian and sometime self-appointed spokeswoman for the aristocratic establishment remarked in 1956:

The English aristocracy may seem to be on the verge of decadence, but it is the only real aristocracy left in the world today. It has real political power through the House of Lords and a real social position through the Queen. An aristocracy in a republic is like a chicken whose head has been cut off: it may run about in a lively way, but in fact it is dead.

The position is practically unchanged thirty-five years later. The uneasy ambivalence between anachronistic irrelevance and an energetic resilience forms a consistent thread through most of the novels dealing with the aristocracy published in this century.

The word 'aristocracy', derived from the Greek words aristos (best) and kratos (rule), originally indicated a system of government by those considered to be superior to the rest of the population for reasons of family, and whose privileges were hereditary. Today, the word is more usually used to indicate the privileged class itself. The idea of "family" and heredity remains intrinsic to the term - a member of an aristocratic family who has suffered a personal decline, ceasing to be either influential or wealthy, and therefore possessing very little material "privilege", would nevertheless continue to be regarded as an aristocrat by both his peers and the population at large.

This is in itself a considerable feat of resilience. As a result of the media focus on the extent of the Queen's wealth, more voices have been raised lately to suggest that her exemption from taxes, which has contributed largely to her fortune, be reconsidered.


In the essay which introduced the *U* and *non-U* controversy in the fifties, the British linguist Professor Alan Ross recognized this aspect implicitly when he stated, "It is solely by its language that the upper class is clearly marked off from the others." ⁴

While the word itself morphologically originated in Ancient Greece, and most ancient societies appear to have had some kind of privileged caste or class, the origins of the present European aristocracy can be traced back to the period of uncertainty after the fall of Rome, when knights or horsemen gained eminence as they assumed the role of military protectors of the people, receiving some kind of allegiance in return for the protection granted.⁵ The rise of this aristocracy is thus indissolubly linked with the rise of Feudalism in Europe. Feudalism in turn has its roots in certain ancient Roman and German practices, and rests on the principle of a reciprocal agreement between lord and vassal, by which the former protects the latter in return for various services.⁶ In Britain, pure feudalism ended with the Wars of the Roses, and a new aristocracy was recruited in the wake of this devastation by the practically minded Tudors and their successors. Disraeli wrote somewhat cynically, "We owe the English peerage to three sources - the spoliation of the Church, the open and flagrant sale of honours by the elder Stuarts, and the borough-mongering of our own times." ⁷

An investigation into the etymological origins of some of the higher titles in the panoply of aristocratic designations gives further hints as to the origins of Europe's modern aristocracy. The Latin dux, the original form of duke, refers to a Roman


military high commander (just as its German equivalent herzog means a ‘leader of an army’), while Marquess is derived from Markgraf, an officer who acquired his superior status by being entrusted with the holding of marks, extensive frontier lands.\footnote{Cf. Robert Lacey, *Aristocrats*, p. 41.} The aristocracy’s enduring association with land and the military is clearly illustrated by this etymological history, while the origin of the continental title of ‘count’, the Latin comes, meaning ‘companion’, reveals the third pillar of the aristocratic edifice – its allegiance to the person of the monarch, and to the monarchy as an institution.

The British aristocracy has enthusiastically pursued the activities deemed appropriate to these origins, and have been (and still are) keen soldiers, farmers, and courtiers\footnote{These interests indeed hold good even for present day aristocrats. Prior to succeeding to the title and position of 17th Duke of Norfolk and premier peer of England, Miles Fitzalan-Howard, for example, rose to the rank of Major-General in the British Army, and was awarded the Maltese Cross, C.B.E. and C.B. (Brian Masters, *The Dukes*, London: Blond & Briggs, 1977, p. 58). Although the Duke of Westminster and his family own 300 of the most valuable acres in London, and industrial interests on four continents, and the total value of their holdings are estimated in the region of 400 million pounds, the Duke spends most of his time as a gentleman farmer on his rural estates in Cheshire and the North of England, and owns a 100 000 acre estate in Scotland (Brian Masters, *The Dukes*, p. 373 and Robert Lacey, *Aristocrats*, p. 16). As far as courtiers are concerned, the Queen is also still surrounded by aristocrats. In his biography of the Queen, Robert Lacey points out that her two private secretaries, Sir Michael Adeane (now Lord Adeane) and Sir Michael Charteris (grandson of the 11th Earl of Wemyss and now Lord Charteris) boast remarkably similar (aristocratic) backgrounds: both Old Etonians, both keen shots, and both Lieutenant-Colonels in prestigious regiments with similar artistic interests – watercolour painting and sculpting (Robert Lacey, *Majesty*, London and Johannesburg: Hutchinson, 1977, p. 259). Her present private secretary, Sir Robert Fellowes, is married to Lady Jane Spencer, a sister of the Princess of Wales.}. However, it has also distinguished itself since early times by the significance it has attached to education. The growth of reading among the leisured classes of Medieval Europe reflects
not only the consequences of printing but also the increased interest of these classes in academic pursuits. Boys from the upper class were educated either at monastery schools (if they were intended for the Church) or at grammar schools, also initially attached to Cathedrals or Collegiate Churches, and girls were sent to nunneries to acquire basic educational skills, or were taught at home by tutors. Further evidence that the nobility and the gentry were deeply concerned with learning is provided by the establishing of the public schools such as Eton (by King Henry VI in 1440-1441) and Harrow (charter granted by Queen Elizabeth I in 1571), and the endowment of colleges at both the Universities of Oxford (e.g. Balliol College, established by the nobleman John de Balliol in 1263, and Merton College by Walter de Merton in 1274) and of Cambridge (King’s College was established by King Henry VI in association with Eton). Many noble families have a connection that goes back for centuries with a particular school or college. The first Earl of Devonshire, ancestor of the great Liberal Cavendish family, went to Eton in the 1560s; his descendant in the 14th generation, the heir of the 11th Duke of Devonshire, went there in the 1960s. The image of the philistine fox-hunting peer is too persistent to discount altogether: "I have only ever read one book in my life, and that is White Fang. It's so frightfully good, I've never bothered to read another," Uncle Matthew - Lord Alconleigh - says in Nancy Mitford's The Pursuit of Love, and Gregory Phillips includes eccentricity, anti-intellectualism and a sense of duty among the attributes of the Edwardian aristocracy.

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is clear, however, that there is also a strong tradition of a
literate, sometimes a highly literate, segment to the
aristocracy. Over the years, it has produced a great number of
distinguished scholars, such as Sir Philip Sidney (1554 - 1586),
Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Viscount St Albans, philosopher and
putative author of Shakespeare’s works, the philosopher 3rd Earl
of Shaftesbury (1671-1712/13), Henry Cavendish (1731-1810),
philosopher, physicist, chemist and grandson of the 2nd Duke of
Devonshire, the Egyptologist 5th Earl of Carnarvon (1866 - 1923),
the Nobel prize-winning physicist (3rd) Baron Rayleigh (1842 -
1919), Nobel laureate writer and philosopher Bertrand (3rd Earl)
Russell (1872 - 1970), Lord David Cecil (b. 1924), Goldsmith
Professor of English Literature at Oxford from 1948 to 1969, the
historian Hugh Trevor-Roper (now Lord Dacre) (b. 1914), as well
as poets and authors, among whom some of the best known are the
Earl of Surrey (ca. 1517 - 1547), Lord Brooke (1554 - 1628), the
metaphysical poet George Herbert (1593 - 1633) (younger brother
of Lord Herbert of Cherbury and scion of an ancient noble family
that claims descent from Charlemagne\textsuperscript{14}), the Earl of Rochester
(1647 - 1680), the Countess of Winchilsea (1661 - 1720), Lady
Mary Wortley Montagu (1669 - 1762), Lord Byron (1788 - 1824),
Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 - 1822) (son of the second and father
of the third baronet) and the novelists Henry Fielding (1707 -
1754) (of the family of the Earls of Denbigh and Desmond) and Sir
Walter Scott (1771 - 1832). In our own time, the Pakenham family
(which also produced the consort of the Great Duke of Wellington)
has yielded a whole coterie of writers: the 7th Earl of Longford
is a well-known politician and the author of a Life of Christ;
his wife has written a number of acclaimed historical works, such
as Victoria RI and Jameson’s Raid under the name of Elizabeth
Longford; the elder son Thomas Pakenham’s account of the Boer War
has not only won critical acclaim, but has also become a best-
seller, while daughter Lady Antonia Fraser is probably the best-
known member of this distinguished family, emulating and

\textsuperscript{14} Burke’s Dormant and Extinct Peerages of the British
surpassing her brother’s double achievements of critical acclaim and commercial success with a number of historical biographies such as *Mary Queen of Scots* and *Cromwell: Our Chief of Men*, and catering at the same time for a different market with a series of highly successful thrillers. (The playwright Harold Pinter is a son-in-law - husband of Antonia - and novelist Anthony Powell a brother-in-law of the Earl.)

The aristocracy has also not hesitated to recruit scholars and writers into its exalted ranks, as is demonstrated, for example, by the elevation to the peerage of the historian, Thomas Babington Macaulay as Lord Macaulay in 1857, that of the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson in 1884 and of the economist John Maynard Keynes as Lord Keynes in 1942.15 Furthermore, possibly because of the constant passage of young noblemen through Oxford and Cambridge, there has always been a reasonably easy social interchange between the aristocracy and intellectuals. In spite of the acerbic comments on Oxford dons, made by Lady Montdore in Nancy Mitford’s *Love in a Cold Climate*, that "they’re all right for dinner, if you like that sort of thing ... but that’s no reason why they should go marrying people"16, marriages between the intelligentsia and the aristocracy have taken place quite frequently, especially in modern times. So, for example, the celebrated classicist Gilbert Murray married Lady Mary Howard, daughter of the ninth Earl of Carlisle in 1889, the poet John Betjeman married the Hon. Penelope Chetwode, daughter of Lord Chetwode, in 1933, and the novelist Anthony Powell married Lady Violet Pakenham, daughter of the 5th Earl of Longford in 1934.17

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It is thus not surprising to find that such a well-educated group, with such a clear interest in letters, would have given expression to the condition, the dilemmas and the crises of their own class in literature, or that non-aristocratic writers should have made it the object of their interest. Sir Philip Sidney dealt with the education of rulers in Arcadia, Thackeray with aristocratic adventures and misdemeanours in novels such as *Henry Esmond* and *Barry Lyndon*, Jane Austen with aristocratic foibles and follies among other human foibles and follies in her novels¹⁸, and Meredith and Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli with Victorian aristocratic manners and morality in theirs. It is also not surprising that many of the novels dealing intelligently and elegantly with the position of the aristocrat in this century are written by aristocrats, as they are the group immediately affected by the changes in the condition and circumstances of their class.

The topic of my thesis is *Decadence and Resilience: The Aristocratic Novel in English in the Twentieth Century*. With the term "aristocratic novel", I do not necessarily mean "novels written by aristocrats" (although many of them are), but rather novels dealing with the aristocracy, novels in which the aristocracy plays a significant role, where its presence is central, and not incidental to the main concerns of the work.

For the purposes of my thesis, I have selected a number of authors in whose work the aristocracy indeed features centrally. I discuss and analyse the various ways in which each of them

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¹⁸Cf. for example the opening paragraph of *Persuasion*:

Sir Walter Elliot of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations arising from domestic affairs changed naturally into pity and contempt as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century; and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history with an interest which never failed.
deals with the position, the role, and the dilemmas of the aristocrat in the twentieth century.

The authors I have selected as representative are V. Sackville-West, Evelyn Waugh, Nancy Mitford, Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane, L.P. Hartley and the contemporary novelist, Emma Tennant. I have also selected from the oeuvre of each author for detailed discussion those works most appropriate to the topic. Other authors and other works, such as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Isabel Colegate's *The Shooting Party* and Hugh Walpole's *Wintersmoon*, are naturally co-opted and referred to whenever deemed necessary or illuminative.

Among features that emerge as central to the aristocratic novel are the characterization of the aristocracy as a social group (manners, morals, identity) and of individual aristocratic types; the use of the non-aristocratic outsider as a catalyst; the symbolic role of the Great Country House or Estate; and social change as a threatening force in the aristocratic novel. In all these aspects the larger motif of the contrasting elements of decadence and resilience can be traced.

The authors are dealt with chronologically and the chapter on each author is rooted in a short discussion of the historical background of that part of the century which forms the principal background to the author's writing and determines to some extent his or her pre-occupations. As authors and novels do not fit into neat time boxes, compromises have had to be made. Vita Sackville-West, Evelyn Waugh and Nancy Mitford, are all more or less contemporary (born in 1892, 1903 and 1904 respectively) and their writing careers coincide to a large extent. As Vita's most important aristocratic novel, *The Edwardians*, deals with the first decade of the century, her writing is foregrounded against that particular era, even though the novel was only published in 1930. Waugh's writing career stretches from the 1920s to the 1960s, but his novels are treated mainly with reference to the years between the two world wars, as his early novels capture the
sparkling madcap twenties so incomparably, and his most significant aristocratic novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, takes place in the years immediately prior to and during the Second World War. Miss Mitford deals to some extent with the same era, but the War itself features prominently in *The Pursuit of Love*, and her later novels continue to deal with the post-war world of the late forties and fifties, so that the chapter on her work is placed at that historic juncture. That is followed by the chapter on Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane, whose aristocratic novels deal with the decline of the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy, and encompasses the era of the three preceding chapters, but is set against the parallel history of Ireland during that period. L.P. Hartley’s *The Go-Between*, published in 1958, is to some extent a retrospection to the beginning of the century, like Sackville-West’s *The Edwardians*, but as it is consciously written from the perspective of the second half of the century, and is a comment on the history of the period up to that point, it is set against the background of the welfare state in Britain. Hartley held the triumph of this social policy in considerable distaste and it is most likely responsible for his jaundiced view of the historical development of the age. Emma Tennant’s aristocratic novels were published in the late 1980s and are dealt with against the background of the resurgence of the aristocracy during the Thatcher era in the last decades of the century. In the concluding chapter I define certain general movements and tendencies that have emerged from the detailed discussion of the individual authors and relate these also to the mythic and intellectual underpinning of the concept of an aristocracy.
The popular perception of the Edwardian era in Britain is that it was a golden sunset before the darkness of the First World War fell, a world naively but splendidly endowed with the "belief that it was a supremely good thing for people to be communally and individually happy"\(^1\). At the heart of the popular notion of a happy, ordered, prelapsarian society, is engraved the image of a supremely confident, carefree, elegant, wealthy and sophisticated aristocracy, leading a life dedicated to the advancement of Empire, the conscious incarnation of civilized behaviour, and above all to the unswerving pursuit of pleasure. It is this nostalgic vision of well-dressed bearded gentleman with golden fob-watches and slender canes, having tea under leafy oaks through endless golden summer afternoons with beautiful women dressed in floating white gowns, abundant hair elegantly swirled up - an image captured by the many society portraits of John Singer Sargent - that has caused the epithet "golden" to be attributed so regularly to the era, and which has prompted a BBC programme to describe it as a "long garden party".\(^2\)


He also mentions the influx of new wealth created by highly successful financiers and industrialists which strengthened the old wealth of the landowning aristocracy, the fact that taxation was so low that it had almost no impact on wealth, the low cost of living and the free availability of domestic servants.\(^1\) Income tax, paid only on incomes above £160 a year - which virtually excluded members of the working class - stood at only 1s. in the pound for most of Edward VII's reign. It was an era when those with possessions felt a great sense of security.\(^4\) At the end of the Edwardian era, 67% of the national capital still belonged to only one percent of the population in Britain.\(^5\) This wealth, concentrated in the hands of the aristocracy - new and old - also represented a concentration of economic power, consisting in the ownership of houses, land, railways, mines and businesses. Before 1914, nine-tenths of the land was landlord-owned rather than owner-occupied.\(^6\) The most important reason for a romanticized perception of the Edwardian era is probably, however, that distance lends enchantment to the view and that those who reminisce about the era describe a scene "all the more radiant because it is on the other side of the black pit of war".\(^7\)

While the life of Edwardian High Society was indeed characterized by the glamour of wealth and position and the opulence of country house parties and Park Lane balls, it was also an era of significant political, social and economic developments and


\(^6\) Ibid., p. 13.

change. The Edwardians themselves regarded their era not as a sunset, but as the beginning of a new century of promise. The changes that did occur, however, went hand in hand with turmoil and upheaval. Under a façade of elegant assurance, the privilege and security of the aristocracy was already being eroded as the proponents of political and social equality started to muster their forces. In his monumental work on the decline of the British aristocracy, David Cannadine traces the origins of the turmoil as far back as the 1880s. He links it with the sudden and dramatic collapse of the agricultural base of the European economy, partly because of the influx of cheap foreign goods from North and South America and the Antipodes, and partly because of the development of a large-scale and highly concentrated industrial economy. Agricultural depression spawned social unrest, the industrial middle class developed political ambitions, and the result was "the gradual eclipse of the old order as the dominant force in the legislature and government."

By the first decade of this century these transformations, at first only subterranean rumblings, had started to surface. A coalition of Conservatives and Liberals held power until 1906 in the successive governments of the Marquess of Salisbury, Arthur Balfour and Joseph Chamberlain. These governments supported the Boer War and promoted British imperial interests in India, China, Persia, Australia and Egypt. In 1906, however, the Liberal Party won a landslide victory in an election and started a programme of social legislation to

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8 The Edwardian world, sometimes presented in retrospect as completely assured, unchanging as Queen Mary’s toque, seemed to Edwardians themselves to be undergoing rapid alteration – political, social, economic, and technological.


improve the condition of the masses. The new Liberals, led by David Lloyd George, won a mass following by focusing particularly on the interests of the working class. At the same time the Labour Movement started to make itself felt as a force in society. A general trade union congress had been held in London in 1899, and in 1900 a "Labour Representative Committee" was established with a membership of 375 000, gaining two seats in parliament in the same year. It changed its name to the Labour Party in 1906, winning 29 seats in that year’s election. By 1914 it had gained 1 500 000 votes and 40 seats in parliament. In the meantime, the Liberal government passed a series of laws aimed at improving the living and working conditions and educational opportunities of the working class, culminating in the "People’s Budget" of 1909, by which Lloyd George increased taxation on the aristocracy by imposing heavy inheritance taxes, levies on undeveloped land, a tax on unearned increment of land values and a graduated income tax.\footnote{Cf. Louis L. Snyder, The Making of Modern Man, Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1967, pp. 510 - 512.}

This act would precipitate one of the most significant confrontations in history between peers and populace, represented by the House of Lords and the House of Commons, and would become a watershed in the history of the power of the aristocracy. The lords, seeing the very fabric of their privileged existence threatened, took the unprecedented step of vetoing a money bill, rejecting the budget by 350 votes to 75. Because of the stalemate the government had to dissolve parliament and call a new election, which they won - albeit with a reduced majority - confirming the approval of the electorate for the budget, which was then passed by the House of Lords. However, the incident precipitated the Parliament Bill of 1910, designed to limit the powers of the House of Lords. It soon became clear that the Lords were quite unprepared to pass a Bill aimed at destroying their effective political power, and parliament had to be dissolved a second time. In the midst of this crisis, King Edward VII died in May 1910. The second general election of that
year took place in December after a bitter and virulent campaign. By then, the government had secretly obtained an undertaking from the new king, George V, that he would be prepared to create up to 500 new Liberal peers if the Lords proved to be obstructive again. The election results confirmed the electorate's earlier judgment and the Bill was reintroduced in February 1911. Faced with the prospect of 500 upstart peers, the Unionists (centre party) urged their peers to abstain so that the Bill could be carried by a Liberal vote. The Conservatives remained intransigent and determined rather to "die in the last ditch" than vote their own power out of existence, and eventually 40 reluctant Unionist peers had to be persuaded to vote for the measure before it could be passed. The result was decisive, though. While the peers might have retained their wealth, social prestige and some influence, they had forever been emasculated as a political power in the land. The "belief in their innate superiority, in their collective political wisdom, in their unique position as the responsible and hereditary custodians of the national interest, was gone for ever." This battle and its result proved a suitable conclusion to the Edwardian era, foreshadowing the definitive divide of the First World War. That conflagration would destroy the old golden securities and certainties of the privileged classes of Europe forever, and catapult the survivors on new, uncomfortable and untried avenues which would test their powers of survival as never before.

Against this background, Vita Sackville-West's novel, The Edwardians, gives an intimate and perspicacious insight into Edwardian aristocratic society, depicting both the glamour and the vacuity of the upper classes, as well as the emergence of the threatening subterranean rumblings which menaced the charmed existence of centuries, signalling an end to the "the long garden party".


13 David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, p. 53.
While on holiday in Italy in the spring of 1929, the writer Vita Sackville-West commented in a letter to her intimate friend, Virginia Woolf, on the novel she was writing at the time: "I say, the novel is about the Edwardians, - a fascinating subject, if only I can do it justice. It is absolutely packed with the aristocracy. Shall you like that? I feel that for snobbish reasons alone it ought to be highly popular!"14

What is interesting in the remark is firstly, the assumption that an aristocratic topic automatically implies good sales, and secondly the slightly deprecating tone of the comment - Miss Sackville-West was obviously in awe of her intellectual literary friend. Both her confidence in the market appeal of the aristocracy and her implied uncertainty as regards the Woolfs' critical approval of her efforts, appear to have been justified. Vita Sackville-West's novel, The Edwardians, became one of the best selling novels ever published by the Woolfs' Hogarth Press. In the first six months sales ran to almost 30 000 copies15 and in 1936 Leonard Woolf told the author that 64 000 copies of the sixpenny Penguin edition had been sold.16 However, in his autobiography, Leonard Woolf, while appreciative of her financial value to his press, patronizingly calls Vita "an honest, simple, sentimental, romantic, naive, and competent writer. When she let all this go off altogether in a novel about high life, she produced in The Edwardians a kind of period piece and a real best-seller." He excludes her from the category of "serious


writers of genius". 17

Despite these remarks, and the fact that the author herself hated to hear the novel mentioned or even praised in later life18, The Edwardians has remained the most enduringly popular of Vita Sackville-West’s novels, if not the most highly regarded by critics. It is true (as Woolf implies) that its reputation depends mainly on its value as a social document. Susan Mary Alsop, the biographer of the author’s mother, calls it "the best novel ever written about the society of the time"19 and Victoria Glendinning, Vita’s own biographer refers to it as a "vivid and authentic social document, as opulent and ambiguous as the author herself". 20 The word "ambiguous" alerts us to its merits not only as social record, but also as a successful vehicle for the writer’s sense of style, powers of description, authenticity, and above all her literary treatment of the peculiar dichotomies of the position and role of the aristocrat, her theme in The Edwardians.

The Edwardians is one of the best examples of the aristocratic novel, as I have defined it. Virtually all the features and preoccupations characteristic of the genre are present. The novel deals primarily with the position of the aristocrat in society. It gives a vivid description of the spoilt and decadent aristocratic society of the Edwardian age and its various components. The aristocratic manor house plays a central symbolic role, and the conflict in the novel hinges on the need for the aristocracy to come to terms with or adapt to a changing reality, to display its resilience in the face of the

17 Leonard Woolf, Downhill All the Way, p. 158.


20 Glendinning, Victoria; Introduction to the Virago Modern Classics edition of The Edwardians by V. Sackville-West, p. xvi.
disconcerting trends and movements of history. The work encapsulates the British aristocracy at the height of its charmed existence during the reign of Queen Victoria's son, King Edward VII (1901 - 1910), when luxury, wealth and self-assurance among the upper classes reached its peak\textsuperscript{21}, in spite of already emerging signs that this kind of existence was approaching its finale.

It would be difficult to find a writer better qualified as regards background to write the definitive aristocratic novel, than Vita Sackville-West. She was born in 1892 as the only daughter of the third Lord Sackville, the proprietor of Knole, one of the largest and most celebrated manor houses in England. The house reputedly has seven quadrangles, fifty-two staircases and three hundred and sixty-five rooms (corresponding to the number of days in a week and the number of weeks and days in a year)\textsuperscript{22}, and has been inhabited continuously for five hundred years, and since the sixteenth century by the Sackville family. The house and estate were granted to Vita's ancestor, the poet and dramatist Thomas Sackville, 1st Earl of Dorset, by his cousin, Queen Elizabeth I. Of Knole, Edmund Burke wrote "I think it is the most interesting thing in England"\textsuperscript{23}, and Vita Sackville-West herself, on whom the house would exert a profound

\textsuperscript{21} Lord Willoughby de Broke believed that those aristocrats who lived in the Edwardian era experienced 'the high-water mark of creature comforts'....Whatever was happening to the Empire, comfort and convenience, and everything that makes for luxury, steadily increased until the outbreak of the War.

\textsuperscript{22}Cf. V. Sackville, Knole and the Sackvilles, London: Lindsay Drummond, 1947, p. 4.

influence\textsuperscript{24}, described it as having "the deep inward gaiety of some very old woman who has always been beautiful, who has had many lovers and seen many generations come and go, smiled wisely over their sorrows and their joys, and learnt an imperishable secret of tolerance and humour."\textsuperscript{25} This house in particular, and houses in general, would play a central role in the writings of Vita Sackville-West.

The writer's lineage is as impressive as the history of the house: the Sackvilles are descended from the Norman knight, Herbrand de Sauqueville, who was Lord of Sauqueville sui Scie, and also held Fawley in Buckinghamshire in 1070. The family became Earls of Dorset in 1603/4 and Dukes of Dorset in 1720. The inheritance passed through the female line when the Sackvilles became extinct in the male line in 1843, and Vita's great uncle, Mortimer Sackville-West, grandson through his mother of the Third Duke, was again created Lord Sackville in 1876.\textsuperscript{26} It is amusing to note that while Leonard Woolf could afford to sneer gently at Vita's status as a writer, he was as much in awe of her background as she was of his and Virginia's intellectual and literary stature. In his autobiography, Woolf writes,

... to hear her put an aggressive taxi driver in his place, even when she was in the wrong, made one recognize a note in her voice that Sackvilles and Buckhursts were using to serfs in Kent 600 years ago, or even in Normandy 300 years before that. She belonged indeed to a world which was

\textsuperscript{24}Victoria Glendinning writes in her introduction to the Virago Modern Classics edition of The Edwardians that Vita's "personal myth centred on Knole .... Vita had been brought up at Knole and loved it more, she often said, than she loved any human being except her husband." (p. ix).

\textsuperscript{25}V. Sackville-West, Knole and the Sackvilles, p. 2.

completely different to ours, and the long line of Sackvilles, Dorsets, De La Warrs, and Knole with its 365 rooms had put into her mind and heart an ingredient which was alien to us .... Vita was, as we used to say to her, only really comfortable in a castle, whereas a castle is almost the only place in which I could not under any circumstances be comfortable.  

In a later volume, Woolf more openly reveals his awe, by comparing his own ancestors "'despised and rejected' in some continental ghetto" and his wife's "a little better than serfs in Aberdeenshire" in Elizabethan times, to Vita's Elizabethan ancestor, Thomas Sackville, feasting in an "enormous banqueting hall [where] he would have been given a mighty feast on plates of gold and silver, and wine or mead in golden cups from silver flagons." In spite of his censorious comments, Woolf appears to take an ingenuous pride in his association with Vita, "who had the blood of all these owners of Elizabethan Castles ... in her veins and seemed always to have a castle or two of her own hanging about her". Her manner and appearance confirmed her impressive ancestry. Woolf describes her as "an animal at the height of its powers .... She was very handsome, dashing, aristocratic, lordly, almost arrogant" and "below the surface, and not so very much below, she had the instinctive arrogance of the aristocrat of the ancient regime." It is the struggle of the author, endowed with this very "instinctive arrogance of the aristocrat", to come to terms with the decadence of her own race and a new democratically orientated society, which makes the novels of Vita Sackville-West such interesting examples of the

27 Leonard Woolf, Downhill All the Way, p. 112.
29 Ibid., p. 56.
30 Leonard Woolf, Downhill All the Way, pp. 111 - 112.
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aristocratic novel in the twentieth century.

After a somewhat traumatic childhood, presided over by her adored, but highly volatile and emotional mother, Lady Sackville, during which her chief consolation was the

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32 In her autobiography, published as part of her son’s account of his parents’ unconventional relationship, Portrait of a Marriage, Vita would write in 1920, “I can’t remember much about my childhood, except that I had very long legs and very straight hair, over which Mother used to hurt my feelings and say she couldn’t bear to look at me because I was so ugly.” (Nigel Nicolson, Portrait of a Marriage, New York: Atheneum, 1973, p. 4).

Lady Sackville (Victoria, like her daughter) was a highly romantic figure, the illegitimate daughter of the second Lord Sackville and a Spanish dancer, Pepita Duran. Their longstanding affair had resulted in the birth of seven children. As a result of her beauty and potential, Lord Sackville’s sister, the strong-minded and influential Countess of Derby, recommended the unprecedented step that the illegitimate Victoria should accompany her father to Washington as his official hostess, when Lord Sackville was appointed British Minister to the American capital in 1881. Victoria was a considerable success in Washington, declining proposals of marriage from a number of European diplomats and American millionaires. She returned to Britain with her father in 1888, when he succeeded to the title and Knole, and in 1890 married her cousin, Lionel Sackville-West, the heir to her father’s title, who became the third Lord Sackville in 1908.

In 1910 Lady Sackville became a national figure during the sensational “Sackville Peerage Case”, when her brother, Henry, tried unsuccessfully to prove in the British courts that their parents had indeed been married and that consequently he, and not his sister’s husband, was the rightful heir to the Sackville peerage. Another sensational court-case in 1913 ensured that Lady Sackville became a household name in Britain. This time the family of one of her admirers, Sir John Murray Scott, sued (again unsuccessfully) in order to nullify his bequest to her of a substantial part of his substantial fortune. The day by day press coverage of the case was highly flattering to Lady Sackville.

Vita Sackville-West lived in the shadow of this powerful figure until Lady Sackville’s death in 1936, and the mother also served as a literary model for the daughter, notably as the original for the Duchess in The Edwardians. In 1937, Vita also published Pepita, a biography of her mother and Spanish grandmother. (Cf. V. Sackville-West, Pepita, London: Virago Press, 1986, and Susan Mary Alsop, Lady Sackville.)
magnificent house where she was brought up\(^{33}\), she married a young diplomat, Sir Harold Nicolson, a younger son of Lord Carnock (who had been British Ambassador to Madrid and St Petersburg) and the author of critical biographies of Tennyson, Byron and Swinburne, in 1913. She travelled widely with him, both in his official capacity and privately, and these journeys led to the publication of such travel books as *Passengers to Teheran* (1926) and *Twelve Days: An account of a Journey Across the Bakhtiari Mountains in South-Western Persia* (1928). Apart from certain juvenilia which had been published privately\(^{34}\), her first anthology of poetry, *Poems of West and East* was published by John Lane in 1918, followed by her first novel, *Heritage*, published in 1919 by William Collins.

Perhaps best known for the less conventional aspects of her life, such as her romantic involvement with Virginia Woolf (she served as the model and inspiration for *Orlando*), Violet Trefusis and Mrs Roy Campbell, Vita Sackville-West is a competent novelist in her own right (as even Leonard Woolf concedes) and has won widespread recognition for her poetry. Her long poem *The Land* was awarded the Hawthorn Prize in 1927, and *The Garden* the Heinemann Prize in 1920\(^{35}\). Among her novels, *The Edwardians* (1930), *All Passion Spent* (1931), and *Family History* (1932) are generally rated most highly. Hugh Walpole wrote in 1930, "... I must confess that I find among all the writers in England no

33On the night before her marriage, Vita would look back on her childhood in Knole:

Pictures and galleries and empty rooms,
Small wonder that my games were played alone;
Half of the rambling house to call my own,
And wooded gardens with mysterious glooms....

(Quoted in Nigel Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 61.)

34These include *Chatterton*, a verse drama (1909), and *Constantinople* (1915). In August 1913, she also published a poem, "The Dancing Elf", in *The English Review*. (Cf. Michael Stevens, *V. Sackville-West*, London: Michael Joseph, 1973, p. 120.)

one else who has achieved such distinction in so many different directions".  

Superbly endowed to do so, Vita Sackville-West presents a penetrating and unsparing picture of the society in which she grew up in *The Edwardians*. The picture, while glamorous, is of a society bereft of vitality and a sense of mission. It depicts a society characterized by monotonous self-indulgence and self-satisfaction. Leonard Anquetil, a discoverer and adventurer who represents energy and a sense of mission, has been invited to spend the week-end at Chevron, the Ducal home, as a result of his temporary status as a celebrity, and is clearly designated by the author as an outsider to this society who can therefore offer a critical perspective on its members. Significantly "watching them from outside", Anquetil, the man of action, marvels that the members of the house party

though surely spoilt by the surfeits of entertainment that life had always offered them, showed no disposition to be bored by each other’s familiar company, and no inclination to vary the programme which they must have followed on innumerable Sunday afternoons since they first emerged ... to take their place in a world where pleasure fell like a ripened peach for the outstretching of a hand.

The garden imagery is indicative of V. Sackville-West’s life-long involvement with the land and gardens of England, which would often find expression in her writing and especially in her poetry. Here the garden clearly denotes a kind of Eden, but

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38 In his essay on V. Sackville-West’s poetry, "A Poet in a Tradition" (*Fortnightly*, CXLVIII, London, 1940) Richard Church describes the poet as "given to the exploration of solitude, to a private agony, and its assuagement in the delights of the soil" (p. 601). This agony is one of having to come to terms with a
a Garden of Eden, a paradise, artificially preserved after the fall.

The atmosphere at the country house is saturated with a sense of languorous purposelessness. Sebastian, the young Duke and central character, complains that "Nothing ever happens ... day after day goes by, and it is always the same" and later in the novel "he was overcome by the futility of his life. Flirtation was scarcely an adequate outlet for the energy of one-and-twenty." A sense of purpose in the lives of these aristocrats has been usurped by a dedication to self-indulgence on the one hand, and by an absolute devotion to the creed of class solidarity on the other. The devotion to self-indulgence ("To Sylvia, as to most of her acquaintance, the life of pleasure was all in all; neither books, art, nor music meant anything to her except in so far as their topicality formed part of the social equipment") is accompanied by a total insensitivity to the humanity, dignity and sentiments of others. While pleased to have Anquetil - the man of the moment - at her party as a social exhibit, the Duchess lightly dismisses his trials during an expedition to the South Pole - having been marooned there for a whole winter with a companion who had gone mad - with the thought that "Polar sufferings were perhaps on the whole a bore". She does not hesitate to denigrate her servants to their faces.

vanishing pastoral England, "a ripe and comely culture", as Church calls it (p. 603). Her poetry thus forms an interesting parallel to her novels, where she essays to come to terms with the vanishing social world of her class and society.

39V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 46.

40Ibid., p. 208.

41Ibid., p. 110.

42Ibid., p. 28.

43In most aristocratic novels, also in The Edwardians, there are examples of a patronizing affection for their servants on the part of the aristocrats. However, there is also widespread evidence of the insensitivity to their humanity demonstrated by the Duchess in this novel. In Hugh Walpole’s aristocratic novel
She bemoans the responsibilities of supervising her staff with the lament that it is "a little hard, I do think, that one should never have any undiluted pleasure in life". The conversation of the Duchess's party is likewise revealed as self-centred, trivial and juvenile:

A large proportion of their conversation seemed to consist in asking one another what they had thought of such-and-such an entertainment, and whether they were going to such-and-such an other .... 'Violet really ought to be stopped from giving parties. There ought to be an Act of Parliament about it. Friday was ghastly.' 'Ghastly! Horribilino! And the filthiest food.'

Self-indulgence and self-preservation become the only religion, the only creed to which they adhere: "... there was only one commandment which mattered, and that was the eleventh." The eleventh commandment decrees that one should not be a traitor to one's class. The elements of this creed are dispersed in clearly quotable, clichéd adages through the novel, such as: "Noblesse oblige ... people like us do not exhibit their feelings; they do not divorce. Only the vulgar divorce ..." and "There were certain things which you did not do, and there was an end of it.

Wintersmoon, roughly contemporary to The Edwardians, even the highly likable and sensitive Wildherne, Lord Poole is guilty of this: "Wildherne on his side knew that Hignett was a devoted servant, but that the man cared for him personally never occurred to him." (Hugh Walpole, Wintersmoon, Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1972, p. 75.)

44 V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 38.

45 The characterization of the aristocracy as child-like, childish or juvenile, is another thread that runs through a considerable number of the aristocratic novels of this century. It is particularly dominant in the novels of Emma Tennant (cf. Chapter 6).

46 V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 17.

47 Ibid., p. 112.

48 Ibid., p. 111.
You did not take the best place at your own shoot, you did not look over your neighbour’s hands at cards, you did not open his letters .... These were things which everybody knew, and which consequently might be taken for granted.  

The noble tenets of the aristocratic ideals of noblesse oblige are debased to a set of social conventions, adhered to for purely snobbish reasons.

Isabel Colegate interestingly amplifies the social creed connected with the "shoot", mentioned above, in her modern Edwardian novel, *The Shooting Party*. Her novel cleverly and effectively recreates the mood of pre-World War I society and the culture of the country house party, a distinctive feature of that society. The book, which has been made into a successful film, clearly owes a great deal to *The Edwardians* as regards details of the era, tone, atmosphere and subject matter. In a fit of jealousy, Sir Gilbert Hartlip disobeys the rules of the "creed" of aristocratic behaviour during a shoot and as a result inadvertently kills one of his host’s tenants. The charge that is held against him at the end, and which would result in his

\[49\] V. Sackville-West, *The Edwardians*, p. 121.


\[51\] The novel compares unfavourably with regard to *The Edwardians* as regards historic authenticity. *The Shooting Party* falls into the trap of making much of the fact that the world of the Edwardian era was a threatened world, because of the catastrophic First World War which would follow it and destroy much of its substance, thus lending the novel a certain elegiac quality. As Hugh Walpole wrote in 1930, long before the publication of *The Shooting Party*,

> It is the customary attitude now to the life and times of King Edward to see them as something very light, frivolous, foolish and touching - touching because the citizens of that world were so completely unaware of the catastrophe that was approaching. (Hugh Walpole, V. Sackville-West, *Bookman*, September 1930, p. 26.) Although *The Edwardians* was also written after the war, it does not exploit that emotional appeal, but takes the reader into the Edwardian era as it was, leaving it to the reader himself to consider its historic placing, and the pathos connected with that time and situation.
ostracism - banishment - from society, is not one of man-slaughter, but "You were not shooting like a gentleman, Gilbert."  

Both the dedication to self-indulgence and the devotion to class solidarity, which replace a sense of moral purpose among the aristocracy in The Edwardians, are paradoxically pursued with an almost admirable sense of commitment. Sylvia, Lady Roehampton, the older woman with whom Sebastian establishes a romantic relationship, pampers and enhances her appearance with single-minded devotion: "It was worship, a rite, that she performed in the service of a double deity: her own beauty and the society she decorated." Viola, Sebastian's sister, who has been shorn of any illusions about her mother's set, comments with irony,

There's not one of our fathers or mothers who wouldn't break their own hearts without hesitation if it came to a struggle between their desires and their convictions. Really, ... sometimes I think it magnificent. Like martyrs going to the stake. Magnificent and absurd. But for what a creed!

Religious vocabulary abounds in the description of the aristocratic outlook: "commandment", "worship", "rite", "martyrs", "creed", suggesting how religious and ethical principles are replaced by social conventions.

The absurdity of unswerving adherence to this secular religion is clearly illustrated when Lady Roehampton, who is nonchalantly pursuing a passionate affair with a young man half her age although she is a "respectably" married leader of society, is morally outraged and emotionally distraught when her daughter, Margaret, wishes to marry a young man who is not "quite

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52 Colegate, Isabel; The Shooting Party, p. 162.
53 V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 156.
54 Ibid., p. 162.
suitable". Extra-marital affairs, if conducted with the required discretion according to the norms of aristocratic society, were very much part of the fabric of the glamorous court circle surrounding Edward VII. The King himself set the tone and established the norms for such involvements, notably with his long-standing and widely accepted liaison with Mrs George Keppel, graciously tolerated by the long-suffering Queen Alexandra and a complaisant Mr George Keppel.\textsuperscript{55} Society's adeptness in accommodating such liaisons is illustrated by the Duchess's chief concerns in planning the week-end party at Chevron:

This question of the disposition of bedrooms always gave the duchess and her fellow hostesses cause for anxious thought. It was so necessary to be tactful, and at the same time discreet. The professional Lothario would be furious if he found himself in a room surrounded by ladies who were all accompanied by their husbands .... Then there were the recognized lovers to be considered; the duchess herself would have been greatly annoyed had she gone to stay at the same party as Harry Tremaine, only to find that he had been put at the other end of the house.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} [The King's] liaison with the voluptuous Mrs Keppel continued; when in London, he visited her almost every day. The Pompadour of his Edwardian court, Alice Keppel was a figure of considerable importance; she could always be relied upon to keep the notoriously ketchy King in a sweet temper .... Nor was Mrs Keppel the only woman capable of diverting the King. Edward loved the company of beautiful well-dressed women.


With characteristic generosity, Alexandra included Mrs Keppel among those whom she allowed into the room to take leave of the King [on his death-bed].


Mrs Keppel is the model for the character of Romola Cheyne in \textit{The Edwardians}.

\textsuperscript{56} V. Sackville-West, \textit{The Edwardians}, p. 26.
In The Shooting Party, Miss Colegate also follows The Edwardians closely as regards the conventions of marriage and love. She also emphasizes the importance of the arrangement of bedrooms⁵⁷, and refers to the King’s role in providing the Royal sanction for this mode of behaviour.⁵⁸

On the other hand, marriage outside one’s class was considered an unpardonable betrayal: "It was manifestly impossible that Margaret should be allowed to marry the creature."⁵⁹ The ironies of this duality are revealed when the Duchess reacts to her daughter’s desire to marry outside her class:

'What’s that?' screamed the duchess; 'a painter? What painter? Who ever heard of such a thing? Sylvia Roehampton’s daughter marry a painter? .... You marry Tony [Lord] Wexford and we’ll see what can be done about the painter afterwards,’ she said, winking at Sylvia behind Margaret’s back.⁶⁰

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⁵⁷ He was sleeping in a room a little further down the passage, Minnie’s forethought having given the Hartlips the Red Room, that was to say the one furthest separated from the dressing room that was usually used with it [and where the complaisant husband would presumably spend the night]. Charles Farquhar’s room was on the other side of the Red Room, not next to it but two away. Minnie could be relied upon to get that sort of thing right.

(Isabel Colegate, The Shooting Party, p. 51.)

⁵⁸ [Sir Randolph] imagined that Minnie probably had a larger collection [of letters from the King], revealing a more intimate side of the Royal nature; he had never asked her .... He had to accustom himself to being what the world considered a complaisant husband, and the Game Book had helped him a little in that respect.

(Isabel Colegate, The Shooting Party, pp. 24 - 25.)

⁵⁹ V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 156.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 159.
The irony of this duplicity is further compounded when Margaret, the victim of her parents' values, echoes their ideas closely, intimating that if one small aspect of the "noble" edifice of "thou shalt nots" should be disregarded, "Everything we believe in would go by the board. All decencies. All principles."  

When it is suggested that her mother might be involved in a scandal (her relationship with the young Duke), her hilariously innocent response is: "My mother, Viola? A scandal? ... how very seldom one hears of scandals in connection with people like us! It is always among the working-classes that those dreadful murders happen, or else in Naples." The use of the phrase "people like us" significantly denotes, however, the advantages of the sacrifice she is about to make by marrying Lord Wexford: her love for the artist has to be renounced, but the solidarity and superiority of the aristocracy are maintained.

This is confirmed when we encounter the same society one generation later in Vita Sackville-West's later novel, *Family History* 63, published two years after *The Edwardians*. At the ball given at Chevron House, the ducal family's London home, the Duchess is seen, "somewhat wrinkled and withered", still gallantly carrying on "the traditions of her age ... into a changing world." 64 The younger generation of aristocrats are depicted, however, as progressively decadent. They are described as "the most decorative on earth .... The standard of looks was amazing; they had the distinction and beauty of thoroughbred animals ... [but] those sleek heads contained no more brains than a greyhound's". 65 An awareness of the aristocracy's increasing decadence appears to have been pervasive at the juncture of the

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61 V. Sackville-West, *The Edwardians*, p. 163.
62 Ibid., p. 164.
64 Ibid., p. 38.
65 Ibid., p. 40.
twenties and thirties, when these novels were published. Evelyn Waugh's novels are a case in point (cf. chapter 2), and in his novel, *Wintersmoon* (1928), Hugh Walpole also closely echoes the mood of the Chevron House ball. He writes about the impression that "London was running swiftly to the dogs, the Upper Classes drinking cocktails and dancing eternally to the jazziest of music ...."  

Sackville-West makes it quite clear that money features very strongly, quite vulgarly so for all the apparent refinement, among the priorities of the aristocracy. As Anquetil passes among the Duchess's friends during the Chevron week-end party, "investments bulked heavy in their talk, and other people's incomes, and the merits of various stocks and shares ..." and Sebastian talks about his mother's "passion for money ..." which causes her to cultivate the Jewish financier, Sir Adam, who might otherwise not have been admitted to the rarefied atmosphere of the ducal estate: "... It was simply part of her creed and the

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66 In an article on V. Sackville-West in *Bookman* of September 1930, Hugh Walpole draws an interesting link between this aristocratic novel of his and V. Sackville-West's *The Edwardians*. He admits that as Knole formed the inspiration for Chevron, so it did for Wintersmoon, the ducal estate in his novel of the same name. It was, of course, also the inspiration for Orlando's house in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. (Cf. Hugh Walpole, "V. Sackville-West" in *Bookman*, September 1930, p. 25).


68 V. Sackville-West, *The Edwardians*, p. 17.

69 The presence of the token Jew in high society is another feature of the Edwardian novel. The introduction of Jews into the inner sanctums of High Society was indeed a novelty in Edwardian times. The Jewish financier Sir Ernest Cassell, grandfather of the late Lady Mountbatten of Burma and a close friend of Edward VII, served at least partly as a model for characters such as "Sir Adam" in *The Edwardians* and Sir Reuben Hergesheimer in Isabel Colegate's *The Shooting Party*. Jewish Randlords such as the Oppenheims, Beits and Sir Lionel Phillips, may also have served as models. Sir Ernest is described thus in Lord Mountbatten's official biography:

Cassell had been born in Cologne, son of a Jewish money-lender and small-time banker. In a career as remarkable as
that of any Rothschild, he battled his way to immense fortune and, through his role as a private banker and financial adviser to the future Edward VII, lodged himself in the innermost temples of the Establishment. (Philip Ziegler, Mountbatten: The Official Biography, London: Collins, 1985, p. 66.)

Edwina Mountbatten’s biographer, Richard Hough, describes Sir Ernest’s entry into society:

A generation earlier, Cassell might never have established himself in Society in England as he was comfortably able to do in the 1890s when there was much more social flexibility. The severe puritan tone established by Queen Victoria and her Prince Consort was fast fading and was being overwhelmed by the brash chorus led by the ‘Marlborough Set’ [Marlborough House was the official residence of the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII]. When the Prince of Wales wanted a West End club over which he had control of the membership, he established one in Pall Mall opposite Marlborough House and filled it with ‘fast’ cronies, men with plenty of money and style. They and their wives and mistresses represented a section of Society that was more likely to be found at the baccarat table than a Buckingham Palace soirée, in the paddock at Ascot than a box at Covent Garden. They were an urbane crowd; a cynical wit, a talent to amuse and willingness to take high risks being admired qualities. They drank and ate and fornicated a great deal.... Prejudice against Jews in the Prince of Wales’s circle was as unthinkable as prejudice against actresses. Both were plentifully numbered among his friends." (Richard Hough, Edwina: Countess Mountbatten of Burma. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, p. 19.)

There are nevertheless clear indications of a residual anti-semitism, particularly among the more old-fashioned sections of aristocratic society in Sackville-West’s Edwardians. Sebastian’s venerable grandmother states uncompromisingly; "King or no King, I don’t like those Jews; I saw a lot of their horrid names today, when I was looking through the Visitor’s book." (V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 215.) Colegate echoes this trend faithfully in The Shooting Party, and Sir Randolph is heard to ask his daughter-in-law with a suggestion of censure, "Is the Israelite not among us?" (Isabel Colegate, The Shooting Party, p. 9.)

70 V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 44.
others in the hope that some pickings might fall to her lot ... She had attached herself particularly to a rich unpleasant widow, squat as a toad, whose personal vanity was as surprising as it was excessive ...."  

Secure in their assumed superiority, contemptuous of the middle class, aristocrats do not hesitate to exploit "lesser breeds".

The counter-side of this attitude to life - the tenacious clinging to creed and greed - is, however, that these aristocrats become the prisoners of their own "mind-forg'd manacles", and eventually dehumanized. The author carefully links images of death and lifelessness with images conveying the splendour of the aristocratic existence. She describes the magnificent ancestral home, Chevron, as an "exquisite sepulchre" and describes Sebastian's sudden insight into the nature of his mother's guests at dinner:

They were all people whose names were familiar to every reader of the society titbits in the papers. Sebastian saw them suddenly as a ventriloquist's box of puppets. Fourteen down one side of the table, fourteen up the other; with himself and his mother at either end, that made thirty. Then his vision shifted, and he was obliged to admit that they were very ornamental. They seemed so perfectly concordant with their setting, as though they had not a care in the world; the jewels glittered, the shirtfronts glistened; the servants came and went ....

As "exquisite", qualifies "sepulchre", so in the dinner scene, "ornamental" is associated with "puppets". There is moreover a further association of this death-in-life "puppet" existence with the smug complacency of the aristocrats: "... as though they had not a care in the world".

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71 V. Sackville-West, *Family History*, p. 25.
73 Ibid., p. 44.
Still stronger is the intimation that adherence to the aristocratic creed implies incarceration in a gilded cage where the aristocrat enjoys every possible privilege, but at the expense of his autonomy and self-regard. At the heart of the conflict in *The Edwardians* is Sebastian's dilemma. While he enjoys his authority, privileges and responsibilities as Lord of the Manor, he realizes that it is to some extent an artificial existence—paradise after the fall—and that he himself is to a large extent imprisoned by the dictates of his caste. Sebastian is at once attracted and repelled by the glittering life of his mother's circle:

Sometimes he wished to see his whole acquaintance cast into a furnace, so vehemently did he deprecate them, sometimes he thought that they had mastered the problems of civilisation more truly than the Greeks or Romans.  

His attraction to his mother's circle finds its purest expression in his passionate love affair with his mother's friend, Lady Roehampton. In a letter to Virginia Woolf (dated 18 August 1933), Vita suggests the role Lady Roehampton would play in the novel: "Lady Roehampton is Lady Westmorland," a lovely sumptuous creature who came to Knole when I was eight, and who first set my feet along the wrong path, I fancy, but who died, herself, relatively young, of drugs and a plethora of lovers." Lady Roehampton represents Sebastian's journey "on the wrong path". The relationship encompasses all that is most seductive in the Duchess's world: beauty, grace, glamour, the effortless

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74 V. Sackville-West, *The Edwardians*, p. 32.

75 In an Author's Note to *The Edwardians*, Vita Sackville-West remarks, "No character in this book is wholly fictitious". The model for Lady Roehampton was Lady Adelaide Ida Curzon, daughter of the 1st Earl Howe, who married Francis William Henry Fane, 12th Earl Of Westmorland, on 16 July 1857 and died on 22 March 1905. (Cf. *Burke's Peerage*, 1980, pp. 1338 and 2802). Vita appears to be mistaken as to her relatively early demise.

ease of social security, but is finally corrupt and decadent, leading to great suffering for the two partners as well as a number of other parties. Lady Roehampton's beauty and demeanour come to represent the splendour of the whole sparkling, self-assured world of the Empire before the First World War, when common wisdom could confidently maintain that "God is an Englishman". This implication is neatly encapsulated by the author when Sylvia encounters imperial grandees at a court ball: "He is speaking to me in English; I am replying to him in English; he is Viceroy of India; I am the most beautiful woman in London" - the parallel seems obvious and futile."

Sebastian's relationship with Lady Roehampton is shipwrecked on the rocks of the aristocratic creed. When Lady Roehampton's liaison is discovered by her husband, he threatens her with the unspeakable - divorce - unless she leaves society with him and withdraws to their country estate in permanent self-exile. Both these threats, the loss of Sebastian and expulsion from her social circle, are devastating blows to Sylvia, who loves the young man deeply and whose involvement in society is tantamount to a religion. Yet the alternative, divorce, betrayal of the codes of her caste, is unthinkable. When she refuses to heed Sebastian's pleas to elope with him rather than obey her husband's injunctions, he suspects that she loves society - presumably cherishing the hope that her husband would tolerate their re-entry after a few years of penal absence - more than she loves him. But he is wrong: "How gladly would she endure privations for Sebastian's sake .... But she was bound by far more rigorous a necessity: the creed of her class, of her code." Even the sophisticated, soignée, amoral Lady Roehampton is a prisoner of the dictates of her class.

Anquetil warns Sebastian quite early in their relationship that for all his rebellion against and despising of his mother's set, he is also subject to this imprisonment: "My dear boy your life

77 V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 145.

78 Ibid., p. 177.
was mapped out for you from the moment you were born.\textsuperscript{79}

The question arises why Lord Roehampton threatens to do the unthinkable, divorce his wife, as it has been demonstrated that extra-marital affairs were almost de rigueur in Edwardian times. Vita Sackville-West takes care, however, to differentiate between the various cross-sections of the aristocracy. Apart from the decadent court circles, there is also the old country aristocracy, to which Lord Roehampton's sisters belong, and whose values he shares, in spite of being dragged by his glittering spouse into the inner circle of Edward VII. Sackville-West describes this group:

They all belonged to the same solid, territorial aristocracy that took no account of 'sets' or upstarts, jargons or crazes, but pursued their way and maintained their dignity with the weight and rumble of a family coach. They ... were profoundly and genuinely shocked by the admission of Jews into society; they regarded the fast set, in so far as it comprised some people who by birth were entitled to inclusion in their own faction, as a real betrayal of \textit{esprit de corps}. Their solidarity was terrific.\textsuperscript{80}

Ironically this sense of solidarity is exactly what binds them to people in the fast set like Lady Roehampton: they all adhere to and maintain the eleventh commandment with equal tenacity and dedication.

In one of the most humorous satiric extracts from the novel, Lady Roehampton, relying on this very \textit{esprit de corps}, visits her sisters-in-law, "like a bird of paradise might wing down on an assembly of hens", in order to pass off her daughter to them for the season. She sits down on the sofa next to her sister-in-law,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79}V. Sackville-West, \textit{The Edwardians}, p. 87.
\item \textsuperscript{80}Ibid., p. 129.
\end{itemize}
Lady Clementina,

retaining that lady’s hand in her own and patting it gently as it lay on her knee .... This physical contact with Lady Roehampton was highly distasteful to Lady Clementina .... What was it that Lady Porteviot always called her? .... ‘That nasty fast woman, my dear - sorry if she’s your brother’s wife - can’t help that - a nasty fast woman.’ ... [And] now here was Sylvia monopolising the conversation, chattering radiantly, appealing now to Ernestine and now to Lady Wexford for corroboration - ‘I’m sure, dear Lady Wexford, you know what I mean - yes, I see that you do’ - turning her lovely head first to one lady and then to another, laughing, joking, and all the while clasping Lady Clementina’s hand and bringing her eyes back to gaze at her as though she were the one object of her affection in the world.81

In this glittering portrait of the bird of paradise among the hens, Miss Sackville-West conveys the stark contrasts between these two groups of aristocrats, the decadence of the one and the puritanical severity of the other, only to undermine it by proving that they are in fact similar in essence - in obedience to the creed of class solidarity.

In Wintersmoon, Hugh Walpole makes an almost identical division with regard to the aristocracy in the 1920s, distinguishing those “who danced and kicked their way through the illustrated papers”, from “those quiet decorous people, poor as mice many of them [after the First World War] ... living in their quiet little houses or their empty big ones .... They never look about them and see where they are. They’ve no need to. They’re just there.” Significantly he concludes his description of the aristocracy by referring to them as "that Class and that Creed that, whether for good or ill, had meant a great deal in the

world’s history, “An aristocrat like Vita Sackville-West, he perceives their class as making up more than just a social grouping, but as constituting a belief, a philosophy, a faith. Walpole appears less ambiguous than Sackville-West in his attitude to the aristocracy, regarding their decline as a tragedy, and affirming that they still have a role to play in history:

... [We] believe that our class and its traditions means a lot to England, and that if you keep the fine side of it you’ll be making better history for England than if you let it go .... We keep our class with all that’s been best in it for hundreds of years and co-operate with the other classes for the good of all of us.

Walpole intimates that he hankers after a kind of feudalism, where the different classes can maintain their hierarchical structure, yet co-operate in symbiotic fashion for the benefit of all.

The same hankering is central to Miss Sackville-West’s philosophy. Sebastian’s attraction to his mother’s circle ends with the failure of his relationship with Lady Roehampton. There is a much more deep-seated love, however, that poses a more profound and bewildering dilemma for Sebastian: the love for a better aristocratic past, for a harmonious symbiotic existence between lord and serf and the land itself - a past with which he identifies himself lovingly and naturally, but which is threatened by modernity as much as the glitter of the Duchess’s

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82 Hugh Walpole, Wintersmoon, pp. 9 - 10.
83 Sir Hugh Seymour Walpole (1884 - 1941), son of the Bishop of Edinburgh, popular novelist and literary critic, was a scion of the family of the Barons Walpole of Walpole and Walpole of Wolterton, and a kinsman of Sir Robert Walpole (1676 - 1745), 1st Earl of Orford, who is generally regarded as the first British Prime Minister. (Cf. Burke’s Peerage, 1980, pp. 2742 - 2744.)
84 Hugh Walpole, Wintersmoon, p. 54.
world is. This past which offers an escape from the decadence of his mother's world and the artificial constraints of its social codes, is symbolized in the novel by Sebastian's ducal seat, the magnificent house of Chevron. Sebastian himself most eloquently expresses the attractions of this "better past" and his reluctance to let go of it to his twin sister, Viola:

'I will agree that Chevron, and myself, and Wickenden, and the whole apparatus are nothing but a waxwork show, if you like. Present-day conditions have made us all rather meaningless. But I still think that that is a pity. I think we had evolved a good system on the whole, which made for a good understanding between class and class. Nothing will ever persuade me that the relations between the squire and the craftsman, or the squire and the labourer, or the squire and the farmer, don't contain the elements of decency and honesty and mutual respect. I wish only that civilisation could have developed along these lines.'

His progressive sister, Viola, comments on Sebastian's suspension between their mother's world and the feudal world of Chevron: "... I do admit that there is something to be said for Sebastian the Squire. I don't admit that there is anything to be said for Sebastian the Smart Young Man." This judgment is also Vita Sackville-West's. While she could afford to distance herself from the heedless hedonism of people like the Duchess in The Edwardians, she found herself unable to dismiss the past of the

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85 Wickenden is the estate carpenter, who is distraught because his son does not want to carry on the family tradition of carpentry, going back for several generations on the estate, but wishes to go into the motoring trade instead. Sebastian and Wickenden are thus portrayed as equally attached to the anachronistic manorial system, unwilling to come to terms with the modern world. This accords with Sackville-West's view that the aristocracy and the workers are in essence closer to one another than the middle class is to either.

86 V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 247.

87 Ibid., p. 243.
Sackvilles as merely anachronistic and defunct. Michael Stevens comments in his critical biography of the author: "Her strong feeling for tradition and the consciousness of her aristocratic background on one hand and, on the other, the dislike she felt for what she regarded as the artificiality and uselessness of the society life her mother indulged in, are ... in conflict."\(^{88}\) Her poetry also expresses a sense of being incongruously out of harmony with the trends and tendencies of her own time. In Sissinghurst, the long poem named after the beautiful garden she and her husband cultivated at their castle of that name, she compares herself to a tired swimmer "in the waves of time",

... by birthright far from present fashion,
As no disturber of the mirrored trance
I move, and to the world above the waters
Wave my incognisance.\(^{89}\)

Vita admitted to being a "pre-1792 Tory"\(^{90}\) and her son uncompromisingly accuses her of being a snob, in the sense that she attached exaggerated importance to birth and wealth, and believed that while the aristocracy had much in common with the working people, particularly those who worked on the land, the middle class ... were to be pitied and shunned, unless ... they had acquired dignity by riches.\(^{91}\)

The aristocracy and the working people are symbolized respectively by Chevron and Wickenden's cottage in The

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\(^{88}\)Michael Stevens, *V. Sackville-West*, p. 55.


\(^{91}\)Nigel Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 80.
Edwardians. Both these, Viola asserts, will go down together. Miss Sackville-West’s dismay and distaste for the tasteless uniformity of the egalitarian modern world is expressed by Sebastian’s bitter answer to his sister, that these will be replaced by "two tenement buildings, alike in every particular."  

Sebastian prefers the mutually beneficial regime of feudalism, a voluntary system, voluntary in that it depended upon the temperament of the squire; still a system which possessed a certain pleasant dignity denied to the systems of a more compulsory sort [and which did not] carry with it a disagreeable odour of charity."

In an earlier story, The Heir (1922), Miss Sackville-West also pitches financial considerations and modernity, Sebastian's "tenement buildings", against a better past, symbolized by the house "Blackboys" that the protagonist inherits. Peregrine Chase has to decide whether to sell his inheritance, a financially sound and modern solution to his problems, or whether to cling to it romantically, to protect it chivalrously, to sacrifice his own life to it. As he moves inevitably in the latter direction, he finds that he is reborn and set beyond the confines of mediocre pragmatism. He develops from an uninteresting manager of a small insurance company (what better symbol for the stifling, safe mundaneness of modern suburban existence) to being a vital, strong individual, saving his inheritance from the onslaught of a Brazilian in a white Rolls-Royce. Lisa St Aubyn de Terán comments:

The theme of The Heir is one of nostalgia for a passing England and dissolving values, it is at once both a celebration and an invitation to mourn the loss of the

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92V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 245.
93Ibid., p. 53.
great house and the unchanging values that remain cocooned within it.\(^{95}\)

This attachment to a better past, to everything that Chevron symbolizes, while promising some escape from the decadent present, ironically constitutes a prison in itself, as Anquetil tries to convince Sebastian when he describes his probable future:

‘And during all these years, you will never escape from Chevron.’

‘But I don’t want to escape from Chevron,’ said Sebastian.\(^{96}\)

In this, Sebastian is untrue to the better side of his aristocratic inheritance. In her article on the author, Carol Ames suggests that

Vita Sackville-West comes to believe that a person who allows his inheritance to bind him to conventionality or to encourage a self-centredness based on hereditary privilege is not a true aristocrat; he is destructive to himself and the society which has endured because of the energy, initiative, and creativity of the natural aristocrat who is in harmony with himself, with his inferiors, with his equals, and most important of all, with his land.\(^{97}\)

It is through interaction with non-aristocratic outsiders, that Sebastian does confront his own position and nature and succeeds to some degree in coming to terms with his dilemma. Although it


\(^{96}\)V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 88.

is never entirely resolved, he achieves a measure of self-
knowledge. Anquetil, the first of these outsiders, is, as I have
stated, clearly designated as an outsider from the outset. He
is the man of action in a society where pleasure falls like fruit
into the ever-receiving hands of effete aristocrats. He is cast
in the role of the objective observer, balancing by his outside
perspective the intimate inside picture the reader gets of the
Edwardian aristocratic world: "... he liked to see how other
people lived, provided he was not obliged to follow their
example." However much they may patronize him, he is clearly
not fool enough to be taken in by the Duchess's circle or
impressed by them: "If this is Society, thought Anquetil, God
help us, for surely no fraud had ever equalled it." Initially
Anquetil is too dismayed by what he perceives of their society,
to take any lasting interest in Sebastian or Viola, whom he
dismisses as too enmeshed in the pleasurable web of aristocratic
passivity to amount to anything.

Poor Sebastian, he thought, condemned by the very
circumstance of his situation to be nothing more, ever,
than a commonplace young man ... there was nothing for him
to rebel against, except his own good fortune, and that was
a thing he never could evade.100

Gradually, Anquetil falls under the spell of Sebastian's charm -
ironically "charming because his breeding made him so."101. He is
slowly convinced that there is something worthwhile in the young
man's character, worth saving from the gilded prison of his
privilege. Almost unconsciously, he designates himself
Sebastian's tutor, and starts conducting him on the road to
emancipation, to resurrect him from the death-in-life limbo of

98 V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 72.
100 Ibid., p. 75.
101 Ibid., p. 74.
being the heir to a great fortune. He determines "to save Sebastian if he possibly could. The boy, he thought, is already lying in state in a splendid tomb. We will see if we cannot make the effigy jump up and run."\textsuperscript{102} (The "splendid tomb" is a further elaboration of the "exquisite sepulchre" and the "ornamental" "puppets", denoting the dehumanizing effect of the artificial world of privilege.) His first task is to convince Sebastian of the critical nature of his condition. In a crucial conversation conducted with appropriate symbolic significance on the roof of the manor house, Anquetil tries to convince Sebastian to come away with him from his beloved tomb, Chevron:

> You are not allowed to be a free agent. Your life has been ordained for you from the beginning. I will give you the benefit of the doubt. I will agree that you will probably do your duty ... but you will be dead, you will be a stuffed image.\textsuperscript{103}

Unfortunately, this conversation takes place at just the time Lady Roehampton decides to set her cap at Sebastian. For the time being the attractions of his mother's world are too strong. To Anquetil's disappointment, Sebastian refuses to go away with him, and decides instead to immerse himself into a glittering world of pleasure. He embarks on his love affair and Anquetil disappears from the scene, though not from Sebastian's consciousness. At the opera on the night that his affair with Sylvia comes to an end, it is towards Anquetil that his anguished mind instinctively turns. Suspecting that Sylvia is betraying him, "[he] was seized with a passionate longing for Anquetil; Anquetil whom he had rejected for Sylvia."\textsuperscript{104} He begins to re-assess his priorities. It is not co-incidental that Sebastian already demonstrates some progress on the road to self-insight and knowledge of his society on that night during his passionate

\textsuperscript{102} V. Sackville-West, \textit{The Edwardians}, p. 81.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p. 89.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 184.
confrontation with Sylvia and her fidelity to the aristocratic creed: "There seemed to him something incongruous between her grief, which was obviously genuine, and the false creed which forced her to suffer it."105 In the unhappy days after the end of the affair, he keeps brooding on the nature and quality of his life. "He wondered what had become of Anquetil. Anquetil, that stranger, had spoken a great many disquieting truths."106

In a carefully wrought scene between Sebastian and his mother, the value and catalytic effect of the interaction with outsiders is cleverly suggested, when the author gives Sebastian momentary outsider status, by making him observe a reflection of reality through a mirror. What he observes is the quintessence of decadent society, the Duchess at her toilette before the dinner party at Chevron.

Sebastian had watched the hairdressing process a hundred times, but now seeing it in the mirror, he observed it with a new eye. He stared at his mother's reflection, with the pools of rubies in the foreground ... as though she were a stranger to him, realising that behind the glitter and animation in which they lived he had absolutely no knowledge of her.107

The scene carries overtones of Pope's Belinda which are probably not co-incidental. The Duchess in front of her mirror also represents a society whose perspective on the importance and significance of matters and events is highly suspect. It is, moreover, an unreal, artificial society, as is suggested by the use of the mirror device. It is a warped, spurious world which Sebastian sees in the mirror, and it is the barrier of the mirror which enables him to get a natural, outside perspective on the issue, alienating him momentarily and symbolically from an

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105 V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 194.
106 Ibid., p. 206.
107 Ibid., p. 37.
existence from which he is weaned in the course of the novel.

The second outsider to encounter and influence Sebastian is Teresa Spedding, the wife of a middle class doctor. She is "frankly and childishly fascinated by high life".\textsuperscript{108} Vita Sackville-West despised the middle class, characterizing them as "bedint", a Sackville word used with utter scorn. Yet the picture of Teresa Spedding is not altogether unsympathetic. There is a child-like charm in the way Teresa revels in the physical closeness to the aristocracy she experiences at the opera, where she might actually "brush against some of them as they left the building when the opera was over."\textsuperscript{109} It is this very charm that appeals to Sebastian after his immersion in a glut of decadent sophistication during his relationship with Sylvia. When Sebastian asks Teresa what she thinks of the snow at Chevron, her naive reply, that it looks like a Christmas card, is what he expects and enjoys.

Teresa is quite unaware that her ingenuousness is what attracts the Duke, and tries her best to be as sophisticated as possible. In a delightfully humorous scene, Sebastian visits Teresa while her sister-in-law, rejoicing in the Dickensian name of Mrs Tolputt, is present. Teresa is mortified at her sister-in-law's substantial lower middle class presence, while at the same time she cannot repress her exultation at impressing Mrs Tolputt with her social coup. Vita Sackville-West exploits the situation to satirize the middle classes.

Mrs Tolputt, as she herself would have expressed it, was totally knocked all of a heap. She had no idea that Teresa carried on that sort of life. Dukes indeed! ... [while] the agonised Teresa ... looked at her sister-in-law, so stout and homely and voluble, buttoned into her plum velvet bodice .... She noticed Maud's string bag, which, stuffed

\textsuperscript{108}V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 180.

\textsuperscript{109}Ibid.
with bulky parcels, was reposing on the floor beside her, and contrasted its ungainliness with the elegance of Sebastian’s stick.  

While there is no denying that Mrs Tolputt and her class appear ungainly next to the elegance of Sebastian and his, the satire is surprisingly gentle, and Mrs Tolputt is left with much of her dignity intact.

It is on her much longed for visit to Chevron as part of the week-end house party, that Teresa’s role as outsider, unwittingly escorting Sebastian on his progress to self-knowledge, culminates. Initially the relationship of starry eyed ingenue and sophisticated reprobate continues, though Teresa’s role as outsider-conductor is stressed by the parallel that is drawn between her and Anquetil. She watched them wonderingly, much as Anquetil, also an outsider, had once watched them, but her reflections were very different from his. She envied, instead of scorning, their prodigious self-sufficiency, their tacit exclusion of all the world outside their own circle.

As the weekend progresses, Teresa imperceptibly moves closer and closer to Anquetil’s position. At first she becomes aware, as he did, of the dehumanized nature of this society:

This glance of the [aristocratic] eye was peculiar; although penetrating, it had something of the deadness of a fish’s eye; glassy, as though a slight film obscured the vision; and the eyelids moreover were sharply cut ... still further robbing the eyes of any open generosity they might have possessed.

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110 V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, pp. 227, 229.

111 Ibid., p. 263.

112 Ibid., p. 264.
Like Anquetil, she listens to their conversation with interest, and like him, she is - rather against her inclinations - not impressed. She found that it differed very little from the conversation of her own acquaintances, only the references were to people she did not know, and the general assumptions were on a more extravagant scale. They even talked about their servants.¹¹³

She reluctantly finds their amusement at the current vogue to add Italian endings to English words silly ("dans-are", "lovel-are", partnerina"). "She tried to dismiss the idea that it was really rather tiresome and affected, and that it reminded her of nothing so much as a secret language used by herself and her fellows at school ...."¹¹⁴ Again we encounter the pervasive intimation, common to a range of aristocratic novels, that the fairy-tale land of aristocratic privilege amounts to nothing more than childishness.

The crisis in Sebastian's interaction with Teresa comes when Sebastian wishes to take what he believes to be his sexual due for having pandered to Teresa's fancies. She is shocked and dismayed, and he is surprised and taken aback at her reaction. Anquetil is not changed by his relationship with Sebastian, but effects change. Teresa, the little middle class housewife, grows in stature and maturity, while she - albeit inadvertently - also causes Sebastian to develop a sense of self-reflection and responsibility. She is forced to consider her own motives, and does so with unflinching honesty.

Perhaps I never really thought about it much; I was so excited about you and when you asked me to Chevron I nearly died of joy. There, now, you know all the depths of my

¹¹³V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, p. 264.
¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 266.
silliness. You were offering sweets, and I took them. But I love John, and he's my husband.\textsuperscript{115}

While respecting her dignity, Sebastian is outraged at her middle class morality ("marriage is marriage") which he recognizes as another - middle class - version of the creed which ruined his relationship with Sylvia. Sebastian is nevertheless not unaffected by Teresa's fearless honesty, dignity, and loyalty to what and whom she holds dear. He heaps abuse on her to cover his own confusion.

He was acutely ashamed of himself, since, for the first time in his life, he saw himself through other eyes; and saw his own selfishness, his self-indulgence, his arrogance, his futile philandering, for what they were worth.\textsuperscript{116}

The shortcomings that Sebastian is forced to acknowledge are not only those of his person, but also those of his class. The despised, or at best humorously patronized outsider, forces the aristocrat to take an outsider's view of himself, and so escorts the pilgrim a further step on the arduous journey towards self-recognition.

What disconcerts Sebastian most about his increased understanding is that he realizes that not only Sylvia and Teresa are bound, victims of their creeds or codes of behaviour, but he himself is subject to the same limitations. "He scorned himself for being no better than Sylvia or Teresa: they had their codes, and he had his; they were all prisoners, bound in hoops of iron."\textsuperscript{117} For this reason, his next association with a non-aristocratic outsider is with the very antithesis of his two previous romantic involvements, the free-thinking, free-living Phil. He is

\textsuperscript{115}V. Sackville-West, \textit{The Edwardians}, p. 301.

\textsuperscript{116}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 303.

\textsuperscript{117}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 317.
determined to break the bars of his golden prison-house. He rejoices and exults in her freedom from conventions and inhibitions. She changes his priorities and life-style. But it does not last long and calmly, without the histrionics and anguish which marked his progress to self-knowledge at the end of his relationship with Teresa, Sebastian finally has to come to terms with his own nature and situation. Forced by those very conventions which he purports to scorn, he asks Phil to marry him. In her reaction and his own, he is finally confronted with the fact that he is as remorselessly enchained by his own creed - as much imprisoned in his own gilded cage - as those whom he has scorned for adhering to theirs. "Sebastian, as Anquetil had said, had been born a prisoner; and his chains were dear to him, although he might pretend to strive against them."\textsuperscript{118} Having come to terms with his own condition, Sebastian can re-encounter Anquetil, his original guide, mentor and friend. He can accept the man he previously rejected when he refused to acknowledge the truth about his own situation.

Suitably, the climax for the novel is the coronation of King George V on 22 June 1911, marking the end of the Edwardian era on the one hand, and also in its ancient ritual confirming to Sebastian his subjection to his condition in life. Symbolically his act of fealty to the King - as a peer of the realm - is an act of abnegation.

He imagined that all life had been stifled under the magnificence of ceremonial and the shroud of the crimson cloak .... He recognised the moment as having an immense importance for him. Westminster and the lords temporal and spiritual had beaten him.\textsuperscript{119}

Symbolically his imprisonment in his class and privilege is confirmed when the door of the family coach sticks, and he

\textsuperscript{118} V. Sackville-West, \textit{The Edwardians}, p. 328.

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 342 - 343.
physically cannot escape from the place allotted to him by tradition and heredity.

Among the throng outside the Abbey, the young Duke meets Leonard Anquetil, who has returned to England in order to get engaged to Sebastian's sister, Viola. He is on his way to depart on another journey of discovery, and repeats his invitation to Sebastian to join him. The invitation obviously functions on a metaphoric as well as a physical level. Again Anquetil forces Sebastian to penetrate to the heart of the matter: Chevron and what it represents. The novel concludes with a pleasing ambiguity, namely that Sebastian agrees to accompany Anquetil, in other words agrees to break the bonds, but in order that he may be a better master for Chevron, in other words entrenching his place in the traditional scheme of things. The dilemma that Sebastian loves Chevron, representing a better, more chivalrous and harmonious past, but a past that enchains and imprisons him, and has to be replaced by a more democratic, perhaps just dispensation, is not resolved, because it is the author's own dilemma. Vita Sackville-West admitted that she was not at ease in the emerging modern world, and yet she was brave enough to look her own world of privilege with all its shortcomings in the face. The ambivalence of Sebastian's attitude to Chevron lends the novel an elegiac quality and precludes it from becoming facile and simplistic. In Vita Sackville-West's novel, Family History, published two years after The Edwardians, Sebastian's plight is again cited and his fate remains unresolved: "He is an unhappy man", who travels abroad for half the year and "buries" himself for the rest of the year at Chevron, suggesting that he lacks the essential dynamic of the "true aristocrat" as Ames defines it, whose time has passed. (The word "buries" recalls the "exquisite sepulchre" as Chevron is described in the earlier novel.) One is reminded of Sackville-West the poet, the "tired swimmer in the waves of time", admitting that she cannot adjust to the modern egalitarian society which started to surface

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120V. Sackville-West, Family History, p. 173.
significantly during the Edwardian era:

I let a plummet down in lieu of fate,
And lose myself within a slumber,
Submerged, elate.\textsuperscript{121}

Sebastian's failure to appropriate that vitality and leadership which his caste used to incarnate is therefore the failure of the aristocracy to meet the changes of the twentieth century with resilience. As an expression of Vita Sackville-West's despair, it is balanced by her portrayal of a vital aristocrat, meeting and revelling in the challenges of his time, in her next novel but one, \textit{Family History}. Miles Vane-Merrick is a successful Labour politician, energetically involved in the crucial issues of the country's well-being. Vane-Merrick is clearly associated with a better past. Living in an inherited castle, modelled on Sissinghurst, the castle that Vita Sackville-West and her husband bought in 1930, he is consistently described in terms of the Renaissance or Elizabethan age, which Miss Sackville-West regarded as an era when the aristocracy played a central role in English society, and had not undergone the process of emasculation which limited it in the twentieth century to a small-minded obsession with its own separateness and superiority:

Your Englishman of birth and education wasn't always the cautious, repressed creature he is today. There was a time when he was ashamed neither of his feelings nor of his culture. He was cruder and coarser then, in many ways, less gentlemanly, according to modern ideas, but more gentlemanly, as I see it.\textsuperscript{122}

A minor character comments on Miles's nature; "Somebody once said he was very Elizabethan. He's very clever, you know, ... he

\textsuperscript{121}Cf. Richard Church, \textit{V. Sackville-West: A Poet in a Tradition}, \textit{Fortnightly}, CXLVIII, 1940, p. 604.

\textsuperscript{122}V. Sackville-West, \textit{Family History}, p. 169.
likes poetry, I believe he even writes it."\footnote{123}{V. Sackville-West, \textit{Family History}, p. 30.} Lady Viola Anquetil (Sebastian’s sister, now married to Leonard Anquetil) echoes that perception: "... I have a theory that Miles is a reversion to type .... [He] would have fitted in the Italian Renaissance ... the imaginary Miles of the sixteenth century, whether in Italy or in England, had no limitations. He drank life greedily."\footnote{124}{Ibid., pp. 169 - 170.} Miles himself reveals Vita Sackville-West’s views, when he says, "I’m a Tory squire"\footnote{125}{Ibid., p. 113.}. He probably represents the fictional fulfilment of the author’s desire to live out the part of the patrician male. The harmony of Sebastian’s relationship with Wickenden, representing the harmony which Sackville-West perceived between the upper and working classes to the exclusion of the middle class, in a past and better hierarchical England, is also echoed by the relationship between Vane-Merrick and his farm worker, Munday: "Miles in his castle, managing his farm and his estate, talking to Munday, was the true traditional Miles."\footnote{126}{Ibid., p. 124.} The author again laments the decline, the decay of her class, to a pusillanimous obsession with class solidarity. Lady Viola, who with her brother Sebastian, represents the point of view of the author in \textit{The Edwardians} \footnote{127}{As they are dual representatives of the author’s somewhat androgynous nature, the names of the twins clearly refer to \textit{Twelfth Night}: a brother and sister who are so similar that they can be mistaken for each other, and are indeed interchangeable. Interestingly, Waugh follows the same pattern in \textit{Brideshead Revisited} (cf. Chapter 2), where the brother and sister are called Sebastian and Julia, and where they succeed one another in the affections of the protagonist, Charles Ryder, rather as Viola and Sebastian succeed one another in the affections of Olivia in \textit{Twelfth Night}.}, re-appears in \textit{Family History} to bemoan the fate of her class: "Anyhow, the better bred you were, and the more expensively educated, the tighter you learnt to shut your mind. You were taught to be less and less of an individual, and more
and more of a type" 128 - a type imprisoned by an immutable law, a creed of self-preservation, which, in the view of Vita Sackville-West, ironically proves self-destructive, resulting in dehumanized, self-limiting individuals, instead of the vital Renaissance man, who "had no limitations".

Miles Vane-Merrick's politics are in line with his Renaissance nature. For all his being a Labour Member of Parliament, he is no democrat: "He loved the people, though he loathed and mistrusted democracy." 129 As in many other respects, Miles expresses here the author's attitudes. In her diary, Vita wrote:

I hate democracy. I hate la populace. I wish education had never been introduced. I don't like tyranny, but I like an intelligent oligarchy. I wish la populace had never been encouraged to emerge from its rightful place. I should like to see them as well fed and well-housed as T.T. cows, but no more articulate than that. 130

These harsh somewhat Machiavellian words sound perilously close to the ideas of the leader of the Fascist movement in Britain, Sir Oswald Mosley, who interestingly enough, crossed the floor in Parliament from the Conservative Party to the Labour Party in 1920. He resigned from the Labour Party in 1930 to establish his own New Party and eventually the British Union of Fascists. What is more, Mosley's views were not regarded as anachronistic or defunct or 'Renaissance' at the time, but as radical and futuristic. His memorandum on unemployment (1930) was described thirty years later by R.H.S. Crossman as "a whole generation ahead of Labour thinking." 131 Mosley, also an aristocrat 132,

128 V. Sackville-West, Family History, p. 170.

129 Ibid., p. 113.

130 Michael Stevens, V. Sackville-West, p. 45.

was a committed and incisive radical young politician, much like Vane-Merrick, with apparently very similar views on democracy. Although the Mosleys were close friends of Harold Nicolson, and Harold joined Mosley’s New Party in 1931 (he did not follow him into the Fascist movement), there is no real evidence that Vane-Merrick is substantially based on Mosley. Vita is said to have “loathed Oswald Mosley” and to have opposed Harold’s joining his Party. 133 Vane-Merrick is much more a projection of the masculine side of Vita’s sexually ambivalent nature, expressing her personal and idiosyncratic views of England and the class structure. 134 The views Vita shares with Mosley, and which Vane-Merrick expresses, are more likely the result of what David Cannadine in his study of the fall of the British aristocracy, calls the “politics of paranoia” - one of the forms the aristocracy’s struggle to come politically and socially to terms


133 Cf. Victoria Glendinning, Vita, p. 244.

134 Michael Stevens suggests that Miles “would appear to be a combination of the personality of H.N. [Harold Nicolson] and the political and economic theories of Maynard Keynes” (Michael Stevens, V. Sackville-West, p. 57.). The dynamic Vane-Merrick appears to me to be far closer to Vita herself, than to the mild Nicolson. Victoria Glendinning also maintains that Miles has “touches of Harold”, but this probably refers to the fact that Vane-Merrick is, a “scholar and author, tall, handsome, country-loving”, than to his personality. (Cf. Victoria Glendinning, Vita, p. 252.)

In All Passion Spent (1931), the novel Vita Sackville-West published between The Edwardians and Family History, and which many critics regard as her best work, she also expresses her distrust of democratic institutions. She depicts a democratic parliament - the voice of la populace, as she scornfully calls the common people in her diary - as a group of extremists constantly tottering on the brink of folly, with a few (aristocratic) voices, calling in a wilderness of populist lunacy. (Cf. V. Sackville-West, All Passion Spent, London: The Hogarth Press, 1931, p. 14.)
with the twentieth century, took.\footnote{Cf. David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, pp. 539 - 552.}

As in *The Edwardians*, so in *Family History*, V. Sackville-West looks for an escape from the decadent aristocratic present in a more illustrious past, represented in the first novel by the country house Chevron, and in the second by the Renaissance figure of Miles Vane-Merrick.

In *Family History*, however, there is also an escape to the future, embodied in a particular character just as a better past is personified by Vane-Merrick. This character is Dan Jarrold. While the Jarrolds are presented as the quintessential middle class family, it is made clear in several ways that Dan is the aristocrat of the future. Old man Jarrold, the founder of the family fortune, states confidently, "They say it takes three generations to make a gentleman. Well, Dan's got his three generations behind him."\footnote{V. Sackville-West, *Family History*, p. 15.} Dan goes to Eton and establishes a close relationship with his mother's lover, the vital Renaissance aristocrat, Vane-Merrick. It becomes clear that these two have more in common with each other than with either the handsome, empty-headed, overbred aristocrats seen at the Chevron House ball, or with Dan's narrow-minded middle class relatives. Dan is reared with all the wealth and privileges of the modern upper class, but shows a lucidity of thought and spontaneity of spirit closer to that of his mentor, the Renaissance aristocrat:

> Evelyn wondered how much harm it did to Dan, to climb into a Rolls-Royce and have a grey squirrel rug put over his knees by a footman .... He [was] the very model of a rich man's grandson. On the floor in front of him, however, instead of golf-clubs and a gun-case, lay his painting-box and a rolled up camp-stool.\footnote{Ibid., p. 55.}

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\footnote{Cf. David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, pp. 539 - 552.}
Miles Vane-Merrick writes poetry and Dan Jarrold paints, showing themselves closer to the multi-faceted, highly developed culture of the sixteenth century, than to the pale modern aristocracy with its unthinking pursuit of pleasure, represented here by the golf-clubs and gun-case. Dan expresses an interest in the well-being of the workers of the Jarrold industries, a twentieth-century equivalent of feudal agricultural labourers: "He had no desire for personal riches. On the other hand, he had a great desire for the Orlestone miners to benefit out of his profits".\textsuperscript{138}

As an alternative to harking back to a better past, Sackville-West here suggests that the aristocracy shows resilience by recruiting to their ranks a more vital, spiritually substantial individual than their own effete offspring. As I indicate in the Introduction, this has been a time-honoured mode of renewal for the British aristocracy. The way for Dan’s apotheosis into nobleman is prepared by his grandfather’s elevation to the peerage as Lord Orlestone—Dan is his heir—and Dan’s cousin comments significantly, "... nowadays people soon forgot that one’s grandfather had been a self-made man, even a man of the people: the new families quickly merged with the genuine article." A new, potent nobility is grafted onto the frail, degenerate aristocracy of the past, and appear to be closer in nature to the nobility of the sixteenth century than to their anaemic counterparts of the twentieth.

Family History deals not only with class, but also with gender. The relationship between the aristocratic Miles Vane-Merrick and the middle-class Evelyn Jarrold becomes a metaphor, not only for the relationship between their two classes, but also their sexes. Family History is thus surprisingly modern in its equation of class with gender. The relationship between Miles and Evelyn falters, because of the conflict between her submissive conservatism and possessiveness which is associated both with her

\textsuperscript{138} V. Sackville-West, Family History, p. 238.
sex and her class, and his liberal open-minded embracing vitality
which is characterized as both male and aristocratic.

That it is not the aristocratic male who would bring about a
change in sexual mores is the theme of All Passion Spent (1931),
which has often been called Vita Sackville-West’s best novel.\textsuperscript{139}
In this work Vita pours out her frustration and anger at the
disadvantages of being a woman in her own age. In 1919, she
wrote to Harold,

> Women ought to have the same freedom as men when they are
> young. It is a rotten and ridiculous system at present;
> it’s simply cheating one of one’s youth. It was alright
> for Victorians. But this generation is discarding, and the
> next will have discarded, the chrysalis. Women, like men,
> ought to have their youth ... glutted with freedom ...\textsuperscript{140}

At the heart of Vita Sackville-West’s feminism lies her
everlasting regret that she had not been born a boy, so that she
could have inherited her beloved Knole. Because of the male-
oriented principle of succession to the peerage and the
entailment tradition, Vita’s being a girl disqualified her from
inheriting both title and estate. The psychological strain of
this realization is at least partly responsible for her sexual
duality. Her son subscribes to this analysis: "We understood her
masculinity, her enduring regret that she was not born a boy, a
boy who would have inherited Knole ..."\textsuperscript{141} and she herself
admits of her girlhood: "I made a great deal of being hardy, and

\textsuperscript{139}Her son, Nigel Nicolson, calls it "the best of her novels"
(Nigel Nicolson (ed.), Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters 1930
- 1939, London: Collins, 1966, p. 49) and Leonard Woolf agrees
that it "was, I think, the best novel which she ever wrote."
(Leonard Woolf, Downhill All the Way, p. 159.)

\textsuperscript{140}Nigel Nicolson, Portrait of a Marriage, p. 143.

\textsuperscript{141}Nigel Nicolson (ed.), Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters
1930 - 1939, p. 17.
as like a boy as possible." 142 Vita loved Woolf's fictional biography of her, Orlando, which appeared in the year her father died and the estate passed to her uncle, the 4th Lord Sackville, because it accommodated the ambivalence of her sexual self, by making Orlando at times a man and at times a woman, and because it gave Knole back to her, and artistically reunited her eternally with her cherished childhood home. 143

Yet, Vita Sackville-West eschewed being called a feminist because of the militant and anti-social connotations of the word at the time 144. In All Passion Spent, she comments on the heroine, Lady Slane, who has had to sacrifice her own life, interests, and ambitions to be an artist to those of her husband and children,

Yet she was no feminist. She was too wise a woman to indulge in such luxuries as an imagined martyrdom .... She would go no further than to acknowledge that the fact of her being a woman made the situation a degree more difficult. 145

Moreover, she appears not to regard the disadvantaged position of women as the consequence of a wilful plot by men to oppress them, and seems to put the blame for the condition of women at least partly on the shoulders of the women themselves: "Yet all the time, as an undercurrent, the older women seemed to have a kind of secret among themselves, a reason for sage smiles and glances, a secret ...." 146 About her husband, Lady Slane comments, "He was not to blame. He had only taken for granted the things he was entitled to take for granted, thereby ranging

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143 Cf. Victoria Glendinning, Vita, p. 204.
144 Ibid., p. 201.
146 Ibid., p. 158.
himself with the women and entering into the general conspiracy to defraud her of her chosen life."\(^{147}\) This perception that women are apparently responsible for being defrauded of their own lives, is, however, undermined by another perception that even in this, women have little choice.

Oh, what a pother, she thought, women make about marriage! and yet who can blame them, she added, when one recollects that marriage ... is the only thing that women have to make a pother about in the whole of their lives? ... Is it not for this function that they have been formed, dressed, bedizened, educated ... safeguarded, repressed, all that at a given moment they may be delivered, or may deliver their daughters over, to Minister to a Man?\(^{148}\)

In spite of its modern approach as regards the position of women, the novel, like Vita Sackville-West's other novels, reveals a distinct hankering after a better social past, here really at odds with the affirmation of a worse sexual past. The better past in *All Passion Spent* is represented by the fine old house Lady Slane withdraws to, and the courteous old people she has to deal with in her new life. Mr Gosheron's deploring "the decline of craftsmanship in the modern world"\(^{149}\) is strongly reminiscent of Sebastian's complaints about tenement houses. To a degree, Lady Slane's action of protest against the repressive conservative measures of her society, is ironically not a withdrawal into a better future, but a better past. The ambiguity of Vita Sackville-West's attitudes to time and society, are again reflected here. Rather touchingly, Deborah's desperate fantasies of escape before the wedding, "... thoughts of nothing less than escape and disguise; a changed name, a travestied sex, and

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\(^{147}\) V. Sackville-West, *All Passion Spent*, p. 164.

\(^{148}\) Ibid., p. 159.

\(^{149}\) Ibid., pp. 111, 115.
freedom in some foreign city"\textsuperscript{150} echoes Vita's own bid for selfhood: her elopement with Violet Trefusis to Paris, where she adopted male attire and a male pseudonym, until the two husbands arrived to resolve the situation and take the two women to their separate homes.

In \textit{The Edwardians} class also plays a role in sexual attitudes. Viola is the liberated young woman, who has had the courage to assess herself and her class honestly and to act according to the integrity of her own convictions. When her brother exclaims, "Mercy, Viola, I never knew you held these convictions", she replies, "... I suspect you hold them too, but you haven't faced them. Too unpleasant."\textsuperscript{151} However, when Viola decides to fly in the face of society and assert her independence, it is ironically very much by virtue of her background that she is able to do so. What other girl would have been in the financial and social position to take a flat in London, and blandly announce to her horrified mother, "I'm of age."\textsuperscript{152} This triumphant phrase which defeats the Duchess and signifies the coming of age of a gender, as much as of an individual, is uttered with a confidence made possible only by Lady Viola's privileged aristocratic background. We thus have a picture here of the aristocrat as feminist. In her book on her family, \textit{Knole and the Sackvilles}, V. Sackville-West suggests that her family can stand as representative of their various ages: "Such interest as the Sackvilles have lies, I think, in their being so representative ..." and " ... let them stand each as the prototype of his age ...."\textsuperscript{153} One detects that very "distinctive arrogance of the aristocrat" of which Leonard Woolf speaks, when she makes the aristocratic Viola a representative of her age, even in promoting such an egalitarian movement as women's rights.

\textsuperscript{150}V. Sackville-West, \textit{All Passion Spent}, p. 148.

\textsuperscript{151}V. Sackville-West, \textit{The Edwardians}, p. 243.

\textsuperscript{152}Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 312.

\textsuperscript{153}V. Sackville-West, \textit{Knole and the Sackvilles}, p. 28.
Viola closely resembles Miles Vane-Merrick as a progressive figure, freed from the constraints of an artificial creed of class solidarity, but nevertheless, distinctly aristocratic in everything they do and say, and undeniably carrying the author’s approval in this respect. We are again confronted with the author’s ambiguous attitudes to her own class, whom she sees at once as pitifully decadent, and as proud prototypes of the best of their ages. The author appears to hover between the attitude, expressed by the progressive thinker, Anquetil, that he “for the life of him, could not see that these people were in any way remarkable”\textsuperscript{154}, and another belief which makes her present Miles Vane-Merrick and Viola, and even the more conventional aristocrat, Sebastian, as distinctly remarkable. Michael Stevens relates Vita’s ambiguous attitude towards heredity to Vita’s personal background. “On the one hand there was the gipsy blood [of her grandmother, the Spanish dancer], which ... she considered responsible for much of her mother’s eccentricity .... On the other side there was the Sackville blood, traceable back to the Conquest, the blood that had already produced two poets. She must have felt herself pulled into two directions; wishing to believe in the strength of heredity for the sake of the Sackville blood, and at the same time afraid to do so, because this would mean that her gipsy blood was equally free to influence her. One moment she rejected the inheritance of her forefathers, the next she was compelled to admit it.”\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{154}V. Sackville-West, \textit{The Edwardians}, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{155}Michael Stevens, \textit{V. Sackville-West}, p. 34.

Miss Sackville-West’s pre-occupation with rival hereditary strains also surfaces elsewhere in her writing, notably in her early novel \textit{Heritage}:

‘What am I to believe? that she is cursed with a dual nature, the one coarse and unbridled, the other delicate, conventional, practical, motherly refined? Have I hit the nail on the head? And is it, can it be, the result of the separate, antagonistic strains in her blood, the southern and the northern legacy? Did she love Westmacott with the one, and me with the other? I am afraid to pry deeper into this mystery, for who can tell what taint of his blood may not appear suddenly to stain the clear waters of his life?’
Vita's troubled attitude to heredity is voiced in her poem "Heredity", written at Long Barn, her house in Kent, in 1928. In this poem, she expresses the inescapable hold of one's heredity, as much and as strong a trap as the social mores which hold the Duchess and Lady Roehampton in thrall:

What is this thing, this bond,
That brings here together?
That keeps us, though we roam,
All on a length of tether?

Why are our faces cut
All in the same sad feature?
It is a quirk, a trick
Played on us all by nature.

I am not you, I am I;
Nothing is foreordained.
I hold my liberty
Unstained and unconstrained.

Because I have your eyes
Does it mean I have your heart?
No, you are you, I am I,
Independent and apart.

Violently I refuse
All seisin with another,
Be she my kinswoman,
Be he my bloodbrother.

-Yet stay. Had he that lies
Dead in the chapel, not
The same unhappy eyes?
My father that me begot?

Yet stay. Have they not all,
The portraits in gilded frame,
Upstairs, the same sad pensive look
The same and still the same?

What is this thing, this strain,
Persistent, what this shape
That cuts us from birth,
And seals without escape?¹⁵⁶

In the last stanza, Sackville-West suggests the hold that heredity has on individuals - "without escape". On the one hand it imprisons the aristocrats in their gilded cages, but on the other ensures that they remain remarkable, superior, fit for "gilded frames" and tombs in chapels, the natural inhabitants of houses like Knole, proudly waving their "incognisance" of the world of tenement houses.

I believe that while she would pay lip-service to egalitarianism through Anquetil's words, her whole aristocratic soul revolted against this particular aspect of modernity, as it did against many others, as she struggled "in the waves of time", and that she remained in actual fact, a firm believer in the inherent superiority of the aristocracy. It is therefore with so much more sadness and eloquence that she bemoans the decline and fall of her race in novels such as All Passion Spent, Family History, and above all The Edwardians.

¹⁵⁶ "Heredity" in Michael Stevens, V. Sackville-West, p. 116.

¹⁵⁷ "If The Edwardians is a vulgar book - as some fastidious critics feel it is - it is precisely as vulgar as its subject matter." (Victoria Glendinning, Introduction to the Virago Modern Classic edition of The Edwardians, p. xv.)
mistaken for vulgarity. This is one of the strengths of her writing, the quality suggested by the Manchester Guardian critic when he wrote in 1934:

Do not read Miss Sackville-West’s novel [The Dark Island \textsuperscript{158}] unless you are strong enough; it will be rather like throwing your hat into the lion’s den. But if after this warning you can protect yourself and go armed, your reward will be a feast of fire and beauty.\textsuperscript{159}

This baldness of style is, however satisfactorily balanced by the ambiguities of her approach, ambiguities which, as I have indicated, stem from her own awkward position in a world she did not find congenial - a woman in a man’s world, an aristocrat in an egalitarian society, a pastoral squire in a world of industrial shopstewards - bravely confronting distasteful realities and at the same time yearning for escape to a kinder, better, and more exclusive world, more suited to her vigorous, aristocratic nature. Vita Sackville-West wrote that she was subject to heredity which

\begin{quote}
cuts us from our birth,  
And seals without escape.
\end{quote}

She was indeed cut from an impressive and noble cloth, and probably would have been more at home in the exhilarating world of her admired ancestor, Sir Thomas Sackville, the poet. Yet, the agony caused by her displacement put her in the position to write with such sympathy and insight, and at the same time such relentless truth, about the decline and decadence of her own aristocratic caste.

\textsuperscript{158}V. Sackville-West, The Dark Island, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co. 1934.

\textsuperscript{159}Manchester Guardian, 2 November 1934, p. 11, quoted in Michael Stevens, V. Sackville-West, p. 62.
II. THE YEARS OF L'ENTRE DEUX GUERRES

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years - Twenty years largely wasted, the years of 'l'entre deux guerres' -

T.S. Eliot

The First World War was the earthquake only anticipated by the tremors of the Edwardian Age. It shattered the massif of the nineteenth-century establishment and cast the world by force into the Modern Age. The after-shocks of this catastrophe would be felt in all sections of society, from the bewildered aristocracy down to the working class.

In terms of sheer numbers, the aristocracy suffered greater losses than any other class. Young nobles had initially volunteered enthusiastically and virtually en masse for service, almost as a matter of class solidarity. According to Cannadine, there was a feeling among aristocrats that the best years of their class were over by 1914, and for them the War came as a God-given opportunity to prove themselves as the warrior class of the nation:

By tradition, by training, and by temperament, the aristocracy was the warrior class. They rode horses, hunted foxes, fired shot-guns. They knew how to lead, how to command and how to look after the men in their charge. Here, then, was their chance - to demonstrate conclusively that they were not the redundant reactionaries of radical propaganda, but the patriotic class of knightly crusaders and chivalrous heroes, who would defend the national honour and national interest in the hour of its greatest trial.¹

The price they had to pay for this demonstration of patriotism and class leadership was high and left a lasting scar. Almost every aristocratic family was afflicted. Cannadine cites the following impressive yet by no means complete list of multiple deaths in noble families:

Three Wyndhams, two Grenfells, and two Charterises [the intellectual and artistic noble families who formed the core of the aristocratic society, the "souls"] had fallen. Lord Penrhyn lost his eldest son and two half-brothers, The fifth Lord de Freyne and one of his half-brothers were killed on the same day in May 1915, and another half-brother died two years later. Lord Kimberley, Lord Middleton, and Lord Denbigh each lost two sons, and so did Sir George Dashwood. The dowager Countess of Airlie had lost her husband in the Boer War, and now lost a son, Patrick, and a son-in-law, Clement Mitford. One of Anthony Eden's brothers was killed in France in October 1914, and another went down at Jutland in May 1916. Of the great Lord Salisbury's ten grandsons, five were killed in action .... On the west wall of the south transept in Chester Cathedral is a memorial commemorating thirteen members of the Grey-Egerton family of Oulton Park, who had died on active service during the war.²

According to the final tally, one out of five of all peers and peer's sons died. The ratio for the population as a whole (thus including this high aristocratic figure) was one in eight.³ "Truly," Lady Curzon later recalled, "England lost the flower of her young men in those terrible days .... There was scarcely one of our friends who did not lose a son, a husband, or a brother."⁴

However, the repercussions reached more widely than the upper classes. The War had demonstrated beyond question the crucial importance to the nation of underprivileged groups such as women and the working classes, and this naturally generated demands from these groups for an increase in political, social and

²David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, pp. 79 - 80.
³Ibid., p. 83.
⁴Ibid., p. 81.
economic status. Women indeed won suffrage in Britain in 1918 as a direct consequence of the war. In the economic sphere, demobilization was followed by a frantic boom during which great land sales took place, factories could be sold for very high prices, and war gratuities, rising wages, easy credit and the relaxation of government controls resulted in a brief period of relative affluence and full employment, sustaining expectations for the future. Prime Minister Lloyd George promised that slums would be swept away from the face of Britain and "homes fit for heroes" would be built in their place. These promises withered in the light of reality as the boom was replaced by a searing depression, causing the Liberal coalition government to fall in 1922. A Conservative government vainly tried to cure the economic ailments but, unsuccessful in their attempts, was replaced by the first Labour government in 1924. This lasted only ten months before it was replaced by another Conservative Ministry, followed by a second brief Labour Ministry. Eventually a National Coalition was established in 1931, by which time a world-wide depression had set in. During this period of instability industrial relations deteriorated badly which led to the general strike in 1926 (described by Evelyn Waugh in Brideshead Revisited). Although the strike was unsuccessful, the labour movement also made some gains during this period. The principle of public housing being supplied by the government, for

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example, became entrenched during the post-war era.\textsuperscript{10}

In spite of the increased economic difficulties, the image posterity retains of the nineteen-twenties, is one of gaiety. The counterside of the economic deprivations was the mad pursuit of entertainment and enjoyment, precipitated by a relief that the war was over, and that one was actually still alive. This facet of society, exemplified by the emergence of the "bright young things" and chronicled in Waugh's early novels, was met with consternation by the establishment:

> There were official estimates for post-war disillusionment and cynicism, but not for all this enjoyment. To be grateful for still being alive was one thing, to be glad to be alive was another.\textsuperscript{11}

As the phenomenon was partly precipitated by a cynicism among the young with regard to the values and judgments of the older generation which had precipitated them into the Great War, the new morality campaign launched by the establishment had little effect.\textsuperscript{12} The gaiety of the dancing, feasting youth was widely reported and popularized by the newspapers\textsuperscript{13}, who had discovered that these mild outrages made good copy, initiating the symbiosis between press and high society which caused Lady Londonderry to comment mournfully in 1938: "Society as such now means nothing, and it represents nothing except wealth and advertisement .... England has become Americanised."\textsuperscript{14} At the centre of this

\textsuperscript{10}Cf. John Lovell, "History: Economic and Social" in Cox and Dyson (eds), The Twentieth Century Mind, Vol. 2, pp. 30 - 34.


\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13}Cf. T.O. Lloyd, Empire to Welfare State, p. 135.

\textsuperscript{14}David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, p. 355.
continuous celebration stood the Prince of Wales, eminent representative of the merry society of the roaring twenties, "a fair, animated story-book royalty sparklingly alive at the heart of the decade in whose meaningless afterglow he was later to be trapped, like a dragonfly in amber."\textsuperscript{15} The abdication of King Edward VIII in 1936 was a fitting though slightly belated conclusion to an era of frenzied enjoyment. He was succeeded by his more serious, family-orientated brother, George VI. The transition signalled the return to strong traditional values which would carry the British through the Second World War.

A more intellectual expression of post-War disillusionment and the shattering of the old world order was found in T.S. Eliot's \textit{The Waste Land}, published in 1922, which together with James Joyce's \textit{Ulysses}, published in the same year, confirmed the sophisticated literary voice of post-War modernism.

As the depressed thirties got under way, new strains of political thinking started establishing themselves. In Italy, Mussolini wrote a defence of Italian fascism for the \textit{Enciclopedia Italiana} in 1932, and Hitler had written \textit{Mein Kampf} in the late twenties. Fascism found its English counterpart in the British Union led by the aristocratic Sir Oswald Mosley. At the same time, Marxism was showing its muscle in the Soviet Union, inspiring in Britain an enthusiasm among workers and intellectuals alike for its egalitarian doctrines and stimulating a "deluge of Marxist analysis, diagnosis, and prediction"\textsuperscript{16} in Britain in the 1930s. Traditional British Liberalism and Conservatism suffered from the onslaughts of these more populist philosophies, heralding the advent of the "Age of the Common Man" so much deplored in Waugh's writings, but nevertheless managed to keep the majority of the public within its familiar fold. Threatened by new ideologies, Pope Pius XI reformulated the Catholic Church's social and


\textsuperscript{16}Raymond Plant, "Social Thought", in Cox and Dyson (eds), \textit{The Twentieth Century Mind}, Vol. 2, p. 69.
political doctrines and in Britain the Anglo-Catholic poet, T.S. Eliot, published The Idea of a Christian Society (1939). Conflict between the various ideologies and consequent realignments would escalate as the decade progressed and culminate in the eruption of war in 1939.\textsuperscript{17} The War ended with a resurgence of democratic socialism and liberalism\textsuperscript{18}, paradoxically confirming the triumph of the Age of the Common Man in the face of the defeat or discrediting of more obviously populist movements - Fascism and Communism - which ultimately proved to be vehicles for the Great Leader rather than the Common Man.

The two decades between the wars signalled momentous change for the aristocratic community in Britain as they tried to cope with the collapse of their assured financial and social positions. The first change was that many disposed of their land, which through the centuries had been the foundation of their wealth and the core of their existence. In 1919, for example, Lords Aberdeen, Aylesford, Beauchamp, Cathcart, Middleton, Northampton, Petre, Tollemache and Yarborough were among the leading vendors of land in Britain and a staggering million acres of land changed hands. This record was broken in 1920, when the Dukes of Leeds, Beaufort, Marlborough, Grafton, Northumberland, Rutland and Norfolk - the very pinnacle of the aristocratic pyramid - were among the sellers.\textsuperscript{19} The sale of land was accompanied by an equally staggering sale of art treasures as noblemen, panicking in the light of new living conditions and life styles, unburdened themselves of paintings, silver and furniture worth hundreds of thousands of pounds.\textsuperscript{20} Industrial assets followed other effects

\textsuperscript{17}Cf. Raymond Plant, "Social Thought" in Cox and Dyson (eds), The Twentieth Century Mind, Vol. 2, pp. 68 - 69.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 92.

\textsuperscript{19}David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, p. 111.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 115.
as patricians got rid of mines, railways, docks and collieries. Since all these were exchanged for cash which could be reinvested, this did not necessarily mean a decline in wealth or income, and by the late nineteen-twenties the Duke of Devonshire, for example, had managed to increase his disposable income in this transfer or restructuring of assets. However, the flight from land was indicative of a change in the structure of society and its perception of the role of the aristocracy which for many of these spelt irreversible decline and would leave the class as a whole feeling increasingly besieged as the century progressed.


22 Ibid., p. 135.
Although Evelyn Waugh was not an aristocrat by birth, he preferred to associate with aristocrats, marry aristocrats, write about aristocrats, and clearly would have liked to be an aristocrat himself. After the publication of *Brideshead Revisited* in 1945, one of the recurrent criticisms levelled at the novel was that it was snobbish and demonstrated a child-like reverence for the aristocracy. Edmund Wilson wrote in the *New Yorker* that

Waugh's snobbery, hitherto held in check by satirical point of view, has here emerged shameless and rampant. His admiration for the qualities of the older British families, as contrasted with modern upstarts, had its value in his earlier novels .... But here ... his cult of the high nobility is allowed to become so rapturous and solemn that it finally gives the impression of being the only real religion in the book.\(^\text{23}\)

Rose Macaulay added in *Horizon* that "Mr Waugh has been charged with snobbishness. I would rather call it self-indulgence in the pleasures of adolescent surrender to glamour ...."\(^\text{24}\) Later critics have conceded that much of the bile provoked by the aristocratic inclinations of the novel had its roots in political


or sectarian prejudice\textsuperscript{25}. Waugh’s views were very unpopular at the time, an era characterized by the statement by Henry Wallace, Vice-President of the United States, in February 1944, that this was "the century of the common man".\textsuperscript{26} It is nevertheless undeniably true to say that Waugh had an almost child-like reverence for the British aristocracy. On a particular occasion, when Waugh was in the company of a friend, the Hon. Peter Beatty\textsuperscript{27} and a psychiatrist, Beatty pointed to Waugh, and remarked to the psychiatrist: "His trouble, doctor, is that he wants to be a Cavendish."\textsuperscript{28} Waugh’s biographer and friend, Christopher Sykes, also describes a conversation between Waugh

\textsuperscript{25} Cf. e.g. Calvin W. Lane, \textit{Evelyn Waugh}, Boston: Twayne Publishers, a division of G.K. Hall and Co, 1981, p. 102:

... but in these reviews [Wilson and Macaulay] and in many others the praise or blame sprang from political or sectarian bias, rather than from a reasoned critical evaluation ....


But what has most offended readers hostile to \textit{Brideshead Revisited} is the narrator’s generously indulged spleen against the democratization of English society in his lifetime, a development epitomized for him by his brother-officer, Hooper.


\textsuperscript{27} Hon. Peter Randolph Louis Beatty (1910 – 1949), second son of the famous British Admiral the first Earl Beatty. (Burke’s Peerage and Baronetage, 105th edition, 4th impression, London: Burke’s Peerage (Genealogical Books), 1980, p. 205.)


The Cavendish family referred to in the remark, is one of the most prominent British aristocratic families, "with a long and glorious tradition of political service, second to none", currently headed by the 11th Duke of Devonshire. (Brian Masters, \textit{The Dukes}, London: Blond & Briggs, 1977, p. 167.)
and the Earl of Antrim²⁹, Sykes's brother-in-law, in which Waugh expressed his regret at being descended exclusively from middle class antecedents:

'But you can always boast,' said my brother-in-law, 'that you are descended from one of the most famous lords in our history.' Evelyn shook his head sadly. 'Lord Cockburn,' he said, 'was ennobled for practical reasons. I would like to be descended from a useless lord.'³⁰

A life-long admirer of the British aristocracy, Evelyn Arthur St John Waugh was born in 1903 into a comfortable middle class family. His father, Arthur Waugh, was a well-known literary critic and publisher, chairman of the firm of Chapman and Hall. Waugh was educated at Lancing, a respected private school, though not quite of the first rank, and thence proceeded to Hertford College, Oxford, having won a scholarship to read History.³¹ Christopher Sykes confirms in his biography of Waugh that, while the latter was related to a number of eminent personalities such as Edmund Gosse, Holman Hunt and the famous British judge, Lord Cockburn, he appears to have valued these but little in the light of his admiration for the aristocracy.³² It is also noticeable

²⁹Randal John Somerled McDonnell, 8th Earl of Antrim, (1911 - 1977), m. 1934 Angela, daughter of Sir Mark Sykes, 6th Bt. (Burke’s Peerage and Baronetage, 1980, p. 90.)

³⁰Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh, p. 5.

³¹Hertford is likewise described by Waugh as

a respectable but rather dreary little college .... In my time there was no scholar of importance among the dons; no President of the Union or of the O.U.D.S., no Blue; the boat never came near the head of the river. There was at the time a generally recognised order of precedence among the colleges. Hertford came half-way up, on a par with Oriel and Exeter.


³²Cf. Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh, pp. 4 - 5.
that in *A Little Learning*, described by Waugh as "The First Volume of an Autobiography", but the only one to be published, Waugh shows an exaggerated pre-occupation with the question of which of his ancestors were entitled to bear arms and which not. He refers proudly to an ancestor who came from "an ancient but impoverished family of Welsh gentry, unambiguously armigerous"33, while he criticizes a worthy paternal great-great-grandfather, Dr Alexander Waugh, a well-known clergyman, for adopting "early in life ... armorial bearings to which it is scarcely conceivable that he had any right."34 In 1937, citing his marriage, children and acquisition of property as reasons, he approached his elder brother, the novelist Alec Waugh, to confirm the family’s aristocratic pretensions by applying to the College of Heralds for an official grant of the coat-of-arms illegally adopted by their great-great-grandfather.35 Sykes, an aristocrat himself36, once chided Waugh on his aristocratic aspirations towards a title, saying that Waugh could surely not really desire a knighthood in the light of the mediocre personalities who did get knighted. With disarming candour Waugh replied, "I would go on my knees ... to Mr Attlee; I would lick his boots if he wanted; I would lie in the mud outside Downing Street, if he promised in return to advise the King to make me a knight."37 When Waugh was asked whether he knew a particularly venerable lord of ancient lineage and impressive appearance, his response revealed an equally sardonic honesty:

34Ibid., p. 8.
'Yes .... He's dull', he groaned, 'so dull - so dull. Oh he's so dull! And you can imagine how much I wanted to like him.'

His Oxford years, during which he came to know and befriend a number of interesting and sometimes controversial figures such as the leading aesthete of the day, Harold Acton, as well as people like Robert Byron, Brian Howard and John Sutro, form the basis for some of his most loved and admired writing, the descriptions of life at Oxford in *Brideshead Revisited*. Having proceeded to the Heatherly School of Fine Art in 1924, he became a rather unsuccessful schoolmaster for a time (which experience provided him with some of the material for his first novel *Decline and Fall*), before settling down to write, partly in order to try to earn some money and pacify his most unwilling prospective mother-in-law, Lady Burghclere. His first novel was published in 1928, the year that he married the first of his two aristocratic wives, the Hon. Evelyn Gardner, daughter of Lord Burghclere. (The couple were known among their friends as he-Evelyn and she-Evelyn.) The success of *Decline and Fall* was repeated even more strikingly with the publication of his second novel, *Vile Bodies*, in 1930. While he was writing this work, however, Waugh’s wife left him for another man, an event which traumatized the writer and was probably partly the cause of his conversion to Roman Catholicism, confirmed by his reception into the Roman Catholic Church in September 1930. The extreme pessimism of his novel *A Handful of Dust* (1934), dealing with the break-up of a seemingly happy marriage, is the consequence of his experience with his first wife. Waugh eventually managed to get an annulment of his first marriage and in 1937 married Laura

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38 Christopher Sykes, *Evelyn Waugh*, pp. 245 - 246.

Herbert, a fellow Catholic, once again an aristocrat and a first cousin of his first wife. This marriage would prove singularly happy in spite of Waugh's abrasive personality, and produced six children. After a creditable war career, somewhat complicated by Waugh's thorny character, he settled down as a country gentleman, first at Piers Court in Gloucestershire and then, in 1956, at Combe Florey in Somerset. During the war he wrote Brideshead Revisited (1945), a nostalgic reminiscence on the glamorous pre-War world of the privileged classes in Britain and an illustration of the working of divine grace in the lives of men; a novel which brought him fame and fortune, and yet alienated many of the most fervent admirers of his earlier satiric works. After the war he published notably a further satiric work, The Loved One (1948), a fictional biography of St Helena titled Helena (1950) - his own favourite among his novels, and his war trilogy: Men at Arms (1952), Officers and Gentlemen (1955) and Unconditional Surrender (1961). He died at Combe

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Laura Laetitia Gwendolen Evelyn Herbert (b. 1916), daughter of the Hon. Aubrey Herbert, M.P. (son of the 4th Earl of Carnarvon), by his wife, the Hon. Mary Vesey, daughter of the 4th Viscount de Vesci. (Burke's Peerage and Baronetage, 1980, pp. 486 - 487.)

Christopher Sykes's biography is riddled with descriptions of Waugh's inexplicable and extreme rudeness to all and sundry, directed consistently at those whose views and opinions he disliked, but sometimes also mischievously directed at his friends and close associates. Sykes, himself a close friend and occasional victim of Waugh's, remarks somewhat mildly with reference to Waugh's long and close friendship with Nancy Mitford: "No friendship with Evelyn was perpetually tranquil, not even this one which was perhaps the happiest and most serene he enjoyed in the course of his life." (Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh, p. 348.) On being asked by Nancy Mitford after a particularly nasty incident at which she had been present, how he - a believing Christian and practising Catholic - could behave like that, Waugh replied: "You have no idea ... how much nastier I would be if I was not a Catholic. Without supernatural aid I would hardly be a human being." (Ibid., p. 334.) This aspect of Waugh's personality caused Sykes to refrain for example from fulfilling Waugh's earnest desire to meet T.S. Eliot, who was a friend of his.

These were re-issued in one volume titled Sword of Honour in 1965.
Waugh emerges as a man with a deep and emotional attachment to tradition and to the aristocracy as an admirable traditional institution. He expresses his admiration for the upper classes and his passionate belief in the benefits for society of the class system in general, and the upper classes in particular, in an essay entitled "What to do with the Upper Classes: A Modest Proposal", which appeared in Town and Country in September 1946. With Swiftian irony, he proposes that in spite of the new socialist ideals, it may be worthwhile to preserve the "English gentleman" in reserves, for tourist purposes, among others. What transpires is a firm conviction that the upper classes have been responsible for most of what he finds valuable in English society. Ostensibly explaining the views of ignorant foreigners, Waugh suggests that aristocrats provided not only the statesmen and admirals and diplomats but also the cranks, aesthetes and revolutionaries; they formed our speech, they directed our artists and architects; they sent adventurous younger sons all over the world; they created and preserved our conceptions of justice and honour and forbearance ....

The essay concludes with a bitter gibe, worthy of his illustrious predecessor: "To the extreme advocates of total class-war the scheme should be acceptable as rendering all the more easy the eventual massacre." In an earlier review, Waugh expounds on the benefits for artists for which the aristocracy has been responsible:


44 Ibid., p. 313.

Aristocracy saved the artist in many ways. By its patronage it offered him rewards more coveted than the mere cash value of its purchases; in its security it invited him to share its own personal freedom of thought and movement; it provided the leisured reader whom alone it is worth addressing; it curbed the vanity of the publicist and drew a sharp line between fame and notoriety; by its caprices it encouraged experiment; its scepticism exposed humbug.46

Waugh’s obvious desire to belong to this tradition that he valued and admired so much, did not escape his own unflinching satiric eye, and in The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold (1957), one of his post-War novels, he paints an uncompromising self-portrait in the obviously autobiographic character of Mr Pinfold:

The style of life adopted by Pinfold is that of those old Catholic landed families .... Everything we learn about Pinfold fits this style of life - with one supremely important exception, the fact that he is by profession a writer, an artist. And this is the central truth about Pinfold, who could never have achieved any distinction as a novelist if he had not been essentially an artist. He is not a Catholic landed gentleman pretending to be an author. He is an author pretending to be a Catholic landed gentleman.47

His unabashed admiration and emulation of the upper classes exposed him to criticism and even scoffing, not only from those who disapproved of these affiliations for political or ideological reasons, but also from those who belonged to the charmed circles that Waugh hankered after. Even his friend, Lady


47Cf. Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh, p. 369.
Pansy Lamb\textsuperscript{48}, remarked during an interview with Jacqueline McDonnell in July 1985 that Waugh was far too poor to be in that kind of [aristocratic] world [he wrote about]. There was a kind of bohemian world in London which we got to know, and that was more the world he had contacts in.\textsuperscript{49}

While it is certainly true that Waugh knew the bohemian society of London, and vividly portrayed this group in his second novel, \textit{Vile Bodies}, it is also true that he was quite intimately acquainted with many members of the higher aristocracy. Among his closest friends, he counted the sisters Nancy Mitford and Diana Guinness (later Mosley), members of an extended clan of Mitfords, Ogilvys, Stanleys, Churchills, Cavendishes and Russells, which certainly reached into the uppermost reaches of the British aristocracy, the Lygon family, children of the 7th Earl Beauchamp, on whom the Flytes in \textit{Brideshead Revisited} are to some extent based\textsuperscript{50}, Lady Diana Cooper\textsuperscript{51}, daughter of the 8th

\textsuperscript{48}Lady Pansy Pakenham (b. 1904), daughter of the 5th Earl of Longford and his wife Lady Mary Villiers, daughter of the 7th Earl of Jersey, married in 1928 Henry Taylor Lamb, M.C., R.A. (Burke's Peerage and Baronetage, 1980, p. 1649.)


\textsuperscript{50}On their mother's side, Waugh's Lygon friends belonged to the Grosvenor family. Lady Beauchamp was a sister of Bend Or, the 2nd Duke of Westminster, the richest nobleman in England at the time. On the day he died, the Diarist Sir Henry (Chips) Channon wrote, So Bend Or the great Duke of Westminster is dead at last; magnificent, courteous, a mixture of Henry VIII and Lorenzo il Magnifico, he lived for pleasure - and women - for seventy-four years. His wealth was incalculable; his charm overwhelming; but he was restless, spoilt, irritable, and rather splendid in a very English way. He was fair, handsome, lavish; yet his life was an empty failure; he did
Duke of Rutland, and Ann Fleming\textsuperscript{52}, wife of author Ian and
granddaughter of the 11th Earl of Wemyss. To boot, both his
wives were nieces of the archaeologist 5th Earl of Carnarvon, the
discoverer of Tutankhamen’s grave and hardly a newcomer on the
aristocratic scene, and were descended from a dazzling array of
Earls, Barons and Dukes, which include some of the grandest names
England has produced. His intimate correspondents included such
august personalities as Daphne, Marchioness of Bath\textsuperscript{53}, Deborah,
Duchess of Devonshire\textsuperscript{54}, and Clarissa, Countess of Avon\textsuperscript{55}, all

few kindnesses, leaves no monument.

(Quoted in Brian Masters, The Dukes, p. 376.)

\textsuperscript{51}Lady Diana Manners (b.1892), daughter of the 8th Duke of
Rutland, married in 1919 Duff Cooper (later 1st Viscount
Norwich), British Cabinet Minister and Ambassador to France.
Lady Diana was one of the leading social figures of her day, a
brilliant Ambassadress and surprisingly for one of her class, a
successful stage actress. She was the inspiration for the
character of Mrs Stitch, who appears in two of Waugh’s novels:
Scoop and Officers and Gentlemen. (Cf. Burke’s Peerage and
Baronetage, 1980, pp. 2004 and 2329, and Michael Davie (ed.), The
Diaries of Evelyn Waugh, p. 797.)

\textsuperscript{52}Ann Charteris, daughter of the Hon. Guy Charteris, a
younger son of the 11th Earl of Wemyss. She firstly married (in
1932) the 3rd Baron O’Neill, who was killed in action in Italy
in 1944, secondly (in 1945) the 2nd Viscount Rothermere, whom she
divorced, and thirdly (in 1952) Ian Fleming, the creator of James
Bond. She was one of a few among Waugh’s friends who had the
courage to stand up to him when he behaved rudely and cruelly to
her or to others, and remained one of his most appreciated
friends up to his decease. (Cf. Burke’s Peerage and Baronetage,
1980, p. 2791 and Michael Davie (ed.), The Diaries of Evelyn
Waugh, pp. 798 - 799.)

\textsuperscript{53}The Hon. Daphne Vivian (b. 1904), daughter of the 4th
Baron Vivian, married firstly in 1927 the 6th Marquess of Bath,
owner of Longleat, which has since become one of the most popular
and competitive in the stately homes of England business with a
zoo in the grounds. She divorced him in 1953 and married Major
Alexander Fielding in the same year. Daphne Bath was the author
of i.a. biographies of Emerald Lady Cunard and her daughter
Nancy, and of Rosa Lewis of the Cavendish Hotel, on whom Waugh
based the character of Lottie Crump in Vile Bodies. (Cf. Burke’s
Peerage and Baronetage, 1980, pp. 2717 - 2718.)

\textsuperscript{54}The Hon. Deborah Mitford (b. 1920), daughter of the 2nd
Baron Redesdale and one of the celebrated "Mitford girls". She
married Lord Andrew Cavendish, later the 11th Duke of Devonshire,
of whom were definitely in the league which Waugh wrote about.

Although a strain of aristocratic interest is common to a majority of Waugh’s novels, I have selected his first two novels—Decline and Fall (1928) and Vile Bodies (1930)—as well as A Handful of Dust (1934) and Brideshead Revisited (1945) for closer attention, as they are his most representative aristocratic novels. In all of them, there is a focus on aristocratic society; the aristocratic houses such as King’s Thursday in Decline and Fall, Anchorage House in Vile Bodies, Hetton Abbey in A Handful of Dust and Brideshead in the novel named after it, play a central symbolic role; and the novels depict an aristocratic society in a time and aura of flux and change, of disorientation, also typical of the aristocratic novel in this century. Other works such as Black Mischief (1932), Scoop (1938) and Put Out More Flags (1942) all have some aristocratic characters or aspects, but the focus is distinctly elsewhere: on revolution and civilization and barbarism, the press and the early part of the war respectively. The war trilogy comes closer to being aristocratic in nature, as the central character, Guy Crouchback is a Catholic aristocrat and

in 1941 and has presided serenely over Chatsworth and the other impressive properties of the Cavendish family since his accession to the title in 1950. (Cf. Burke’s Peerage and Baronetage, 1980, p. 795.)

Waugh adored ‘Debo Devonshire’ and addressed her in correspondence as ‘Darling Debo’ (Mark Amory (ed.), The Letters of Evelyn Waugh, p. 484). References to her frequently appear in Waugh’s letters to her sister, Nancy Mitford, but he appears to have been slightly in awe of the Duchess’s beauty, wit and position. An unattractive fawning note appears for example in a letter to Debo dated 10 August 1957: “I did love staying with you and meeting your little ones and getting a glimpse of the treasures of Chatsworth. Thank you. Thank you.” (Ibid., p. 493). In later letters, he also repeatedly expresses the fear that she may find him boring.

55Clarissa Churchill (b. 1920), niece of Winston Churchill. She married Sir Anthony Eden, the British Prime Minister and later first Earl of Avon, in 1952. Although Waugh was very fond of her, she incurred his wrath by this alliance because she—brought up as a Catholic—married a divorced man. (Cf. Mark Amory (ed.), The Letters of Evelyn Waugh, pp. 378, 381 – 382.)
the novels centre on the development of his consciousness during the war; the focus, however, is on a rendition of the War as such rather than on a depiction of an aristocratic dilemma.

Waugh's career can be divided into two major phases, before and after Brideshead. The early satiric novels can be called "novels of denigration"; they criticize, satirize society and its decline, without overtly stating a positive alternative. Brideshead and the novels after, are "novels of affirmation", proposing a positive solution or alternative to the decadence depicted in the earlier novels. One traces again the themes of decadence and resilience: the early novels concentrate on demonstrating in a striking and humorous manner the decadence of society in general and of aristocratic society in particular, while the later novels, still depicting that decadence, also demonstrate the means of resilience, the way in which to survive and supersede the pervasive decline.

Waugh's early novels are universally described as satirical. It is interesting that he himself denies this attribute - in an essay called Fan-Fare, which appeared in Life Magazine on 8 April 1946 - on the grounds that true satire is not possible in modern times:

Satire is a matter of period. It flourishes in a stable society and presupposes homogeneous moral standards - the early Roman Empire and eighteenth-century Europe. It is aimed at inconsistency and hypocrisy. It exposes polite cruelty and folly by exaggerating them. It seeks to produce shame. All this has no place in the Century of the Common Man where vice no longer pays lip service to virtue. The artist's only service to the disintegrated society of today is to create little independent systems of order of his own.56

In this statement Waugh's disappointment at the decline in society, his disaffection towards the Age of the Common Man, to which he would oppose his ideal of the old Catholic aristocracy, can clearly be perceived. He despairs of a future where England as a great power is done for ... [where] the claim of the proletariat to be a privileged race, sloth and envy, must produce increasing poverty; ... [where] the cutting down will start at the top until only a proletariat and a bureaucracy survive.\textsuperscript{57}

His denial of the satiric nature of his writing is open to doubt, however. His technique is satirical and the "little independent systems of order" he creates, suggests a set of values, the values of that English gentleman whose demise he so deeply regrets in "What to do with the Upper Classes", and which is recognizable enough to the modern reader, even if - as Waugh fears - it is not shared by that reader. His early works certainly expose cruelty and folly and hypocrisy, even though this criticism is never overt. In fact, that is where the strength of these novels lie. Malcolm Bradbury comments:

His most powerful single effect lies in his invention of a comic universe seen from above by a creator largely independent of the action who, from a position of moral uninterest, perceives it as a total impression.\textsuperscript{58}

I would add that Waugh writes from a position of apparent "moral uninterest", for though a moral premise is never overtly postulated in these early novels of denigration, it is nevertheless clearly suggested. Waugh's approach is farcical, comedy of character and situation, and a great deal of the humour rests on the apparent "moral uninterest" of the narrator, a kind

\textsuperscript{57}Michael Davie (ed.), \textit{The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh}, p. 661.

of bland understatement, according to which the most outrageous characters and events are portrayed without any comment, enthusiasm or outrage, underlining the moral and social confusion, the decadence Waugh wishes to depict. Paul Pennyfeather, in *Decline and Fall*, accepts his sudden elevation to the position of prospective husband of one of the wealthiest women in Britain with as little surprise as his subsequent decline to the status of criminal and convict. As in his explanation of why he does not consider his novels to be satires, the implications of this moral apathy are that in a disintegrated society, a world without standards or values, "where vice no longer pays lip-service to virtue", there are also no standards by which to judge people or offences, and everything gains acceptance by default. He illustrates this most strikingly in *Black Mischief*, where Basil Seal ends up consuming his mistress. Even cannibalism is fathomable in this incoherent world without standards.

The characters in the early satiric novels are one-dimensional and often preposterous abstractions, so that they do not engage our sympathies or antipathies strongly, and are perfectly suited to be pawns of a creator, looking from a point of "moral uninterest". As Waugh himself puts it, the hero of his first novel, Paul Pennyfeather, "as the reader will probably have discerned already ... would never have made a hero, and the only interest about him arises from the unusual series of events of which his shadow was witness."\(^59\)

The title of Waugh's first novel, *Decline and Fall*, already indicates the theme of decline or decadence that pervades his work. The title is obviously derived from Gibbon. Waugh did not approve of Gibbon's secular perception of history and poked fun at him in his historical novel, *Helena*. He did appreciate and admire Gibbon's style, however:

Suppose that in years to come, when the Church's troubles seem to be over, there should come an apostate of my own trade, a false historian, with the mind of Cicero and Tacitus and the soul of an animal' and he nodded towards the gibbon who fretted his golden chain and chattered for fruit. 'A man like that might make it his business to write down the martyrs and excuse the prosecutors. He might be refuted again and again but what he wrote would remain in people's minds when the refutations were quite forgotten. That is what style does - it has the Egyptian secret of the embalmers. It is not to be despised.'

In this extract Waugh does not only underline the importance he attaches to style, but also introduces the idea of a Christian civilization, which underlies all his work. In an article titled "Converted to Rome", published in the Daily Express a month after Waugh's reception into the Roman Catholic Church, the author states unambiguously:

Civilization - and by this I do not mean talking cinemas and tinned food, nor even surgery and hygienic houses, but the whole moral and artistic organization of Europe - has not in itself the power of survival. It came into being through Christianity, and without it has no significance or power to command allegiance.

It is a "civilization" devoid of Christianity that is depicted in Waugh's early novels such as Decline and Fall, and the title of this novel suggests the decline and fall of a new Empire, a modern civilization. This perception of modern society as essentially decadent is central to Waugh's vision. David Lodge makes the point that the title of Decline and Fall would be as

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appropriate to Waugh’s other novels as to his first. The world into which the young innocent, Paul Pennyfeather, is propelled is a cruel, arbitrary world, devoid of sense and meaning. Paul travels through this world on a quest without destination or aim, encountering and interacting with a number of characters, many of them aristocrats. The mock-heroic quest provides Waugh with the opportunity to illustrate the decadence of the twentieth-century world as he perceives it. It is a world where the traditional order is incoherent, or often even altogether inverted. The particular targets of the satire are the English aristocracy and the educational and penal systems of the country.

The arbitrary nature of existence in this "fallen" reality is perhaps best illustrated by the fate of little Lord Tangent in Decline and Fall. Using a technique developed by Ronald Firbank, whose work Waugh admired, he sets up a chain of inconsequential events, picking up the strands at odd moments during the action, and so demonstrating the cruel and arbitrary nature of existence. Tangent is accidentally wounded in the foot by the starter during the school games. Later, during one of Beste-Chetwynde's organ lessons with Paul, he remarks in passing and with relish that "Tangent's foot has swollen up and turned black ..." and at the wedding of Captain Grimes it is

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62 David Lodge, Evelyn Waugh, p. 7.

63 Waugh’s biographer, Christopher Sykes makes the point that while Decline and Fall has often been praised for its originality, Waugh claimed that it was derivative. Apparently, he never cited the sources. (Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh, p. 87.)

The novel was clearly influenced - in terms of genre, rather than in terms of plot or style - by Voltaire’s Candide and L’Ingénu, which established the technique of satirizing a decadent and corrupt society by exposing to it an innocent and naive central character.


65 Evelyn Waugh, Decline and Fall, p. 94.
mentioned that everybody is present, except little Lord Tangent, "whose foot was being amputated at a local nursing home." The sequence is concluded when Lord Tangent's mother, Lady Circumference, expresses her fury at the inconvenience of his death à propos of the imminent marriage of Margot and Paul: "It's maddenin' Tangent having died just at this time," she said. 'People may think that that's my reason for refusin' ...." Tangent is just another victim, sent arbitrarily and accidentally to his death in a world without purpose or aim.

The satiric humour in the novel is based on an inversion of rational expectations, suited to demonstrate Waugh's premise that the irrationality of the world can be ascribed to the loss of the civilizing and bonding force of religion. This point is made in a particularly succinct manner in the opening scene of the novel, where the vandalistic revelries of the aristocratic Bollinger Club are described. Inspired by the fact that "Founder's port", a highly prized beverage in the senior common-room, "is only brought up when the College fines have reached £50", Mr Sniggs, the Junior Dean, and Mr Postlethwaite, the Domestic Bursar, are rather enthused by the havoc wreaked by the young noblemen: "'It'll be more if they attack the Chapel,' said Mr Sniggs. 'Oh, please God, make them attack the Chapel.'"

The same technique - the inversion of rational expectations - is used to introduce the reader to Lady Circumference, one of the aristocratic parents at the Llanabba School sports day:

A stout elderly woman dressed in a tweed coat and skirt and jaunty Tyrolean hat advanced to the Doctor. 'Hullo!' she said in a deep bass voice, 'how are you? Sorry if we're

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66Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall*, p. 105.

67Ibid., p 149.

68Ibid., p. 10.
late. Circumference ran over a fool of a boy ....' 69

The cruelty revealed by Lady Circumference's insouciant concluding remark is indicative of the role assigned by Waugh to the aristocracy in this nightmarish world "where cause has only the most irrational relation to effect and the greatest disparity exists between action and consequence." 70 The aristocracy is depicted as intimately involved in this arbitrary universe, and often in fact as perpetrators, responsible for cruelties inflicted on unsuspecting innocents. This is intimated already in the opening pages where it is the boisterous revelry of the aristocratic members of the Bollinger Club under the leadership of Sir Alastair Digby-Vane-Trumpington that causes Paul's undeserved expulsion from Scone College and the ruin of his envisaged career as a clergyman. The innocent Paul is held responsible and the guilty aristocrats are characteristically exonerated. That the reason for this is a question of rank is made clear:

At length the crowd parted, and Mr Sniggs gave a sigh of relief.

'But its quite all right. It isn't [Lord] Reading. It's Pennyfeather - someone of no importance.'

'Well, that saves a great deal of trouble. I am glad, Sniggs; I am, really.' 71

A similar miscarriage of justice favouring the aristocracy is depicted when Paul has to go to jail in order to shield his aristocratic fiancée, Margot Beste-Chetwynde 72, a notorious

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69 Evelyn Waugh, Decline and Fall, p. 67.

70 James F. Carens, The Satiric Art of Evelyn Waugh, p. 11.

71 Evelyn Waugh, Decline and Fall, p. 13.

72 According to Lane, the name is pronounced 'beast cheating' (Calvin W. Lane, Evelyn Waugh, p. 46). 'Beast chained' has also been suggested.
white slaver. Waugh’s description of the trial is an ironic commentary on the absence of justice in a morally incoherent world:

Margot Beste-Chetwynde’s name was not mentioned, though the judge in passing sentence remarked that ‘no-one could be ignorant of the callous insolence with which, on the very eve of arrest for this most infamous of crimes, the accused had been preparing to join his name with one honoured in his country’s history, and to drag down to his own pitiable depths of depravity a lady of beauty, rank, and stainless reputation.’

Paul himself comes to the conclusion that this discrepancy of standards - one law for the powerful and another for the powerless - is indeed proper for the world he lives in:

As he studied Margot’s photograph, ... he was strengthened in his belief that there was, in fact, and should be, one

73 Waugh’s biographer, Christopher Sykes, observes that Waugh’s early novels have a strong element of the roman à clef, although no original for Mrs Beste-Chetwynde has been discovered. As a young teacher in Wales, Evelyn Waugh was asked to give organ lessons to Derek Verschoyle, later literary editor of The Spectator, although he (Waugh) was unfamiliar with the instrument. This is obviously the inspiration for Lord Pastmaster’s organ lessons with Pennyfeather, which lead to his involvement with Pastmaster’s mother, Mrs Beste-Chetwynde. The photographer, David Lennox, is a caricature of Cecil Beaton, who had been to school with Waugh, and Miles Malpractice’s name had to be changed from its original form to avoid a possible libel suit, as it was so close to the name of his original. Lady Circumference is a portrait of Mrs Jessie Graham, the mother of Waugh’s close friend at Oxford, Alastair Graham - "quite a good likeness", according to her son. Waugh also used his novel as a form of light-hearted revenge. The burglar Cruttwell is named after an unpopular tutor of Waugh’s at Hertford College, while the swindler Philbrick is named after a fellow student at Oxford whom Waugh did not like. (Cf. Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh, pp. 85 - 86 and Michael Davie (ed.) The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh, p. 790.)

74 Evelyn Waugh, Decline and Fall, pp. 159 - 160.
law for her and another for himself ....”

Waugh clearly suggests that the aristocracy has managed to preserve its position of privilege in a corrupt and meaningless society only by the perpetuation of corruption and exploitation, as suggested by Margot’s involvement in prostitution and slavery.

It is interesting that Waugh makes the same distinctions among the different types of aristocrats that Sackville-West or Walpole make in their novels.\textsuperscript{76} The rural aristocracy, represented by Lord Roehampton’s sisters in \textit{The Edwardians}, is satirically portrayed here in the persons of the watery-eyed and insubstantial Lord Circumference and his powerful wife, exuding rude health and a rude disregard for others:

\begin{quote}
She gave Dr Fagan a hearty shake of the hand, that obviously caused him acute pain. Then she turned to Paul.

‘So you’re the Doctor’s hired assassin, eh? Well, I hope you keep a firm hand on my toad of a son. How’s he doin’?’

‘Quite well’, said Paul.

‘Nonsense!’ said Lady Circumference. ‘The Boy’s a dunderhead. If he wasn’t he wouldn’t be here. He wants beatin’ and hittin’ and knockin’ about generally, and then he’ll be no good ....’\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

When Margot Beste-Chetwynde’s black lover, Chokey, laments the black man’s fate in this world: “Beat him; put him in chains; load him with burdens”, Paul observes “a responsive glitter in Lady Circumference’s eye.”\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{75}Evelyn Waugh, \textit{Decline and Fall}, p. 188.

\textsuperscript{76}Cf. chapter 1 of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{77}Evelyn Waugh, \textit{Decline and Fall}, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid., p. 81.
The brilliant society of aristocrats, represented by the Duchess's circle in Sackville-West's *The Edwardians* and by those "who danced and kicked there way through the illustrated papers" in Walpole's *Wintersmoon*, is represented here by Margot Beste-Chetwynde and her debauched circle. Mrs Beste-Chetwynde (whether "beast cheating" or "beast chained") represents the antithesis of that Christian civilization that Waugh valued. She is a ruthless international white slaver, who does not hesitate to send Paul to jail in her place and her only concern is to amuse herself. She is surrounded by a suitable entourage of dissolute acolytes, e.g. the Hon. Miles Malpractice and the photographer David Lennox, who "emerged with little shrieks from an Edwardian brougham and made straight for the nearest looking-glass", Pamela Popham, "square-jawed and resolute as a big-game huntress", who "drank three cocktails, said: 'My God' twice ... and stalked off to bed", and Lord Parakeet, "slightly drunk and in evening clothes".  

The level of civilization that has been lost in this decline is never postulated, but is briefly suggested by the Beste-Chetwynde ancestral home, King's Thursday. Owing to the poverty and inertia of the family, King's Thursday has been preserved as a perfect example of Tudor architecture, "the finest piece of domestic Tudor in England." Visitors would marvel at how they seemed to have been privileged to step for half an hour out of their own century into the leisurely, prosaic life of the English Renaissance, and how they talked at tea of field-sports and the reform of the Prayer-Book just as the very-great-grand parents of their host might have talked in the same chairs and before the same fire three hundred years before, when their own ancestors, perhaps, slept on straw or among the aromatic merchandise of some

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80 Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall*, pp. 128 - 129.
When Margot Beste-Chetwynde gets hold of the house, however, her reaction to the gracious past and traditional life-style that Waugh describes above, albeit in satiric tones, is that she "can't think of anything more bourgeois and awful than timbered Tudor architecture." She has the house rebuilt by Professor Otto Silenus, whose ideal is "the elimination of the human element from the consideration of form. The only perfect building must be the factory, because that is built to house machines, not men." He creates an awesome monstrosity of black and bottle-green glass, aluminium and vulcanite, which, apart from satirizing the utilitarian aspects of Bauhaus architecture, constitutes a metaphor for the artificial and degenerate society, lifeless and inhuman - not to say inhumane - that Margot and her circle represent.

The contrast between the civilization that has been lost, and what has replaced it, is emphasized by Paul's thoughts as they approach King's Thursday:

Surely, he thought, these great chestnuts in the morning sun stood for something enduring and serene in a world that

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81 Evelyn Waugh, Decline and Fall, pp. 116 - 117.

The description of this fictitious aristocratic home and family by the non-aristocratic Waugh is strikingly reminiscent of the non-aristocratic Leonard Woolf's description of the aristocratic Vita Sackville-West and her ancestral home, Knole, in Woolf's autobiography. Woolf's biography was published many years after Waugh's novel, so that the similarity must be either coincidental or indicative of what aspects of the aristocracy particularly impress non-aristocrats, or may indicate that Waugh's novel struck a responsive note in Woolf's consciousness. (Cf. Leonard Woolf, Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919 - 1939, London: The Hogarth Press, 1967, p. 112.)

82 Ibid, p. 118.

83 Ibid, p. 124.
has lost its reason and would so stand when the chaos and confusion were forgotten? And surely it was the spirit of William Morris that whispered to him in Margot Beste-Chetwynde’s motor car about seed-time and harvest, the harmonious interdependence of rich and poor, of dignity, innocence, and tradition?  

These lines come the closest to affirming any positive values in the ostensibly neutral, morally uninterested, description of the world in Decline and Fall. As for Paul, he manages to extricate himself from Mrs Best-Chetwynde and her circle and returns to Scone College where — in perhaps the most significant personal affirmation of the novel — he prepares himself for the ministry.

In his second novel, Vile Bodies, Waugh focuses on the frenetic social whirl of London in the twenties, the world of the "bright young things". We encounter many old acquaintances — Margot, now Lady Metroland, still engaged in her "commercial" activities ("... I can get you a job in South America. I mean it ...")\textsuperscript{85}, the Hon. Miles Malpractice, touching up his eyelashes\textsuperscript{86}, and Lady Circumference, breaking up an evening of religious revival with characteristic candour.

The central metaphor for the frenetic existence of the bright young things is the motor race in which the Hon. Agatha

\textsuperscript{84}Evelyn Waugh, Decline and Fall, p. 124.

Waugh was a great admirer of the Pre-Raphaelites and his first two published books dealt with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, published in 1926 and 1928 respectively. He continued to be a collector of Victorian art throughout his life.

\textsuperscript{85}Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1975, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{86}Ibid., p. 153.
Runcible, leader of the most frenzied social set, participates. Typical of Waugh’s depiction of a senseless, chaotic world, she arrives at the race merely as a spectator and gets involved in the action by chance. In some of the best farce in this acidly funny book, she sails around the course ostensibly in record time, leaves it with the car out of control, careers across the countryside and eventually crashes into a market-cross in a village. The experience deranges her mind and she ends up in a nursing home, surrounded by members of her set drinking champagne, while she mumbles, “Faster ... Faster ...." Like Lord Tangent, she dies a senseless death, and her illness and death are treated with typical “moral uninterest”. Her ordeal is at best a social occasion:

'Yesterday I visited the Hon. Agatha Runcible comma Lord Chasm's lovely daughter comma at the Wimpole Street nursing home where she is recovering from the effects of the motor accident recently described in this column stop Miss Runcible was entertaining quite a large party which included ....' 88

The mindless and chaotic going round in circles ("Faster ... Faster ...."), leading to arbitrary destruction and death, is an apt image for the young aristocrats’ frenzied pursuit of pleasure.

Waugh focuses again on the aristocracy who forms the core of "the bright young things" as the centre of paralysis. Using anti-climax or the inversion of expectations as strategy, he indicates the scale of the nobility’s downfall:

87 This character is reputedly based on the Hon. Elizabeth Ponsonby (1900 - 1940) - daughter of Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede - who was regarded as the brightest of the bright young things. She married Major William Pelly in 1929 and divorced him in 1933. (Cf. Burke’s Peerage and Baronetage, 1980, p. 2146 and Jacqueline McDonnell, Evelyn Waugh, p. 53.)

88 Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies, p. 189.
At Archie Schwert's party the fifteenth Marquess of Vanburgh, Earl Vanburgh de Brendon, Baron Brendon, Lord of the Five Isles and Hereditary Grand Falconer to the Kingdom of Connaught, said to the eighth Earl of Balcairn, Viscount Erdinge, Baron Cairn of Balcairn, Red Knight of Lancaster, Count of the Holy Roman Empire and Chenonceaux Herald to the Duchy of Aquitaine, 'Hullo,' he said. 'Isn't this a repulsive party? What are you going to say about it?' for they were both of them, as it happened, gossip writers for the daily papers.  

The banal conversation that follows the long and impressive string of aristocratic titles which suggest a glorious noble past of Royal service and knightly achievement, ending in the admission that these two gentlemen earned a living by gossip, underlines the discrepancy between ideal and reality, between past and present. Lord Balcairn admits later: "All my cousins are in lunatic asylums or they live in the country and do indecorous things with wild animals ...." Moral decline is re-enforced by genetic or mental decay.

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89 Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 50.

90 According to David Cannadine, Lord Vanburgh is based on the 6th Marquess of Donegall (1903 - 1975), whose family lost their wealth during the nineteenth century, so that he had to earn a living as a writer for the *Daily Sketch*, the *Sunday News*, the *Sunday Graphic*, and most particularly as the author of the column "Almost in Confidence" in the *Sunday Despatch*. Another aristocratic gossip writer was the 6th Earl of Kenmare (1891 - 1943), who as Lord Castlerosse (his courtesy title before his accession) wrote "Londoner's Log" in the *Sunday Express* between 1926 and 1939. Cannadine comments:

Appearing in the gossip columns could be devastating evidence of a patrician family's decline and fall: but being a titled writer of them provided even more emphatic proof.

(Cf. David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, pp. 403 - 405.)

91 Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 86.
In accordance with the views expressed in his essay, "Converted to Rome", published in the same year as *Vile Bodies*, Waugh makes it clear that the glittering veneer of the godless society of bright young things does not constitute the surface of a great civilization; it merely masks barbarism. Harking back to the leaders of the two aristocratic sets - town and country - in *Decline and Fall*, he refers to "those two poles of savagery Lady Circumference and Lady Metroland."\(^{92}\) That godlessness is fundamentally responsible for the corrupt state of society is more clearly suggested in this novel, than in *Decline and Fall*. During the rough channel crossing described in the opening scene of the novel, people like Agatha Runcible and Miles Malpractice try all kinds of remedies to avert *mal de mer* and Waugh comments: "... to avert the terrors of sea-sickness they had indulged in every kind of civilized witchcraft, but they were lacking in faith."\(^{93}\) Clearly, "civilized witchcraft" is the informing paradox of the irony here. A civilizing faith has been replaced by the ludicrous travelling show of evangelist Mrs Melrose Ape and her troop of "angels", rejoicing in names such as Faith, Chastity, Fortitude, Charity, Humility, Divine Discontent and Creative Endeavour, whose elevated hymn "There ain't no flies on the Lamb of God" exhorts those of little faith to embrace the salvation of jazz and self-gratification. When towards the end of the novel, Creative Endeavour reads a letter she has received from Chastity and Divine Discontent who have embarked on a new career as prostitutes in Lady Metroland's South American establishments, she sighs wistfully: "It don't sound much different from us."\(^{94}\)

A better aristocratic alternative to corrupt society is briefly suggested by the symbolically named Anchorage House, the last survivor of the noble town houses of London ... in its

\(^{92}\)Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 115.

\(^{93}\)Ibid., p. 11.

\(^{94}\)Ibid., p. 110.
time, of dominating and august dimensions, and even now ... its pillared façade ... had grace and dignity ....

Behind all the socialites present at the reception there, came a great concourse of pious and honourable people (many of whom made the Anchorage House reception the one outing of the year), their women-folk well gowned in rich and durable stuffs, their men-folk ablaze with orders; people who had represented their country in foreign places and sent their sons to die for her in battle, people of decent and temperate life, uncultured, unaffected, unembarrassed, unassuming, unambitious people, of independent judgment and marked eccentricities, kind people who cared for animals and the deserving poor, brave and rather unreasonable people, that fine phalanx of the passing order, approaching, as one day at the Last Trump they hoped to meet their Maker, with decorous and frank cordiality to shake Lady Anchorage by the hand at the top of her staircase.

This is the kind of paean in praise of the aristocracy that would later discredit Waugh with some of his ideologically minded critics. Here, however, it escaped notice in the general satire of the work. It is significant that the first adjective Waugh uses to describe this alternative society of admirable

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95 Anchorage House may have been partly based on Brook House, the Park Lane mansion Countess Mountbatten of Burma inherited from her banking grandfather, Sir Ernest Cassell, and which remained in full use, "the biggest pied-à-terre in Town", owing to Lady Mountbatten's great wealth after such establishments had in general become economically untenable. It was finally sold in 1935, and turned into flats. The title may have been suggested by Lord Mountbatten's naval connections but the symbolic significance of the house does not apply to Brook House. The Mountbattens were very much part of the riotous, partying society of bright young things in the 1920s. (Cf. Richard Hough, Edwina, Countess Mountbatten of Burma, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, pp. 100 and 138 - 139.)

96 Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies, pp. 126 - 127.
aristocrats is "pious" and that he concludes the description by referring to these people's hopes of an after-life. For Waugh, civilization finds its anchor in religious faith, and the embattled old aristocracy is the society which he identifies with a Christian civilization.

The novel has an unexpectedly grim, though appropriate, apocalyptic conclusion when the godless society is caught up in the "biggest battlefield in the history of the world."\textsuperscript{97}

A \textit{Handful of Dust}, written after Waugh's divorce and his conversion to Roman Catholicism, is an elaboration of a short story Waugh wrote in South America called \textit{The Man Who liked Dickens}, which was inspired by a meeting with a religious fanatic in the wilds of British Guiana.\textsuperscript{98} The novel deals with the collapse of a marriage and more broadly with the general collapse of values in a civilization. As regards its general theme, it is therefore close to the other novels of denigration of Waugh's early career. A \textit{Handful of Dust} represents, however, a marked progression as far as characterization is concerned. There are some caricatures: Lady Cockpurse and the Princess Abdul Akbar would have been at home in the earlier farcical novels, but others such as Tony Last, his wife, Lady Brenda, and even their little son, John Andrew, are much more rounded and fully realized than any of the characters in \textit{Decline and Fall} and \textit{Vile Bodies}. Waugh commented on this aspect in a letter to Katherine Asquith in January, 1934: "Very difficult to write because for the first time I am trying to deal with normal people instead of eccentrics. Comic English character parts too easy when one gets to be thirty."\textsuperscript{99}

Tony Last is a well-born landed gentleman labouring under a

\textsuperscript{97}Evelyn Waugh, \textit{Vile Bodies}, p. 220.


\textsuperscript{99}Mark Amory (ed.), \textit{The Letters of Evelyn Waugh}, p. 84.
delusion, which is that he can maintain the traditions and values of his ancestors at his beloved ancestral home, Hetton Abbey, in a world no longer congenial to those values. Unwittingly, he lives a life which is nothing but a charade. The world he tries to preserve at Hetton Abbey, is a traditional, almost feudal one. He takes his responsibilities as Lord of the Manor seriously, insists that his wife fulfils her obligations by giving speeches to the villagers, and rewards a lodge-keeper for sixty years service at Hetton with a clock, and so forth. The reader is given a hint, however, that this world is counterfeit, however much Tony loves it and is in earnest about it. The chapter where Hetton and its people are introduced opens significantly with a passage from the county Guide Book, describing Hetton Abbey:

... This, formerly one of the notable houses of the county, was entirely rebuilt in 1864 in the Gothic style and is now devoid of interest ....

Architecturally Hetton is a fake and it is also a fake in terms of the significance of the novel, however much Tony might be attempting to maintain a truly aristocratic way of life, or more significantly, a truly aristocratic disposition. Tony has built a mock Gothic world for himself to go with his mock Gothic castle, with knights in armour leading lives devoted to honour, but this world is far removed from the realities of the modern world, centred symbolically around the flat Brenda rents from the dreadful Mrs Beaver in London, and where she conducts her affair with John Beaver.

As the passage from the Guide Book sets the tone for the make-believe world at Hetton Abbey, so the opening passage of the novel sets the tone for the actual world outside:

'Was anyone hurt?'
'No one, I am thankful to say,' said Mrs Beaver, 'except

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It is a world like that of the two previous novels where callous cruelty and gratuitous death are not out of place. The society that inhabits it is essentially callous and its value-system is dangerously warped, often inverted. This inversion of civilized values is powerfully suggested when Brenda receives the news that her son has been killed in riding accident at Hetton Abbey, and exclaims "... thank God ..." when she realizes that it is her son, and not her feckless lover that has been killed. The moment is made savagely poignant by the contrast it affords between engaging little John Andrew Last and John Beaver, Brenda's unengaging and worthless lover.

Waugh described the novel as "a study of other sorts of savage at home and the civilized man's helpless plight among them." The discrepancy between the attitudes of the "civilized man", Tony, and the "savages" that surround him in Britain reaches a head with Tony's divorce from Brenda. Doing the "gentlemanly" thing, Tony goes to a sea-side hotel with a woman and arranges for witnesses so that Brenda will be able to divorce him. The situation becomes preposterous, however, when Brenda's brother, Lord St Cloud, (whose occupation as an archaeologist is aptly described as "desecrating some tombs") approaches Tony to request, or rather insist on a larger settlement than Tony can afford. The scene is taut with irony:

'... I'm allowing her five hundred a year.'
'Well, you know, I don't think that you have any right to take advantage of her generosity in that way. It was


\[102\]Evelyn Waugh, "Fan-Fare" in Donat Gallagher (ed.), The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh, p. 303.

\[103\]Evelyn Waugh, A Handful of Dust, p. 145.
most imprudent of her to consider your proposal - she admits now that she was not quite herself when she did so.'

It transpires that the St Cloud family expect Tony to sacrifice his beloved Hetton Abbey in order to settle an exorbitant amount on Brenda, especially as "[this] chap Beaver has got practically nothing and doesn't look like earning any." When Tony realises the complicity of Brenda, whom "he had got into a habit of loving and trusting" in this scheme to deprive him of his cherished home, his delusion crumbles at last:

His mind had suddenly become clearer on many points that had puzzled him. A whole Gothic world had come to grief ... there was now no armour glittering through the forest glades, no embroidered feet on the green sward; the cream and dappled unicorns had fled ....

The worm turns and Tony refuses to give Brenda a divorce or any allowance whatsoever. The heavy irony of society's reaction to this change confirms the inverted values, the urban savagery, which Waugh wanted to depict:

'Now I understand why they keep on in the papers about divorce law reform,' said Veronica. 'It's too monstrous that he should be allowed to get away with it.' ...

'Its so like Brenda to trust everyone,' said Jenny Abdul Akbar.

Tony goes on a safari to the wilds of South America, where he is

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105 *Ibid.*., p. 149.
surrounded by savages, to provide a symbolic parallel to the savagery of Brenda’s set in London. The story concludes with a fitting travesty of civilized activity: Tony is kept a prisoner by an illiterate maniac in the Amazon, who forces him to read aloud from the novels of Charles Dickens in perpetuum. What is ostensibly a highly civilized activity - the reading of great literature - becomes the expression of violent savagery and cruelty. This is Waugh’s final comment on the “civilization” of society London.

Waugh stated in an interview with Life Magazine that A Handful of Dust “dealt entirely with behaviour. It was humanist and contained all I had to say about humanism.” This has puzzled some commentators. What he does suggest, is that humanism is not enough; it does not provide adequate armour against the onslaught of savagery, it is not the vehicle for resilience in the general pervasive decadence of modern society. Tony is a good man, a decent man in humanist terms. He is loyal, loving, trusting, but he fails to show any sign of spiritual life, the necessary condition, according to Waugh, for real civilization and for the survival of civilization in the modern world: “... Christianity is essential to civilization and ... it is in greater need of combative strength than it has been for centuries.” Tony regularly attends divine service at Hetton, but it is purely a part of his duties as the Lord of the Manor, purely the preservation of a tradition. This is made clear when the vicar, whom “Tony’s father had given ... the living at the instance of his dentist”, preaches an irrelevant sermon, one which he had conceived in Jellalabad in the previous century.

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110 Malcolm Bradbury says, “What has Waugh to say about humanism? It is hard to say.” (Malcolm Bradbury, Evelyn Waugh, p. 66.)


112 Evelyn Waugh, A Handful of Dust, p. 32.
containing phrases like

'... let us remember our Gracious Queen Empress in whose service we are here, and pray that she may long be spared to send us at her bidding to do our duty in the uttermost parts of the earth; and let us think of our dear ones far away and the homes we have left in her name, and remember that though miles of barren continent and leagues of ocean divides us ...'\(^{113}\)

and is commended by Tony: "A most interesting sermon, Vicar."\(^{114}\)

Religion is merely a matter of form, totally out of touch with the daily lives of parishioners.

Even more significant is Tony’s reaction when the Vicar tries to comfort him after the death of his son: "It was very painful ... after all the last thing one wants to talk about at a time like this is religion."\(^{115}\) Waugh calls Tony a "civilized man" among savages, but his civilization is a humanist one without the bolstering of Christian faith, and therefore has no resilience, it "has not in itself the power of survival."\(^{116}\)

Again the author gives us a glimpse of an alternative condition, as he does with the crowd of landed aristocrats at Anchorage House in *Vile Bodies*. Significantly it is again a group of landed aristocrats, Tony Last’s impoverished cousins, who embody humane and civilized values. After the shocking revelation of Brenda’s reaction to her son’s death, we are told, "The impoverished Lasts were stunned by the telegram [informing them of John Andrew’s death] .... It did not enter the heads of any

\(^{113}\)Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust*, p. 32.

\(^{114}\)Ibid., p. 33.

\(^{115}\)Ibid., p. 115.

of them that now, if anything happened, they were the heirs to Hetton. Had it done so, their grief would have been just as keen."\(^{117}\)

The novel concludes on a gloomy note, however. Hetton Abbey is inherited - as Tony, lost in the jungle, is presumed dead - by one of his cousins, Teddy Last. He starts a fox-breeding farm at Hetton, and hopes with the proceeds "one day to restore Hetton to the glory that it had enjoyed in the days of his Cousin Tony."\(^{118}\) As has been pointed out, this is at best a make-believe glory, artificially protected from a cruel and decadent reality.\(^{119}\)

With *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh moves from the "novel of denigration" to the "novel of affirmation", where the entire action of the work is shaped towards the affirmation of a positive belief and the author demonstrates a mode of resilience. In the words of the novelist himself, the novel is "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, half paganised themselves, in the world of 1923 - 1939."\(^{120}\) It may seem far-fetched to see the book as a twentieth-century and Catholic equivalent of Milton's epic attempt to "justify the ways of God to men", but Waugh had no illusion about the magnitude and sheer ambitiousness of his undertaking: "[The general theme] is ambitious, perhaps intolerably presumptuous ..."\(^{121}\).

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\(^{117}\)Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust*, p. 120.

\(^{118}\)Ibid., p. 221.

\(^{119}\)Waugh later wrote an alternative ending for a serialization of the novel. Although Tony survives the jungle ordeal in this version, it is also essentially cynical and pessimistic as it suggests Tony's 'conversion' to the corruptions of his wife's world. Tony returns to Brenda and with the collaboration of the dreadful Mrs Beaver, decides to keep on Brenda's flat for his own purposes.


\(^{121}\)Ibid.
With this change of intention comes a change in technique. In *Brideshead Revisited* the progress as regards characterization made in *A Handful of Dust* is completed. Here we have no cardboard figures, but full, resonant characters who appeal to, disgust or seize the imagination of the reader. Christopher Hollis comments: "But it is not until we come to *Brideshead Revisited* that we come to what may be called a wholly three-dimensional novel - to a novel on whose characters we can pass judgments as if they were real people."\(^{122}\) In 1946 Waugh declared the novel to be his best\(^{123}\) and he recommended it particularly for its language and style\(^{124}\), which indeed constitute an impressive achievement. A.A. Devitis comments on this achievement:

> Perhaps the most signal triumph of the novel is the language in which it is written. *Brideshead Revisited* ... moves from sheer romanticism, from pastoral and idyllic beauty, to worldly cynicism, to mellowed retrospection in language so commensurate with the moods that one is convinced of the authenticity of the portrayal by sheer force of the words themselves.\(^{125}\)

The writing is indeed superb, often transparently beautiful and at times achieving a poetic prose effect of remarkable dignity.


Although the novel is more romantic and elegiac in tone than any of Waugh's earlier works, the satiric humour is still in evidence. V.C. Clinton-Baddeley writes in his original review:

> Although the theme of *Brideshead Revisited* is deeply serious, it is accompanied by a brighter wit and more sudden laughter than you will find in any other novel these last anxious years.\(^\text{126}\)

The narrator of the novel is Charles Ryder, a non-aristocratic non-Catholic, non-Christian. This is an important device to make what is an intensely Christian and Catholic novel accessible to a largely non-Catholic and often wholly secularized reading public. The vitriolic criticism evoked by the novel in spite of its general popularity was mainly provoked by the overtly Christian intentions and the aristocratic affiliations of the novel. Christopher Sykes suggests that these criticisms were the result of "wholly insincere protestations of class preference" in the populist aura of the era:

> To admit to friendship with the family of a marquess, to admire his traditions and to find pleasure in the beauty and luxury of the family seat - and without a word of sociological criticism of such things - this, [the critics] declared, hurt their sensibilities.\(^\text{127}\)

Waugh defended himself eloquently, defiantly, and somewhat arrogantly:

> Class-consciousness, particularly in England, has been so much inflamed nowadays that to mention a nobleman is like mentioning a prostitute sixty years ago .... I reserve the

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\(^{127}\) Christopher Sykes, *Evelyn Waugh*, p. 250.
right to deal with the kind of people I know best. The main narrative, dealing with the years 1923 to 1939 is bracketed within a prologue and epilogue set during the Second World War. This is a useful technique, providing Waugh with the selective and glamorizing device of memory to deal with Ryder’s interaction with the Flytes and so to defuse possible criticisms of an exaggeratedly romantic portrayal of his youth. "My theme is memory, that winged host that soared about me one grey morning in war-time ..." Charles says. The device is also ideologically useful to Waugh, as it provides him with the opportunity of contrasting his depiction of the aristocratic and charming Flytes with that of the proletarian Hooper, who is most unflatteringly portrayed in the prologue and epilogue. Whereas the early novels portray a senseless, chaotic and superficial reality replacing the gracious hierarchical life prized by Waugh, he suggests here who the beneficiary of this brave new egalitarian world is. Waugh clearly sees Hooper as a harbinger of the future of England, representing that which Waugh most feared and despised, the proletarian governing the Age of the Common Man - "the age of Hooper," as Waugh terms it on the last page of the novel. The characterization of Hooper has particularly aroused the ire of Waugh’s critics. Frank Kermode, for example, wrote in Encounter in November 1960: "Hooper and his brothers may be hard to bear, ... but it seems outrageous to damn them for their manners." Waugh admitted in his preface to the revised edition of the novel (1960), that he had perhaps been a bit effusive in his praise of

130 Ibid., p. 395.
a culture and a civilization which he valued highly and had assumed to be in its death throes, and he blamed his effusiveness on the *zeitgeist* of the war years:

It was impossible to foresee in the spring of 1944, the present cult of the English country house. It seemed that the ancestral seats which were our chief national artistic achievement were doomed to decay and spoliation like the monasteries in the sixteenth century. So I piled it on rather, with passionate sincerity .... And the English aristocracy has maintained its identity to a degree that then seemed impossible. The advance of Hooper has been held up at several points. Much of this book therefore is a panegyric preached over an empty coffin.\textsuperscript{132}

Waugh is unapologetic about his opinion of Hooper, however, and associates what is best in English culture with an aristocratic past. In this respect, *Brideshead Revisited* comes close to Sackville-West's *The Edwardians*. Charles Ryder's denigration of Hooper and what he represents is similar to the Duke's disaffection for a future England, where a house like Chevron, resplendent with beauty and tradition, would be replaced by tenement houses, alike in every particular.\textsuperscript{133}

The story revolves round the interaction between Charles Ryder, an artist, and a Catholic aristocratic family, the Flytes.\textsuperscript{134}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{132}]Evelyn Waugh, Preface to *Brideshead Revisited*, p. 10.
  \item[\textsuperscript{134}]The Flyte family is to some extent based on Waugh's friends, the Lygons, the family of Lord Beauchamp. William Lygon, 7th Earl Beauchamp (1872 - 1938) was, like Lord Marchmain an impressive figure. He had been a cabinet minister, Governor General of Australia, Chancellor of London University, Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire and Warden of the Cinque Ports, and was a Knight of the Garter. He was married to Lady Lettice Grosvenor, sister of the 2nd Duke of Westminster, and had seven charming children. Like Lord Marchmain, he lived in exile on the Continent, but in his case it was not to escape a hated wife, but
\end{itemize}
Brideshead, the house from which the novel takes its title, provides the setting for Charles Ryder's romance with the family. His first view of it is across the valley, where "grey and gold amid the boskage, shone the dome and columns of an old house ..." and what he finds there is indeed a golden and enchanting world. This first chapter of the novel, dealing with Charles's romantic friendship with Lord Sebastian Flyte, a homosexual scandal. Although there is little doubt that Lord Beauchamp had been involved in some homosexual activities, the scandal was triggered by the Duke of Westminster's vendetta against his brother-in-law, prompted apparently by jealousy, which caused him to reveal Lord Beauchamp's predilections. At the Duke's instigation a warrant for the arrest of Lord Beauchamp was issued in 1931, and the latter had to flee to the continent. He was not even allowed to return for his wife's funeral in 1936. Lord Beauchamp spent some of his time in Venice, like Lord Marchmain, and was presumably visited there by his children, who chose their father's side against their uncle. Two of his daughters, Lady Mary and Lady Dorothy Lygon, were among Evelyn Waugh's closest friends, while the two sons, Viscount Elmley (later the 7th and last Earl Beauchamp) (1903 - 1977) and the Hon. Hugh Lygon (1904 - 1936) were among Waugh's friends at Oxford. Hugh Lygon is generally assumed to be one of the models for Lord Sebastian Flyte, and while Lord Elmley is apparently not really a model for Lord Brideshead as regards personality, there are nevertheless some striking similarities. He married fairly late in life, like Lord Brideshead, his bride was a widow, like Lord Brideshead's, and like him he had no children and was the last of his line. (Cf. Robert Lacey, Aristocrats, London: Hutchinson, 1983, pp. 164 - 166, Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh, p. 114 - 116, and Burke's Peerage and Baronetage, 1980, p. 206.)

The house is partly based on Madresfield, the country house of Lord Beauchamp, especially with regard to the art nouveau chapel. Castle Howard, where the television series of Brideshead Revisited was filmed is also in all probability an important model. (Cf. Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh, p. 252.)

While the circumstances and appearance of Sebastian are partly based upon those of the Hon. Hugh Lygon, the second son of Lord Beauchamp who died tragically young during a trip to Germany, the character is largely based on Waugh's closest friend at Oxford, Alastair Graham, who later became a diplomat and retired to lead a reclusive life on the Welsh coast. (Graham's mother was the model for Lady Circumference in Decline and Fall and Vile Bodies). According to Waugh's biographer, Christopher Sykes, the name Alastair appears a few times in the manuscript in the place of Sebastian. Smaller influence was exercised by a few others: an incident in which Matthew Ponsonby, later 2nd
at Brideshead and in Oxford and Venice, is entitled 'Et in Arcadia Ego' for it appears to be an earthly paradise in which they live and walk. Great care is taken to establish the beauty and charm of the Flytes' country seat, but even though the house and gardens are magnificent, appearances are deceptive. Like Hetton Abbey in A Handful of Dust, Brideshead is a second version, a rebuilding of the original family seat. Unlike Hetton, Brideshead is utterly beautiful and charming; it is nevertheless not "the real thing". The original civilization of the Flyte family has been replaced by semi-paganism, a charming semi-paganism though it may be. Lord Marchmain, disgusted with his beautiful and pious wife, has left the country and lives in self-imposed exile in Italy. His most charming child, Sebastian, is a delightful, even enchanting no-good, steadily moving towards alcoholism. Sebastian is incurably child-like. Lord Marchmain's mistress says: "Sebastian is in love with his own childhood. That will make him very unhappy. His teddy-bear, his nanny ... and he is nineteen years old ...." 138 It is interesting that childishness is often ascribed to the aristocracy in aristocratic novels, notably those of Emma Tennant and Molly Keane. 139 Here, Sebastian is childish in his inability to assume responsibility and to come to terms with his family, but also ultimately child-like in his ability to experience an innocent faith, which enables him to die a holy death, presaged by his martyr's name.

Baron Ponsonby of Shulbrede and brother of Elizabeth Ponsonby, the bright young thing who served as a model for Agatha Runcible in Vile Bodies, was involved, provided the model for Sebastian's arrest for drunken driving. Both Keith Douglas, another contemporary of Waugh's at Oxford, who carried his toy bear around with him, and John Betjeman, who had conversations on the underground with his teddy-bear, have been cited as models for Sebastian's attachment to Aloysius, his bear. (Cf. Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh, p. 252; Michael Davie, The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh, p. 799; Jeffrey Heath, The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and his Writing, Kingston and Montreal: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1982, p. 177, and Humphrey Carpenter, The Brideshead Generation: Evelyn Waugh and His Friends, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990, pp. 102, 356.)

138 Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited, p. 120.

139 Cf. chapters 4 and 6 of this thesis.
Sebastian’s cry, "Contra mundum" expresses his increasing isolation from his family as he travels the road to alcoholism, but it also expresses that quality, "against the world", which makes him beloved by the community of monks at the end of his life. Lady Julia, the equally beautiful and charming daughter of Lord Marchmain, who succeeds her brother in Charles’s affections, has been estranged from what Waugh regards as the source of civilization, the Church, by her marriage to a divorcé. The eldest son, Lord Brideshead, though a faithful - even dogmatic - Catholic, marries a pompous middle aged and middle class widow, unable to provide the family with heirs. The youngest daughter, the physically unattractive but also delightful Cordelia, is a spiritual nun without the necessary vocation to enter a convent, and thus also doomed to sterility as regards the dynasty.

In spite of their spiritual shortcomings, the engaging and aristocratic Flytes are compared to great advantage with the middle-class characters in the novel. This provides some fuel for those who decry the novel as a treatise in snobbery. The derisive eloquence of Charles Ryder’s father provides a stark contrast to the captivating charm of Sebastian to whom Charles escapes during an unbearable holiday at home. Even more strident

\[\text{140 An interesting point of correspondence with The Edwardians, arises here. As the names of Sebastian and Viola in Sackville-West’s novel refer to Twelfth Night and suggest a brother and sister who are so similar as to be virtually interchangeable, representing the masculine and feminine sides of the author, so, it might seem, do the names Sebastian and Julia in Brideshead Revisited suggest a more oblique reference to the play. In Twelfth Night, Viola (the wrong sex) is a forerunner in the affections of Olivia of her brother, Sebastian, and so in Brideshead Revisited, Sebastian (the wrong sex) is a forerunner in the affections of Charles Ryder of his sister, Julia. Waugh makes the point that Sebastian and Julia are remarkably alike in appearance: "She so much resembled Sebastian that, sitting beside her in the gathering dusk, I was confused by the double illusion of familiarity and strangeness ..." (p. 90). Intriguingly, Sebastian concludes the letter he writes to Charles just before the latter comes to Brideshead and meets Julia: "Love or what you will. S." (p. 86). (Cf. footnote 127 in chapter 1.)}\]
is Waugh’s implied criticism of Rex Mottram, Julia’s husband, a self-made millionaire and prominent politician. Charles Ryder’s ethereal love for Sebastian and his passionate involvement with Julia is contrasted with Rex’s reasons for marrying Julia. During a dinner in Paris with Rex, Charles is constantly reminded of “the harsh, acquisitive world which Rex inhabited. He wanted a woman; he wanted the best on the market, and he wanted her at her own price; that was what it amounted to.”¹⁴¹ This very scene has been a particular red rag to those critics who are offended by Waugh’s snobbish preference for aristocratic manners. Throughout the scene, the reader is treated to Charles’s patronizing comments on Rex’s naive boorishness. Henry Reed comments in his original review in *New Statesman*:

There are several scenes in *Brideshead Revisited* where the narrator sets his own savoir faire against that of the lower characters - the scene in the Parisian restaurant with the colonial go-getter Rex, for example ... - and emerges as no less vulgar than his victims .... This vulgarity goes deep with Mr Waugh; and it is not surprising that in embarking on his most serious novel he should show addiction to the purple.¹⁴²

Waugh’s denigration of Mottram is not, however, merely an assertion of snobbishness. In terms of the novel, Mottram represents a particular movement in society, a shallow materialism, which Waugh regarded with fear and revulsion as an ominous threat to civilization. Julia explains to Charles,

I thought he was a sort of primitive savage, but he was something absolutely modern and up-to-date that only this ghastly age could produce. A tiny bit of man, pretending


Mottram is one of T.S. Eliot's "hollow men".\footnote{Evelyn Waugh, \textit{Brideshead Revisited}, p. 230.}

\footnote{References to the work of T.S. Eliot are to be found throughout the novels of Evelyn Waugh. The most obvious example is of course the title of his third novel, which is taken from the first part of \textit{The Waste Land}:}

\hspace{1em}I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

Waugh shared a perception of the modern world as chaotic, disorderly, disharmonious, incoherent and fragmented with Eliot, and this perception is particularly clearly expressed in the senselessness of the events that occur to the heroes of the earlier novels and in the frenetic activity - without aim and purpose - in \textit{Vile Bodies}. James F. Carens remarks on Waugh's novels that "[the] decay of civilization, futile sensuality leading to boredom, the poverty of spiritual life - these are the subjects of the first three works ..." (James F. Carens, \textit{The Satiric Art of Evelyn Waugh}, p. 13). All these themes are at the heart of Eliot's oeuvre, and of \textit{The Waste Land} in particular. Waugh also pays tribute to the profound effect that Eliot had on his generation when he makes Antony Blanche read aloud from \textit{The Waste Land} from the balcony of Sebastian's rooms in Christ Church:

\begin{quote}
After luncheon he stood on the balcony with a megaphone which had appeared surprisingly among the bric-a-brac of Sebastian's room, and in languishing tones recited passages from \textit{The Waste Land} to the sweatered and muffled throng that was on its way to the river.

'I, Tiresias, have foresuffered all,' he sobbed to them from the Venetian arches;

'Enacted on the same d-divan or b-bed,
I who sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the l-1-lowest of the dead ...'
\hspace{1em}\textit{(Brideshead Revisited}, p. 42)
\end{quote}

Less obvious echoes of \textit{The Waste Land} abound in Waugh's work. When Ginger and Nina fly over England in \textit{Vile Bodies}, Ginger is moved to try and quote the 'Sceptred isle' speech from \textit{Richard II}, but the reality is very far removed from the lyrical description of Shakespeare and is rendered in Eliotian terms:

... arterial roads dotted with little cars; factories, some of them working, others emptying and decaying; a disused canal ...

'I think I'm going to be sick,' said Nina.
\hspace{1em}\textit{(Vile Bodies}, pp. 199 - 200)
This recalls

... While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse ...

from the third section of The Waste Land. That the reference is not merely incidental is confirmed by the description of Adam’s view from an English country hotel:

He looked out and saw a grey sky, some kind of factory and the canal from whose shallow waters rose little islands of scrap-iron and bottles ...

This echoes the opening passage of the same section of The Waste Land:

The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers, silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends ...

In Vile Bodies, the eventual nihilistic effect of the aimless pursuit of the wind, is suggested by the significant repetition of the word ‘nothing’. A conversation between Adam and Nina is strongly reminiscent to the Belladonna conversation in "A Game of Chess" in The Waste Land. Compare

"'Oh, Adam, my dearest ...'
'Yes?'
'Nothing."

(Vile Bodies, p. 192)

to

"'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'
Nothing again nothing.

'Do you know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
'Nothing?"

In hospital the deranged Agatha Runcible is soothed by the words:

"There’s nothing to worry about, dear ... nothing at all ... nothing."

(Vile Bodies, p. 200).

There are quite a few fortune-tellers or card-players in Waugh’s novel. These evoke Madame Sosostris in The Waste Land or Madame de Tornquist in Gerontion, and suggest the replacement of religious belief by superstition. The enigmatic Mrs Rattery in A Handful of Dust, creates a false sense of order with her games amidst the moral chaos at Hetton Abbey, and in the same novel Mrs Northcote tells fortunes by looking at people’s feet while Brenda receives the news of John Andrew’s death.

Both Jacqueline McDonnell and Calvin W. Lane also point out that the rhythms and structure of certain passages from Vile Bodies and Brideshead Revisited are clearly influenced by Eliot’s
Much is made in the novel of the charm of the Flyte family. It is in fact their overriding characteristic. Antony Blanche, the wonderfully depicted and highly entertaining aesthete at Oxford\textsuperscript{145}, takes Charles to dinner and warns him of Sebastian's charm: "... Sebastian has charm'; he held up his glass of hock to the candle-light and repeated, 'such charm.'\textsuperscript{146} He makes it sound menacing, darkly spicing their conversation with phrases such as "So charming; so amusing" and "He used to spend such a time in the confessional, I used to wonder what he had to say, because he never did anything wrong .... Perhaps he was just being charming through the grill ..." and finally "... How do our thoughts run on that little bundle of charm to be sure .... It's odd because there's no mystery about him except how he came to be born of such a very sinister family."\textsuperscript{147} Sebastian himself refers to his family's charm: "If once they got hold of you with their charm, they'd make you their friend not mine, and I won't let them."\textsuperscript{148} It is only after Charles's return from South America that he begins to grasp the sinister implications of the Flyte charm. Blanche, who had dismissed Charles's earlier work

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\textsuperscript{145}Antony Blanche is one of the most successful of the many excellently portrayed minor characters in \textit{Brideshead Revisited}. Some of his less attractive characteristics are based on Waugh's Oxford associate, Brian Howard, an "extravagant homosexual-aesthete", whom Waugh later disliked intensely and described in Lady Caroline Lamb's words as "Mad, bad, and dangerous to know". Blanche is widely regarded as a portrait of Waugh's life-long friend Harold Acton, however. Acton, an Englishman with Italian and American influences in his background, was the leader of the aesthetes at Oxford in Waugh's time there and unlike Howard commanded the intelligence and wit displayed by Blanche. (Christopher Sykes; \textit{Evelyn Waugh}, pp. 254 - 255, and Michael Davie (ed.), \textit{The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh}, p. 801.)

\textsuperscript{146}Evelyn Waugh, \textit{Brideshead Revisited}, p. 62.

\textsuperscript{147}Ibid., pp. 62 - 65.

\textsuperscript{148}Ibid., p. 47.
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with the epithet, "Charm again ...", overhears society ladies describe the pictures at Charles’s new exhibition as "forceful", "barbaric", and "downright unhealthy". Excitedly, he rushes to the gallery, only to be disappointed:

'... I found, my dear, a very naughty and very successful practical joke. It reminded me of dear Sebastian when he liked so much to dress up in whiskers. It was charm again, my dear, simple, creamy English charm, playing tigers .... I took you out to dinner to warn you of charm. I warned you expressly and in great detail of the Flyte family. Charm is the great English blight .... It spots and kills everything it touches. It kills love, it kills art; I greatly fear, my dear Charles, it has killed you.'149

While Blanche’s comments may appear to be merely an amusing satire on the English cult of charm, they suggest much more: his words reveal the charm of the Flytes as a symptom of their decadence. It is what disguises "the real thing", just as the beautiful house at Brideshead disguises with eighteenth-century charm the true chivalric origins of the family, the original Brideshead Castle. The Flytes, "half-paganized themselves", have deviated from their god-given obligations, from their divine destiny. Cordelia comments: "There’s him [Lord Marchmain] gone and Sebastian gone and Julia gone. But God won’t let them go for good, you know."150 This is a statement of the central theme of the novel. Waugh demonstrates how God proceeds to bring these stray lambs back into the fold, like an angler brings in a fish, "with a twitch upon the thread"151 - a phrase used in a Father Brown story that Lady Marchmain reads to her family, and which becomes the title of the last chapter of the novel where the divine purpose is fulfilled, not only for the stray Flytes, but inevitably also for Charles Ryder himself.

149 Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited, pp. 311 - 312.
150 Ibid., p. 253.
151 Ibid.
Before the final affirmation of belief at the end of the novel, Waugh characteristically gives us glimpses of the alternative condition, of people who are not subject to the general decay from true civilization as he defines it. This is done most notably in references to Lady Marchmain's brothers, who were all killed during the First World War. Unlike the Flytes who only converted to Roman Catholicism at the time of Lord Marchmain's marriage, Lady Marchmain's family is one of those ancient aristocratic Catholic families, which constitutes for Waugh the ideal. Looking at a commemorative volume of their poems, essays, letters and other writings, which Lady Marchmain had had published privately, Charles notices that these young men are very different from the Flytes. They bear a stern, harsh, but noble air - the word "charm" would be singularly inappropriate to describe them:

The frontispiece reproduced the photograph of a young man in Grenadier uniform, and I saw plainly revealed there the grim mask which, in Brideshead, overlaid the gracious features of his father's family; this was a man of the woods and caves, a hunter, a judge of the tribal council, the repository of the harsh tradition of a people at war with their environment.

The last line recalls Waugh's assertion that "Christianity is essential to civilization and that it is in greater need of combative strength than it has been for centuries." The stern Catholic gentleman is at war with his decadent dechristianized environment. The writings of Lady Marchmain's brothers exhale a "high-spirited, serious, chivalrous, other-

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152 Cf. Waugh's confession in the extract from The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold on p. 8 of this chapter.

153 Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited, pp. 159 - 160.

That England has come to the end of an era, both spiritually and socially, is indicated by the fact that Lady Marchmain’s brothers have all died, fallen in that war which marked the beginning of the end of the traditional, hierarchical society which was so dear to Waugh. It is also indicated by repeated references to aristocratic houses being demolished. Charles, ironically, makes a living from painting these for the owners before they go, recording the splendour of what has been, rather as Waugh felt he was doing by writing *Brideshead Revisited*. Most ominously, also Anchorage House, which had stood as a beacon of civilization amidst the chaos of *Vile Bodies*, is up for demolishing. Charles’s wife tells him:

I promised Lady Anchorage you would do Anchorage House as soon as you got back. That’s coming down too, you know - shops underneath and two-roomed flats above.⁷

Echoing the parallels drawn in *A Handful of Dust*, Charles responds that this is “just another jungle closing in”. Marchmain House, the Flytes’ London home, is also demolished and Charles does a number of studies of the house to be kept by the

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⁷Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, p. 266.
family.\textsuperscript{158}

It is the ideal aristocrats - Lady Marchmain's brothers - that are most sharply and bitterly contrasted to Hooper, representative of the common man in the twentieth century:

These men must die to make a world for Hooper; they were the aborigines, vermin by right of law, to be shot off at leisure so that things might be safe for the travelling salesman, with his polygonal pince-nez, his fat wet handshake, his grinning dentures.\textsuperscript{159}

The character of Lady Marchmain, "starry and delicate", unlike her brothers, remains something of an enigma. She is described as beautiful and devout, thus not subject to the decadence of her family, and yet her love for her family brings disaster to them. "Poor mummy ..." says Sebastian, "She really was a \textit{femme fatale}, wasn't she? She killed at a touch."\textsuperscript{160} Nancy Mitford was so puzzled by this apparent contradiction that she wrote to Waugh,

\textsuperscript{158}As with Anchorage House in \textit{Vile Bodies} (cf. footnote 94), there appears to be a reference to the Mountbattens here. In this case, it is something of a jibe. Cordelia comments on the passing of Marchmain House:

\begin{quote}
It's sad about Marchers isn't it? Do you know they're going to build a block of flats, and that Rex wanted to take what he called a "penthouse" at the top. Isn't it like him? Poor Julia. That was too much for her.
\end{quote}

\textit{(Brideshead Revisited, p. 252)}

When the Mountbattens' magnificent Park Lane mansion, Brook House, was demolished in 1935, a block of luxury flats arose on its place, and the Mountbattens took a penthouse encompassing the two top floors, just as Rex Mottram wants to do in the novel. (Cf. Richard Hough, \textit{Edwina, Countess Mountbatten of Burma}, pp. 138 - 139.)

It is interesting that Lady Mountbatten's biographer refers several times to Waugh's portrayal of the twenties, particularly in \textit{Vile Bodies}, to illustrate the kind of lives that the Mountbattens led at the time.

\textsuperscript{159}Evelyn Waugh, \textit{Brideshead Revisited}, p. 161.

\textsuperscript{160}Ibid., p. 246.
"Are you, or not, on Lady Marchmain's side. I can't make out ..."). Waugh replied in a letter dated 7 January 1945, "... no, I am not on her side; but God is, who suffers fools gladly; and the book is about God ...." The novel makes its final affirmation of belief with the deathbed of Lord Marchmain. This scene lies at the heart of the novel. Waugh wrote to his Catholic mentor, Monsignor Ronald Knox, "It was, of course, all about the death bed". The scene - and to some extent the whole novel then - is based on the death of Waugh's friend, Hubert Duggan, brother of the novelist Alfred Duggan, and step-son of the great Edwardian statesman and former Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon. Duggan had been born a Catholic, but had not practised his religion for many years. Waugh wrote,

I was present at almost exactly that scene, with less extravagant decor, when a friend of mine whom we thought in his final coma and stubbornly impenitent, whose womenfolk would only let the priest in because they thought him unconscious, did exactly that, making the sign of the cross. It was profoundly affecting and I wrote the book about that scene.

Lord Marchmain's death is the climax of the novel. He had unceremoniously ordered the priest from his room when the family brought him in for the first time. When he is apparently unconscious, it is surprisingly and significantly the apostate Julia, who takes the priest into the sick-room, the magnificent

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162 Mark Amory (ed.), The Letters of Evelyn Waugh, p. 196.
163 Ibid., p. 206.
Chinese drawing room. Charles surprises himself in the unaccustomed action of praying that Lord Marchmain would give some sign of acknowledgment, if only to give Julia peace of mind. In a scene pregnant with sense and emotion, Lord Marchmain acknowledges the extreme unction administered to him:

The priest took the little silver box from his pocket and spoke again in Latin, touching the dying man with an oil wad; he finished what he had to do, put away the box and gave the final blessing. Suddenly Lord Marchmain moved his hand to his forehead; I thought he had felt the touch of the chrism and was wiping it away. 'O God,' I prayed, 'don't let him do that.' But there was no need for fear; the hand moved slowly down his breast, then to his shoulder, and Lord Marchmain made the sign of the cross. Then I knew that the sign I had asked for was not a little thing, not a passing nod of recognition, and a phrase came back to me from my childhood of the veil of the temple being rent from top to bottom.  

Lord Marchmain's repentance has profound repercussions. It is the "twitch upon the thread" that brings Julia back to God and the Church, as Cordelia had predicted, and it is also the avalanche that destroys the hut that Charles had established in the snow to protect his security. Julia's conversion destroys their relationship and leaves Charles unprotected, vulnerable to the ineluctable grace of God:

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.  

In the epilogue, Charles rejoices to find that the flame in the chapel at Brideshead, the flame which was extinguished when the


167 Ibid., p. 387.
chapel was deconsecrated, burns again. The divine purpose has been accomplished, in his own life as in the lives of the Flytes, and the image of the flame universalizes his experience against the background of the war being conducted in 1945 and the secularized society of that time:

... a small red flame ... the flame which the old knights saw from their tombs, which they saw put out; that flame burns again for other soldiers, far from home, farther, in heart, than Acre or Jerusalem.168

For Evelyn Waugh, the resilience to combat the decadence of his time, lies undoubtedly in the affirmation of religious belief, the embracing of Christianity. This is, of course, a resilience which applies to the individual, rather than to a class. In accordance with his personal mythology, however, Waugh selects the old aristocracy, particularly the old Catholic aristocracy, an embodiment of traditional mores and beliefs, to suggest the ideal, the example for modern man to find his salvation amidst the debris of a crumbling civilization.

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III. THEIR FINEST HOUR

Shakespeare: Henry V

On, on you noble English!
Whose blood is fed from fathers of war-proof;
Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,
Have in these parts from morn till even fought,
And sheath'd their swords for lack of argument.

In a certain sense the Second World War occupies a crepuscular territory in the middle of the century, being at once the culmination of the movements and currents of the thirties and the prologue to the privations of a profoundly altered post-war world.¹

The war itself passed through a number of well-documented phases, starting with the "phony war" during which Hitler pursued his blitzkrieg into Poland while offering peace to Britain and France.² The populations of these countries were left curiously suspended in anticipation of hostilities - an experience of unreality used as comic material in Nancy Mitford’s early novel, Pigeon Pie (1940). This phase ended in April 1940 when Germany attacked Denmark and Norway, followed by their attack on the Low Countries in May, which in turn led to the invasion of France. This second phase precipitated the fall of Chamberlain’s government and the formation of a national government composed of Conservatives, Labour supporters and Liberals under the premiership of the aristocrat, Winston Churchill, grandson of the 7th Duke of Marlborough and lineal descendant of John Churchill, the Great Duke of Marlborough, who had been the most celebrated commander of Englishmen under arms in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. This transfer of power can perhaps be regarded as ringing the knell of the old order:

When Churchill assumed leadership of Britain and the Commonwealth in May 1940, the spirit of the thirties died.


²For the factual history of the war, cf. ibid., pp. 22 - 23.
It died, visibly and audibly, in the Commons debate of 8 May, which compelled Chamberlain’s resignation. The mood of mental lassitude and moral fecklessness began to disperse ....

The adversities of the fall of France, the forced evacuation of British troops at Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain when the Luftwaffe tried (but failed) to gain control over British airspace, constituted the next phase. During this time only Britain and the Dominions among the allies were in a position to pursue the war actively and North Africa was the only theatre of war. After the German invasion of Russia in June 1941 and the entry of the United States into the war in December 1941 after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Britain’s role became overshadowed by that of the two superpowers, however. This already adumbrated the power-structures of the post-war world. As the war drew to a close, the British public became more intensely introspective as they tried to determine the society they would inherit after the war. During the course of the conflict, a perception of it as a "moral crusade" for a better existence emerged, much more strongly than in the First World War. The British, having seen all classes co-operating closely, sharing hardship and glory, defeat and victory, became intent on a better deal for all social groups, crystallized in the concept of the "Welfare State" in the Beveridge Report of 1942, anticipating comprehensive national welfare supported by national insurance, "guaranteeing minimum well-being for all 'from the cradle to the grave'".

Churchill’s assumption of power in 1940 was the most distinct signal of a remarkable aristocratic resurgence during the War. He himself was the first man of genteel birth to hold the premiership since Balfour - who had been Prime Minister from 1902

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4 Ibid., p. 212.

to 1905 - and as Cannadine states, he governed the country through the turbulent war years "with a mixture of power and panache, eloquence and magnanimity, which exemplified patrician high-mindedness at its most majestic." In spite of the devastating experience of the First War, the aristocracy once again flocked to the standard and prepared - with astounding success - to resume their roles as leaders of the nation and defenders of the realm. So successful was their resurgence that between "1940 and 1945, the British war effort was far more patrician in its supreme direction and high command than it had been between 1914 and 1918"! The Prime Minister was himself at least partly responsible for this state of affairs as he chose to surround himself with people of his own kind. His favourite private secretary was Jock Colvile, grandson of the Marquess of Crewe, while the Director-General of the Ministry of Economic Warfare was the 10th Earl of Drogheda. At a higher level, Anthony Eden, the Foreign Minister (later Prime Minister and Earl of Avon) was the son of the 7th Eden baronet of West Auckland in County Durham, and Sir Archibald Sinclair, 5th baronet, held the key war-time position of Secretary of State for Air. Churchill’s best friend, Oliver Lyttelton, later Viscount Chandos, became President of the Board of Trade and Minister of Production, while Lord Cranborne, eldest son and heir of the 4th Marquess of Salisbury was in turn Dominions Secretary, Lord Privy Seal and Lord President. In the Commons, the government chief whip was a nobleman - James Stuart, son of the seventeenth Earl of Moray, while C. Moore-Brabazon, an Anglo-Irish aristocrat, successively held the posts of Minister of Transport and of Aircraft Production. Viscount Swinton became Minister of Civil Aviation; the Duke of Devonshire Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the

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7Ibid., p. 607.

8This and subsequent examples are mainly cited from David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, chapter 13: The Second World War.
Colonies, and the Duke of Norfolk - premier peer of the realm - Under-Secretary of State for Agriculture. Sir Alexander Cadogan, son of the 5th Earl of that name, was Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, and Churchill’s particular liking for him may have been not unrelated to the fact that the 1st Earl Cadogan had been principal staff officer and director of intelligence for the 1st Duke of Marlborough in ten campaigns! The list is by no means exhaustive, but illustrates to what extent key positions, from the most conspicuous to the more discreet, were held by patricians during the war.

Even more conspicuous was the contribution the nobility made in their traditional role of military leadership. Agincourt and Malplaquet could not have appeared so very remote as aristocrats set out with the same enthusiasm and vigour to fight for England, as they had been doing for centuries. The 14th Duke of Hamilton, the 5th Earl of Bandon and the future 6th Earl of Gosford were among the senior commanders in the Royal Air Force. Admiral of the Fleet the 12th Earl of Cork and Orrery and Admiral Sir Reginald Plunkett-Ernle-Erle-Drax, son of the 17th Lord Dunsany, both reached retirement age during the war, but continued to serve the country with distinction at sea. The King’s own cousin, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten (later Earl Mountbatten of Burma and last Viceroy of India) served as Supreme Commander: South East Asia. The 6th Viscount Gort, an Anglo-Irish nobleman who had received the Victoria Cross during the First World War, "presided brilliantly over the Dunkirk evacuation" 9, while his son-in-law, the Hon. William Sidney (later Viscount De L’Isle), continued the family tradition by winning a Victoria Cross at Anzio 10. Churchill’s favourite commander was another Anglo-Irish aristocrat, Field Marshal the Earl Alexander of Tunis, younger son of the 4th Earl of Caledon. The future Duke of Devonshire, Earl of Derby and Lord Carrington each won the

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9 David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 613.

10 Ibid., p. 614.
Military Cross, as did innumerable other patricians. For many aristocrats, it was indeed their finest hour, an opportunity to rise with heroic valour to the challenges of the time in response to the values of their class. Cannadine comments:

Indeed, with a Britain led by the patrician Churchill, with the United States presided over by the upper-class Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and with the Free French Forces under the command of General Charles de Gaulle, it is not altogether fanciful to see the European war as the last reassertion of upper-class leadership against the upstart corporals and petty duces of the Fascist powers. In the clash between the allied patricians and the axis Pooters, it was the old established order that ultimately triumphed. ¹¹

Ironically, the war in which they excelled so impressively, drove the nails into the coffin of the fortunes of many aristocratic families. It transpired to be not a genuine renaissance of aristocratic leadership, but "one brief shining moment" amidst the general gloom of aristocratic decline, particularly as the Second World War moved British society towards new egalitarian ideals. The war led to the abandonment of the Empire as Britain embraced the aims of the United Nations Charter "to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions ..." ¹², closing up that avenue for aristocratic aspirations and leadership energies. Stately homes had been commandeered as hospitals, military headquarters or barracks - like Brideshead in Waugh’s Brideshead Revisited - and especially in the socialist aftermath of the war, many, perhaps most, never recovered their former glory. Viscount Churchill expressed the scattering and cataclysmic effects of the war on his own aristocratic family - and those of many other

¹¹David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, p. 617.

Before it was finished, [the war] had scattered the family and every material object, every record and every possession. Ancestral homes, heirlooms, family jewels, libraries, portraits, even trivial mementoes and old yellowing photographs, were dispersed for ever, and no one - sisters, brother, father, mother - would come to rest from that upheaval, until each was a stranger, and everything had disintegrated and disappeared.\textsuperscript{13}

As Cannadine points out\textsuperscript{14}, this picture of disintegration and dispersal is particularly applicable to the Mitford family, the talented and charming children of the 2nd Lord Redesdale. Tom was killed in Burma, Nancy settled in France after the disintegration of her marriage, Diana and her husband spent the war in prison and then went into exile in Ireland and later on the continent. Jessica emigrated to the United States; her husband was killed in action and she married as her second husband a Jewish lawyer from the Bronx. Unity tried to commit suicide and died an incontinent invalid a few years after the war, and Lord and Lady Redesdale eventually also parted to lead separate lives.

In her article on the English aristocracy that appeared in \textit{Encounter} in September 1955, Nancy summarizes the experience of the war for the aristocracy in a short description of the lives of a fictional couple, Lord and Lady Fortinbras, he "young, healthy, and not stupid" and she "handsome, bossy, and energetic ... the kind of woman who, in America, would be running something

\textsuperscript{13}Quoted by David Cannadine from Lord Churchill’s autobiography, \textit{All My Sins Remembered} (1965), in his book, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy}, p. 624.

\textsuperscript{14}David Cannadine, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy}, p. 623.
with enormous efficiency and earning thousands."\textsuperscript{15} By the nineteen-thirties they are financially ruined, but do not think of getting jobs and retrieving the family fortunes. Instead, they sell off everything that is not entailed, close up most of the house and move into the nursery with the Dowager Lady Fortinbras, an Aunt and Nanny, doing all their own house and estate work, and continuing to attend the County Council, sit on the Bench and do a great deal of committee work. When the war comes, they both naturally join up:

Their war records are brilliant in the extreme, their energy, courage, and instinct for leadership have at last found an outlet, and in no time at all, they both become generals. After the war, they are not surprised to find themselves more ruined than ever.\textsuperscript{16}

They break the entail, sell everything "very badly", move into a mews flat in London, "where they will continue to cook and wash up for the rest of their days"\textsuperscript{17}, and continue to sit on endless committees - Lord Fortinbras sitting in the House of Lords - until they both kill themselves with overwork, never having earned, apart from their army pay, one single penny.

In her novels, which span three decades - the nineteen-thirties to the nineteen-fifties - Miss Mitford paints the same history of decline on a wider and more intimate, humorous yet ultimately affecting canvas.


\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 100.
When one considers the aristocratic novel in the twentieth century, the name of Nancy Mitford, novelist and historian, springs to mind immediately. Miss Mitford's novels have received fairly limited critical attention, and Christopher Sykes goes so far as to state that "her talent, though real and interesting, was a slight one." This assessment does not prevent him, however, from praising *The Pursuit of Love* as "a remarkable autobiographical novel" with "irresistible appeal". The reason why Miss Mitford is such an obvious choice for a study of aristocratic novelists, however, does not relate primarily to an assessment of her stature as a novelist, but rather to the fact that she has come to be recognized as a kind of unofficial spokeswoman for the British aristocracy in this century, and that her novels are intrinsically and dominantly aristocratic in nature.

Nancy Mitford (1904 - 1973) was the eldest of the 2nd Baron Redesdale's five remarkable daughters, who have continued to delight and horrify the British public through much of this century, and represent for many perhaps the quintessence of aristocratic charm - wayward, talented, and unpredictable, though demonstrating an enigmatic but recognizable homogeneity and solidarity, and exuding a fascination on which Miss Mitford capitalized greatly in her novels.

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19 Ibid., p. 288.

Among Nancy’s siblings, Diana Mitford (b. 1910), the most beautiful of these alluring sisters, became a well-known socialite in the 1930s as the wife of the Hon. Bryan Guinness (now Lord Moyne), poet and novelist and scion of the enormously wealthy Irish brewing and banking family. In 1934 she divorced him to pursue a liaison with the charismatic Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Fascist movement, who married her in 1936. She embraced her husband’s unpopular political views with fervour, enjoyed the friendship of the Nazi

21Bryan Walter Guinness, 2nd Baron Moyne (1905 - ), who published inter alia 23 Poems (1931) and Collected Poems (1956), many novels such as A Week by the Sea (1936), Lady Crushwell’s Companion (1938), The Children in the Desert (1947), The Animal’s Breakfast (1950), The Giant’s Eye (1964) and The Engagement (1969), and plays such as The Fragrant Concubine (1938) and A Riverside Charade (1954), son of the 1st Baron and Lady Evelyn Stuart Erskine, daughter of the 14th Earl of Buchan, married in 1929 the Hon. Diana Mitford, (divorced 1934) and 2ndly in 1936 Elisabeth Nelson. Two sons were born from the first marriage and a further nine children from the second. (Cf. Burke’s Peerage, 1980, pp. 1914 - 1915; Who’s Who 1975, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1975, pp. 2266 - 2267.)

22Sir Oswald Ernald Mosley, 6th Baronet of Ancoats (1896 - 1980), M.P. for Harrow (1918 - 1924) and for Smethwick (1926 - 1931), author of My Life (1968) and other works, son of Sir Oswald Mosley, 5th Baronet and his wife Katharine Edwards-Heathcote, married in 1920 Lady Cynthia Curzon (1898 - 1933), M.P. for Stoke Division, Stoke-on-Trent (1929 - 1931), daughter of 1st and last Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, former Viceroy of India, and 2ndly in 1936 the Hon. Diana Mitford. Three children were born from the first marriage of whom the eldest son is the novelist Nicholas Mosley (now the 3rd Baron Ravensdale), and two from the second. (Cf. Burke’s Peerage, 1980, p. 1893).

Sir Oswald started his political career as a Conservative M.P., soon became an independent and joined the Labour Party in the 1920s. He then established his own New Party, and was defeated with all his candidates in the 1931 election. The New Party eventually evolved into the British Union of Fascists. Mosley was generally acknowledged to be a brilliant speaker and thinker, despite his unpopular policies. The Westminster Gazette, a Liberal mouthpiece, described Mosley, then an independent M.P., as "the most polished literary speaker in the Commons, words flow from him in graceful epigrammatic phrases .... To listen to him is an education in the English language, also in the art of delicate but deadly repartee. He has human sympathies, courage and brains." (Cf. Diana Mosley, A Life of Contrasts, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977, pp. 95 - 97. See also pp. 54 - 56 of chapter 1 of this thesis.)
leadership in Germany, spent some of the war years in prison with Mosley, and with a keen intelligence and eloquence has continued to defend their views even since the war. Unity Mitford (1914 - 1948) was, if anything, an even keener Nazi than her sister and became famous (or notorious) in Britain for her personal friendship with Hitler and her overtly anti-semitic views. At the outbreak of war in 1939, she tried to commit suicide by shooting herself through the head in the Englischer Garten in Munich, but survived - her mind impaired - until 1948. On the other side of the political spectrum, sister Jessica Mitford (b. 1917) - author of two best-selling autobiographies: Hons and Rebels and A Fine Old Conflict - became a committed Communist\textsuperscript{23}, eloped at nineteen with Winston Churchill's nephew, Esmond Romilly, to go and fight in the Spanish Civil War, and with her second husband\textsuperscript{24} became a leftist human rights activist in the

\textsuperscript{23}Ironically Unity and Jessica, inveterate political enemies, were the closest to each other in the family. In her suicide note, Unity sent her love particularly to her "Boud" (the nickname by which she and Jessica called each other). (Jonathan & Catherine Guinness, The House of Mitford, p. 427.) In her memoirs, Jessica describes how she and Unity shared a room allotted to them for their own purposes by their mother, and divided it down the middle .... Boud decorated her side with Fascist insignia of all kinds - the Italian 'fasces', a bundle of sticks bound with a rope; photographs of Mussolini ...; photographs of Mosley trying to look like Mussolini; the new German swastika, a record collection of Nazi and Italian youth songs. My side was fixed up with my Communist library, a small bust of Lenin ...., a file of Daily Workers.

She also describes how the two of them conspired to take five pounds each out of the kitty of their mother's stall at the Conservative fête to send to the Daily Worker and the British Union of Fascists respectively. (Jessica Mitford, Hons and Rebels, London: Quartet, second impression, 1979, pp. 60 - 61.)

\textsuperscript{24}Robert Treuhaft, the son of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, studied law at Harvard and settled in California as a partner in a law firm which counted various unions and the American Communist Party among its clients. He built up a considerable reputation as a civil rights lawyer and joined the American Communist Party in 1943. (Cf. Jessica Mitford; A Fine Old Conflict, London: Quartet, second impression, 1979, pp. 39 - 41, 59 et passim.)
United States. Pamela (b. 1907) married the respected British scientist Derek Jackson, while Deborah (b. 1920) moved to the top of the aristocratic ladder by marrying the Duke of Devonshire and becoming chatelaine of Chatsworth, which has

25 Prof Derek Ainslie Jackson, OBE, DFC, AFC, MA (Cantab and Oxon), DSc (Oxon), son of Sir Charles James Jackson, one of the founders of News of the World, who left him a considerable fortune. Jackson, was Professor of Spectroscopy at Oxford and later Research Professor at the Faculté des Sciences, Centre de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. As unconventional as his in-laws, Jackson was an outstanding horseman, participating in the Grand National. This accomplishment caused his sister-in-law, Jessica, who was intent on gaining maximum effect from her unconventional family history for her own purposes, to describe him in her autobiography as a "jockey", leading to an icy rejoinder by her sister, Lady Mosley, in a letter to The Times Literary Supplement:

The jockey in question is a distinguished physicist, a Fellow of the Royal Society, who occupied the Chair of Spectroscopy at Oxford University. He also rode in the Grand National. (Times Literary Supplement, 8 April 1960, p. 225.)

Professor Jackson had the further distinction of rivalling Henry VIII's marital achievement by marrying six times. (Pam was his second wife and lasted the longest - 14 years.) His wit and his approach to people could be as surprising as that of any of the Mitfords. He was once overheard announcing to a group of bewildered Viennese: 'Ich bin steinreich, bildschoén und weltberuhmt' - I am as rich as Croesus, pretty as a picture and world-famous. (Cf. Who's Who 1975, p. 1625 and Jonathan & Catherine Guinness, The House of Mitford, pp. 348 - 351.)

26 Andrew Robert Buxton Cavendish, 11th Duke of Devonshire, b. 1920, son of the 10th Duke and Lady Mary Gascoyne-Cecil, his wife, married in 1941 the Hon. Deborah Mitford. The Duke is or has been inter alia Vice-Lieutenant of Derbyshire, Chancellor of Manchester University, a Minister of State for Commonwealth Relations, and a Trustee of the National Gallery. It is said that Debo, even as a child insisted that she would marry a duke. Where others spoke of Mr Right, she dreamed about the Duke of Right. It should be added, however, that she married the present Duke when he still had a live elder brother, William, Marquess of Hartington, the husband of President Kennedy's sister, Kathleen, and did not expect to inherit the title. Lord Hartington was killed in action in 1944 and Andrew succeeded his father in 1950. (Cf. Burke's Peerage, 1980, pp. 795 - 798; Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd, Debrett's Great British Families, Exeter: Webb & Bower, with Michael Joseph, 1988.)
been described as one of Europe’s great palaces. The only brother, Tom, regarded by many of the Mitfords’ acquaintances as the most talented of this gifted family, was killed in action in Burma in 1945.

With such an array of personalities, the Mitfords soon achieved legendary status in Britain and were pursued by the popular press upon whatever eccentric activity they happened to be engaged. Their story has even been turned into a musical comedy, The Mitford Girls. Lady Redesdale is said to have remarked sadly that whenever a headline started with "Peer’s Daughter ... " she knew that it would deal with one of her children. Jessica’s elopement to Spain provided a high-point of such activity:

By now the story had hit the papers. It was made for them: peer’s daughter, young warrior, stuffy and obstructive parents - an archetypal romance, not a dry eye in the house. The Daily Express scooped the story on 1 March, splashing it on its front page with a photograph of Decca [Jessica] and Debo.

Lady Redesdale wrote, sadly again, to Nancy: "The papers ... have surpassed themselves as one might have expected .... Farve and I are terribly down .... Nancy turned the whole event into high farce when she used it in her novel The Pursuit of Love, where one of the younger Radlett daughters, Jassy, runs off to America to marry a minor film star:

Alconleigh now turned upon a state of siege. Journalists braved Uncle Matthew’s stock whips, his blood-hounds, his

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28 Jessica Mitford, Hons and Rebels, p. 8.


30 Ibid.
terrifying blue flashes, and hung around the village, penetrating into the house itself in their search of local colour. Their stories were a daily delight. Uncle Matthew was made into something between Heathcliff, Dracula, and the Earl of Dorincourt, Alconleigh a sort of Nightmare Abbey or House of Usher, and Aunt Sadie a character not unlike David Copperfield’s mother. Such courage, ingenuity, and toughness were displayed by these correspondents that it came as no surprise to any of us, when, later on, they did so well in the war. 31

Nancy has remarked that the English regard her as "their chief purveyor of fairy tales" 32 and the success of her novels is at least partly to be ascribed to the British public’s enduring fascination with the aristocracy, as exemplified by her own family, who indeed to a large extent formed the inspiration for her work. The British public’s perceptions of the Mitford family are largely the result of Nancy’s best-selling novels on the one hand, and of Jessica’s highly popular autobiographies on the other. More objective and learned commentaries have been published, but the original impression of fierce, explosive, unintellectual backwoods peer and vague ineffectual wife with brilliant, wayward daughters, has prevailed.

Comparing the renditions of family life by the two sisters, Jessica and Nancy, is not only interesting, but reveals what lies at the heart of the one’s ‘factual’ and the other’s fictional writing, and is thus significant for an assessment of Nancy Mitford as a novelist. Jessica’s rendition of their childhood is summed up by The Times Literary Supplement’s reviewer of Hons and Rebels as follows:


Her portraits of Lord and Lady Redesdale ("Farve" and "Muv") show them as monsters of arrogance and dullness, whose neglect, in all but a material sense, of their children might well have resulted not in that rebellious pattern of behaviour so much prized by the author but in alcoholism or the analyst's couch.\textsuperscript{33}

This picture of a deprived and repressed childhood is suggested by statements such as "Swinbrook [the family seat] had many aspects of a fortress or citadel of mediaeval times"\textsuperscript{34}; "My mother thought the company of other children unnecessary and over-stimulating"\textsuperscript{35}; and

\begin{quote}
The name Farve may ... conjure up the picture of a pallier-than-Daddy father. Not to me. In my earliest memory of them Muv and Farve were actually as tall as the sky and as large as Marble Arch, and were somewhat more powerful than King and Parliament rolled into one.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

She describes their education as erratic, narrow-minded, and bigoted, taught as they were at their mother's knee from an illustrated book called Our Island Story, "with a beautiful picture of Queen Victoria as its frontispiece"\textsuperscript{37}, or by governesses who were either fools or delinquents. As the reader progresses it becomes clear that Jessica's purpose is to spread the gospel according to Marx. She portrays herself as the victim of the bigotry and blindness of the oppressive upper classes, bravely managing to escape from these moral and intellectual confinements to a clear insight into the iniquities of her


\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., p. 10.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 11.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 17.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 15.
parents' class and to the moral superiority, justice and earthly bliss of socialist egalitarianism. Jessica is richly endowed with the Mitford gifts of humour, charm and eloquence so that the book is highly readable, wildly entertaining and even reasonably convincing. She certainly managed to impress the Times Literary Supplement reviewer with her earnestness:

She is never arch, facetious or falsely modest: she could not be sentimental if she tried, or spiteful, however provoked; she is severe sometimes, and often amusing. She remains agreeable and gay .... If she does [connect her parents' egoism, discourtesy and self-satisfaction with the fate of her sisters Unity and Diana], she is too wise and too loyal to stress these points ....

However, Jessica's subtle indictment of her parents and class and its endorsement by the review caused a flurry of letters to The Times Literary Supplement from correspondents who jumped to the Redesdales' defence.

In her novels The Pursuit of Love and Love in a Cold Climate, Nancy Mitford's description of the Mitfords' childhood takes up many of the themes and even actual incidents described by Jessica, but treats them with a humour as characteristic of


Mrs Violet Hammersley, an old friend of the family's wrote for example in the edition of 15 April 1960: "This is a complete travesty of the truth. Theirs was a charming home and, on the face of it, all the heart could desire."

40 One of the funniest of these is Jessica's anecdote of how she told her dancing class "the facts of life" as she understood them, resulting in a severe reprimand from Lady Redesdale after one of the little girls had "wakened night after night with screaming nightmares". (Jessica Mitford, Hons and Rebels, p. 11.)
her work as Jessica’s politicising is of hers. Farve, now Lord Alconleigh, or the narrator’s "Uncle Matthew", does indeed roar, but is shown as having an affectionate and even lovable side, and Muv, here Lady Alconleigh or Aunt Sadie, is indeed rather vague, but also dignified and caring in her own rather distracted way:

Linda and I were very much occupied with sin, and our great hero was Oscar Wilde.

‘But what did he do?’

‘I asked Fa once and he roared at me - goodness, it was terrifying. He said: "If you mention that sewer’s name again in this house I’ll thrash you, do you hear, damn you?" So I asked Sadie and she looked awfully vague and said: "Oh, duck, I never really quite knew, but whatever it was was worse than murder, fearfully bad. And, darling, don’t talk about him at meals, will you?"

Uncle Matthew’s bark is described as “being invariably worse than his bite” and his children’s life with him as

a perpetual Tom Tiddler’s ground. They went as far as they dared, sometimes very far indeed, while sometimes, for no apparent reason, he would pounce before they had crossed the boundary. Had they been poor children they would probably have been removed from their roaring, raging, whacking papa and sent to an approved home, or, indeed, he himself would have been removed from them and sent to

Nancy’s witty fictional rendition attributes the "lesson" to Linda Radlett:

There was much worse drama when Linda, aged twelve, told the daughters of the neighbours, who had come to tea, what she supposed to be the facts of life. Linda’s presentation of the ‘facts’ had been so gruesome that the children left Alconleigh howling dismally, their nerves permanently impaired, their future chances of a sane and happy sex life much reduced. (Nancy Mitford, The Pursuit of Love, p. 10.)


42 Ibid., p. 16.
prison for refusing to educate them. Nature, however, provides her own remedies ....\textsuperscript{43}

The reference to education is a typical Nancy Mitford 'tease', although she did indeed disagree with her parents' policies on this topic. From early childhood, Nancy displayed a tendency to tease. It was probably partly her natural wit and humour that gave rise to this activity, but it also became a natural weapon against younger siblings that took attention away from her. Nancy was temperamental from babyhood, given to sudden rages and equally unexpected "sunny patches". Her life turned to misery when the second child, Pamela, was born, and affections were transferred, as was to be expected, to the new baby. It appears that Nancy never quite forgave her siblings for appearing, and punished them by her teases.

\[\text{Pam}\] as the second child, ... bore the brunt of her legendary teasing. Yet of course, Nancy could also be so funny and delightful that she and the others were attracted. It was the attraction of the flame for the moth.\textsuperscript{44}

The children were not her only victims, however, and the teasing was not always malicious either.

Although often unkind, Nancy's teasing was very funny and for those who were not at the receiving end it was the most glorious spectator sport. Best of all was when Nancy took on Farve, for with him she more than met her match. The children found it brilliantly entertaining, and loved the sparring that went on between Nancy and Farve, usually at table - on and on they would go, sniping and firing at each other to the accompaniment of gales of laughter from the

\textsuperscript{43}Nancy Mitford, \textit{The Pursuit of Love}, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{44}Jonathan & Catherine Guinness, \textit{The House of Mitford}, p. 243.
Her novels are liberally sprinkled with teases, and in fact, the early ones seem to be little more than teases. In the passage quoted from *The Pursuit of Love*, Nancy is teasing her father because of his attitude to education. Lord and Lady Redesdale, like many of their class at the time, did not believe in boarding school for girls, and the Mitfords were largely educated at home. Nancy and Jessica were keen to go to school and criticized their parents for this refusal. (Unity, on the other hand, managed to be sent to two schools and to be expelled from both. It is alleged that the reason for one of these expulsions is that when asked to recite, she added the word "rot" to the line "A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot".) Jessica, characteristically uses the refusal as an example of the shortsighted and wilful prejudice of her parents and her class, and Nancy, characteristically turns it into a joke and a tease:

Uncle Matthew and Aunt Emily [his sister-in-law, who is the guardian of Fanny, the narrator] were now engaged upon an argument we had all heard many times before. It concerned the education of females.

Uncle Matthew: 'I hope poor Fanny's school (the word pronounced in tones of withering scorn) is doing her all the good you think it is. Certainly she picks up some dreadful expressions there.'

Aunt Emily, calmly, but on the defensive: 'Very likely she does. She also picks up a good deal of education.'

Uncle Matthew: 'Education! I was always led to suppose that no educated person ever spoke of notepaper, and yet I hear poor Fanny asking Sadie for notepaper. What

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45 Selina Hastings, *Nancy Mitford*, p. 35.

46 Jonathan & Catherine Guinness; *The House of Mitford*, p. 237.

is this education? Fanny talks about mirrors and mantelpieces, handbags and perfume, she takes sugar in her coffee, has a tassel on her umbrella, and I have no doubt that, if she is ever fortunate enough to catch a husband, she will call his father and mother Father and Mother. Will the wonderful education she is getting make up to the unhappy brute for all these endless pinpricks? Fancy hearing one's wife talk about notepaper - the irritation!"  

This was to become the germ of the most famous of all Nancy Mitford's teases - her article on U and non-U speech in *Encounter* in September 1955 and of the debate that followed it.

However, Nancy's joking, as much as Jessica's descriptions and Debo, Duchess of Devonshire's straight-faced remark in a Television interview, "I hate ... books", have left the public


49 She enjoyed herself tremendously in writing the article, which was received with much less enthusiasm by her friends and relations: "I cook at it all day & think it the best thing I've ever done," she wrote. "It's a sort of anthology of teases - something for everybody." (Selina Hastings, *Nancy Mitford*, p. 223.)

Her sister Diana commented on the whole fracas:

> What she had written also made quite a few people cross, which was fatal with somebody like Nancy who enjoyed nothing so much as teasing. When she realized it had annoyed she was naturally overjoyed, and entered into the spirit of the thing, collaborating in a book called *Noblesse Oblige*.


Despite her professed hatred of books and disdain for education, the Duchess herself has proved to be "a meticulous chronicler of the history of Chatsworth." (Jonathan & Catherine Guinness, *The House of Mitford*, p. 262.) Harold Acton maintains
with the impression that the Mitfords, like their fictional counterparts, the Radletts, had little education. In his book *Six Novelists Look at Society*, John Atkins maintains that Nancy Mitford "experienced a childhood which was as intellectually restricted as that of a slum child". In *The Pursuit of Love* Nancy describes the education of the Radletts:

The Radlett children read enormously by fits and starts in the library at Alconleigh, a good representative nineteenth century library, which had been made by their grandfather, a most cultivated man. But while they picked up a great deal of heterogeneous information, and gilded it with their own originality, while they bridged gulfs of ignorance with their charm and high spirits, they never acquired any habit of concentration, they were incapable of solid hard work.

Nancy probably reveals her own perception of her education - which she felt to be inadequate - here, but her views are disputed by her nephew, Jonathan Guinness, and by the literary and journalistic achievements of a number of the Mitfords in later life, which could hardly have occurred without "concentration" and "solid hard work", not least by Nancy’s own meticulous research and success as a historical biographer. The Mitfords were, in fact, exceptionally well read at a very early age, owing to the excellent library of their grandfather,

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the 1st Lord Redesdale\textsuperscript{54}, and taught thoroughly and reliably by their governesses under the Parents National Education Union system, a system of education by correspondence.\textsuperscript{55}

What is significant is that Nancy, whatever her grudges or feelings might have been, turned everything into a joke or a tease - that was her defence against the outside, against unpleasantness, against pain, against a world which was steadily becoming more and more uncongenial in terms of her essentially aristocratic tastes and beliefs. Her sister Jessica remarks,

I doubt if anybody - even Diana and Debo, her closest companions toward the end of her life - managed to penetrate too deeply her lightly worn yet adamantine protective armour of drollery.\textsuperscript{56}

This feature lies at the core of Nancy Mitford's life and

\textsuperscript{54} Algernon Bertram Freeman-Mitford, 1st Lord Redesdale (1837 - 1916), started his career in the Diplomatic Service and then went on to the Office of Works, where he was instrumental in the remodelling of Hyde Park. In 1886 he inherited large estates from a cousin, settled on these and became a Member of Parliament for Stratford-on-Avon. He was a considerable scholar and won fame for his book *Tales of Old Japan*, based on his experiences as a diplomat in the Orient, and published in 1873. The book was and has remained a success and is even referred to with respect by the Japanese. It includes an eye-witness description of a ceremonial hara-kiri. (Cf. Jonathan & Catherine Guinness, *The House of Mitford*, pp. 13 - 16.)


\textsuperscript{56} Jessica Mitford, *A Fine Old Conflict*, p. 198.
writings. As the Marxist creed is the trade-mark of Jessica’s writing, so humour and wit, turned to use as defensive weapons, are the trademarks of Nancy’s.

As I have indicated, Nancy’s early novels — Highland Fling (1931), Christmas Pudding (1932), Wigs on the Green (1935) and Pigeon Pie (1940) — amount to little more than a series of jokes or teases. Her writing would always be very autobiographical, and these early works are full of private jokes and references to recognizable characters, notably Farve as General Murgatroyd in Highland Fling, Unity as the Fascist Eugenia Malmains in Wigs on the Green (the British Union of Fascists is called the Union Jack Movement and Mosley becomes Captain Jack in the novel), and Nancy’s close friend, Mark Ogilvie-Grant, as Sir Ivor King, the King of Song, in Pigeon Pie. (Mark is "teased" by Nancy inter alia for his botanical interests, his homosexuality and his love for Greece\(^57\):

Sophia poured out tea, and asked after his Lesbian irises.

‘They were not what they seemed,’ he said, ‘wretched things. I brought the roots all the way from Lesbos, as you know, and when they came up, what were they? Mere pansies.’\(^58\)

Jessica comments in her autobiography about the writing of the first of these early works:

For months Nancy had sat giggling helplessly by the drawing-room fire, her curiously triangular green eyes flashing with amusement, while her pen flew along the lines of a child’s exercise book. Sometimes she read bits aloud to us. "You can’t publish that under your own name," my

\(^{57}\)Cf. Selina Hastings, Nancy Mitford, p. 127.

mother insisted, scandalized, for not only did thinly disguised aunts, uncles and family friends people the pages ..., but there, larger than life-size, felicitously named General Murgatroyd, was Farve.\textsuperscript{59}

Farve would be much more memorably portrayed as Uncle Matthew in the later novels, but nevertheless cuts an amusing figure in \textit{Highland Fling}, displaying Lord Redesdale’s violent prejudices:

... I heard him say that before the War the things he hated most were Roman Catholics and Negroes, but now, he said, banging on the table, now it’s Germans. I wonder what he would do if he met a Roman Catholic Negro with a German father!\textsuperscript{60}

Jessica confirms that her father held similar views, though he, in fact, did not discriminate in his general prejudice against all foreigners. “When one of our cousins married an Argentinian of pure Spanish descent, he commented, ‘I hear that Robin has married a black.’”\textsuperscript{61}

The world Nancy depicts in these novels is of course an aristocratic one, and the characters are caricatures of aristocratic types. The novels resemble the early novels of Evelyn Waugh, a good friend of Nancy’s\textsuperscript{62}, in tone and approach, but lack the satiric force and effectiveness of Waugh’s works, mainly because the novels appear to be merely funny - jokes and teases - without a clear point of view, a premise from which the satire could be launched. Mitford admitted the resemblance,

\textsuperscript{59}Jessica Mitford; \textit{Hons and Rebels}, p. 30.


\textsuperscript{61}Jessica Mitford, \textit{Hons and Rebels}, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{62}Nancy stayed with Evelyn Waugh and his first wife, the Hon. Evelyn Gardner, in their flat for a few months in about 1930. Nancy’s 1951 novel, \textit{The Blessing}, is dedicated to Evelyn Waugh.
stating that she had to change *Highland Fling* quite a lot, "as it is so like Evelyn's in a lot of little ways, such a bore."\(^6^3\) The resemblance to Waugh's novels, though striking, is a surface resemblance, however, and these novels cannot be called truly satiric.

The "little ways" abound though. *Highland Fling* (1931) is closest to *Vile Bodies* (1930) in that it deals with a younger generation of "bright young things", who discard the *mores* and manners of their elders with gay abandon. Having heard a description of an incident involving a mock funeral, where the "corpse" got out and walked away at the end, while the mourners "picked up the wreaths and ran for dear life", Lady Prague, a character not at all unlike Waugh's Lady Circumference, "said loudly and angrily, 'Those are the Bright Young People, no doubt. How very disgusting!'"\(^6^4\) The novel opens with the hero Albert Memorial Gates, an artist, arriving by ferry in England and having a book (*Ulysses*) seized by customs, just as *Vile Bodies* opens with a writer, Adam Fenwick-Symes, arriving in England by ferry and having the manuscript of his novel seized by customs. There are similar references to society columnists; the Bright Young Things use similar jargon ("We told the taximan [of our engagement] because he was getting rather tired of driving round and round Berkeley Square, poor sweet, and he was divine to us ..."\(^6^5\)); and there are similar examples of Wildean humour: "Besides, why shouldn't I do some work? If you come to think of it, lots of people do."\(^6^6\) T.S Eliot also hovers in the background, but less significantly so than in Waugh's works: Albert declaims *The Hollow Men* "in a loud and tragic voice" while

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\(^{6^4}\)Nancy Mitford, *Highland Fling*, pp. 172 - 173.

\(^{6^5}\)Ibid., p. 2.

\(^{6^6}\)Ibid., p. 3.
the general tries to shoot game-birds.\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Christmas Pudding} (1932) takes its cue from \textit{Decline and Fall} (1928), with a tutor, called Paul Fotheringay (the counterpart of Paul Pennyfeather in the Waugh novel and apparently based on John Betjeman\textsuperscript{68}), engaged for a young boy spending a time at his mother's house in the country. The mother, Lady Bobbin, resembles Lady Circumference in \textit{Decline and Fall}, rather than Lady Metroland, the mother in Waugh's satiric novel. As in \textit{Decline and Fall}, somebody is killed at a school's sports day, and the speech of some of the house guests resembles that of Margot Metroland's house party: "'I couldn't be more amused' ... 'It was a riot,' 'My sweetie-boo' and 'What a poodle-pie'"\textsuperscript{69}

The cardboard characters of Lady Bobbin in \textit{Christmas Pudding} ("Lady Bobbin tramped Gloucestershire mud and cursed the foot and mouth disease which had stopped the hunting that beautiful, open winter ...")\textsuperscript{70} and Lady Prague in \textit{Highland Fling} show obvious kinship to Waugh's Lady Circumference, though Lady Prague is also an embryonic version of Miss Mitford's later grand creation, Lady Montdore in \textit{Love in a Cold Climate}, just as Mrs Fairfax in \textit{Christmas Pudding} is an earlier version of the Bolter in the later novels, and the briefly referred to Lord Maida Vale (... a widowed peer, who could write his name, ... but little else\textsuperscript{71}) in \textit{Pigeon Pie} is a halfway station between Colonel Blount in \textit{Vile Bodies} and the vital Uncle Matthew in the later Mitford novels. Miss Mitford is thus heavily, too heavily, influenced by Waugh, but does show the seeds of originality in these early works.

\textsuperscript{67} Nancy Mitford, \textit{Highland Fling}, p. 66.


\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 2.

\textsuperscript{71} Nancy Mitford, \textit{Pigeon Pie}, p. 4.
The novels also demonstrate some of the more general traits that have emerged among aristocratic novels. The flippant description of Lady Brenda Chadlington in *Highland Fling* ("... she is a creature so overbred that there is no sex or brain left, only nerve and the herd instinct ..." 72) is strongly reminiscent of Vita Sackville-West’s pre-occupation with the overbreeding and resultant decadence of the aristocracy 73; and the childishness of the upper classes, a feature which is stressed again and again by aristocratic novelists, is also demonstrated in these works. Albert Gates refers to a fellow guest at Dalloch Castle as “the only nice one among the grown-ups here” 74 and the bright young heiress Héloïse Potts, amuses her friends by the common children’s game of inserting “the sound ‘egi’ after the consonants of her words, thus rendering her meaning far from clear to those unversed in this practice” 75. These flashes of satire, momentarily suggest some more serious aim of the author’s, as do Albert’s declamation of *The Hollow Men* and his passionate pacifistic attack on “those unprincipled members of the governing classes (of all nationalities)” who were responsible for staging the War, because it was in their own interests 76, and Lady Sophia Garfield’s considered opinion that “it was difficult to think of any public man whose assassination would not greatly advance the Allied cause” 77. These remain, however, mere sparks of unrealized potential, and the novels are after all meant merely to amuse.

The two novels which established Nancy Mitford’s reputation as

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73 Cf. Vita Sackville-West, *Family History*, London: Virago, 1986, p. 40: "... they had the distinction and beauty of thoroughbred animals ... [but] those sleek heads contained no more brains than a greyhound’s".

74 Nancy Mitford, *Highland Fling*, p. 92.


76 Nancy Mitford, *Highland Fling*, p. 89.

a writer\textsuperscript{78}, The Pursuit of Love (1945) and Love in a Cold Climate (1949) represent an advance similar to that which Waugh achieved with A Handful of Dust (1934). Christopher Sykes comments, \"With The Pursuit of Love Nancy showed a sudden and rich fulfilment of the mild promise of her early fiction.\"\textsuperscript{79} As in Waugh's case, the cardboard figures become real people, however eccentric and bizarre they may still be. The anonymous reviewer of The Times Literary Supplement, writes for example after the publication of Love in a Cold Climate that \"... Miss Mitford's people possess an authenticity not always achieved by novelists whose characters are drawn largely from families of the

\textsuperscript{78}In her biography, Selina Hastings says that The Pursuit of Love was

an instant and phenomenal success. If ever there was a case of the right book at the right time, this book was it. Funny, frivolous, and sweepingly romantic, it was the perfect antidote to the long war years of hardship and austerity .... (Selina Hastings, Nancy Mitford, p. 165.)

Harold Acton adds \"... The Pursuit of Love was like a gloom dispersing rocket. Evelyn Waugh's Brideshead Revisited had paved the way for it ....\" (Harold Acton, Nancy Mitford: A Memoir, p. 59.) It was the Book Society Choice for December 1945, and sold 200 000 copies in the first twelve months. (Selina Hastings, Nancy Mitford, p. 168.)

Love in a Cold Climate, which was published in July 1949, received

even greater acclaim than its predecessor. The critics extolled it; it was the first novel ever to be chosen simultaneously as Book of the Month by the Book Society, the Daily Mail and the Evening Standard; and the catchy title was on everybody's lips. ('The Queen had to act Love in a CC in a charade - she kissed the King & shivered everybody guessed at once!!') (Ibid., p. 189.)

Acton again adds that

Gay, clever, witty, startling, brilliant, enchanting, extravagant, adroit, spirited, joyous, pungent, piquant, frisky, post-Waugh, were among the adjectives applied to it by reviewers. (Harold Acton, Nancy Mitford: A Memoir, p. 75.)

\textsuperscript{79}Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh, p. 288.
One of the features by which this felicitous transition is achieved, is that Miss Mitford changes to a first person narrator, Fanny, and sticks even more closely to her own family and experience as material than in the earlier novels, lending greater authenticity to these works. Fanny grows up with the Radletts, and therefore knows their world intimately, but she is much more level-headed than they are, and marries an Oxford don, which gives her a degree of distant perspective on the aristocratic world from which she has emerged and to which she continues to belong as regards the all-important issues of taste and values. As Fanny herself says, "It is so difficult for somebody who is as fond of sport as I am to resist running with the hare and hunting with the hounds whenever possible." This feature contributes notably to making her a successful and convincing narrator.

A second feature that contributes to the increased authenticity of the novels is rooted in Nancy Mitford's personal life. John Atkins mentions that in these two novels "there is a human sympathy and compassion in the writing which never appears in the earlier novels." This points to a change in the perceptions and view of the world and of life in general, of the author herself. The "increased human sympathy and compassion" in her later works is undoubtedly the consequence of Nancy's liaison with Col. Gaston Palewski which started in 1944.

Nancy Mitford's first love interest was "an elegant and amiable

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young social butterfly*83, the Hon. Hamish Erskine, son of the 5th Earl of Rosslyn. Both sets of parents disapproved of the liaison. Hamish was unable to pursue any activity with perseverance and his association with Nancy merely reinforced his flippant social vagrancy.84 It was not a happy relationship. In a letter, written in 1930, Nancy remarks, "... the other day Hamish said to me in tones of deepest satisfaction, 'You haven't known a single happy moment since we met have you ....',"85 They were briefly engaged and the affair dragged on from 1929 to about 1933. Nancy eventually tried to commit suicide by putting her head in a gas oven:

It is a lovely sensation just like taking anaesthetic so I shan't be sorry any more for school mistresses who are found dead in that way, but just in the middle I thought that Romie who I was staying with might have a miscarriage which would be disappointing for her so I got back to bed and was sick.86

If not the exact model, Hamish established the pattern for the rather effete, ineffectual,arty heroes of Nancy's earlier novels. (Bobby - Sir Roderick - Bobbin in Christmas Pudding is said to be a fairly accurate portrayal.87) Their relationship was not physical88, and in The Pursuit of Love, Linda would

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83Harold Acton, Nancy Mitford: A Memoir, p. 28.
84He would fight very bravely during the Second World War, though. He was wounded, taken prisoner, managed to escape, was mentioned in despatches twice, and was awarded the Military Cross in 1943. (Cf. Selina Hastings, Nancy Mitford, p. 141, and Burke's Peerage, 1980, p. 2301.
86Quoted in Jonathan & Catherine Guinness, The House of Mitford, p. 301.
87Selina Hastings, Nancy Mitford, p. 72.
88Jonathan and Catherine Guinness cite the fact that Nancy had such a long relationship with Erskine as evidence of her "lukewarm attitude towards the joys of sex". (Cf. Jonathan &
remark on her two first marriages, reflecting Nancy’s hindsight assessment of her liaison with Hamish:

Twice in her life she had mistaken something else for [love]; it was like seeing somebody in the street who you think is a friend, you whistle and wave and run after him, and it is not only not the friend, but not even very like him. A few minutes later the real friend appears in view, and you can’t imagine how you ever mistook that other person for him.  

The second case of "mistaken identity" concerned the man with whom Nancy took up as soon as her liaison with Hamish Erskine was finally over, and who became her husband, Peter Rodd. Rodd was handsome and talented but, like Erskine, could never sustain interest long enough in order to maintain a career. Diana Mosley describes him as

a handsome and clever man who despite his undoubted intelligence and even charm managed to be an excruciating bore, buttonholing one and inexorably imparting information upon subjects one was only too happy to know nothing about.

Rodd the bore is partly the model for Linda’s first husband, Tony Kroesig in The Pursuit of Love, and Rodd the carefree adventurer and political idealist, for Christian Talbot, her second husband. Rodd was a compulsive philanderer and the marriage was not a

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90 Hon. Peter Murray Rennell Rodd, b. 1904, sometime Lt. Col. in the Welch Guards, son of the 1st Baron Rennell, a distinguished diplomat and former Ambassador to Rome. He married Nancy Mitford in 1933 and they were divorced in 1958. He died in 1968. (Cf. Burke’s Peerage, 1980, p. 2245.)

91 Diana Mosley, A Life of Contrasts, p. 100.
success. The couple eventually parted after the war, when Nancy took up permanent residence in Paris. They still maintained contact and a residual affection is evident in their relationship, even after their divorce in 1958. When Rodd died in 1968 in Malta, he was found with a letter from Nancy, which had arrived that morning, clutched in his hand. Diana Mosley was surprised to find Nancy wearing mourning for her former husband. Nancy's tombstone at Swinbrook describes her as "Nancy Mitford, wife of Peter Rodd".

However, in 1944, Nancy met the great love of her life in war-torn London. He was a Colonel in the Free French forces and the Directeur de Cabinet of General de Gaulle, Gaston Palewski. All Nancy’s passion and devotion was awakened at the age of forty and the rest of her life was dedicated to a large extent to her love for Palewski. The profound influence that this awakening had on her life and writing is universally acknowledged and Selina Hastings significantly starts her biography of Nancy by referring to Nancy’s charming account of the meeting between Linda (Nancy) and Fabrice de Sauveterre (Palewski) in The Pursuit of Love. Hastings comments:

And so begins the great love affair of Linda's life, a love which transforms her existence, breaking her free from the dark and dreary confines of her English past to release her into perfect happiness in Paris, the most beautiful city on earth. Nancy herself describes Linda as "feeling, what she had never felt for any man, an overwhelming physical attraction." [And] she was filled with a strange, wild, unfamiliar happiness.

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93 Nancy died in Paris on 30 June 1973, after a long illness and great suffering.
and knew this was love. Appropriately, *The Pursuit of Love* is dedicated to Palewski.\(^97\)

Unfortunately, her love for Palewski did not transport Nancy, as her love for Fabrice did Linda, to "perfect happiness". While Palewski was fond of Nancy and maintained the relationship for the rest of her life - he was indeed one of the last people to visit her on her death bed - he was an obsessive womaniser, and never allowed Nancy to feel that she was the undisputed number one in his life. The greatest blow for Nancy came in 1969, just three years before her death, when Palewski married the divorced Duchesse de Sagan. Nancy had for years accepted Gaston's excuse that he could not marry her, because marriage to a divorcée in Catholic France would harm his political career. Her dignity was not even allowed this face-saving device. Nevertheless, Gaston imbued her life and her work, causing her novels to take on a sparkle, a life, a passion, that had previously been absent.

Fabrice de Sauveterre in *The Pursuit of Love* and Love in a *Cold Climate* and Charles-Edouard de Valhubert in *The Blessing* and *Don't Tell Alfred* are portraits of Palewski. They could easily have been caricatured Frenchmen, exaggerated Latin lovers oozing charm, especially as Palewski himself rather resembled that caricature\(^98\), but are saved from this by innumerable little

\(^{96}\)Nancy Mitford, *The Pursuit of Love*, p. 147.

\(^{97}\)The dedication caused a minor political uproar in France, when the French edition appeared. It was deemed suspect and unsuitable that the sister of Unity Mitford should dedicate a work to a member of De Gaulle's inner coterie. (Cf. Selina Hastings, Nancy Mitford, p. 186.)

\(^{98}\)Selina Hastings mentions that many people found Palewski a figure of fun,

with his rotund figure and slicked-back hair, ... at every party pursuing the pretty women like a Frenchman in a farce .... Regular guests at the British Embassy used to watch with amusement as Gaston selected his prey, pressing close to her on one of the huge sofas in the Salon Jaune, bouncing up and down on the cushions while urgently hissing in her ear, 'J'ai envie de toi! J'ai envie de toi!' (Selina Hastings, Nancy Mitford, p. 191.)
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touches, dictums, characteristics, peculiarities, lovingly taken from the Col himself:

[Fabrice] made a certain kind of face when he was pulling his tie into a knot, she had quite forgotten it in the months between, and it brought back their Paris life to her suddenly and vividly ....

and "Women I love," [Charles-Edouard] said with his guilty, interior laugh.

Inevitably the novels also contain private jokes involving the Colonel. When Fanny and Cedric discuss the promenading habits of the French and the English, Fanny asks,

'... don't French Colonels go for walks?'
'Much too ill ..., though I do know a colonel, in Paris, who walks to the antique shops sometimes.'
'How do they get their exercise?' I asked.
'Quite another way, darling.'

Though the Colonel did not bring Nancy contentment, he did bring the scintillating vitality of her personality to the fore, a quality which would characterise her later novels. Various anonymous reviews appearing in The Times Literary Supplement bear witness to this, commenting on her "deliciously light and

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101 Nancy Mitford, Love in a Cold Climate, p. 419.
Nancy’s love affair with the Colonel precipitated another love affair, hardly less ardent, with France. Just as love for Mosley or admiration for Hitler entailed unquestioning support for Nazism in Diana and Unity, and love for Esmond Romilly went hand in hand with ardent Marxism in Jessica, so her love for the Colonel meant that Nancy became an ardent French patriot and a fervent supporter of General de Gaulle. At the end of her life she was awarded both the CBE by Britain and the Légion d’Honneur by the French, but declared that the latter was the only order she had ever coveted, and that the former meant little to her. Her novels, as well as her other post-War writings, are liberally sprinkled with avowals of this great love for France. The love-hate relationship between the French and the English is one of the main comic themes in *The Blessing*, a novel which deals with the marriage of a romantic upper-class Englishwoman and a devastatingly charming French Marquis, and is at once a rendition and an idealized fulfilment of Nancy’s love for Gaston Palewski. A worldly wise Duchess, Madame Rocher des Innouis, comments for example on her nephew’s marriage to the English Grace Allingham:

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104 "Novels of the Week", containing an anonymous review of *The Pursuit of Love* by Nancy Mitford, in *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 December 1945, p. 617.

She told me, at luncheon, that she had hardly been out in society since the war, but spent all those years looking after goats. [Grace spent the war years quietly on her father's country estate, waiting for her dashing French husband to return.] Of course the English are very eccentric, you don't know that, Sosthène, you have never crossed the Channel, but you can take it from me that they are all half mad, a country of enormous, fair, mad atheists. Why did she look after goats? We shall never know. But looking after goats can hardly be considered to be as a good preparation for life with Charles-Edouard, and I am bound to feel uneasy for her.  

The plot turns on the fact that the marriage runs into trouble because of Charles-Edouard's compulsive, but charming and essentially French, womanising, and is only resolved when Madame Rocher convinces Grace, who is in any case sick with longing for the delightful husband she has deserted, to look upon his womanising as "his hobby. Like hunting or racing, a pursuit that takes him from you an afternoon sometimes, amuses him, and does you no harm ...." Putting it down as an inevitable aspect of the French national character probably assuaged Nancy's hurt at Palewski's infidelity. In later life, Nancy was able to take a more objective and even satirical view of her devotion to France. Grace, whom Nancy admitted to be "more or less me", reappears in Don't Tell Alfred as a charming, pretty, woman with an exaggerated admiration for all things French - affecting a slight French accent when speaking her native English - and an equal disdain for all things English, "a bit of a goose, but so good-natured, pretty and elegant, that one could not help liking her." Incensed by British insults as Anglo-French relations...


107 Ibid., p. 208.

108 Quoted in Harold Acton, Nancy Mitford: A Memoir, p. 141.

cool down politically, Grace "announced that she was going to empty the English blood from her veins and have them refilled from the blood bank of the VIIth arrondissement." ¹¹⁰

The third and most important feature that contributes to the increased authenticity of the later novels is that Miss Mitford has found the moral and intellectual centre which was lacking in her earlier novels, and she finds it in her class - the novels constitute in some ways "a defence of the aristocracy". In spite of a brief flirtation with socialism in the Thirties, Nancy’s political views are ultimately conservative, even reactionary. The clearest exposition of her views on class and social change is found in her Prefaces to the collections of letters of the Stanley family that she edited, The Ladies of Alderley (1938) and The Stanleys of Alderley (1939), especially the former.¹¹¹ On

¹¹⁰ Nancy Mitford, Don’t Tell Alfred, p. 195.

¹¹¹ The first volume consists mainly of letters between Maria Josepha (1771 - 1863), daughter of the 1st Earl of Sheffield and wife of the 1st Baron Stanley of Alderley (1766 - 1850), and her daughter-in-law, Henrietta Maria (1808 - 1896), daughter of the 13th Viscount Dillon and wife of the 2nd Baron Stanley of Alderley (1802 - 1869). The second volume deals mainly with the letters of the next generation, the children of the 2nd Baron and Henrietta Maria. One of their daughters, Blanche (1829 - 1921), married the 5th Earl of Airlie, and through her daughter, Clementine (1854 - 1922), who married the 1st Lord Redesdale (1837 - 1916) became the great-grandmother of Nancy Mitford. Nancy thus had a personal family interest in this remarkable family, an interest probably fired by its similarity to her own family. She cites the common characteristics of the Stanleys as being "... downright rudeness, a passion for quarrelling, great indifference to public opinion, an unrivalled skill in finding and pointing out the weak points in other people’s armour, thick legs and eyebrows, lively minds and a great literary sense." (Nancy Mitford, Preface to The Ladies of Alderley, Second Impression, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967, p. xx.) Most of these characteristics apply equally to the Mitfords. In a letter to The Times Literary Supplement, disputing Jessica Mitford’s rationale of parental oppression as the cause for the eccentricities and vagaries of the Mitford daughters and their careers, Mrs Violet Hammersley, an old family friend, holds up heredity as the actual reason, and refers to the Stanleys of Alderley as the actual - genetic - culprits. (Cf. Times Literary Supplement, 15 April 1960, p. 241.)

Of the children of the 2nd Baron and Henrietta Maria, the
reading her introduction to letters from an era where, "each individual has his allotted place in the realm" and where her relatives' "allotted place was among the ruling, the leisured and the moneyed classes"\textsuperscript{112}, it becomes clear that she prefers that time and that social system to "this terrible twentieth century", where people are "being herded ... towards, we suppose, a brave new world."\textsuperscript{113} She mourns that other world, where "the minor nobility of England ... could live their lives, develop their personalities and cultivate their talents in perfect security."\textsuperscript{114} She contrasts their security with the bewilderment engendered by the modern world, peopled by "those who believe that effort and warfare are essential factors in human development."\textsuperscript{115} "It is hard to believe that a world so

\textsuperscript{112}Nancy Mitford, Preface to The Ladies of Alderley, p. xv.

\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., p. xv.

\textsuperscript{114}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., pp. xv - xvi.
different from our own existed less than a hundred years ago,"\textsuperscript{116} she laments. In her novels Nancy Mitford takes up the cudgels against the onslaught of this bewilderment, and defends the merits of an orderly, stratified society, with the recognizable values of an aristocratic elite. \textit{Love in a Cold Climate}, declares itself as an aristocratic novel in the opening line:

I am obliged to begin this story with a brief account of the Hampton family\textsuperscript{117}, because it is necessary to emphasize the fact that the Hamptons were very grand as well as very rich.\textsuperscript{118}

She declares her allegiance to the nobility on the next page:

Both Burke and Debrett linger with obvious enjoyment over so genuine an object as this family, unspoilt by the ambiguities of female line and deed poll. Nor could any of those horrid books which came out in the nineteenth century, devoted to research and aiming to denigrate the nobility,\textsuperscript{119} make the object seem less genuine.\textsuperscript{120}

Nancy’s main weapon, in literature as in life, is humour. She handles the encroaching masses, she defends her class and their values, she disarms the enemy, by means of her superlative humour and wit.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{116}Nancy Mitford, \textit{Preface to The Ladies of Alderley}, p. xxiv.
  \item \textsuperscript{117}The family of Lord and Lady Montdore and their daughter, Polly, around whom the plot of \textit{Love in a Cold Climate} is woven.
  \item \textsuperscript{118}Nancy Mitford, \textit{Love in a Cold Climate}, p. 217.
  \item \textsuperscript{119}An example of such a book, though published early in this century, would be Howard Evans’s \textit{Our Old Nobility}, published in Manchester by The Daily News and Reader in 1913, which sets out to deflate many an aristocratic myth.
  \item \textsuperscript{120}Nancy Mitford, \textit{Love in a Cold Climate}, p. 218.
\end{itemize}
In May 1968, Nancy witnessed the students’ revolt in Paris, and reported on this event for the Spectator. It became for her a kind of culmination of her apprehensions and fears for her class as a threatened species, and she reacted to it with her accustomed weapon - humour. When she was personally threatened, she reacted accordingly:

On my way home from the park two boys on a motor-bike pretended they were trying to kill me, following me up on to the wide footpath; but I must say when I laughed so did they, and went away with friendly waves. I do hope the over-thirties are going to be killed mercifully and quickly and not starved to death in camps.\textsuperscript{121}

She explains her attitude in another extract from this "revolutionary diary". A friend of hers, Henry, is reported as having commented to another friend: "I believe if Nancy saw you and me in a tumbril she would say ‘Oh, they were shrieking with laughter.’" Her response is significant: "I said well probably you would be. There’s always something to laugh at."\textsuperscript{122} Her acerbic wit could also be turned against her own sisters. Somewhat sensitive concerning prison camps as a result of her sisters’ political activities, she writes to Mrs Hammersley, "D[iana] says Sir O has never been so busy - it makes my flesh creep. No doubt we shall all be in camps very soon. I’ve ordered a camping suit from Lanvin."\textsuperscript{123}

In the early novels, there are already furtive glimpses that Miss Mitford is aware of the discrepancy between her and her family’s values and that of the age they live in. In Christmas Pudding, the worldly wise ex-prostitute socialite, Amabelle Fortescue, warns Paul that

\textsuperscript{121}Nancy Mitford, "A French Revolutionary Diary", in A Talent to Annoy, edited by Charlotte Mosley, p. 212.

\textsuperscript{122}Ibid., p. 206.

\textsuperscript{123}Quoted in Selina Hastings, Nancy Mitford, p. 207.
... it's no good writing about the upper classes if you hope to be taken seriously. You must have noticed that by now? Station masters, my dear, station masters.

Paul's response comes straight from Nancy's aristocratic heart,

I know, I know. Of course, I have noticed. But you see my trouble is that I loathe station masters, like hell I do, and lighthouse keepers, too, and women with hare-lips and miners and men on barges, and people in circuses; I hate them all equally.¹²⁴

It is, however, in *The Pursuit of Love* and *Love in a Cold Climate*, that Nancy begins to put up her most spirited defence for the role and values of the aristocrat, and in the same breath gives full vent to her snobbishness by choosing the middle-classes to bear the acerbic brunt of her witty disdain. The Radlett children form a secret society of "Hons", derived from the abbreviation of the honorific prefix to their names. (As the daughters of a Baron, they are entitled to be known as the Honourable Louisa Radlett, the Honourable Linda Radlett, etc.¹²⁵) Anyone who is not a friend of the Hons, is dismissed as a 'Counter-Hon' and the battle cry of the Society is "Death to the Horrible Counter-Hons". Fanny, the narrator and cousin to the Radletts, comments with some satisfaction, "I was a Hon,


¹²⁵Jessica Mitford maintains that the term "hon" - the society was an actual Mitford creation - was not derived from their being 'Honourables', but was a corruption of the word 'hen', hens playing "so large a part in our lives". (Jessica Mitford, *Hons and Rebels*, p. 12.) Although this theory is supported by the Guinneses (nephew and grand-niece) in their version of the family history (Cf. Jonathan & Catherine Guinness, *The House of Mitford*, p. 292), it sounds a bit too contrived to be credible, and also in keeping with Jessica’s ideological unwillingness to accept responsibility for such an elitist self-identification. I am inclined to believe Nancy’s version, even though it appears in a work of fiction, as opposed to Jessica’s supposedly factual rendition.
since my father, like theirs, was a lord." Membership of the society of Hons is not limited to actual aristocrats, however, because, as Linda quoting Tennyson remarks, "Kind hearts are more than coronets, and simple faith than Norman blood", and honorary membership is extended, for example, to Josh, the groom, "who was greatly beloved by us all and worth buckets full of Norman blood." This confirms Nancy's perception of relations between the aristocracy and the labour class, already revealed in Pigeon Pie. When Princess Olga Gogothsky talks darkly of her cousins in Russia having been "given over to their peasantry to do as they liked with", Lady Sophia (the Nancy Mitford persona) replies that there must be something wrong somewhere. If the Duchess of Devonshire, for instance, was handed over to the peasantry to do as they liked with, they would no doubt put her in the best bedroom and get her a cup of tea.

It is clear, however, that the middle class can under no circumstances qualify as honorary Hons, and here Nancy takes a similar position to that of that other uncompromisingly snobbish aristocratic novelist, Vita Sackville-West, in that she hankers back to a kind of feudal system, an English golden age, a better past, where lord and labourers live happily together in symbiotic bliss, a harmony lost in "this terrible twentieth century", which has brutally destroyed, as Nancy's biographer, Selina Hastings puts it, "the order established over centuries of the divine right of the upper classes to live in beautiful old houses set in beautiful old parks, and waited on by perfectly sweet members of the lower orders", and excluding the dreadful, counter-honnish, money-grubbing middle class.

127 Ibid.
128 Nancy Mitford, Pigeon Pie, p. 47.
129 Selina Hastings, Nancy Mitford, pp. 113 - 114.
Linda, the most beautiful Radlett daughter, and the romantic heroine of *The Pursuit of Love*, falls in love with Tony Kroesig, the son of a wealthy banker. Describing this romance - and later marriage - affords Nancy the opportunity to indulge her spleen against the middle class. Speaking for the author, Linda contrasts the ethics of her own irascible father’s life with that of her father-in-law, Sir Leicester Kroesig:

Sir Leicester grubs up his money in London, goodness knows how, but Fa gets it from the land, not only money, but work. Look at all the things he does for no pay - all those boring meetings, County Council, J.P, and so on. And he’s a good landlord, he takes trouble.\(^{130}\)

She concludes that, "I am all for them stringing up Sir Leicester, but if they started on Aunt Emily and Davey, or even on Fa, I don’t think I could stand by and watch." This is a theme close to the author’s heart. She had warmed to it in her Preface to *The Ladies of Alderley*.\(^{131}\) Starting somewhat surprisingly by saying that the snobbishness of "those days" (the merits of which she has just extolled) seem very funny to us in view of modern ideas, she cites the following example:

A cadet of the family, Lord Stanley’s nephew, marries a banker’s daughter - an eventuality which nowadays would probably be hailed with delight. Lady Stanley, however, assuming that the banker would be vastly flattered by the connexion and greatly exalted that she should have called upon him, bewails the fact that his family is so common, and his livelihood, she supposes, so precarious. This attitude persisted among some of the more sheltered members

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of the aristocracy even into the twentieth century .... It is only fair to say that this attitude came partly from the tradition that it was for a gentleman to serve his country in some capacity or other, and not to indulge in the purely selfish pursuit of money making.\textsuperscript{132}

On reading Miss Mitford's novels, however, one gains the distinct impression, that this attitude is not limited to "the more sheltered members of the aristocracy" in the twentieth century, unless she counts herself among their number. When Linda receives a cheque of £1,000 from the Kroesigs for her birthday, she is delighted and buys a beautiful necklace of pearls and rubies with it.

Linda arrived, wearing a very plain white satin dress cut very low, and her necklace, went straight up to Sir Leicester, and said: 'Oh, you were kind to give me such a wonderful present - look -'

Sir Leicester was stupefied.

'Did it cost all I sent you?' he said

'Yes,' said Linda. 'I thought you would like me to buy one thing with it, and always remember it was you who gave it to me.'

'No. dear. That wasn't at all what I intended. £1,000 is what you might call a capital sum, that means something on which you expect a return.'\textsuperscript{133}

Linda's insouciant aristocratic charm is contrasted to Sir Leicester's venal pragmatism, much to the latter's detriment. Miss Mitford becomes quite lyrical in her denunciation of the Kroesigs' attitude to material wealth:

Inwardly, their spirit was utterly commercial, everything

\textsuperscript{132}Nancy Mitford, Preface to \textit{The Ladies of Alderley}, pp. xvii - xviii.

\textsuperscript{133}Nancy Mitford, \textit{The Pursuit of Love}, p. 90.
was seen in terms of money. It was their barrier, their
defence, their hope for the future, their support for the
present, it raised them above their fellowmen, and with it
they warded off evil. The only mental qualities that they
respected were those which produced money, in substantial
quantities, it was their one criterion of success, it was
power and it was glory. To say that a man was poor was to
label him a rotter, bad at his job, idle, feckless,
immoral.¹³⁴

Contrasted to this, Miss Mitford proposes Uncle Matthew,
irascible, unconventional, unpredictable, yet, as Fanny says, for
his family the ideal of English manhood, embodying the values of
the - vastly superior - landed aristocracy:

... money was a subject that was absolutely never mentioned
at Alconleigh. Uncle Matthew had no doubt a large income,
but it was derived from, tied up in, and a good percentage
of it went back into, his land. His land was to him
something sacred, and, sacred above that, was England.
Should evil befall his country he would stay and share it,
or die, never would the notion have entered his head that
he might save himself, and leave old England in any sort of
lurch. He, his family, and his estates were part of her
and she part of him, for ever and ever.¹³⁵

When the war comes, Tony Kroesig significantly sends his daughter
and second wife to America, manages to go there himself on "some
parliamentary mission or something"¹³⁶, while Uncle Matthew

was busy from morning to night with his Home Guard. He was
happy and interested and in a particularly mellow mood, for
it looked as if his favourite hobby, that of clocking

¹³⁵Ibid., pp. 88 - 89.
¹³⁶Ibid., p. 179.
Nancy Mitford’s disapproval of the middle class is not limited to an intellectual rejection of their materialism and a disapproval of their lack of patriotism, however, but encompasses every aspect of their lives and taste, which, as far as she is concerned, is entirely made up of pretentiousness. She is utterly scornful at the pretence of the affluent bourgeoisie to be "landed". When Sir Leicester protests that he is not a London person - "I work in London, but my home is in Surrey" - Aunt Sadie answers firmly, "I count that ... as the same." With unmitigated scorn Miss Mitford describes the Kroesigs’ house and garden in Surrey as "a lady water-colourist’s heaven":

... herbaceous borders, rockeries, and water-gardens were carried to a perfection of vulgarity, and flaunted a riot of huge and hideous flowers .... It would be hard to say whether it was more frightful, more gloriously Technicolor, in spring, in summer, or in autumn.\footnote{139}

Taking great pride in this glorious imitation of a country estate, is the equally fraudulent Sir Leicester, who, "in the country, gave a surprisingly adequate performance of the old English squire. Picturesque. Delightful." Miss Mitford concludes on a note of caustic sarcasm.\footnote{140}

\footnote{137}Nancy Mitford, \textit{The Pursuit of Love}, p. 192. 
\footnote{138}Ibid., p. 83. 
\footnote{139}Ibid., p. 103. 
\footnote{140}Nancy Mitford, \textit{Love in a Cold Climate}, p. 104. 

\footnote{141}Nancy waged her battle against middle class gardens in her journalism as in her fiction. In an article on Faringdon House (the model for the Alconleigh’s neighbouring estate, Merlinford in \textit{The Pursuit of Love}), published in \textit{House and Garden} in May 1948, she states: 

Faringdon House has very little in the way of a flower garden, Lord Berners [himself the model for the Radlett’s sophisticated neighbour, Lord Merlin] is not fond of
Of course, her most lethal weapon in the defence of her class, is her humour, and in *Love in a Cold Climate* she uses it perhaps with even greater effectiveness than her most eloquent invective can achieve, to devastate the Kroesigs and their ilk. The gloriously grand, ruthless, rude Lady Montdore, one of Nancy Mitford's most memorable creations, comments on Linda's wedding:

Bankers don't seem to be much to look at - so extraordinarily unsuitable having to know them at all, poor things, let alone marry them. But these sort of people have got megalomania nowadays, one can't get away from them.\(^{142}\)

Lady Montdore's daughter, Polly, is the central character in the plot of *Love in a Cold Climate*, but as a character and as a representative of the aristocracy she is completely overshadowed by her mother. Lady Montdore is a monster of selfishness, egocentricity, greed and insensitivity\(^{143}\), and Miss Mitford is unflinchingly clear about this: "... Lady Montdore was for ever doing common things and mean and she was intensely unpopular, quite as much as her husband was loved ..."\(^{144}\) and "... her worldly greed and snobishness, her terrible relentless rudeness, had become proverbial, and formed the subject of many a legendary

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143 According to Nancy's biographer, Selina Hastings, Lady Montdore is a composite portrait of Nancy's mother-in-law, Lilias, Lady Rennell, and Helen Dashwood, "two ladies well known for a lofty view of themselves and their belief in uncompromising candour." (Selina Hastings, *Nancy Mitford*, p. 188.) Lord Montdore is said to be a life-like portrait of her father-in-law, Lord Rennell, a distinguished diplomat, who was *inter alia* Minister Plenipotentiary to Stockholm and Ambassador in Rome. (Cf. *Ibid.* and *Burke's Peerage*, 1980, pp. 2244 - 2245.)

What is remarkable, is that this unpromising specimen paradoxically becomes one of Nancy Mitford’s main protagonists in her defence of the upper classes. Once again, the main device used to achieve this is humour. Lady Montdore, for all her shortcomings - or perhaps because of them - is intensely funny. Discussing her experiences in India (she prided herself that she and her husband - a former viceroy - had "put India on the map"), and Indian women in particular, she says:

Poor creatures, it’s one baby after another, you can’t help feeling sorry for them .... I used to go and visit the ones who were kept in purdah and of course they simply worshipped me, it was really touching.\textsuperscript{146}

Bemoaning her daughter’s lack of interest in affairs of the heart, she continues in similar vain:

She takes no notice of the young men I provide for her and they take no notice of her. They worship me, of course, but what is the good of that?\textsuperscript{147}

Her egocentricity is defused with humour. Her snobbishness is dealt with likewise:

Lady Montdore loved anybody royal ... and the act of curtsying was the consummation of this love. Her curtsies, owing to the solid quality of her frame, did not recall the graceful movement of wheat before the wind. She scrambled down like a camel, rising again backside foremost like a cow, a strange performance, painful it might be supposed to the performer, the expression on whose face, however, belied this thought. Her knees cracked like

\textsuperscript{145}Nancy Mitford, \textit{Love in a Cold Climate}, p. 220.

\textsuperscript{146}Ibid., p. 236.

\textsuperscript{147}Ibid., p. 265.
Her callousness gains respectability by amusing us as unapologetic, aristocratic forthrightness. Getting into a car on a chilly day, with pouring rain outside, she remarks happily from under the bearskin "I love being so dry in here ... and seeing all those poor people so wet." Her disregard for others becomes entertaining as she refers to a distinguished French Duchess, as the "old French tart", because she "was famous for picking up words that she did not quite understand and giving them a meaning of her own." Gradually Miss Mitford manoeuvres the reader into a grudging admiration for Lady Montdore and makes him or her succumb like the narrator, Fanny, to the aristocratic glamour of Lady Montdore:

The fact is she had charm, and since charm allied to riches and position is almost irresistible, it so happened that her many haters were usually people who had never met her or people she had purposely snubbed or ignored.

It is made quite clear, that the "riches and position" enjoyed by Lady Montdore have made her extremely hard to resist:

'All this' was a favourite expression of Lady Montdore's. It did not mean all this beauty, this strange and fairy-like house set in the middle of four great avenues rushing up four artificial slopes .... 'All this', on her lips, meant position allied to such solid assets as acres, coal mines, real estate, jewels, silver, pictures, incunabula, and other possessions of the sort. Lord Montdore owned an

\[148\text{Nancy Mitford, Love in a Cold Climate, p. 288.}\\
\[149\text{Ibid., p. 278.}\\
\[150\text{Ibid., p. 266.}\\
\[151\text{Ibid.}\]
By impressing the reader with "all this" and cajoling him or her with her wit, Miss Mitford makes the reader range himself or herself firmly on the side of the arrogant old woman in the battle against the unsubtly named Boreley family, who bear the brunt of Nancy Mitford’s scorn in *Love in a Cold Climate*, as the Kroesigs do in *The Pursuit of Love*. The Boreleys are a cut above the Kroesigs, because they are "county". However, they are not in the same league as the historical Mitfords or the fictional Radletts or Hamptons. Great-grandfather Boreley had made his money in foreign railroads and bought an estate near Oxford, from where his family had spread throughout the county.

Fanny’s first encounter with the Boreleys takes place at the home of Professor and Mrs Cozens in Oxford. Professor Cozens is the head of the Department to which, Alfred, Fanny’s husband, is attached at the University, and Mrs Cozens, is a Boreley. The Cozens’ house is

the very worst kind of Banbury-Road house, depressing with laurels .... The other women present were either in lace or marocain, décolleté to the waist behind, and with bare arms. Their dresses were in shades of biscuit, and so were they .... The Cozenses’ hearth was not laid for a fire, but had a piece of pleated paper in the grate ... the room was terribly cheerless. The hard little sofa, the few and hard little arm-chairs were upholstered in a cretonne of so dim and dismal a pattern that it was hard to imagine anybody, even a Boreley, actually choosing it, to imagine them going into a shop, taking a seat, having cretonnes thrown over a screen one after another and suddenly saying, all excited, ‘That’s the very thing for me - stop! The ... walls were of shiny cream paint, and there were no

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The Boreleys do not share the vulgar pretentiousness of the Kroesigs, but are instead bleak and cheerless, as their name indicates. In the aristocratic judgment of Miss Mitford, they are found equally wanting: they lack that charm, which according to her, characterizes the British aristocracy, even such fearsome prototypes as Lady Montdore. She contrasts the Boreleys' grim, dispassionate humourlessness, with the spirited appeal of Fanny's Radlett cousins, whose rhapsodic speech patterns are based on her and her sisters' own. On visiting Fanny at Oxford, Jassy


154 The "Mitford voice" became one of the most distinctive features associated with the family. After the Television programme, "Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters", broadcast by the BBC in 1980, Gabriele Annan writes for example:

They all have the Mitford voice, but in different tempi .... Even forty years ago the voice was thought to be a disaster: Nancy's chief in the fire service asked her to drop her lectures to new recruits because ... "your accent irritates people so much they'd like to put you on the fire."

She carries on to say, though, "The Mitfords seem defiantly themselves, voice and all, ashamed of nothing and pleased with their non-conformity." (Gabriele Annan; "Awf centre", a review of the BBC TV programme, "Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters" in Times Literary Supplement, 6 June 1980, p. 643.)

Jonathan Guinness reports as regards the "Mitford voice" that the Mitfords' governess showed great concern when the only son, Tom, had to go to school.

She confided her fears to Sydney. He ought, she said, not to say things like 'How amusing.' 'Boys never say how amusing,' said Miss Mirams; especially in that tone of voice, was the implication. (Jonathan & Catherine Guinness, The House of Mitford, p. 245.)

As regards the rhapsodizing, he cites an example when Evelyn Waugh took Nancy to lunch at the Hyde Park Hotel during the war, and there was toast in little silver racks on the table. "'Oh!' she exclaimed in tones of rapture: 'Toast!'" Also during the war Debo, Duchess of Devonshire, wrote to Diana Mosley after Christmas 1943:

Darling Honks, Oh Honks oh Honks the gifts, I am completely
rhapsodizes, for example:

Not digestives! Vict. - look, digestives! Isn’t Fanny wonderful, you can always count on something heavenly - weeks since I tasted digestives, my favourite food, too.

Mrs Heathery [the housekeeper], who adored the children and had heard their shrieks as she came in, brought up some fresh tea and a Fuller’s cake, which elicited more exclamations.

Oh, Mrs Heathery, you angel on earth, not Fuller’s walnut?¹⁵⁵

By contrast Norma Cozens (née Boreley) responds with bleak cheerlessness that Fanny “must look out because new brooms sweep clean, and Mrs Heathery was sure not to be nearly as nice as she seemed.”¹⁵⁶

It is no wonder that Fanny - although she leads rather a difficult life with Lady Montdore, who turns her into an unpaid lady-in-waiting - is stung into defending the old harridan, when she hears her reviled by the Boreleys and their kin: “I felt thoroughly on Lady Montdore’s side against these hideous people.”¹⁵⁷ She dismisses the Boreleys with aristocratic disdain:

{o’ercome by their glory I can’t think what to thank for first. The underclothes Honks, the stockings, all the Honnish things for Em, well I must say I never saw such a parcel. The coupons Honks, you must have saved so many I can hardly bear to think of you going quite naked which is what you’ll surely have to do ....}


¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 382.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 374.
I had a feeling that they [reviled her] out of an obscure jealousy, and that she only had to take any of these women up and bestow a flicker of her charm upon them for them to become her grovelling toadies.\textsuperscript{158}

The novel concludes significantly with a nose-thumb at the insupportable Boreleys. The dazzling homosexual, Cedric Hampton, heir to the Montdores\textsuperscript{159}, manages to enchant the redoubtable

\textsuperscript{158}Nancy Mitford, \textit{Love in a Cold Climate}, p. 375.

\textsuperscript{159}The character of Cedric, the outrageous homosexual, is mainly derived from the Hon. Stephen Tennant, fourth son of the 1st Lord Glenconnor, and uncle of the novelist Emma Tennant, who has also used him as a model for characters in some of her novels. (Cf. Philip Hoare, \textit{Serious Pleasures: The Life of Stephen Tennant}, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990, pp. 267, 281.) Tennant was a flamboyant homosexual who moved in artistic circles and was a friend of Noel Coward and Cecil Beaton's. Nancy counted many other homosexuals among her close friends, however. In May 1962, she wrote to Mark Ogilvie-Grant from Killarney,

Went to a shopping centre and purchased a china plaque with in Irish lettering "Everybody's Queer but Thee and Me". Now who can I give it to? Takes a bit of thought. (Quoted in Harold Acton, \textit{Nancy Mitford: A Memoir}, p. 150.)

The portrayal of Cedric as a beneficent, rather than malevolent or at least tragic presence in the novel, was new at the time, and caused some controversy, particularly in the United States, where, as Nancy reported to her friend, Lady Harrod,

It seems ... you can have pederasts in books so long as they are fearfully gloomy and end by committing suicide. A cheerful one who goes from strength to strength like Cedric horrifies them. They say 'Cedric is too revolting for any enjoyment of the book'. So I write back 'how can you hate Cedric when he is such a love?' (Ibid., p. 77.)

Nancy was unperturbed by the criticism. Inveterately anti-American, she wrote to her friend, Mark Ogilvie-Grant, that "the American reviews are so terrible I am flattered." (Ibid., pp. 76.) In her next novel, \textit{The Blessing}, Nancy would satirize the American perception of homosexuals. The opinionated and verbose American, Hector Dexter, holds forth, that

morally and politically these people are lepers. They are sickly, morbose, healthless, chlorotic, unbraced, flagging, peccant, vitiated and contaminated, and when I use the word contaminated I use it very specifically in the political sense. But I think you British have absolutely no
Lady Montdore and to seduce her former brother-in-law, son-in-law and lover, Boy Dougdale:

... Cedric managed the whole thing quite beautifully ... he put Lady Montdore and Boy into the big Daimler and rolled away with them to France ....

Then the Daimler rolled back to Hampton.

'So here we all are, my darling, [Cedric says to Fanny] having our lovely cake and eating it too, One’s great aim in life.'

'Yes, I know,' I said, 'the Boreleys think it’s simply terrible.'\textsuperscript{160}

Aristocratic panache, however decadent, triumphs over censorious middle-class mediocrity.

Miss Mitford’s defence of the aristocracy reaches a climax in her last novel, \textit{Don’t Tell Alfred} (1960), in which Fanny reappears as narrator (she had been absent for \textit{The Blessing} (1951) ) and as the wife of the British ambassador to Paris, the city where Nancy Mitford had settled after the War. One gains the impression that this novel constitutes Nancy Mitford’s last stand against "this terrible twentieth century".\textsuperscript{161} For all its conception of the danger in your midst, of the harm these perverts can do to the state of which you are citizens. You seem to regard them as a subject for joking rather than as the object of a deep-seated, far-reaching purge.

Several paragraphs later, he concludes with satisfaction:

And I am very very glad to say that this very unpleasant problem does not exist in the States. We have no pederasts. (Nancy Mitford, \textit{The Blessing}, pp. 110 – 111, 112.)

The depiction of the effete Cedric as the heir of the great aristocratic Hampton family, however charming he may be, is probably nevertheless a pessimistic comment on the future of the aristocracy and their great houses and estates.

\textsuperscript{160}Nancy Mitford, \textit{Love in a Cold Climate}, p. 457.

\textsuperscript{161}Nancy Mitford, Preface to \textit{The Ladies of Alderley}, p. xv.
humour and typical Mitford hilarity, the novel is filled with an elegiac nostalgia for a lost past and with a profound sense of decline. The novel opens with Fanny visiting post-war London from her home in Oxford. The British capital is described in terms of decline, reminiscent of Sebastian's bemoaning the replacement of Chevron by tenement houses in V. Sackville-West's The Edwardians, and Evelyn Waugh's similar lament on the passage of architectural beauty in Brideshead Revisited. Fanny says,

Every time I visit it I am saddened by seeing changes for the worse: the growing inelegance; the loss of character; the disappearance of landmarks and their replacement by flat and faceless glass houses. When I got off the bus at Hyde Park Corner, I looked sadly at the huge hotel where Montdore House used to be, in Park Lane. When first built it had been hailed as a triumph of modern architecture, but although it had only stood there for three years it had already become shabby, the colour of old teeth, and in an odd way out of date.  

The physical decline of the city becomes a metaphor for the social decline of the upper classes in England. Grace and beauty are associated with the nobility, whereas "inelegance" and "loss of character" form the domain of the rising proletariat.  

Later, Charles-Edouard de Valhubert (the aristocratic French hero of The Blessing, who reappears in this novel) echoes Fanny's lamentations:

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162 Nancy Mitford, Don't Tell Alfred, p. 9.

163 Miss Mitford describes this relationship between family and class on the one hand, and architecture on the other, overtly in her preface to The Stanleys of Alderley:

The fortunes of the Stanleys continue to be typical of that kind of English family. Alderley, where they lived for 500 years, sees them no more - the house has been pulled down and the estate is a dormitory suburb of Manchester. (Nancy Mitford, The Stanleys of Alderley, p. xvi.)
So we remember the old world as it had been for a thousand years, so beautiful and diverse, and which, in only thirty years, has crumbled away .... Never in history have the past and the present been so different; never have generations been divided as they are now.\textsuperscript{164}

Fanny responds pensively that people such as Valhubert, her father, and Uncle Matthew

would not have been themselves had they not always been kings in their own castles. Their kind is vanishing as surely as the peasants, the horses and the avenues, to be replaced, like them, by something less picturesque, more utilitarian.\textsuperscript{165}

The aristocracy is projected as the mythical embodiment of man's striving for individuation, but is sadly replaced in the post-war world by unappealing utilitarianism.

The novel is, however, far from being as lachrymose as these extracts may imply. With her customary wit, Nancy lays the ghost of sadness and of threat, even as regards this distressing theme. On a visit to Boisdormant\textsuperscript{166}, the French country house of the old Duchesse de Sauveterre, Charles-Edouard's aunt, the venerable old lady comments:

'... I am told the boys and girls nowadays are against birth?'

'Against birth?'

'Against being born.'

'My aunt means they don’t care whether they belong to

\textsuperscript{164}Nancy Mitford, *Don't Tell Alfred*, p. 148.

\textsuperscript{165}Ibid., p. 149.

\textsuperscript{166}Boisdormant is based on Fontaines, the country house of the Countess Costa de Beauregard, where Nancy was often invited to stay. She describes it in an article, "Portrait of a French Country House" in the *Sunday Times* of 6 August 1961.
good families or not, any more."

'Oh, I see.' I had supposed she meant something to do with birth control. 'But do you think that young people ever cared about such things?'

'When I was young we did. In any case it is shocking to be against. The grandchildren of a friend of mine actually started a newspaper against birth - horrible, I find, and so of course one of the girls married somebody who wasn't born -'

'Yes,' said Valhubert, with a quizzical look in my direction, 'it won't do. We can't have these goings-on in society, though I must say the unborn young man is rather solid for a disembodied spirit.'

And so, with laughter, the sadness and the fear engendered by the erosion of those values and practices which had constituted and preserved their class over many centuries, are exorcised.

As these extracts indicate, Nancy returns in her last novel to the theme of her earliest works, the chasm between the generations. But, whereas the earlier novels, such as Highland Fling and Christmas Pudding, treat the older generation as old fogies, and the younger (Nancy's) as amusing "bright young things", it is here the younger generation, denizens of "this terrible twentieth century", which now besieges the gracious harmony of the old world existence of Fanny's (and Nancy's) now older generation.

The younger generation, who launch aggressive sorties on the gracious lives Fanny and her husband - now Ambassador Sir Alfred Wincham - lead, are mainly represented by Fanny's children. The first to appear is the second son, Basil, who has taken a brilliant first in History at Oxford, and has intended joining the Foreign Office. At the last moment, he throws all that up and decides to become a travel agent. Although his decision is

167 Nancy Mitford, Don't Tell Alfred, p. 154.
not a deliberate act of rebellion against his parents, it nevertheless constitutes a rejection of the values they and their class represent.

You can’t really expect me to swot away and get into the Foreign Service and put up with an aeon of boredom simply to end my days in a ghastly dump like this? I love Father, you know I do, and I don’t want to hurt your feelings, but I’ve no intention of wasting the best years of my life like he has ...."  

His partner in the venture is his populist step-grandfather, a young man whom Fanny’s much married mother - known in the family as "the Bolter" - has taken for her ninth husband. Basil is joyously unconcerned about class distinctions, service to King and country, and other considerations which have been paramount to his parents’ class and generation, and throws himself heart and soul into his new and lucrative career with his opportunist step-grandfather. It is clear, however, that he shares in his family’s aristocratic heritage of "charm", and despite his claims to treat the British tourists abominably (Grandad ... gets together parties of tourists, takes their cash of them, and leaves me to conduct them to their doom ..." 169), he is adored by all his charges who regard him as a guardian angel in the face of the untold terrors and threats endemic in continental travel. Fanny, who becomes the representative of aristocratic values and behaviour amidst these various onslaughts, recovers from this particular set-back and deals with it with dignity, poise and humour. She entertains the British travellers at the embassy - which they take to be a smart Parisian hotel, once again pulled out of a hat by their miracle-worker, Basil - and receives their compliments on her "fallen" son with good grace.

A more serious threat is posed with the arrival of the eldest

168 Nancy Mitford, Don’t Tell Alfred, p. 92.
169 Ibid., p. 88.
son, David (who has taken a first in Greats at Oxford), just as the Ambassadorial couple is about to sit down to a formal dinner with fifty official guests.

Then my bearded son David came crab-wise into the room, pulling after him a plastic cradle and a girl attached to its other handle. He was dressed in corduroy trousers, a duffle coat, a tartan shirt and sandals over thick, dirty, yellow woollen socks. The girl was tiny, very fair with a head like a silk-worm's cocoon, short white skirt (filthy) swinging over a plastic petticoat, a black belt, red stockings and high-heeled, pointed, golden shoes.¹⁷⁰

This detailed picture of youth in the sixties, with its emphasis on plastic, slovenliness and utter lack of either personal hygiene or taste, constitutes a more conscious and concerted rejection of the values Fanny and Alfred represent. David has adopted Zen (and the Chinese baby of his Zen Master) and is walking to China in search of Truth with his wife Dawn (who turns out to be the daughter of a Bishop, equally distressed at his progeny's choice of vocation).

We are the bridge [David says] between pre-war humanity with its selfishness and materialistic barriers against reality and the new race of World Citizens. We are trying to indoctrinate ourselves with wider concepts and for this we realize that we need the purely contemplative wisdom which comes from following the road.¹⁷¹

This wisdom consists according to Fanny of giving way "to complete mental laziness."¹⁷² As David says to his stricken

¹⁷⁰Nancy Mitford, Don't Tell Alfred, p. 106.
¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 109.
¹⁷²Ibid., p. 111.
academic father, "Zen forbids thought". The son is outspoken in the rejection of his family's value system:

... Ma, I can't approve, I never have, of your way of life .... In Zen I have found the antithesis of what you and father have always stood for. So I embrace Zen with all my heart. 174

While Fanny and Alfred cannot win an intellectual argument with their 'unthinking' son, the author exposes her preference quite clearly in her depiction of their actions. The aristocratic aplomb with which they incorporate the two slovenly hippies into their diplomatic dinner party on arrival and into their household as parents, contrasts with the graceless behaviour of the two uninvited guests; the poise with which Fanny instals her new adopted grandson in an Empire cradle in the Salon vert and takes him to her heart, exposes the lack of taste displayed by his parents, just as the dignity and humour with which she regards the situation, contrasts with the boring earnestness of her Buddhist philosopher son. As Charles Child Walcutt comments,

The aristocratic narrator of Don't Tell Alfred ... obviously believes that the world is moving from under her very fast and that the force and effect of the aristocracy is perhaps in its last half century. Her quality, however, is to see the world change with humour and dignity. 175

He continues:

By humour and dignity the author establishes the tone of the aristocracy - its ideals and its manners: what might be

173 Nancy Mitford, Don't Tell Alfred, p. 115.
174 Ibid., p. 116.
considered its social context ...\footnote{Charles Child Walcutt, \textit{Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction}, p. 235.}

In keeping with Nancy Mitford's vision, humour is the weapon Fanny uses to cope with the decline of aristocratic values in her own family. David says,

I don't like talking to you about Zen - I know you think it's funny - you're laughing now, Ma, aren't you. That's what makes it difficult to confide in you, you laugh at everything .... You ought to be considering where everybody stands in the universal scheme instead of laughing at them and saying they are bores.\footnote{Nancy Mitford, \textit{Don't Tell Alfred}, p. 140 - 141.}

The climax of the novel, both in terms of theme and of farce, is brought about by the two youngest Wincham sons, Charles and Fabrice (the son of Linda and Fabrice de Sauveterre, whom Fanny adopts after his parents' deaths at the end of \textit{The Pursuit of Love}). Fanny and Alfred have high hopes that these two would be "normal" (in their adherence to their parents' aristocratic values), since they have been given the archetypal English aristocratic education:

I felt thankful that we had been able to send the two youngest to Eton; presumably they at least, when grown up, would look like everybody else.\footnote{Ibid., p. 126.}

Obviously, this desire reveals the horizons of Fanny's world - a world where "everybody" goes to Eton. However, these two also disappoint their parents. They run away from school with their friend Sigi de Valhubert (the "blessing" in the novel of that name, like his parents, making a reappearance in this work) - in a Rolls-Royce, as befits Etonians. They start working in a blade
factory and eventually turn up in Paris as the publicity agents for a pop idol rejoicing in the name of Yanky Fonzy. These young ones represent the cult of youth which would constitute the ethos of the sixties.

'You must try and put yourself in our place,' said Fabrice, 'wasting the best years of our lives (only three more as teenagers - every day so precious, when we ought to be hitting it up as never again) ... in that dark creepy one-horse place [Eton] with Son et Lumière (the head beak) and all the other old weirdies yattering at us morning and night and those ghoulsh kids mouldering in the same grave with us.'

When Fanny tries to point out that they should be preparing for "real life, which is very long, [and] very serious", they respond,

The whole point is that we are too old, now, to be preparing. This is life, it has begun, we want to be living.\(^1\)

They, too, reject what their parents represent:

'All you oldies thought and thought of the future, and where did it get you?'

'It got your father to Paris.'

'And what good does it do him? How many days off does he get? How does he spend his evenings? Who is his idol?'\(^2\)

Their arrival in Paris is accompanied by a riot at the Embassy, caused by admirers of Yanky Fonzy ("an unprepossessing

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\(^{179}\)Nancy Mitford, *Don't Tell Alfred*, p. 172.

\(^{180}\)Ibid., p. 173.

\(^{181}\)Ibid., p. 174.
hobbledehoy, with pasty face, sloppy look about the mouth and hair done like Queen Alexandra’s after the typhoid\textsuperscript{182} yearning to see and hear him, which is mistaken for a political riot by both the British and French authorities. This causes the two governments to resolve their differences and turns Alfred’s mission unexpectedly into an enormous success. The riot also provides a comic highlight for the novel.

Trying to justify their actions to their father, Charlie and Fabrice explain that

members of showbiz were the aristocracy of the modern world; that Yanky was its King and that as Yanky’s gentlemen-in-waiting they had the most covetable position of any living teenagers.\textsuperscript{183}

The threesome eventually abandon Fonzy and reform themselves in order to aspire to great wealth as businessmen - their new idol is a French tycoon called Jacques Oudineau, who promises to take them into his business if they worked hard and pass all their examinations, after which “they would be happy ever after”\textsuperscript{184}. Fanny is delighted by the change in her sons’ attitudes, but even this career choice is a come-down for an aristocratic mother, reared with the belief, that “no gentleman ever goes into business.”\textsuperscript{185} It is revealing that Jacques Oudineau is the son of the butler at Boisdormant. As far as Miss Mitford is concerned, the fact that success at business is the highest happiness to which modern youth can aspire, though she recognizes it as a reality, is in itself a sad comment on the age.

Fanny indeed feels the aristocratic world she belongs to cracking

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{182} Nancy Mitford, \textit{Don’t Tell Alfred}, p. 200.
\item \textsuperscript{183} Ibid., p. 212.
\item \textsuperscript{184} Ibid., p. 219.
\item \textsuperscript{185} Cf. Nancy Mitford, \textit{The Ladies of Alderley}, p. xvii.
\end{itemize}
up under her feet. However, it is her very aristocratic nature, the poise and manner that is inherent to it, that gives her the dignity and humour to cope, and even more, to become the mean, the touchstone, according to which the escapades and frantic activities of the new era emerging around her, are measured and judged.

Don't Tell Alfred was published in October 1960. In spite of unenthusiastic reviews, it followed its predecessors onto the best-seller’s lists and sold 50 000 copies in the first two months. Critically regarded, it does not measure up to the standards of the three preceding novels. The main problem lies in the fact that Nancy’s judgment on what is acceptable within the confines of the suspension of disbelief, always a bit precarious, fails her here. She mixes touches of over-the-top satirical farce into an otherwise credible romantic novel, with characters which, while eccentric, remain believable and lifelike. The unrealistic farcical touches, though undeniably entertaining, undermine the framework of the novel as a whole.\footnote{The anonymous reviewer of The Times Literary Supplement deplores the fact that “one so well equipped to become our foremost writer of serious comedy should fob us off ... with something not far above ramshackle farce.” (“Miss Mitford Regrets”, anonymous review in Times Literary Supplement, 28 October 1960, p. 689.)} An example is the account of the "Ambulating Raiments", which are sent to the Iles Minquiers, a group of uninhabited rocks in the English Channel, the suzerainty of which is disputed by the French and English governments:

The Ambulating Raiments were immediately dispatched there. These baleful bales are full of ghastly old clothes collected at the time of the Dutch floods. Since then they have been round the world over and over again, bringing comfort to the tornadoed, the scorched, the shaken, the stateless, the volcanoed, the interned, the famished, the parched, the tidal-waved; any communities suffering from extreme bad luck or bad management are eligible for the
Raiments, which are so excellently organized that they arrive on the scene almost before the disaster has occurred. There is a tacit understanding that they are never to be undone, indeed nobody, however great their want, would dare to risk the vermin and disease that must fly out from them as from Pandora’s box. The recipients take their presence as a sort of lucky sign or sympathetic visiting card .... There was just time to have the bundles photographed, at low tide, on the rocks of the Ile Maitresse before they had to be dispatched to Oakland, California\(^\text{187}\), where a gigantic fire had wiped out acres of skyscrapers.\(^\text{188}\)

Nancy was hurt by the negative reviews and wrote to Evelyn Waugh, "I can see the time has come to chuck it".\(^\text{189}\) Waugh responded that she should not think of giving up novel writing and dismissed the reviewers as malicious.\(^\text{190}\) She ceased writing novels, however, and devoted the rest of her career to historical biographies - of Louis XIV, Madame de Pompadour, Voltaire and Frederick the Great. In spite of mixed reviews from historians - they were amazed that history could be made so readable - she achieved great popular success and eventually also respect as a meticulous researcher. She herself regarded *Frederick the Great* as her best book\(^\text{191}\), and *Love in a Cold Climate* as her best novel. The irrepressible Mitford style is responsible for much of the popular success of the historical works. Nancy’s friend, Raymond Mortimer, wrote to her:

Your narrative style is so peculiar, so breathless, so

\(^{187}\)A private joke: Oakland, California, was the home of Nancy’s sister, Jessica.

\(^{188}\)Nancy Mitford, *Don’t Tell Alfred*, p. 194.


\(^{190}\)Christopher Sykes, *Evelyn Waugh*, p. 430.

\(^{191}\)Diana Mosley, *A Life of Contrasts*, p. 277.
remote from what has ever been used for biography. I feel as if an enchantingly clever woman was pouring out the story to me on the telephone.\textsuperscript{192}

The eminent historian, A.J.P. Taylor, put it in a less flattering way in the \textit{Manchester Guardian}: "Certainly no historian could write a novel half as good as Miss Mitford's work of history. Of course he might never try."\textsuperscript{193} Readers and historians have had to admit on the whole, however, that even though the books are witty and clever, there is little wrong with the facts. Like all Nancy's works, they are full of delightful jokes. The following excerpt from \textit{The Sun King} illustrates both the informal conversational style and the humour:

\begin{quote}
Louis XIV was now not only sad but also bored. Mme de Maintenon [the King's last mistress and eventually, morganatic wife], to try and amuse him, brought two old, long neglected friends back into his little circle: Madame [the Duchess of Orléans] twice descended from William the Silent, was, like William himself, a wonderful chatterbox, and sometimes succeeded in making the King smile, and the Maréchal de Villeroy, who had lost many a battle but was a jolly soul and had been brought up with the King; (the courtiers used to say that Villeroy was irresistible to women but not to the enemy).\textsuperscript{194}
\end{quote}

With Nancy, as with her narrator Fanny, it is the humour that lasts and prevails in the end. This is her defence against the unfriendly modern world, in which she felt herself as an aristocrat of the old school, one of a dying breed, increasingly alien. In the preface to \textit{The Ladies of Alderley}, Nancy Mitford

\textsuperscript{192}Quoted in Jonathan & Catherine Guinness, \textit{The House of Mitford}, p. 522.

\textsuperscript{193}Quoted \textit{ibid.}, p. 523.

laments the passing of a "dead world, past and gone"\textsuperscript{195}, in which the aristocracy was secure and the world secure in the care of the aristocracy. Her concluding thought on the matter reveals both her involvement with and nostalgia for a "better past" and her tactics in dealing with the "worse present": "... [the reader] will, I hope, find the lives of The Ladies of Alderley as fascinating and their jokes as good as I do."\textsuperscript{196} Amidst all the wit, the gaiety and the laughter of her life and of her writing, there is pathos in her very determination to laugh, to "shriek", in the face of personal suffering and an ever increasing sense of alienation from society.

\textsuperscript{195} Nancy Mitford, Preface to \textit{The Ladies of Alderley}, p. xv.

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., p. xxv.
IV. IRELAND

A spot whereon the founders lived and died
Seemed once more dear than life; ancestral trees,
Or gardens rich in memory glorifies
Marriages, alliances and families
And every bride's ambition satisfied.
Where fashion or mere fantasy decrees
We shift about - all that great glory spent -
Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent.

W.B. Yeats

English involvement in Ireland's troubled history started in 1172 when King Henry II invaded Ireland, reorganized society according to the principles of Norman feudalism - granting land and castles to his favourite barons and reducing much of the native population to serfdom. These Norman barons, among them the FitzGeralds of Kildare and Butlers of Ormonde, soon identified with Ireland and intermarried with the native aristocracy, but in their continued - though sometimes tenuous - allegiance to the English Crown constituted the nucleus of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Kings of England were henceforth styled "Lords of Ireland" until 1541 when King Henry VIII, supported by an Irish Parliament which was "an assembly of magnates which had been evolving under English domination" adopted the title of King of Ireland. Up to this time, actual English authority extended only to the "Pale", consisting then of the counties of Louth, Meath, Dublin and Kildare. The new title for King Henry was the result of an active campaign by the King to bring the Irish nobles - both Norman and native - to heel and make his dominion over the island a political reality. King Henry followed a fierce policy of aggressive anglicization, trying "to destroy the essential distinctiveness of Irish society - their language, their laws, and their traditions - and to create out of the divided country

3The word "pale" means "fence", and refers to a stockade enclosing the 4 counties where English supremacy was unassailable. To the English "beyond the pale" came to mean "beyond the bonds of civilised behaviour". (Cf. Magnus Magnusson, Landlord or Tenant?, p. 14.)
The King's ideal was never realized, however. Instead the entrenchment of the reformation in England under Queen Elizabeth I caused further divisiveness as a majority of the pro-English nobility adopted the new religion while the majority of the populace remained faithful to the old. Under Queen Elizabeth the settlement of English gentlemen on Irish estates grew apace and the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy established itself as a cultural and political entity. The rebellion of the O'Neill, chieftain of the still Gaelic enclave of Ulster (1601 - 1603), resulted in the large-scale confiscation of land in that province and to the "Ulster plantation" - the extensive settlement of Protestant colonists loyal to the crown on that land, so that the last citadel of Gaelic power ironically became the most extensively and the most lastingly protestant. Most of these Ulster settlers were Scottish Presbyterian citizens, however, and would not become part of the largely Anglican and aristocratic Ascendancy, although pragmatic alliances between the two groups against the Catholic majority would be formed from time to time. The next great influx of Protestant gentry came with Cromwell's invading forces in the middle of the seventeenth century. Catholic Ireland would rise again to support the Catholic King James II against his Protestant son-in-law, William of Orange, in 1690, but was defeated at the Battle of the Boyne, a decisive victory which would confirm Protestant rule in Ireland for the next two centuries.  

The Act of Union (1800) which incorporated Ireland formally into the United Kingdom and removed Irish parliamentary representation from Dublin to London, spelled the end of the golden age of the "Protestant Irish nation", an era of great affluence for the

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4 Magnus Magnusson, *Landlord or Tenant?*, p. 15.  
5 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 18 - 43.
Ascendancy which saw the erection of the majority of the magnificent stately homes or Big Houses in Ireland. After 1800, the focus of the Irish aristocracy shifted from the Irish to the British capital and this was largely responsible for the widespread landlord absenteeism, which exacerbated the already strained relationships between pro-British protestant landlords and largely nationalist Catholic tenants. Although Catholic emancipation granted the franchise to Catholics in 1829, the strained situation in the country was further aggravated by the potato famine of 1846, which led to suffering and starvation among the Irish peasants and experientially further emphasized the great divide between landlord and tenant.

As the clamour for political empowerment and independence from England grew during the nineteenth century, the British government tried to defuse the situation at various stages. Home Rule Bills, proposing to restore parliamentary government and a measure of independence to Dublin, were introduced by the Liberal government at Westminster in 1886 and 1893, but were defeated by Conservative opposition. The Protestant Ascendancy was itself fervently opposed to Home Rule. Organized Irish nationalism coincided to some degree with demands for land reform. The Irish Land League was organized in 1879 by the nationalist leader Michael Davitt under the protection of the Irish parliamentary leader and national hero Charles Stewart Parnell. The success of this movement culminated in the Land Act of 1881 which went quite far towards protecting the rights of tenants. By the end of the nineteenth century the belief that the solution to the Irish problem lay in the granting of land to the tenants at the expense of the landlords had become prevalent. Politicians from widely divergent backgrounds and with equally divergent aims

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appeared to agree on this one issue. For the nationalists, land reform went hand-in-hand with the achievement of legislative independence, while the Anglo-Irish landlords had been convinced by the Conservative Party that it was the only way in which to 
preserve the Union.⁹ Among progressively minded gentlemen, the belief was that class conflict would end in this way and the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy would be able to re-enter public life, "not as a selfish and self-centred élite, still essentially parasitic on the British connection, but as patriotic servants of the Irish people as a whole."¹⁰ People like W.B. Yeats felt that the Ascendancy were the natural leaders of Ireland, a "superior race".¹¹

Wyndham's Land Act of 1903 and Birrell's Act passed six years later made funds available to tenants to purchase land. The results of these measures, together with persuasive pressure from virtually all political parties, were quite stupendous. Between 1903 and 1909 alone 9 million acres were sold. In 1870 only 3 % of Irish land was held by former tenants; by 1908 it was 46% and still increasing steadily. By the time the Irish Free State was established in 1922, three-quarters of the land had been transferred from landlords to former tenants. The Irish Free State completed the process by making what had been a voluntary process compulsory, acquiring the remaining land at a standard price and selling it off to tenants.¹² Cannadine comments that in "scale, this was land reform on a par with Bolshevik Russia: the hereditary owners, who had held the land for centuries, now

⁹David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, p. 472.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 475.


¹²David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, pp. 104 - 105.
held it no more."  

For the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy the tragedy was that the aim for which they had been prepared to make this sacrifice - the preservation of the Union and a place for themselves and their beliefs in the New Ireland - never had any chance of materializing:

Caught between the strident and irresistible demands of agrarian nationalism in the south, and of Belfast big business in the north, the old patrician class surrendered the political initiative, found itself deserted by its allies in Britain, and was brutally relegated to the sidelines in Ireland.... [It] was a defeat so bitter, a rejection so complete, and an abandonment so total, that it amounted to nothing less than a 'great betrayal'.

In the first British election after the First World War, the nationalist movement Sinn Féin gained an overwhelming majority in Ireland. Sinn Féin members refused to take their seats at Westminster and proclaimed themselves instead the first session of the Dáil Éireann, the Assembly of Ireland, ratifying the Republic that had been proclaimed during the Easter Rising in 1916. Civil war broke out between the Republican forces and Unionist forces (the Royal Irish Constabulary supported by the Black-and-Tans, a paramilitary force specially recruited among unemployed ex-soldiers in Britain). This was the time of "the troubles", during which Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* is set. Many of the Big Houses of Ireland were burnt down - an irreparable architectural loss for the country. In 1920 the British government passed the Government of Ireland Act dividing Ireland into Northern and Southern Ireland, successfully

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14Ibid., p. 472.


16Ibid., pp. 140 - 150.
isolating the loyalist North from the chaotic and violent South. After Sinn Féin had confirmed its dominance with another overwhelming victory in a general election in 1921, Britain started working towards a truce and the granting of some form of independence for Southern Ireland. After protracted negotiations, an Irish delegation accepted the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty - granting Ireland dominion status, or independence within the Empire and under the crown - in December 1921, when it appeared clear that the British would rather reinitiate the war than concede more. This compromise proved so unacceptable to extremist nationalists that civil war broke out between the supporters of the new Irish Free State and the more radical Republican nationalists. This amply illustrates to what degree the Anglo-Irish had been marginalized in the political arena: they were simply no longer a factor at all. By 1937, the Irish constitution contained no reference to the King, and Ireland had ceased to consider itself one of His Majesty’s Dominions.

What happened to the Ascendancy? A great number, particularly of the upper titled nobility, simply left an Ireland where they were no longer wanted, and settled elsewhere. The Duke of Leinster, premier peer of Ireland and head of the powerful clan of the Fitzgeralds, lives in Oxfordshire and the Marquess of Ormonde, head of the once rival House of Butler, in the United States. The Marquess of Lansdowne lives in Wiltshire and the Marquess of Ely in Canada. The Earl of Cork has settled in Sussex and the Earl of Drogheda in Surrey, and so forth. Others have continued to live on their remaining property in Ireland, but lead inward-looking or eastward-looking lives, far removed

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17 Mark Tierney, Modern Ireland, pp. 144 - 145.
18 Ibid., p. 150 et seq.
19 Ibid., p. 155 et seq.
20 Ibid., p. 175 et seq.
21 Ibid., p. 207.
from the centres of activity and interest - and from the esprit as such - of Republican Ireland. As a significant cultural and political entity, the Protestant Anglo-Irish Ascendancy is no more.
Elizabeth Bowen (1899 - 1973) and Molly Keane (1904 - ) are both products of that peculiar but astonishingly artistic community, the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy. This group, established over the centuries in Ireland by various conquering armies from England, has contributed to the gallery of men and women of letters inter alios Jonathan Swift, Edmund Burke, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Maria Edgeworth, George Moore, Oscar Wilde, Augusta Lady Gregory, George Bernard Shaw, William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge.

Granted extensive estates appropriated from the vanquished Catholic Irish majority, the Anglo-Irish wielded unchallenged political and social domination over Ireland after Catholic Ireland’s last concerted resistance had failed at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. By that time dispossession of the native Irish was virtually a fait accompli: all the ancient estates of the Old Irish Catholic nobility and the farms of the Irish people were declared forfeit on 26 September 1653 and henceforth belonged to Cromwell’s conquering army. Native Irish landlords were exiled to Connaught in the West whither they had to remove themselves and their families before 1 May 1654, under penalty of death if they were found east of the Shannon after that day.22 Their land was then distributed in parcels to the English soldiers according to the debt owed them by the government for their participation in the war of subjugation.23 Penal laws prevented the native Irish from recouping any losses by excluding Catholics from holding any commission in the army or sitting in parliament. Squire and villager thus became estranged; landlord and tenant were separated by barriers of

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22Elizabeth Bowen, Bowen’s Court, p. 72, in Bowen’s Court and Seven Winters, London: Virago, 1984.
23Ibid., pp. 70 - 71.
After the original period of establishment and subjection, the Anglo-Irish settled down with unbridled self-confidence to create a society of wealthy and landed country noblemen and gentleman, who built a large number of singularly beautiful stately homes during the eighteenth century. (Together with their remarkable literary prolificity, their architectural achievements probably constitute their most significant legacy.) Peerages and baronetcies were distributed liberally to give the new elite the required status. In spite of the barriers dividing them from their tenantry, the Anglo-Irish gentry started to identify with the country and, though remaining loyal in sentiment to England and the Crown, soon came to regard themselves as Irishmen, as representatively Irish even. They disregarded any anomaly in their position. Elizabeth Bowen comments on the national identity of her race:

If Ireland did not accept them, they did not know it - and it is in that unawareness of final rejection, unawareness of being looked out at from some secretive, opposed life, that the Anglo-Irish naive dignity and, even, tragedy seems to me to stand. Themselves, they felt Irish, and acted as Irishmen.  

In her partial autobiography, *Seven Winters*, she describes the experience of growing up in the confident cocoon that was Protestant Anglo-Ireland:

It was not until the end of those seven winters [of her Dublin childhood] that I understood that we Protestants were a minority, and that the unquestioned rules of our being came, in fact, from the closeness of a minority

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Roman Catholics were spoken of by my father and mother with a courteous detachment that gave them, even, no myth. I took the existence of Roman Catholics for granted but met few and was not interested in them. They were simply "the others", whose world lay alongside ours but never touched.\textsuperscript{26}

Only in the twentieth century would this confidence be undermined as Irish nationalism became militant, catching the generally blindly benevolent (though often neglectful) Irish Protestant nobility unawares, depriving them suddenly of their national identity and marginalizing them in terms of what they regarded as their own country. Many left Ireland, while others, like Elizabeth Bowen, continued to lead isolated lives in their demesnes (the term used for their Irish estates), severed from the national life of the country, culturally dispossessed. Elizabeth Bowen comments in Bowen’s Court:

\begin{quote}
In the life of what we call the new Ireland - but is Ireland ever new? - the lives of my own people become a little thing; from 1914 they begin to be merged, already, into a chapter of different history.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

This decline of fortune and sense of increasing irrelevancy and isolation lie at the heart of Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane’s Irish novels. The books deal with an aristocracy in decline, with the power over the present of a past of expired grandeur, and with its weakness, with the coming to terms with changes of fortune or futile resistance to them. Hermione Lee says that Elizabeth Bowen’s novels are shaped by "a preoccupation with loss, betrayal and dislocation ..." and that "she repeatedly characterizes [her personal vision of contemporary life] as


\textsuperscript{27}Elizabeth Bowen, \textit{Bowen’s Court}, p. 437.
dislocated, dispossessed and denatured." In the speed and scale of its decline, the Protestant Anglo-Irish Ascendancy provides us with an intensified prototype of the decline of the aristocracy in Europe. Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane render this example with subtlety and nuance, with asperity and humour, with wit and compassion, from within, as it were.

Like most ascendancy families, the Bowens arrived in Ireland as part of a conquering army, in this case, Cromwell's. Elizabeth's ancestor, Col. Henry Bowen from Wales - the family name had originally been apOwen - was granted 800 acres in County Cork in 1653, and there his descendants established the family home, Bowen's Court, where Bowens resided as gentlemen until Elizabeth sold the house in 1959. Her mother, Florence Colley, came from a slightly grander Anglo-Irish aristocratic dynasty. She was of the family of the Viscounts Harborton, descended in the male line from the Very Rev. Arthur Pomeroy, who came to Ireland in 1672 as Chaplain of the Lord Lieutenant and became Dean of Cork, and in the female line from Sir Henry Colley, a Captain in Queen Elizabeth I's army in Ireland, who was knighted in 1576, son of Walter Cowley who successively held the posts of Solicitor-general and Surveyor-general for Ireland in the sixteenth century. She was a kinswoman of the Duke of Wellington (a branch of the Colleys changed their name to Wellesley on an inheritance and founded the Wellington line) and a niece of the ill-fated Sir George Pomeroy Colley, who commanded the British forces at the Battle of Majuba.

Although Elizabeth's father, Henry Cole Bowen, was the heir to the estate, he broke with the family tradition of spending their

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lives entirely in the country and became a barrister in Dublin, where she was born. The family continued to spend summers at Bowen’s Court. In 1906, Henry Bowen’s mental health broke down, and Elizabeth and her mother left Ireland for England where they spent the next five years in rented villas on the Kent coast. Just as her father’s recovery appeared to make a permanent return to Ireland possible, Elizabeth Bowen’s mother was diagnosed as suffering from cancer. As a result of her mother’s consequent death in 1912, Elizabeth continued to live and go to school in England, spending only her summers with her father and an aunt at Bowen’s Court. The anomaly of her Anglo-Irish identity was thus intensified by the fact that also physically her life was divided between England and Ireland. In 1924 she married Alan Cameron, a British education official, and lived with him successively in Northampton, Oxford and London, going back to Bowen’s Court, which she inherited from her father in 1930, for part of every year and so continuing her schizophrenic Anglo-Irish existence. She and her husband settled permanently at Bowen’s Court in 1952, but he died in the same year. She sold the property in 1959, mainly for financial reasons and on the understanding that the purchaser would live there with his family. It was demolished soon afterwards, however. In spite of her attachment to the house which had escaped the fate of so many others - burnt down during the political struggles of the early nineteen twenties - and to the tradition and history it represented, Bowen commented: “It was a clean end. Bowen’s Court did not live to be a ruin.”

Elizabeth Bowen’s writing career started in 1923, when she published a volume of short stories, Encounters. This was

\[30\] Elizabeth Bowen, Bowen’s Court, p. 459.

followed by another volume, *Ann Lee's and Other Stories* in 1926, before her first novel, *The Hotel*, was published in 1928. Her first Irish novel, *The Last September*, followed in 1929. It deals with life in an Anglo-Irish Big House in September 1920, during the political upheavals of the war between the Irish Republican Army and the British forces garrisoned in Ireland. Another four volumes of short stories and eight novels would follow, among which *The Death of the Heart* (1938) and *The Heat of the Day* (1949) probably received the highest critical acclaim and contributed most to establishing Miss Bowen's status as a major English novelist. Her second Irish novel, *A World of Love*, dealing with the infringement of the pre-First World War past on an Anglo-Irish family in full mid-century decline, was published in 1955. She also published a fair number of autobiographical and critical works. Her last novel, *Eva Trout*, appeared in 1969, and her last book, *Pictures and Conversations* in 1975, only two years before her death. Her writing has broadly been termed "psychological realism" or "literary impressionism". Miss Bowen herself said that for her a novel is a "prose statement of a poetic truth", a truth to be found in personal experiences transformed by the author, also called by her "transformed biography". It is thus in accordance with her personal poetics that Miss Bowen's personal sense of dislocation and isolation as a member of the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy should permeate her work and possibly explains why she called *The Last September*, which deals most intimately with the dilemma of the Irish Protestant gentry "of all my books ... nearest my heart."

Molly Keane was a good friend of Elizabeth Bowen's and comes from a similar background. She was born in 1904 in County Kildare as


33 Ibid.

34 Hermione Lee, Introduction to Bowen's Court and Seven Winters, p. xii.
the daughter of a Protestant landowner, Walter Clarmont Skrine. Her mother, Nesta Shakespeare Higginson, enjoyed a fair reputation as the poet of *The Songs of the Glens of Antrim*, under the pseudonym Moira O’Neill. Mrs Keane was raised on the family estate, Ballyrankin in County Wexford, where she was educated privately by governesses. She became part of the “hunting and shooting and fishing” society she so admirably depicts and satirizes in her novels, describing her interests at the time as “hunting and horses and having a good time”. She published her first novel, *Young Entry*, in 1928 under the pseudonym, M.J. Farrell, as she feared ostracism from the sporting Anglo-Irish society where “anybody who had anything to do with the intelligentsia was out on a limb.”

Mrs Keane’s career can be divided into two clear phases, the first executed under the pseudonym M.J. Farrell and the second under her own name. *Young Entry* was followed by nine more novels and a collection of sketches between 1929 and 1952. She also achieved some eminence as a playwright, with four plays produced and enjoying considerable popular success in the West End or Dublin between 1938 and 1950. The death of her husband, Robert Lumley Keane in 1947, leaving her a widow with two minor children, was a shocking blow to her, and though she continued to write for a while, it was not with the same enthusiasm. When her last play, *Dazzling Prospect* (1961) failed in the West End, she gave up writing altogether, concluding the career of M.J. Farrell. However, she surprised the literary world by making a

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36 Interview with Molly Keane published in *Contemporary Authors* (edited by Hal May), Volume 114, Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1985, pp. 264 - 266.

In her 1981 novel, *Good Behaviour*, Mrs Keane would write with sympathy for those that did not fit the mould of society:

> A cowardly child was a hidden sore, and a child driven to admit hatred of his pony was something of a leper in our society.

comeback (this time under her own name) in 1981, when she was seventy-seven years old, with the publication of Good Behaviour. The novel was short-listed for the Booker Prize and filmed for television. It was followed by Time After Time in 1983 (also filmed for television) and Loving and Giving in 1988, when the author was an impressive eighty-four years old. In general the critical reaction to these last three novels has far surpassed the reception of her earlier novels.\footnote{For biographical details, cf. article by Charity Ann Dorgan and interview by Jean W. Ross in Contemporary Authors (edited by Hal May), Volume 114, pp. 263 - 266.}

All Mrs Keane’s novels centre on the lives of the Anglo-Irish country gentry, revealing their foibles, eccentricities and humanity. As with Elizabeth Bowen, politics enters only peripherally into the action of the novels (even more so in the case of Molly Keane); the anomalous position or decline of the Protestant aristocracy is not discussed or elaborated on as such, but is nevertheless a constant given: the historical aspects are absorbed in the personal experience of the individual characters. History and individual experience are made indivisible. In an article on two of the later novels by Molly Keane, Vera Kreilkamp states that these novels

portray characters who survive through their capacity to create self-serving illusions about their past. In examining and exposing these illusions, [the] novels implicitly move beyond character analysis into the larger enterprise of a cultural analysis of twentieth-century Anglo-Ireland.\footnote{Vera Kreilkamp, Molly Keane’s Recent Big House Fiction, The Massachusetts Review, Vol. 28, number 3, 1987, p. 454.}

This aspect of "cultural analysis" is not limited to the particular novels of Molly Keane, but is indeed the most interesting common feature of the novels discussed in this chapter: The Last September (1929) and A World of Love (1955)

Like most Anglo-Irish novels, these works have in common that the action centres on the Big House, or country manor. As such they form part of a tradition of Big House Fiction, which can be traced back to Maria Edgeworth’s novel, Castle Rackrent, which appeared in 1801, dealing with the decline of the Rackrent family over three generations and criticising eighteenth-century Irish landlords for their profligacy and corruption. The tradition was carried on in the nineteenth century in the fiction of Charles Lever (1806 - 1872), of the Anglo-Irish cousins and literary partners Somerville (1858 - 1949) and Ross (1862 - 1915), and in the twentieth century in the Irish novels of Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane, as well as in the contemporary fiction of Aidan Higgins and Jennifer Johnston, for example. The novels traditionally deal with the disruption of the symbiotic relationship between landlord and tenant or peasant, as a result of the cultural and political estrangement between them in Ireland, and with the consequent decline of the estates and of the aristocracy or gentry.39 Kreilkamp states that

\[\text{Most Big House novels are written with an explicit concern for the connection between the private, domestic world of the landlord's decline and the world of history - the political transformations of Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.}\]  

In Bowen’s and Keane’s novels the concern is indeed explicit, but the execution is implicit; historical events are cast purely in personal, individual terms, and actual historical events are

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hardly discussed at all. Bowen's *The Last September* is the exception, where there is some overt reference to grand political movements, but even in this novel the general concept of rendering these occurrences in terms of personal experience rather than as great historical milestones *per se*, holds true.

In Anglo-Irish literature, the Big House generally represents tradition or Anglo-Irish cultural identity. In her history of her own family's Big House, Elizabeth Bowen states:

> A Bowen, in the first place, made Bowen's Court. Since then, with a rather alarming sureness, Bowen's Court has made all the succeeding Bowens.\(^{41}\)

The house is given an emotional life of its own; it functions virtually as an independent character in the novels. It is clearly significant that the Big House stands at the heart of each of these novels. The central role of the house, symbolizing Anglo-Irish tradition and culture, confirms the "cultural analysis" aspect of the novels as suggested by Kreilkamp.

In *The Last September*, the house in question is Danielstown, home of Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, and temporarily of Sir Richard's niece, Lois Farquar, and Lady Naylor's nephew, Laurence. Danielstown represents the past - a pre-occupation of Elizabeth Bowen's - an order and a tradition which maintains a powerful hold over the present inhabitants, and yet is clearly under siege as the new Ireland starts to threaten it. In her essay, "The Big House" (1940), Elizabeth Bowen describes the kind of power the past exercises over the present as a spell:

> ... [L]ife in the Big House, in its circle of trees is saturated with character: this is, I suppose, the element of the spell. The indefinite ghosts of the past, of the dead who lived here and pursued this same routine of life

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\(^{41}\)Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, p. 32.
in these walls add something, a sort of order, a reason for living, to every minute and hour. This is the order, the form of life, the tradition to which Big house people still sacrifice much. 42

The tradition represented by the house is not altogether negative. In her quoted essay on the topic, Miss Bowen talks of a true bigness, a sort of impersonality, in the manner in which the houses were conceived. After an era of greed, roughness and panic ... these new settlers who had been imposed upon Ireland began to wish to add something to life. They began to seek ... what was humanistic, classic and disciplined. 43

In The Last September, Miss Bowen suggests the positive values embodied by the Big House, mainly the order and harmony intrinsic to tradition, and therefore lending protection from the political and emotional chaos of the "outside". After Lois had been confronted with a revolutionary making his way through the demesne, she becomes aware that the shuttered-in drawing room, the family sealed in lamplight, secure and bright like flowers in a paperweight - were desirable, worth much of this to regain. Fear curled back from the carpet-border .... 44

Paradoxically, however, this honourable tradition has become vacuous, sterile, unmanned by the very alienation of the house from its environment that also lends it its protective

42 Elizabeth Bowen, "The Big House" in The Mulberry Tree, pp. 28 - 29.
43 Ibid., p. 27.
competence. Danielstown is described as having a sad irrelevant look .... Chairs standing round dejectedly ... mirrors vacant and staring; books read and forgotten, contributing no more to life; dinner table certain of its regular compulsion; the procession of elephants that throughout uncertain years had not broken file.\textsuperscript{45}

The tradition has become a meaningless ritual, a "regular compulsion", held on to as empty security through "uncertain years", its performers like a troupe of trained circus animals unthinkingly following ingrained patterns. In the dining room, the present occupants of Danielstown consequently appear "unconvincingly painted, startled, transitory" against the "immutable figures\textsuperscript{46}" of their ancestors on the walls, representing the powerful past. A more vital past - a familiar theme in aristocratic novels - has cast a spell of inaction and isolation on a dislocated present. The characters are paralysed, inhibited and denatured, made insubstantial by the House and tradition to which they are in thrall: Lois could not try to explain the magnetism they all exercised by being static. Or how ... she and the home surroundings still further penetrated each other mutually in the discovery of a lack.\textsuperscript{47}

The focus of the novel is on the character of Lois, a young girl trying to work out her own identity, a theme much cherished by Bowen. As Linda Noble points out, Lois is described physically in terms of incompleteness and immaturity:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{45}Elizabeth Bowen, \textit{The Last September}, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., p. 24.

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., p. 166.
\end{flushright}
delicately on the rise of the bone. Her eyes, long and soft-coloured, had the intense brimming look of a puppy’s; in repose her lips met doubtfully, in a never-determined line, so that she never seemed to have quite finished speaking .... He supposed that unformed, anxious to make an effort, she would marry early.\textsuperscript{48}

Lois’s desire to manifest herself, to escape the paralysis of Danielstown, leads her to an engagement with Gerald Lesworth, one of the British Officers stationed nearby to protect British interests and in particular the Anglo-Irish from the vengeance of native Irish nationalists. She hopes that his perception of her would lend substance to herself in her own mind, would concretize her as an individual. When Gerald proposes she confesses that she has “been so ... vacant”\textsuperscript{49} and reflecting on the consequences of her engagement, she muses, “All the same, ... it is something definite.”\textsuperscript{50} However, her attempt to achieve reality in this way is doomed to failure, because on the one hand Gerald is too prosaic to be a suitable partner for her (“His life was a succession of practical adjustments, into which the factor of personality did not enter at all”\textsuperscript{51}) and on the other because she cannot identify with his concept of her (“Lois had been worried chiefly because Gerald had illusions about her ...”\textsuperscript{52}). Even while she is conducting the relationship, she is aware that it merely comprises “an illusion both were called upon to maintain.”\textsuperscript{53} Their relationship is doomed to the pervasive insubstantiality and paralysis that the Big house determines for


\textsuperscript{49}Elizabeth Bowen, The Last September, p. 154.

\textsuperscript{50}Ibid., p. 162.

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., p. 41.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., p. 48.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., p. 32.
its inhabitants:

She would have loved to love him; she felt some kind of wistfulness, some deprivation. If there could only be some change, some movement - in her outside of her, somewhere between them - some incalculable shifting of perspectives that would bring him wholly into focus ....\textsuperscript{54}

For the inhabitants of the Big House, action and determination of the future are inconceivable: "The unbelievable future became as fixed as the past ...."\textsuperscript{55}

Lois's own lack of identity is a reflection of the historic situation in which her society finds itself, a situation symbolized by the isolation of the Big House, Danielstown, from its surroundings. In Bowen's Court, Bowen comments on the intrinsic isolation of the Big House:

Each of these houses with its intense, centripetal life, is isolated by something much more lasting than the physical fact of space: the isolation is innate; it is an affair of origin.\textsuperscript{56}

With startling impressionistic effect, she renders the isolation of Danielstown in The Last September:

... their isolation became apparent. The house seemed to be pressing down low in apprehension, hiding its face as though it had a vision of where it was. It seemed to gather its trees close in fright and amazement at the wide, light, lovely unloving country, the unwilling bosom whereon

\textsuperscript{54}Elizabeth Bowen, The Last September, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., p. 166.
\textsuperscript{56}Elizabeth Bowen, Bowen's Court, p. 20.
Both Lois and Laurence admit to the isolation of their existence in the Big House. Lois complains,

How is it that in this country that ought to be full of such violent realness, there seems nothing for me but clothes and what people say? I might just as well be in a kind of cocoon.  

Laurence, with intellectual perspicacity, not only senses the cocoon of isolated displacement, but is able to express his constriction and to desire its violent explosion:

But I should like something else to happen, some crude intrusion of the actual ... I should like to be here when this house burns.

Later, when Lois is confronted by her own insubstantiality in the face of the physical presence and reality of Marda (an intriguing visitor to Danielstown, who had made her escape from the spell of passive isolation and achieved actuality by moving to England and getting engaged to an Englishman, thus reinforcing Lois’s decision to marry Gerald), she echoes Laurence’s wish:

And she hoped that instead of fading to dust in summers of empty sunshine, the carpet would burn with the house in a scarlet night to make one flaming call upon Marda’s memory.

Between the inhabitants of the house and actuality stands the

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57 Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*, p. 66.
enchanted fortress of the Big House, ensuring an isolated existence, in which its increasingly uneasy inhabitants are entrapped, emotionally and spiritually out of harmony with its environment. In *Bowen's Court*, Elizabeth Bowen explains the tension that exists between the Big House and its uncongenial surroundings:

It is the negation of mystical Ireland: its bald wall rebut the surrounding, disturbing light. Imposed on seized land, built in the rulers' ruling tradition, the house is, all the same, of the local rock, and sheds the same grey gleam you see over the countryside.\(^6^1\)

The house belongs ostensibly to the landscape, it is "of the same local rock", shedding "the same grey gleam ... over the countryside", and yet in essence it is "the negation of mystical Ireland". This is the dilemma of the Anglo-Irish, belonging ostensibly to the country and yet having no concept of the country, or of their alienation from it, tragically unaware of the final rejection, as Miss Bowen expresses it. When Lois notices a man in a trench-coat rushing secretively through the demesne, she becomes aware of her alienation. It constitutes one of those significant moments where Miss Bowen allows the overtly political to transect the personal aspects of the story, where she fuses the historical and the personal, a fusion which lies at the heart of the work. "It must be because of Ireland he was in such a hurry", Lois thinks, and then concludes sadly: "Here was something else she could not share. She could not conceive of her country emotionally ...."\(^6^2\)

Lois and Laurence's awareness of their isolation and alienation puts them a step ahead of the older generation, Naylors and Montmorencies, who, blinded by the "local rock" and "same grey gleam", are indeed tragically unaware of their rejected status.

\(^{6^1}\)Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, p. 31.

\(^{6^2}\)Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*, p. 34.
This is particularly evident in the attitude of Sir Richard Naylor, who, as a Protestant landlord, is dependent on the British military for the preservation of his position and even for his safety, but who nevertheless deplores their presence and sympathizes emotionally with the very people whose aims are to unseat him and his kind. When he hears of Lois’s attachment to a British officer, his first concern is that Lois might have told Gerald of the arms hidden by the Republicans in the lower plantation on the demesne. The members of the family also express great concern for the son of one of the tenants, who is a rebel on the run. Lois explains to Hugo Montmorency:

He is wanted over in County Clare; they got him once, but he escaped again — I was so glad ... I know he is home, for Clancey saw him three days ago. But don’t speak of it — one cannot be too careful.63

Sir Richard and Lady Naylor preserve their illusion of acceptance in Ireland by an almost wilful campaign of self-isolation and delusion. In answer to speculation on arms buried on the estate, Sir Richard explodes, "I will not have men talking, and at all accounts I won’t have them listened to ... "64 and Lady Naylor concurs: "From the talk, you might think anything was going to happen, but we never listen."65 The portrayal of the Naylors as wilfully resistant to an appreciation of their real position in Ireland is reinforced by small but significant touches, such as Lady Naylor loftily expressing her pity for the Russian Tsar for having to live in such constant and imminent danger of attacks from Nihilists, shortly before her own house is burnt down by Irish revolutionaries.

Inside their self-made cocoon the Anglo-Irish aristocracy continue to live the life they have ever lived, regardless of the

63 Elizabeth Bowen, The Last September, p. 66.
64 Ibid., p. 25.
fact that their world is breaking up around them. Not only does Miss Bowen portray their society as obstinately isolated, but she is also unsparing in her characterization of the values they preserve within their cocoon. They are presented as courteous and hospitable, but also as liable to shallow judgments - Laurence’s unfashionable intellectualism is only redeemed by the fact that "of course, he plays tennis." The main criterion for judgment appears to be the preservation of the order of the past - dissenting politics is dismissed and forbidden as "inconvenient". Class snobbery is rampant: "... she was a Vere Scott, a Fermanagh Vere Scott." Poignant in the light of their dependence on the British forces and their rejection by the Irish, is their disdainful dismissal of all things English:

[The Honourable Mrs Carey] thought of Mrs Vermont as 'a little person' and feared she detected in her a tendency, common to most English people, to talk about their inside. She often wondered if the War had not made everybody from England a little commoner.

Not only does the Hon. Mrs Carey’s speculation reveal her snobbish class consciousness, but it also demonstrates her arrogant and ignorant self-assuredness, as she, herself a member of a doomed class, considers the decline in standards of English society.

The most sustained satirization of class values among the Ascendancy, and also one of the most sustained passages of social comedy in *The Last September*, is Lady Naylor’s protestations on hearing of Lois’s proposed engagement to the British officer, Gerald Lesworth:

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66 Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*, p. 16.
67 Ibid., p. 21.
68 Ibid., p. 36.
69 Ibid., p. 46.
Of course, he’s a thoroughly nice boy, so much liked in the regiment. But then, what are the Rutlands nowadays? ... No, he of course is charming, but he seems to have no relations. One cannot trace him. His mother, he says, lives in Surrey, and of course you do know, don’t you, what Surrey is? It says nothing, absolutely; part of it is opposite the Thames Embankment. Practically nobody who lives in Surrey ever seems to have been heard of, and if one does hear of them they have never heard of anybody else who lives in Surrey. Really altogether, I think English people are hard to trace. They are so pleasant and civil, but I do often wonder if they are not a little shallow: for no reason at all they will pack up everything and move across six counties .... Of course I don’t say Gerald Lesworth’s people are in trade - I should never say a thing like that without foundation. Besides, if they were in trade there would be money; money on English people shows so much and he quite evidently hasn’t any. No, I should say they were just villa-ry.⁷⁰

The passage is a tour de force of ironic self-revelation, worthy of Jane Austen. While Lady Naylor devastates Lesworth’s social background - her concessions about his niceness only emphasizing the acidity of her disparagement -, Miss Bowen exposes the worst of Lady Naylor and her kin: snobbery, arrogance, xenophobia, condescension, small-mindedness and materialism. On the other hand, the Anglo-Irish are not the only group to come in for social satire. The dance given by Captain and Mrs Rolfe of the Gunners, appears to confirm some of Lady Naylor’s reservations about the behaviour of the English, and as regards arrogance, it would be hard to surpass earnest English Gerald’s explanation of his views on the political situation: “I mean, looking back on history - not that I am an intellectual - we do seem the only people.”⁷¹

⁷⁰Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*, p. 58.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 93.
While Miss Bowen concedes the positive values of the Big House tradition, Lady Naylor’s monologue demonstrates that the inhabitants, in the superficiality of their values, are morally culpable for their own decline. As Pamela Brown points out,

Lady Naylor’s background and good manners count for nothing in this scene because she has failed Bowen’s definition of ‘the exercise of the imagination on another person’s behalf.’ For Bowen, as for Henry James, this is not only an inexcusable and vulgar breach of courtesy, but a moral lack.

The novel’s title *The Last September* denotes the end of summer, moving into autumn, and thus obviously signifies the end of an order. This is a political disempowerment, as well as an internal collapse, caused by isolation and delusion in the midst of an alien political and spiritual environment. The novel concludes with the burning down of Danielstown, actualizing the dissolution of the order that the house represents. Before this blazing dénouement, however, there are other important scenes where the political disorder is shown to impinge on the traditional order of the Big House. These scenes not only indicate the fragility of Anglo-Irish civilization and prefigure the fate of the house and its society, but also constitute important milestones in the personal development of some of the characters, notably of Lois. Such pivotal moments are described by Lois as her having "surprised life at a significant angle". As has been stated when the first of these, her encounter with the revolutionary passing through the grounds of the demesne, is described, they mark the transection of the historical with the

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72 Quoted by Ms Brown (see infra) from Miss Bowen’s essay "Manners" in the volume *Collected Impressions*, London: Longmans, 1950, p. 200.


74 Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*, p. 34.
individual, a confluence which constitutes a basic structure in the novel.

The second of these scenes takes place when Lois, Marda and Hugo Montmorency go for a walk and the two women surprise a gunman sleeping in a deserted mill. Waking up, the gunman points a firearm at them, and though they manage to convince him of their good faith - another example of the anomaly of Anglo-Irish political sentiments - the pistol is triggered in the confusion and the shot grazes Marda's hand. Hugo reacts with violent emotion to this incident. The incident thus confronts Lois for a second time with the politico-historical reality of her time ("... you had better keep in the house while y’have it ..."\(^75\)), and at the same time with metaphysical and psychological realities, the possibility of death ("She thought how the very suggestion of death brought this awful unprivacy"\(^76\)) and Hugo's sexual attraction to Marda, hitherto unsuspected by Lois ("... Mr Montmorency ... he’s being awful about you ..."). Lois's political unawareness, her inability to "conceive emotionally of her country", is a reflection of her personal isolation (a condition which Bowen suggests is endemic to her class) and her naiveté, her inability to seize life in its full dimension. In these moments of surprising "life at a significant angle", she is confronted by history, but also by mortality and sexuality and so increasingly emerges from her innocence: "I had no idea – I was too damned innocent."\(^78\)

The next such convergence of the personal and the historical takes place shortly before the end of the novel, when Mr Daventry comes to tell Lois that Gerald has been killed in an ambush. The potential for violence and death felt at the mill has been

\(^75\)Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*, p. 125.

\(^76\)Ibid., p. 127.

\(^77\)Ibid., p. 128.

\(^78\)Ibid., p. 128.
fulfilled, and Lois is finally enabled to overcome the insubstantiality of existence and to grasp life - paradoxically in death: "Life, seen whole for a moment, was one act of apprehension, the apprehension of death." 79 This prepares Lois for the resolution of her situation, and shortly afterwards she leaves the confines of both Danielstown and Ireland behind to move to the continent, just as Laurence also leaves Danielstown to return to Oxford. The resolution is confirmed when Danielstown is burnt down by the activists, manifesting the destruction of a class and a civilization, but paradoxically liberating the protagonists from a historical paralysis, enabling them to function as vital individuals. For Lois then resolution can only come when the conjunction between history and individual experience is broken, when she has admitted to the decline and extinction of the aristocratic claims of her society. She is set free from its protective and beautiful yet stifling cocoon.

Elizabeth Bowen’s other Irish novel, *A World of Love*, is set in a decaying Big House in Ireland after the Second World War (it was published in 1955). As in *The Last September*, the personal focus is on a young girl on the verge of life (Jane Danby, the daughter of the house), and as in the earlier novel, the convergence between the historical and personal is sustained thematically. As this novel is set thirty or forty years after the fall from power of the Ascendancy, it is the historical past which forms a constant parallel to the personal situation of the characters. This historical past is embodied in the character of Guy, the last male heir of Montefort, who - suitably - was killed in the First World War, the conflagration that appears to have marked the end of the era of secure privilege for most of Europe’s aristocrats. Though dead for thirty-five years, Guy dominates the lives of the inhabitants of Montefort. He has bequeathed Montefort to his cousin Antonia, who by default has also inherited responsibility for his fiancée, Lilia. Trying to resolve the problem of these inheritances, she marries Lilia off

to Fred, her and Guy’s illegitimate cousin and informally puts Fred in charge of Montefort, visiting the demesne from time to time, maintaining her status as the owner of the estate.

In the opening sequence of the novel, Montefort is described. The emphasis is on decay:

For the small mansion had the air of having gone down: for one thing, trees had been felled around it, leaving space impoverished and the long roofline framed by too much sky. The door no longer knew hospitality; moss obliterated the sweep for the turning carriage; the avenue lived on as a rutted track, and a poor fence, close up to the house, served to keep back grazing cattle. Had the façade not carried a ghost of style, Montefort would have looked, as it almost did, like nothing more than the annexe of its farm buildings ....

Dispossession of the native Irish, not so much as regards property, but as regards dignity and status, has been reversed. When a stranger from the area gives Lilia and her younger daughter, Maud, a lift from the fair to the house, his innocent comment is: "No idea there was anyone living here ...." 81

Jane Danby, born from the marriage arranged by Antonia, has a face "perfectly ready to be a woman’s, but not yet so" 82. As with Lois, Jane’s growing maturity is traced mainly through her troubled relations with the past. Just as Lois had to establish her identity in the face of a paralysing tradition, Jane has to establish her identity and maturity in the face of an overwhelming past. The plot is set off by Jane’s discovery in the attic of a bundle of love letters written by Guy to an

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81 Ibid., p. 41.
82 Ibid., p. 11.
unnamed woman. Jane, who finds the past inimical ("the wreckage left by the past oppressed her - ... everything was derelict, done for, done with"\textsuperscript{83}), is suddenly invaded by it, and by the presence of Guy, the author of the letters. Guy, whose remembered grace, elegance and vitality denotes a gracious and vital historical past, casts his long shadow over the lives of the living at Montefort. For Antonia, his cousin and close companion, for Fred, the unlikely heir to his position in the family and on the estate, for Lilia, his love, he is ever present, and his presence is thrown into sharp relief by the disturbing discovery of the letters. "Not that it was unlike him to be killed ...", muses Antonia, but "it was unlike him to be dead."\textsuperscript{84}

It was simply that these years she went on living belonged to him, his lease upon them not having run out yet. The living were living in his lifetime; and of this his contemporaries - herself, Lilia, Fred - never were unaware.\textsuperscript{85}

Lilia still defines herself in terms of her romance with and engagement to Guy: "... but if not the Beloved, what was Lilia? Nothing. Nothing was left to be."\textsuperscript{86} Her uncertainty is compounded by the fact that she is not even certain that the letters are addressed to her. They were probably written to a mysterious woman whom Guy had arranged to meet at the station on his last departure for the continent before his death. Also Fred, who has had to step into Guy’s marital and occupational shoes, but is significantly illegitimate, barred from being the lawful heir to the Montefort tradition, is haunted by his presence. Discussing Guy with Antonia, Fred says,

\textsuperscript{83}Elizabeth Bowen, \textit{A World of Love}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{84}Ibid., p. 64.
\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., p. 65.
\textsuperscript{86}Ibid., p. 143.
Can't say I ever knew him.'

'But you remember there was Guy?'

Something snapped in Fred. He shouted: "God, Antonia - how can I ever not?" 87

Jane is enchanted by the love letters Guy wrote to his unknown mistress those many years ago, before she had even been born. In spite of her professed aversion to the past ("an instinctive aversion ...; it seemed to her a sort of pompous imposture ..." 88), she responds instinctively to Guy's appeal:

... he was in love. 'I thought', he wrote, 'if only YOU had been there!'

A thread lay dropped on the grass, for Jane to pick up. 'But here I am. Oh, here I am!' she protested ... Between him and her dwindled the years: where indeed was he if not beside her? They could not miss one another, surely? 89

She picks up the thread of the past over a breach of thirty-five years, and acknowledges the force of history in the present lives of the Anglo-Irish.

In an article in Essays in Criticism (1963), Geoffrey Wagner criticizes A World of Love for not having adequate social reality. Though he admits that the "poetic novel", such as a World of Love, may have a higher density of symbolization than the social novel per se, he nevertheless suggests that the characters fail to suggest more general patterns of human behaviour and that that makes Jane's trauma rather senseless. 90

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87 Elizabeth Bowen, A World of Love, p. 121.

88 Ibid., p. 48.

89 Ibid., p. 69 - 70.

This does less than justice to Miss Bowen who does indeed delineate more general patterns of human behaviour, though these do not function in the realm of "social realism" but in the realm of "cultural analysis". This becomes particularly clear when the novel is seen in the light of its predecessor *The Last September*. Jane's trauma of having to deal with the past in order to prepare herself for the future is a pertinent commentary on the dilemma of the Anglo-Irish community in the post-World Wars era, a society whose very existence as a class, as a vital and viable entity, lies in the past, and whose present speaks only of dislocation and cultural dispossession. Richard Gill recognizes this when he says that Montefort is

an emblem, like Gerontion's, for the listless condition of its older generation of inmates, who, as victims of their own 'toxic fantasies' their own crippling fixations on the past, live on in a kind of emotional limbo ... what Danielstown might have become if it had survived untended and unloved. 91

In a short story called "Sunday Afternoon", Miss Bowen confirms Wagner's interpretation of the condition of the Anglo-Irish continuing their isolated existence in modern Ireland. She speaks of their "suspended charm" and comments that an "air of fastidious, stylised melancholy, an air of being secluded behind glass, characterised ... these old friends ...." 92 The fact that the cultural dilemma is rendered in terms of Jane's personal experience is also in accordance with the technique Miss Bowen followed in *The Last September* of establishing a close


conjunction between the politico-historical and the personal, of rendering the wider context in terms of a crisis of the individual.

Jane’s involvement with Guy reaches a climax, when she attends a dinner party given by the nouveau riche Lady Latterly in her “unusually banal Irish castle” and she has a vision of Guy present on the occasion:

Guy was among them. The recoil of the others - she did not for an instant doubt it was a recoil - marked his triumphant displacement of the air.  

Guy’s triumphant presence at the Latterly party also serves to mark the inadequacy of a present-day make-believe upstart aristocracy in the face of the real though historically obsolete class that ceased to exist more or less at the end of the First World War. Guy causes a "displacement of the air", whereas Lady Latterly’s castle is described as a "foreign dimension ... in which nothing, no one could be unreal enough." Terence, the one guest who appears to be familiar with the old order, confirms the contrast to Jane:

‘These days, one goes where the money is - with all due respect to the charming lady [Latterly]. Those days, we went where the people were.’

She drew a profound breath. ‘My cousin Guy - ’  

Jane’s experience of the past manifested in an apprehension of Guy’s physical presence, is echoed in the experience of the other women living in his shadow. This is a critical moment for Jane,

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93 Elizabeth Bowen, A World of Love, p. 83.
94 Ibid., p. 95.
95 Ibid., p. 84.
96 Ibid., p. 94.
but also a crisis for Montefort, which has imposed an "emotional limbo" on its occupants. Antonia has an intense experience of herself and Guy, kindred spirits, repossessing the present:

Going to stand in the doorway, she was met at once by a windlike rushing towards her out of the dark - her youth and Guy's, from every direction .... All around Montefort there was going forward an entering back again into possession: the two, now one again, were again here .... Exhilaration caught her in the lungs. Their tide had turned and was racing in again .... This was not the long-ago, it was now or nothing .... Ghosts could have no place in this active darkness - more, tonight was a night which had changed hands, going back again to its lordly owners: time again was into the clutch of herself and Guy. 97

This experience of being seized by the presence of Guy, causes her to cry out impulsively to Fred (concerning Jane): "She should have been his daughter!" 98 In this way also Fred's predicament of having to live in Guy's shadow reaches a turning point as he is confronted with the reality of his, Guy's and Lilia's present and past relationships. Lilia likewise goes to meet the past in Guy's "vanishing garden": "The clock-hands stood still: she was seventeen." 99 Transposing herself to the past means, however, that she has to confront the fact of the probable intended recipient of the letters that have triggered all the upheaval and relive Guy's last departure for the continent. As her longing for Guy appears about to precipitate a "vision" of him similar to Jane's experience ("... not memories was it but expectations that haunted Montefort. His immortality was in their longings ..." 100), Fred enters instead, bringing his

97 Elizabeth Bowen, A World of Love, p. 114.
98 Ibid., p. 95.
99 Ibid., p. 141.
100 Ibid., p. 145.
wife the controversial letters (revealing his own confidence in her as the "beloved") and Lilia, laughing, stumbles towards him. Here it becomes clear that the crisis of Guy’s return, or rather of the substantial manifestation of his continued dominance experienced by those living in the "limbo" of his shadow, is a necessary prerequisite for the liberation into life of those emotionally imprisoned by his "presence". Fred and Lilia’s reconciliation, or rediscovery of each other without the shadow of Guy, is described as

not so much a solution as a dissolution, a thinning away of the accumulated hardness of many seasons, estrangement, dulledness, shame at the waste and loss. A little redemption, even only a little, of loss was felt.\textsuperscript{101}

In this sense the trauma of Jane and the other characters is not at all pointless, as Wagner suggests, but forms a counterpart to the burning of Danielstown in \textit{The Last September} - becomes an agent of redemption. Guy’s return is an act of exorcism, and only by exorcising Guy (the past), can the occupants of Montefort move into an autonomous, meaningful life of their own. "He came back, through Jane, to be let go. It was high time."\textsuperscript{102} The break with the past is symbolized by the resonant chiming of Big Ben, played on the radio by Maud, who has a passionate obsession with the sound of the clock:

Now, dogmatically and beautifully, the chimes began, completed their quarters, ended .... The sound of Time, inexorably coming as it did, at once was absolute and fatal. Passionless Big Ben .... But now came Now - the imperative, the dividing moment, the spell-breaker - all else was thrown behind, disappeared from reality, was over.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{101}Elizabeth Bowen, \textit{A World of Love}, p. 155.
\textsuperscript{102}Ibid., p. 203.
\textsuperscript{103}Ibid., p. 193.
The emergence of the characters into life is indicated by the conclusion of the novel, where Jane, free from Guy, goes to meet an unknown young man, a friend of Lady Latterly's, at the airport. No longer under the spell of the past, she can embrace the future: "Their eyes met. They no sooner looked but they loved."\(^\text{104}\) Again the conjunction between the historical (Guy, the past) and the individual (Jane, Lilia, Fred, Antonia), has to be broken, the ghost of an aristocratic but now devitalized heritage laid, in order for the survivors to come to terms with life in the present; stripped of the encumbrances of class, they can function as human beings in a world not congenial to aristocrats.

A World of Love is thus not merely a fairly obscure investigation into the supernatural, or a novel of mood, experimenting with stylistic devices, as some readers and critics appear to suggest\(^\text{105}\), but a valid analysis of the culturally dispossessed...

104Elizabeth Bowen, A World of Love, p. 224. The concluding line is a reference to As You Like It, Act V: Scene 2, where Rosalind tells Orlando:

... for your brother and my sister no sooner met but they looked; no sooner looked but they loved; no sooner loved but they sighed; no sooner sighed but they asked one another the reason; no sooner knew the reason but they sought the remedy: and in these degrees have made a pair of stairs to marriage, which they will climb incontinent, or else be incontinent before marriage: they are in the very wrath of love, and they will together; clubs cannot part them.

Linda Noble suggests that the reference together with the classical ring of the young man's name, Priam, implies that "because people go on to repeat the actions and emotions of generations past, ... it is not necessary to live in the grip of recent history." (Linda Noble, A Critical Study of Elizabeth Bowen's Novels, p. 100.) I suspect that Miss Bowen merely found the phrase and the context felicitous to describe the nature of Jane's instant emotion - for which she had been prepared by the narrative - rather than having larger intellectual configurations in mind.

105Linda Noble says "... A World of love is locally elegant and globally unrewarding." (Linda Noble, A Critical Study of Elizabeth Bowen's Novels, p. 83.) Alfred McDowell calls the novel " ... one of Miss Bowen's weakest. None of the characters
Anglo-Irish Ascendancy in full decline in the mid-twentieth century.

In her regret for the pastness of the past, for the evanescence of that "humanistic, classic and disciplined" way of life that the Anglo-Irish had embodied in their houses in their eighteenth-century heyday, Miss Bowen closely approximates the regrets for a vital and harmonious past expressed by other aristocratic writers such as V. Sackville-West, Evelyn Waugh and Nancy Mitford as discussed in the previous chapters. In an essay, "The Bend Back" (1950), Miss Bowen discusses the disillusionment of the twentieth century:

"The better days", if one needed them [at the turn of the century], were the future. But confidence was broken by 1914: from then on, decline of love for the present went with the loss of faith in it. After 1918, the artist, by general assent, took up the attitude of the critical exile, the psychologically displaced person. ¹⁰⁷

In the introduction to a collection of Elizabeth Bowen’s writings, Hermione Lee comments:

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¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Bowen, "The Big House" in The Mulberry Tree, p. 27.

¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth Bowen, "The Bend Back" in The Mulberry Tree, p. 54.
Her fascination with the treacherous ‘bend back’ of memory is part of a political antipathy for the modern world, a Burkean conservatism which is most apparent when she is writing about the history of the Anglo-Irish or the wartime and post-war climate of feeling in England. At its crudest, this takes the form of a preference for stately homes and good manners – ‘the unwary civility of the old world, privilege, ease, grace’, as she calls it in a review of Rosamond Lehmann – over middle-brow provincialism, best-selling novels full of sex, blocks of flats and housing estates, and the unwelcome successors of Mr Churchill .

In Bowen’s Court Miss Bowen herself questions modern preoccupations somewhat bitterly:

And to what did our fine feelings, our regard for the arts, our intimacies, our inspiring conversations, our wish to be clear of the bonds of sex and class and nationality, our wish to try to be fair to every one bring us? To 1939.109

These sentiments are akin to Miss Sackville-West’s distaste for the replacement of the glories and harmony of an aristocratic lifestyle by “tenement buildings, alike in every particular”110, to Miss Mitford’s distress at the advent of “this terrible twentieth century”111 and to Evelyn Waugh’s dismay at the dawning of the “Century of the Common Man where vice no longer

108 Hermione Lee, Introduction to The Mulberry Tree, p. 4.
109 Elizabeth Bowen, Bowen's Court, p. 125.
pays lip service to virtue". Miss Bowen faces up to the unpleasant truth (as she perceives it) of her own time, however, and discerns the necessity of laying the ghost of history, however glamorous, in order to survive in the present.

Molly Keane's novel, Treasure Hunt (1952), is roughly contemporary to A World of Love. The novel also describes a world in which the Anglo-Irish ascendancy is in full economic and social decline. The Big House, inhabited by the Ryall family, characteristically sets the tone as the novel opens:

The armoured cat's face of the house withheld itself from the afternoon - the house was high and square, built of stone blocks, rough cut like fish scales, but the cut stones round all the windows fine as skin. The windows stared hollow-paned, stony-browed, into afternoon. They had stared into about two hundred September afternoons, so what was there different about this one?

As in Miss Bowen's novels the house is endowed with an emotional life of its own, and represents a way of life, a tradition, a civilization. The unapologetic stare of the house, as it has stared for two hundred years (presumably two hundred Septembers and not two hundred afternoons), immediately suggests the unwillingness to change, or to adapt to changed circumstances, which characterizes its inhabitants. This is confirmed more explicitly shortly afterwards:

On the wall a flock paper had turned from peony to a warm tomato red, and all the portraits of ancestors and race horses hung still in their places; there was no peony square to show where a sale had been made; indeed, nowhere

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was there any sign of picturesque Irish poverty.\textsuperscript{114}

What might have been evidence that the Ryalls have been fortunate enough to escape the adversity of pervasive economic decline as regards their class and time, soon appears to be a particularly strong case of self-delusion. The actual state of the family finances is spelt out in a farcical scene by the family lawyer, Mr Walsh. He reads out the will of Sir Roderick Ryall, just deceased, containing generous bequests to his various relations and retainers who are all enraptured and moved by Sir Roderick's customary beneficence. Having gone through this charade, he disabuses the family, informing them that there is in fact no inheritance for any of them (Sir Roderick's brother Hercules, his sister Consuelo, his niece, Veronica), and that all that his son and heir, the new Sir Phillip, inherits is the run-down home farm and decrepit - for all its show - house of Ballyroden. Mr Walsh raises his voice against the extravagant follies and fantastic delusions of the decadent aristocracy:

[Sir Phillip is] young and the four best years of his youth have gone fighting rather creditably in a hideous war. And now, when he should come into a tidy inheritance and a peaceful life, what does he get. Nothing! Nothing but hard work and heartbreak, owing to the ghastly extravagance, waste and fritter of your generation.\textsuperscript{115}

It becomes clear that under Sir Roderick's regime a life of champagne and fine cigars has been led without any consideration for grim twentieth-century economic realities, and that thus the considerable family fortune has been idly exhausted. The plot is then put into motion by the fact that the younger generation, Sir Phillip and his cousin Veronica, decide that the only way to save the situation is to take in wealthy English paying guests. Hercules and Consuelo - the champagne and cigar generation - are

\textsuperscript{114}Molly Keane, Treasure Hunt, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., p. 49.
implacably and recklessly opposed to this scheme and war is declared between the different factions. Add a guest family of a socially ascendant and ambitious upper middle class English mother, a beautiful debutante daughter and a gentle scholarly uncle and all the elements for a country house romp are in place.

And a romp it is. In its farcical scenes and hilarious situations, the novel’s origins as a successful West End comedy are evident. However, there is more to Treasure Hunt than mere social comedy. As in the other Anglo-Irish novels discussed, Miss Keane here also indulges in some keen "cultural analysis".

The decline of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy is dealt with in terms of the three generations occupying the Big House. A vital older generation from a vigorous aristocratic past can only exist by a complete negation of the actual. This generation is represented by Great-Aunt Anna Rose, a delightful, vivacious old lady, with "an indefinable air of arrival and departure - a look of absolute virility and concentration, enchanting in one so old"116, who enjoys excursions on the butler's motor-bike, amuses herself with imaginary assaults on poachers on the demesne or nesting as a swan ("... She shouldn’t be nesting now, it’s almost gaga. In March it’s perfectly reasonable, but if she does it now people may think her a bit odd ..."117), and spends a great deal of her time in a sedan-chair which has to do service in turn as a nest, or an express train, an ocean liner or aeroplane, taking Aunt Anna Rose on frequent trips to destinations as exotic and far-flung as Honolulu, Moscow, Berlin, Vienna, Constantinople, St Petersburg or Budapest. Through her apparent lunacy, shimmers a keen intelligence and a broad sanity, suggesting that Aunt Anna Rose’s fantasy world is only a self-protective bubble she maintains in order to survive the uncongenial present. In the following passage she starts off by telling her aging nephew and niece a few home truths, and then

116Molly Keane, Treasure Hunt, p. 90.
117Ibid., p. 32.
before they have time to react, slides into fantasy to protect herself:

"Changes are due here," she said firmly. "Oh, the years fly by, so quick, so quick. Twenty-five years have gone since you came back a widow, Consuelo - God!" She kissed her fingertips, "you were a peach, too - oh, a fine gal - can't think why you never got another man - anyway, you didn't - and I watched you and Hercules encourage poor Roddy in every naughty thing he did. Where he spent a shilling you pushed him on to spend a pound .... Thousands." The thousands rolled round the room. "If I hadn't kept an eye on the milkin' cows and the layin' hens, if I hadn't spent my days catchin' poachers and timber stealers, things would be past saving now."118

In terms of the conjunction of the historical and personal, Aunt Anna Rose's delusions are explained on a personal level as the result of a traumatic experience she had on the Orient Express during her honeymoon, which she cannot face psychologically, and which impels her to blot out reality and the past. (It turns out that she killed her elderly husband by pushing him off the train.) However, in terms of the historical level, the "cultural analysis" of the novel, they also suggest that Aunt Anna Rose, embodying all those positive qualities that enabled the Ascendancy to establish a vigorous aristocratic class in Ireland, has no place in the new Ireland where her social group has become "dislocated, dispossessed, denatured".

The middle generation, Hercules and Consuelo, are spoilt, decadent and incapable of any resolution in terms of the arduous present. Constance's inability to grasp the predicament of the family in even the vaguest terms, is illustrated by a statement such as:

118Molly Keane, Treasure Hunt, p. 79.
It’s always the cheapest in the end to stay at the Ritz. and no one could possibly call me extravagant - look at my meanness over pins - common pins or safety-pins. See a pin and pick it up - that’s me. Never bought a pin in my life - it’s my favourite economy.\textsuperscript{119}

"Master" Hercules, in his sixties, is the perpetual child of Ballyroden, still treated and cosseted by a nanny. Consuelo and Hercules both reveal the charm and appeal of naughty children, but also their selfishness and lack of responsibility. Having tried to explain the exigencies of the new economically orientated regime upon Ballyroden - the result of their careless extravagances - to them, Phillip admits ruefully, "It was like scolding two children for eating up an open box of chocolates at one go."\textsuperscript{120} The pleasure of these two engaging but aging imps is equally acute in recalling their glamorous days at the gaming tables of the Riviera ("Do you remember the night we were cleaners - absolutely out, at Monte, and you left everything on red and it came up fourteen times ..."\textsuperscript{121}) and in finding eggs for the breakfast table:

They went their opposite ways, prowling and poking along the racks of hay and straw-filled corners and hollowed earthly places as they had done since they were five years old. They knew they were better at finding eggs than any two people in the world and of all things they loved the game. A hot egg in the palm of the hand sent shivers of pleasure through them.\textsuperscript{122}

In this respect, Miss Keane takes up another theme common to aristocratic novelists: the childlike quality of the aristocracy:

\textsuperscript{119}Molly Keane, Treasure Hunt, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{120}Ibid., p. 67.

\textsuperscript{121}Ibid., p. 160.

\textsuperscript{122}Ibid., p. 204.
insouciant charm coupled with pervasive selfishness and an inability or unwillingness to assume responsibility. This theme, which occurs for example in V. Sackville-West’s *The Edwardians*, in Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* and in the aristocratic novels of Emma Tennant, is another expression of the dislocation and denaturalization of the aristocracy which these Irish novels deal with.

It is thus left to the younger generation, Phillip and Veronica, to divest themselves of historic encumbrances in order to deal with reality in purely practical and personal terms.

[The] outlook [of Phillip and Veronica] ... was not unlike that of two plumber’s mates looking back without much interest or rancour to an illegitimate ducal grandfather. The present struggle to live and continue to live blinded them to their family’s yesterdays and days before yesterday. They were depressingly factual and sensible in their acceptance of the present; sane and indulgent to a degree towards their glamorous spendthrift elders.

While Mrs Keane, like Miss Bowen, acknowledges that this divestment of past glamour is the only way to survive in the New Ireland, she nevertheless mourns the transience of the beauty and harmony of a lost past, embodied by Hercules and Consuelo. The scholarly and aesthetically perceptive English guest, Eustace, thinks to himself that Phillip and Veronica “seemed ... like the Victorian age succeeding the age of elegance.” The loss of allure is reflected in both the appearance and the spirit of the younger generation:

Although in features [Phillip] was a blunt edition of his elders, he did not have that air of cosseted glamour which

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123 Cf. chapters 1, 2 and 6 of this thesis.
125 Ibid., p. 155.
they wore with their clothes, without their clothes and under their skins. There was a commoner colour about him ..., there was no grace, inherited, studied, or forgotten. There was no leisure or dalliance with amusing thoughts by the way .... There was something useless yet valuable which had been cut out of his life.\textsuperscript{126}

Though they are gracious and glamorous, the champagne and cigars generation does not have an intimation of the resources necessary to help the unglamorous youth to resolve the situation. It is left to Aunt Anna Rose, representing the vital past, to come up with a solution to the family’s predicament. Again the cultural and historical need to exorcise the past, with both its magic and its tragedy, is rendered in terms of the personal need to come to terms with former personal glory and tragedy: Aunt Anna Rose has to face the trauma of her youth. This solution can only be achieved at the risk of some sacrifice to herself:

And why must this struggling with possessions be all Phillip’s inheritance? She was old, this fairy being from the past century. Even though her great rainbowed bubble of happy existence should be shattered, there could not be many years to come of depression and suffering, while there looked to be a lifetime of both before these stern young people, Phillip and Veronica.\textsuperscript{127}

In terms of plot, the solution to the family’s predicament lies in Aunt Anna Rose’s long-lost rubies - believed by some to be mythical - which she is supposed to have worn on that fateful day during her honeymoon on the Orient Express. Eustace orchestrates a return to the past. Dressing up Veronica in Aunt Anna Rose’s travel costume, he recreates the past, and gently forces Aunt Anna Rose’s mind back to the unpleasant realities of her marriage. The climax is a hilarious game of "hunt the thimble"

\textsuperscript{126}Molly Keane, \textit{Treasure Hunt}, pp. 26 - 27.

\textsuperscript{127}Ibid., p. 159.
with the entire household participating in a search for the jewels, not even sure that they do exist. However, as Aunt Anna Rose encounters and lays the ghost of the past, the situation is resolved for the family. With the discovery of the jewels Phillip and Veronica's future financial security is assured - but at the same time, the magic of the glorious past, both Aunt Anna Rose's personal past of Viennese waltzes and imperial grandeur, and the wider historical past of the Anglo-Irish as a dazzling aristocracy, is irretrievably lost, acknowledged to be lost.

Delusion as a measure to ensure self-preservation is a favoured theme of Molly Keane's and becomes the central theme in the later works, written during her second career: Good Behaviour, Time After Time and Loving and Giving. Vera Kreilkamp suggests that Keane indicates what her nineteenth-century predecessors barely implied: that the ever-receding ideal of the cultivated Big House at the center of an organic community is based on a fictive rather than historical vision of the past. This ideal of a harmonious and morally ascendant ruling class, suggests Keane in Good Behaviour and Time After Time, rests on carefully constructed patterns of delusion, on wilfully misinterpreting the past in order to construct self-protecting illusions of stability.128

While it is undeniably true that the books deal with "carefully constructed patterns of delusion" involving both the present and the past, I do not believe that Mrs Keane's later novels suggest the total absence of vitality in the past of the Ascendancy. These novels do not make as clear a distinction between three generations of vital aristocracy, decadent aristocracy and struggling survivors as Treasure Hunt does, but the three stages are nevertheless suggested. In Treasure Hunt, the author writes

about the "family's yesterdays and days before yesterday"\textsuperscript{129}, confirming her perception of the three phases of social history. \textit{Good Behaviour}, \textit{Treasure Hunt} and \textit{Loving and Giving} concentrate on the last two phases, decay and survival, but does not explicitly deny a happier earlier phase, as Kreilkamp appears to suggest.

In \textit{Good Behaviour} the older, vital generation is for example briefly suggested by the Crowhurst sisters, who live in poverty but who, as consummate huntresses, hostesses and "ladies", command the respect and admiration of everyone in the community. Significantly the Crowhurst girls' attempts to keep going on their demesne are defeated in the course of the novel, and it is only Aroon St Charles, the pathetic heroine, who survives, protected by a cocoon of lies and pretence which she has spun around herself.

\textit{Good Behaviour} deals with the attempts of this unloved spinster daughter of an Ascendancy family to keep the unpleasant at bay by means of a grand strategy of "good behaviour", an elaborate network of dishonesty, disguised as good manners. Aroon's parents are the champagne and cigars generation, gaily amusing themselves while imperceptibly their world starts cracking under their feet:

\begin{quote}
While, as though in duty bound, Papa was hunting, fishing, and shooting in their proper seasons, at Temple Alice money poured quietly away. Our school fees were the guilty party most often accused. Then came rates and income tax and the absurd hesitations of bank managers. Coal merchants and butchers could both be difficult, so days of farm labour were spent felling and cutting up trees - the wood burned up quickly and delightfully in the high fast-draughting Georgian grates. As a corrective to the butcher's bills lambs were slaughtered on the place. Half the meat was
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{129}Molly Keane, \textit{Treasure Hunt}, p. 154.
eaten while the other half went bad, hanging in the musty ice house without any ice.  

The economic decline at Temple Alice is paralleled by moral and physical decline. Major St Charles is crippled in the Great War and gradually declines into a drunken invalid, cared for by the maid Rose, who supports and pacifies him with sexual favours. "Mummie", a heartless parent, gradually withdraws into her own world of beautiful objects, while Hubert, the son and heir, is involved in a furtive homosexual relationship with a young nobleman from England and is killed in a motor-car accident. (The death and barrenness of Anglo-Irish heirs is typical of Anglo-Irish aristocratic novels, suggesting the decline of the race generally. In The Last September, Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, as well as Hugo and Francie Montmorency, are childless; Guy, the last male heir of Montfort in A World of Love is killed in the First World War - unmarried and childless; Hubert is homosexual and dies young while Aroon is an unloved spinster in Good Behaviour, and the four siblings around whom Time After Time revolves are all disabled in some way, as well as being childless - Jasper, the only son, clearly remains a virgin.) At Temple Alice, Aroon has to devise a network of fantasy to protect herself from the reality that nobody loves or needs her, that, like her class in the broader context, she is a reject from society:

I can afford to be kind to Rose. She will learn to lean on me. There is nobody in the world who needs me now [after Mummie’s death] and I must be kind to somebody.  

The novel is an outstanding example of ironic self-exposure. The first-person narrator uncovers "the intricate patterns of avoidance, delusion and hypocrisy which gives her the authority

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130 Molly Keane, Good Behaviour, p. 73.

131 Ibid., p. 9.
denied her as a child."\textsuperscript{132} As Kreilkamp suggests, Aroon's delusions are exposed as being intrinsic to her culture: "Her adult voice, controlling and dominating those around her through her power of self-delusion, suggests the awful fulfillment of her culture's training."\textsuperscript{133} The narrative is a gleaming surface of delusion with the truth running clearly below the surface and breaking through at crucial moments. Caring for her elderly and unloving mother, Aroon comments:

One knows sick people and old people can be difficult and unrewarding, however much one does for them: not exactly ungrateful, just absolutely maddening. But I enjoy the room whenever I go in. It's all my own doing and Mummie, lying back in her nest of pretty pillows, is my doing too - I insist on her being scrupulously clean and washed and scented.\textsuperscript{134}

She excuses her mother's resentment of her - actually a constant feature of their relationship - as being consequent to her being sick and old; she expresses her own delight in the manipulation of others to suit her own needs, and she reveals her obsession to hide everything that is unpleasant. When the surface cracks it causes pain and embarrassment. When her mother insults her by ironically describing her appearance - dressed up for a ball - as "stupendous", she blushes and chokes back tears of pain and hatred: "It was a shocking moment for each of us. The worst possible instance of not knowing how to behave."\textsuperscript{135}

As her future gradually becomes more bleak and lonely, Aroon spins a web of self-delusion around herself, a bubble of self-protection like Aunt Anna Rose's, but clearly more pernicious,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{132}Kreilkamp, \textit{Massachusetts Review}, Vol. 28, number 3, 1987, p. 458.
\item \textsuperscript{133}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{134}Molly Keane, \textit{Good Behaviour}, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{135}Ibid., p. 194.
\end{itemize}
partly because she is devoid of Aunt Anna Rose’s vitality and also because we are let into the processes of calculated and deliberate self-delusion, which denies Aroon dignity and deprives her of the excuse of innocence. After her brother’s lover has brought a conspicuous visit to Aroon in her bedroom in an attempt to disguise the true nature of his relationship with Hubert from her father, and has spent some time sitting or lying on her bed and talking to her, we see Aroon turning and twisting the disappointing event into another pillar of her fantastic fortress:

And another thing: I can never look on myself as a deprived, inexperienced girl. I’ve had a man in my bed. I suppose I could say I’ve had a lover. I like to call it that. I do call it that.\(^{136}\)

When she receives a totally non-committal letter from this man, Richard Massingham, she initially suffers “a rage of disappointment”. She scours the letter for a sign of affection, some message between the lines. As she finally folds the sheets of the letter, she sees across the back of the last page the very words which I could translate into glory: “I want you to know, Aroon” (he had written Aroon), “the Black Friday yearling is all yours, my share and Hubert’s. Richard.” All our names together. My happiness appalled me.\(^{137}\)

However much pity the unloved and unlovely Aroon evokes, the novel is much more sinister and damning than Mrs Keane’s earlier novels or Miss Bowen’s Irish novels, for here there is no resolution, no release from the past. The novel concludes with Aroon, triumphant in her self-delusion, dominating the lives of those she has not already destroyed. This constitutes Molly


\(^{137}\)Ibid., p. 135.
Keane's conclusive comment on the appalling disintegration of her own society's culture. What was once vital and dominant has become delusive, decadent and destructive. Kreilkamp comments, Her unreliable narrative voice, the stunning stylistic tour de force of Good Behaviour, allows Keane to expose society with an ironic control comparable to that achieved by Maria Edgeworth ... in Castle Rackrent ... Aroon reveals the horror which she cannot register, freeing Keane from the necessity of overt judgments, in this most judgmental of her Big house novels.\(^{138}\)

In her last novel, Loving and Giving (1988), Mrs Keane goes one step further to show the patterns of self-delusion devised by the heroine, Nicandra, to be ultimately self-destructive. Nicandra is killed in the last headlong pursuit of her self-delusive fantasy that her husband, who has deserted her, loves her after all.

Between these two amusing but ultimately dark novels, Molly Keane published Time After Time (1983), which is closer in spirit to Treasure Hunt and the Bowen novels. It focuses on the Swift family (possibly a reference to the lost intellectual vitality of the Ascendancy as represented by Jonathan Swift), consisting of one brother, Jasper, and three sisters: April, May and Baby June. Each of them is physically or psychologically maimed: April is stone deaf, obsessed with her own appearance, and appears to have had a lurid marriage to a sex-crazed husband; May has a deformed hand and is a competent shop-lifter; Baby June is stunted in growth, uneducated (the money had run out) and "in thrall" to the farmhand responsible for her horses. Jasper, the only brother, has lost an eye and appears to be vaguely homosexual. In terms of the conjunction of the personal and historical, their emotional defects are ascribed to the overpowering impact of their late mother: "She crippled them all

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with awful old love ...\textsuperscript{139}, but it obviously refers more broadly to a society maimed by its past, unable to come to terms with that past. The lasting negative effects of "Mummie’s" love even after her death, equates the paralysing cultural grip of the past on the present existence of the particular society.

Again the horrors of the psychological and physical realities on Durraghglass, the family house, are contained by an elaborate edifice of "good behaviour". The decline of fortune on the estate is always described in close conjunction with objects or actions denoting the more gracious past and often associated with "Mummie". This conjunction - present decline and past glory - constantly suggests the unwillingness of the Swifts to exorcise the past and come to terms with the radical alteration in their (and their society’s) fortunes:

Mummie had chosen the stuff for his tweed coat too. She had purred suggestions to the tailor during the fittings and the resulting coat still moved in a flow of perfection, giving grace with austerity. Perhaps the cuffs, grafted and integrated with their sleeves and serving no more useful purpose than that of pleasing the eye, were its most touching and elegant feature. An ageless antique and needing care, it could fall to bits on him any day now ... [He] shuddered: three hundred pounds for anything proper today. Forget it. Horrible. Horrible times.\textsuperscript{140}

Threadbare elegance has to disguise present horror. Having described the decline in plumbing conditions at Durraghglass, Mrs Keane starts the next paragraph with "This evening the Swifts were in their bedrooms changing, as they always did, for dinner."\textsuperscript{141} "Good behaviour" has to hold up the fragile edifice


\textsuperscript{140}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{141}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 20.
of a defunct aristocratic existence.

The agent that rips up all the disguises and pretences, revealing both the fraudulence of their present existence and the horrors of the past, is their long-lost cousin Leda. She manages to ferret out all the deepest secrets of their aberrant behaviour, and in a climactic scene reveals each one's moral disabilities to the others over the breakfast table. She tears open the wounds of the past, the carefully hidden facts of the Swifts' father's relationship with her, his pubescent niece, years ago, and his subsequent suicide, previously explained as a shooting accident. The corruption of both the past and the present is aired. Although this is very far from her intentions, the operation actually has salutary results. The tissue of lies, the house of cards held up by "good behaviour" is destroyed, and the glamorous but corrupt past is exorcised. This is symbolized by the burning of all "Mummi's desecrated clothes", carefully preserved as part of the cult of the past, in the orchard. The four siblings are released from their obsolete aristocratic inheritance, regaining their vitality, embarking on new enterprises, "grace gone, age apparent in all its inadequacies"[^142], but dealing with the graceless, inadequate, unglamorous present on its own terms, released from "a long sustained dream, and empowered [for the] practical decision for tomorrow."[^143]

Far from the adjustment being painful, the now mature Swifts rejoice in their new-found autonomy. Each one devises his or her own modest and distinctly unaristocratic *modus vivendi* in a new Republican Ireland: April retires to a convent, May is engaged to work for a shop-keeper, Baby June comes to terms with the limitations of her job as a farmer and Jasper reaches an agreement with the neighbouring monastery to keep his garden going. Significantly the Catholic Church features prominently

[^143]: Ibid., p. 232.
in the adjustments made by April and Jasper, suggesting the displacement of the Protestant Ascendancy by a Catholic establishment. The vital achievement of autonomy by members of the Ascendancy is even more clearly demonstrated in Treasure Hunt. Phillip and Veronica cannot afford to run an estate in lordly fashion, but have to run a farm in an economic way: settling down in the mire to assist a farrowing sow or spending a night in a stable with a colic horse. Ironically, this ability to grapple with the harsh realities of survival is the very mark of their aristocratic forbears: adventurous knights who had sought and made their fortunes in Ireland from the Twelfth to the Seventeenth Centuries. It is the very resilience of their aristocratic mettle which paradoxically enables them to adapt to a non-aristocratic environment. 144

In her fiction Elizabeth Bowen shows the necessity for such an adaptation while Molly Keane celebrates it as admirable. Both writers nevertheless betray a lingering liking for their pampered ancestors. In Treasure Hunt, Keane overtly expresses regret for the loss of "something useless yet valuable" 145. In considering the relationship of these novels and characters to the past, it is dangerous to see them too narrowly in terms of social or historical formulae alone, as both these novelists consistently deal with the cultural and historical in terms of the personal and individual. Bowen and Keane postulate divestment of a mythic past as a first step to their main focus, which remains investment of a mature, energetic self.

144 Parallels with the present situation in South Africa, where another privileged community is facing the loss of traditional privilege and social identity, have been recognized by the Afrikaans novelist, Karel Schoeman, in his Irish novel By Fakkellig ('By Torch Light'), which deals with the Protestant Ascendancy's various reactions to rising Irish nationalism and the imminent loss of ensconced advantages in Ireland. Although South Africa is never mentioned in the novel, it becomes clear to the reader in the context of the language in which the novel is written, that the novel deals as much with South Africa as with Ireland. (Cf. Karel Schoeman, By Fakkellig, Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1966.)

145 Molly Keane, Treasure Hunt, p. 27.
It could be argued that against this fictional exemplum of an aristocracy successfully adapting to an egalitarian environment, there are too many actual examples of real members of the Protestant Ascendancy who either simply abandoned Ireland to continue an aristocratic life in England, or stayed in Ireland in pockets of insular imitation of a lost past, totally at odds with the reality of present-day Republican Ireland. Bowen and Keane could then be accused of romanticizing the potential of the Irish aristocracy to fully adapt themselves to a new and non-aristocratic role in Ireland. In defence of the two authors, it should be pointed out that their works are not necessarily aimed at reflecting their society merely as a social record of what is, but as autonomous works of fiction may well constitute a representation of what they regard as admirable and preferable.
V. THE WELFARE STATE

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.

Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

W.H. Auden

Britain emerged from the Second World War victorious but
exhausted - not only economically but also spiritually. Its
cities had been bombed, more than half its merchant shipping had
been destroyed, foreign competitors had captured its markets,
British production methods were obsolete and industry was in
grave need of modernization.¹ Internationally its position had
also changed irrevocably, though few in Britain realized this
immediately.² The United States and the USSR had emerged as the
superpowers of the post-war era, and Britain was relegated into
a position of secondary importance. A decline in international
status was compounded by the break-up of Empire. The cry of
uhuru started to ring out and colonies began to move to
nationhood and independence. Within Britain, the upper and
middle classes wanted to return to a pre-war existence of low
taxes and a hierarchical social structure, while the working
class wanted to retain the full employment and adequate wages
precipitated by the war and it now had to be determined
whether this would be a lasting trend or not.³ There was a
widespread awareness of the need for economic and social
improvement, a belief, "fostered in war-time, that victory over
the external foe would be matched by the conquest of the eternal
evils which had caused so much needless suffering in the inter-

¹Louis L. Snyder, The Making of Modern Man, Princeton: Van

²T.O. Lloyd, Empire to Welfare State: English History 1906 -
1985, third edition, Short Oxford History of the Modern World,

³Ibid., pp. 270 - 271.
These factors set the scene for the general election of July 1945 from which the Labour Party emerged the victors with 393 seats to the 213 seats won by the Conservative Party, led by the war-hero Churchill. Legislation passed by the post-war Labour government has been called both a "social revolution" and a defence "against a counter-revolution", the terms reflecting conflicting interests and goals among different segments of post-war society. The most controversial of this legislation was the nationalization programme. The Bank of England, the coal and railway industries and gas and electricity supplies were taken over by the state. In 1946 the National Insurance Act and the National Health Act implemented the war-time Beveridge Report, so that by 1949, Britain was generally accepted to be a "Welfare State". Together with the Education Act of 1944 and the introduction of family allowances in 1945, these acts of parliament represented considerable progress "towards the ideal of a 'national minimum' and the abolition of preventable suffering". In order to achieve this, the level of super-tax went up, so that the wealthy were taxed more heavily, even as the general level of taxation came down to help the underprivileged. Death duties were increased to 75 percent on

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7 Ibid., pp. 289.

8 Sidney Pollard, "History: Economic and Social" in Cox and Dyson (eds), The Twentieth Century Mind, Vol. 3, p. 55.

estates of over a million pounds\textsuperscript{10} in a determined effort to destroy the remnants of the super-rich among the British upper-classes. This could prove a devastating blow to families suffering multiple deaths in a few years, and some indeed never recovered. Even those landed aristocrats who did survive, had to sell off vast tracts of land in order do so. So, for example, John Wyndham had to dispose of all the Leconf ield estates in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Dumfries, as well as 20 000 acres in Cumberland and 7 000 acres in Sussex; the Earl of Harewood sold two-thirds of his holdings in Yorkshire; the Duke of Argyll disposed of the Isle of Tiree and 28 000 acres in Kintyre, while Lord Dalhousie had to sell 10 000 acres in Angus, which had been in his family for 850 years.\textsuperscript{11} Many aristocrats also had to dispose of valuable urban property, works of art and other assets in order to pay death duties. Some, like the Marquess of Bath and the Duke of Bedford, opened their houses to the public and started the "stately homes business" to try and retain their inheritance for their own posterity. Many could no longer afford to keep their country seats and handed them over to the National Trust to preserve as a national heritage. A large number of country houses - 400 between 1945 and 1955\textsuperscript{12} - were simply demolished.

Redistribution of wealth was at the heart of the programme of the Labour government. A detailed calculation made for 1948/1949, after the war and reconstruction, showed that taxation and the welfare system had transferred about £1 260 million pounds, or 13.1\% of the national income, from the richer to the poorer citizens.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., pp. 640 - 642.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 644.

\textsuperscript{13}Sidney Pollard, "History: Economic and Social" in Cox and Dyson (eds), \textit{The Twentieth Century Mind}, Vol. 3, p. 54.
The 1950s brought a brief expansion of British influence in world affairs as Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden established a reputation as a successful international negotiator, but this revival was soon eclipsed by the Suez Crisis which ended Eden's premiership - he had succeeded Churchill as Prime Minister in 1955 - and "marked the nadir in British prestige in the post-war world". Interestingly enough, this era also proved a brief period of recovery for the British aristocracy as they adjusted to new measures and grew more adept at finding loop-holes, legally avoiding death-duties. (Having had to pay massive death-duties at the demise of the 2nd Duke of Westminster in 1953, the Westminster estate re-arranged its affairs, for example, so that the deaths of the 3rd, 4th and 5th Dukes in the next two decades would hardly cause a ripple in the smooth running of the vast fortune.) A revival of country houses and country-house society, which had seemed impossible in the austere aftermath of the war, unexpectedly ensued, causing Evelyn Waugh to remark in his preface to the revised edition of *Brideshead Revisited* in 1960 that the novel which had been intended as a tribute to a disappearing aristocracy, had proved "a panegyric preached over an empty coffin." This revival also proved short-lived, coming to an end in the late 1960s and 1970s, when economic pressures made the upkeep of the estates prohibitively expensive and Capital Gains Tax (1965) and Capital Transfer Tax (1975), made further inroads on the affluence of the aristocracy and

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16 David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 651.

their ability to avoid crippling death-duties. Nevertheless, some of the great patricians still managed to retain their wealth and their prestige, continuing to be counted among the richest in the land. The period of aristocratic revival to some degree coincided with a general increase in affluence in Britain, when Prime Minister Harold Macmillan could proudly proclaim, "Most British people have never had it so good."19

For many British conservatives, like the novelist L.P. Hartley, the welfare state proved anathema, however, representing the loss of those qualities mythically embodied in the aristocracy such as heroic individuation, free from the constraints of a grey, uniform mass of mediocre humanity. For people like Hartley, socialism as a system - however laudable its aims may have been - denatured humanity, using people as pawns in a larger framework, ignoring the discrete value of their individual identities.20

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18David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, p. 652.
CHAPTER 5

L.P. HARTLEY: INTENTION AND PERFORMANCE

In a lecture published in the *Saturday Review* in April 1928, L.P. Hartley states that the critic's task, and what he most delights in, apart from "elucidating the obscure", is "to discover a discrepancy between intention and performance". That Hartley should so blithely assume "intention" in an author's work is an interesting refutation by a practising writer of the "intentional fallacy" propagated by academe. Yet, having accepted Hartley's point of view, it can be pointed out that his own work reveals just such a discrepancy between "intention" and "performance" with respect to the treatment of the aristocracy in the two novels to be discussed in this chapter, *The Go-Between* (1953) and *The Hireling* (1957).

It is interesting that among the authors selected for detailed consideration in this thesis as prime exponents of the aristocratic novel in the twentieth century, all the women - V. Sackville-West, daughter of the 3rd Baron Sackville, Nancy Mitford, daughter of the 2nd Baron Redesdale, Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane, members of the landed Irish Protestant Ascendancy, and Emma Tennant, daughter of the 2nd Baron Glenconnor - belong to the class under consideration in their novels, whereas the two male novelists, Evelyn Waugh and L.P. Hartley, belong to the middle class. The aristocratic women novelists are often nostalgic and melancholy about the decline of their class in this century, but looking from the inside, they can frequently also be unflinchingly honest and critical about the degeneration of their society. The two men, standing outside the aristocratic cadre, reveal a strong strain of reverence towards the aristocracy. They appear more respectful, more romantic, more chivalrous, and certainly more reluctant to condemn. Waugh, in his life as in his letters, espouses the values of the aristocracy.

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aristocracy whole-heartedly, emerging as an unapologetic champion of the aristocratic cause in the unappealing "Age of the Common Man", associating everything that is best and most valuable in Western culture with the nobility, and ascribing the moral and cultural decay of the world in this century - as he perceives it - to the encroaching of the lower orders on the privileged positions of influence, formerly held with dignity and honour by the aristocracy. Hartley is more ambiguous. He appears to sense that death and decay are incumbent upon an obsolete aristocratic tradition, and to wish to depict this in his novels, yet at the same time he cannot bring himself to ring the knell on an order that he so clearly admires and reveres, that appeals so greatly to his romantic imagination. Peter Bien comments on Hartley's dilemma in broad terms:

[Hartley] is torn ... between his recognition that detached, leftover standards cause our emotional starvation, and his natural repugnance to the vulgarity which results when those standards have been removed.  

Leslie Poles Hartley was born at Whittlesea in 1895. His first name was a tribute to Sir Leslie Stephen - Virginia Woolf's father - for whom Hartley's cultured parents cherished great admiration. Hartley's friend, Paul Bloomfield, bears witness to the great influence Hartley's family life had on his personality and on his work, and calls his parents "a remarkable pair." Mr Hartley Snr was a solicitor with literary tastes who encouraged his son's intellectual development. He retired early from his law practice to take over a successful brickworks which ensured the family fortunes. With the considerable proceeds from this enterprise, the family were able to live on

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22Peter Bien, L.P. Hartley, p. 27.
an estate with the rather grandiose name of Fletton Tower, near Peterborough, described by another friend, C.H.B. Kitchin, as a "gothic castle". The relative splendour of Hartley's childhood home is probably what causes Bloomfield to refer to the middle-class Hartley as being "Landed Gentry". Hartley himself in later life admitted to a sense of snobbish shame that the family's and his own later financial independence was the result of his father's success "in trade". His mother, Mary Elizabeth Thompson, is described as having been endowed with "enormous force of character", and with constant solicitude for her not very robust son. Hartley had two sisters, Enid and Norah, who - like him - never married, and preserved a close family unit with their long-living parents. Enid is described by Kitchin as "quite inured to all human frailties", very much like the elder sister, Hilda, in Hartley's magnum opus, the Eustace and Hilda trilogy, while Norah became a noted breeder of deer-hounds. His father's affluence made it possible for Hartley to be educated at Harrow and Balliol College, Oxford, where he could rub shoulders with students of more patrician backgrounds. A real incident, where the young Hartley was invited to stay at the home of a school friend, who, because of the grandeur of the name Fletton Tower, took him to be from a more aristocratic background than he actually was, is perpetuated in The Go-Between, where Leo is invited to Brandham Hall because of a similar misapprehension, resulting from the aristocratic name of


his mother's house, "Court Place".  

Hartley enlisted in April 1916, serving as a Second Lieutenant in the Norfolk Regiment, but like Eustace in the trilogy, was given a medical discharge. He graduated in 1921 and embarked on a literary career, sustained by an independent private income. He published his first collection of short stories, Night Fears and Other Stories, in 1924. His first novel, Simonetta Perkins, published in 1925, shows a strong Jamesian influence and is set in Hartley's beloved Venice, where for many years he spent a part of every year. These were followed by another seventeen novels and a number of collections of short stories. The last in each genre, The Will and the Way and The Complete Short Stories of L.P. Hartley, were both published posthumously in 1973. Of the novels, The Go-Between (1953) and The Hireling (1957) are usually regarded as his best works. Both have been made into award-winning films. In addition, Lord David Cecil has described the Eustace and Hilda trilogy, published between 1944 and 1947, and as a single volume in 1958, as perhaps the most substantial of Hartley's works, "in any age and by any standard ... a masterpiece." Hartley was also a tireless reviewer and a collection of his critical essays, The Novelist's Responsibility: Lectures and Essays, was published in 1967. He died in December 1972.

In his study, Six Novelists Look at Society, John Atkins remarks that Hartley does not like the modern world: "We are in the age of the Common Man but, if we take sides with our author, we don't

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30 Derek Parker, The Novelist L.P. Hartley talks about his childhood to Derek Parker, Radio 4 series, 'Myself When Young', published in The Listener, 31 August 1971, p. 274.


feel at home in it." That Hartley’s problems with the twentieth century are not only social in nature, but moral, becomes clear when we read his own remark:

As for the sin of using human beings for one’s own purposes, and not as ends in themselves (which Kant believes to be the corner-stone of ethics) we only have to glance at the last fifty years.34

During a press conference in Paris, Hartley in an unguarded moment described himself as "a moralist".35 Although he tried to retract the statement, fearful of how it would reflect upon him among his friends, the remark was nonetheless revealing of the ethical foundations of his work. In The Novelist’s Responsibility he would take up the cudgels against modern moral apathy and affirm: "The novelist - at least I think so - must believe that something matters ...."36

In his novel The Go-Between, Hartley deals with his disillusionment with the twentieth century in terms of the ethical issue of people being misused by others for selfish advantage. The tale of young Leo Colston’s traumatic experience at the hands of his elders becomes a parable for the uncaring and loveless history of the twentieth century. In her study of Hartley’s symbolism, Anne Mulkeen comments on Marian, the primary "guilty party" in the novel:

How can she miss the connection between her own selfishness and pride and deception, the breakdown of all standards,


36Ibid., p. 16.
and victory of outright evil within her own family circle, her own class - and the wars which have plagued her country and the world? Hartley has made sure with his entire book that we do not miss the connection.  

Hartley renders his criticism of the age in *The Go-Between* by giving us a double perspective. The book is one of his so-called "framed novels". The main narrative, taking place during nineteen days of the summer of nineteen hundred when the young and optimistic Leo Colston, in love with the promise of "the twentieth century, that glorious epoch"\(^\text{38}\), visits the family of his school friend, Marcus Maudsley, at Brandham Hall in Norfolk, is presented to us through the eyes of the boy Leo. This is balanced by the viewpoint of an older, disabused Leo, looking at the events from a vantage point fifty-two years later, in the Prologue and Epilogue.

Having successfully "vanquished" some school-boy opponents by casting spells upon them which - to his own surprise - appeared to have effect, the twelve-year old Leo arrives at Brandham Hall\(^\text{39}\) in fine fettle, his success as a magician lending him a dauntless confidence, even though his invitation to the Hall originated from an error of judgment as regards his social standing on his host's part, caused by the misleadingly aristocratic ring of his mother's address. "Court Place" was in


\(^{39}\)In a letter to the American academic, Professor Richard Gill, Hartley states that Brandham Hall was based on Bradenham Hall, the home of Rider Haggard in Norfolk, where he had stayed for a week when he was thirteen. (Leo turns thirteen during his visit to Brandham Hall.) It is red-brick Georgian house in the Adam style, where the Haggard family had lived for generations as landed gentry. The house served as an army barracks during the Second World War and later became a government bureau. (Richard Gill, A Letter from L.P. Hartley, *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 5, 1976, pp. 529 - 531.)
fact "quite an ordinary house" and Leo's father had been a bank manager before his death. His mother managed to run the household on the pension from the bank and the little his father had put by.

Leo's confidence is soon undermined by the awareness that he is out of his social depth, a fact instantly seized upon by his host, Marcus, once they are out of the equalizing environment of their public school. Owing to his personal ascendancy at school, Leo is able to hold his own in his relationship with Marcus himself. Their conversation continues to be conducted in school-boy jargon, which allows Leo to maintain the relationship on school-boy terms, but Marcus nevertheless automatically steps into the role of social arbiter, instructing Leo in les convenances, as he calls them, and Leo has to accept his own class inferiority:

Only cads wear their school clothes in the holidays. It isn't done. You oughtn't really to be wearing the school band round your hat, but I didn't say anything. And, Leo, you mustn't come down to breakfast in your slippers. It's the sort of thing that bank clerks do. You can put them on after tea if you like.

... I winced at the reference to bank clerks, and remembered that on Sundays my father had always come down to breakfast in his slippers. 41

Leo's inferiority is indicated particularly by his lack of suitable clothes, a typical mark of class distinction. It is specifically his warm Norfolk jacket which is ironically unsuitable for the warm Norfolk summer weather.

Hitherto I had always taken my appearance for granted; now I saw how inelegant it was compared with theirs; ... and

40L.P. Hartley, The Go-Between, p. 22.
41Ibid., p. 41.
for the first time, I was acutely aware of social inferiority. I felt utterly out of place among these smart rich people, and a misfit everywhere.⁴²

Even fifty-two years later, the older Leo remembers his awe at these "smart rich people" and his inability to comprehend them. Because of their social superiority, their style and elegance, they become associated in his romantic imagination with his fantasy world, the world of the zodiac which had seized his vivid imagination, a world of golden, magical promise with which he identifies the imminent twentieth century:

I did not understand the world of Brandham Hall; the people there were much larger than life; ... they had zodiacal proportions. They were, in fact, the substance of my dreams, the realization of my hopes; they were the incarnated glory of the twentieth century ....⁴³

Leo’s mortification is ended when the perceptive and beautiful daughter of the house, Marian, takes note of his discomfort and embarrassment and takes him to Norwich to buy him a green summer suit. The clothes transform Leo and the external transformation also heralds a return and in fact a transcendence of his earlier confidence. Suddenly he feels himself no longer an outsider, but begins to be part of the exalted upper-class company at Brandham Hall; he starts to ascend Olympus, to move towards the gods of his dream world. Leo’s own exaltation is accompanied by an increased reverence and appreciation of the company at Brandham Hall, "those resplendent beings, golden with sovereigns (and I suspected guineas) ...."⁴⁴, and particularly of Marian, his redemptress, whom he identifies with the Virgin of the zodiac, and for whom he nurtures emotions of chivalry and devotion, characteristic of many of Hartley’s principal male characters.

⁴²L. P. Hartley, The Go-Between, p. 43.
⁴³Ibid., p. 19.
⁴⁴Ibid., p. 51.
This reverence and admiration cause Leo to feel particularly aggrieved by the oblique references to one "Trimingham", who is "dreadfully ugly", having been wounded in the Boer War, and whom Mrs Maudsley wants Marian to marry:

I ... felt violently jealous of Trimingham, and the fact that he was a war-hero did not recommend him to me ... And why shouldMrsMaudsley want Marian to marry a man who was horribly ugly and not even a Mr?  

When Trimingham appears, Leo nevertheless feels a certain sympathy with him as a result of his disfigurement and his "ambiguous social position", and can generously afford to be quite pleased that Marian "take[s] such trouble with him". On a visit to the village church, Leo notices the memorials on the mural tablets to all but one of the eight late Viscounts Trimingham. The sudden realization that there could be a ninth Viscount still living, transforms the family for the impressionable Leo from a part of history into a living entity, with the Church as "the citadel of its glory", the Maudsleys its heirs, and Leo as their guest, a participant in the glory:

A glory brighter than the sunshine filled the transept. It filled my mind too, and reaching upwards and outwards began to identify itself with the Zodiac, my favourite religion.  

While the upper-class Maudsleys and their guests at first intimidated Leo and were later exalted by him, they are now completely eclipsed by the idea of the truly aristocratic Triminghams. It is only on the way back from the Church that it occurs to Leo that the scorned, pitied Trimingham, is in fact the very ninth Viscount. The realization causes an explosion of

45 L. P. Hartley, The Go-Between, pp. 52 - 53.

46 Ibid., pp. 61, 62.

47 Ibid., p. 68.
glory in Leo’s mind:

The equivocal unmistered Trimingham I had pictured to myself vanished utterly, to be replaced by the ninth Viscount, whom I somehow felt to be nine times as glorious as the first. I had never met a lord before, nor had I expected to meet one. It didn’t matter what he looked like: he was a lord first, and a human being, with face and limbs and body, long, long, after.\textsuperscript{48}

This unexpected encounter with the aristocracy marks an important turning point in Leo’s ascendancy:

I wanted to deal in larger sums. I wanted to enjoy continuously the afflatus of spirit that I had when I was talking to Lord Trimingham and he admitted to being a Viscount. To be in tune with all that Brandham Hall meant, I must increase my stature, I must act in a grander scale.\textsuperscript{49}

The grandeur of Brandham Hall, the patronage of the beautiful Marian, and most of all the glory of intimacy with a lord ("I had taken a great liking to Lord Trimingham though I couldn’t have told whether I liked the Viscount or the man\textsuperscript{50}"), cause Leo to abandon all trepidous discretion; he transcends the limitations of his socially inferior past and, consorting with the "gods", he feels himself at last moving into the realm of his idealized dream-world of the Zodiac: "Without knowing it, I was crossing the rainbow bridge from reality to dream."\textsuperscript{51}

The interplay between dream and reality is a favourite theme in

\textsuperscript{48}\textsuperscript{48}L.P. Hartley, \textit{The Go-Between}, p. 72.

\textsuperscript{49}Ibid., p. 76.

\textsuperscript{50}Ibid., p. 74.

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., p. 77.
Hartley’s fiction, and the dream aspect is often associated with the aristocracy, indicative in itself of Hartley’s personal disposition towards the class. In the Eustace and Hilda trilogy, for example, Eustace struggles to keep the world of his imagination from impinging on reality, and his dreams are almost inevitably connected with the aristocratic Staveleys of Anchorstone Hall, "settled at Anchorstone since the Conquest". To Eustace, "the ancient lineage of the Staveleys had meant a great deal, though he was shy of admitting it". Chiefly his dreams entail the marriage of his beloved elder sister, Hilda, to Dick Staveley, the son and heir of Sir John Staveley of the Hall. Eustace wants to see his sister "clothed in the glory and radiance of Anchorstone Hall." As with Leo in The Go-Between, Eustace’s inability to keep his dreams at bay, his attempts to dissolve the divisions between illusion and reality, his overestimation of his own power to accomplish this, leads to disaster. For a while, as he settles in Venice with Lady Nelly Staveley, the grande dame of the family, he appears to have realized his fantasies, leading a life of pleasure, consorting daily with aristocrats such as Lord and Lady Morecombe, the dashing Count Andrea de Monfalcone, and the bored Countess Loredan, while his sister is involved in a romance with the Staveley heir in England. However, he is rudely brought back to reality when the news reaches him that Hilda has been deserted by Dick Staveley, with whom she had allowed herself to become involved at Eustace’s insistence. Eustace can only save her by sacrificing himself in a final act of supreme sacrificial

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53 Ibid., p. 298.
54 Ibid., p. 317.
55 Ibid., p. 430.
56 After Eustace’s departure from Venice, the Count de Monfalcone turns out to be an impostor, underlining the illusory and deceptive quality of Eustace’s Venetian dream world.
love, shorn of his aristocratic fantasies.

In *The Go-Between*, Leo’s overestimation of his powers also leads to disaster. He is used by Marian and her two suitors, Lord Trimingham and the tenant farmer, Ted Burgess, as an intermediary, carrying messages. Heady with power, he regards himself as Mercury, the messenger of the gods, a god himself. He extends the Zodiac identifications to include Lord Trimingham, now his hero, as the Archer, the Warrior, bearing as he does the honourable scars of war; while Ted, the farmer, with whom he actually has a more natural affinity, becomes the Water-carrier.

It soon transpires that Marian is conducting an illicit love affair across class barriers with Ted Burgess, while at the same time contemplating a socially advantageous marriage with Lord Trimingham. She, and to a lesser degree Ted, abuse the innocent devotion of the twelve year old boy to maintain the liaison. Marian and Ted are thus guilty of Hartley’s cardinal sin of "using human beings for one’s own purposes, and not as ends in themselves", and for that reason are responsible for the cataclysm that brings not only them down, but also Trimingham, the Maudsleys and above all the innocent victim, Leo.

When Leo starts fathoming the nature of the “business messages” he is carrying between Marian and Ted, he tries to bring an end to the liaison, but is ruthlessly manipulated by the lovers to continue. His hesitation is partly inspired by his devotion to the “ninth Viscount”, partly by an awareness of the class barriers between the two lovers, but mostly by a sense of impending doom based on the history of the fifth Viscount, who was killed in a duel about a lady, and by his awareness that the situation is getting beyond the reach of his powers. Trying to avert disaster, he changes the content of Ted’s last message to Marian, altering the time of the planned tryst, and, drawing on his resources as a magician, he casts a spell while destroying the beautiful but poisonous *belladonna atropa*, the deadly nightshade, symbolizing both Marian’s beauty and evil in general.
Ironically, his interference merely precipitates the disaster, as due to the change in schedule, Marian's absence is noticed and Mrs Maudsley and Leo discover the errant couple in flagrante delicto in the outhouse where he had destroyed the belladonna. In terms of Hartley's ethics, this chain of events is acceptable, as transgression is shown to lead to calamity: Ted commits suicide, Mrs Maudsley goes mad, Marian's own life becomes a lonely and sad pretence, and Leo is condemned to a life of emotional desiccation, cut off from all significant human involvement, a death-in-life. His treatment of the class structure in the novel is, however, much less clear cut and shows an interesting discrepancy between "intention" and "performance".

Hartley's treatment of the love affair between Marian and Ted shows many parallels to D.H. Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover. As Lord Trimingham, Marian's aristocratic partner, is shown to be physically disfigured by his war wounds, so Sir Clifford Chatterley, Lady Chatterley's aristocratic husband, is paralysed as a result of his experiences in war. Both consequently appear to be sexually impaired and impotent - clearly indicative of the decadence and sterility of the class they represent - and therefore unfit to sustain a meaningful physical relationship with their female partners, causing these partners to turn to vital, natural, vigorous men from outside their own class, manifesting the - presumably desirable - breakdown of redundant and artificial distinctions. Considerable emphasis is laid in both novels on the "natural" quality of the lower class lovers. Leo watches Ted swimming in the river, radiating a natural power and sensuality which the pubescent boy senses but cannot yet understand: "I retreated almost in fear before that powerful body, which spoke to me of something I did not know"\(^57\), but which nevertheless attracts him:

... and I wondered, what must it feel like to be him, master of those limbs which have passed beyond the need of

\(^{57}\)L.P. Hartley, The Go-Between, p. 56.
Ted’s local accent lends "warmth and substance to his words"⁵⁹, and when Leo tries haltingly to discuss the facts of life with him, the only criterion that appears to be valid for Ted is what is "natural": "For him the word ‘natural’ seemed to be conclusive."⁶⁰ Mellors, the game-keeper lover in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, is depicted as similarly distanced from the judgments of society, in touch and in complete harmony with nature without and his own nature within:

No sense of wrong or sin; he was troubled by no conscience in that respect. He knew that conscience was chiefly fear of society, or fear of oneself. He was not afraid of himself. But he was quite consciously afraid of society, which he knew to be a malevolent, partly-insane beast.⁶¹

Mellors is described as bearing a "natural distinction"⁶², free from the codes of any class. He himself proclaims:

I stand for the touch of bodily awareness between human beings ... and the touch of tenderness. And she is my mate. And it is a battle against the money, and the machine, and the insentient ideal monkeyishness of the world.⁶³

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⁵⁹Ibid., p. 55.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 117.


⁶²Ibid., p. 287.

⁶³Ibid., p. 292.
These are very much Marian’s sentiments - which she expresses more delicately, though - as she reminisces to the older Leo on her relationship with Ted:

But we weren’t ordinary lovers, not lovers in the vulgar sense, not in the way people make love today. Our love was a beautiful thing, wasn’t it? ... All those house parties - people being paired off like animals at stud - it wasn’t like that with us. We were made for each other.⁶⁴

Yet there is a crucial distinction between the two novels. Whereas Lawrence courageously poses his natural lovers against the whole world, to make them defy defunct and bankrupt conventions, to pursue "nature" to the end, Hartley shies back, cannot bring himself in the end to challenge the class structure seriously. Marian answers Leo’s question why she does not marry Ted with an anguished cry, "I couldn’t, I couldn’t! ... Can’t you see why?”⁶⁵. That Marian speaks here for Hartley as well, appears more and more likely as we consider his treatment of the central characters and the class barriers between them.

One could try to justify Hartley’s reluctance to defy the class structure by the excuse of verisimilitude. It could be argued that the class structure was so strong in 1900 that in all likelihood people like Marian and Ted would merely not have had the necessary resources to challenge it, but Hartley’s reluctance goes further than that. While he makes Trimingham impotent and mutilated, like Sir Clifford Chatterley, with clear symbolic significance⁶⁶, he nevertheless contradicts his own symbolic indication of decay and frailty elsewhere in the novel.

⁶⁴L.P. Hartley, the Go-Between, p. 279.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 238.

⁶⁶Anne Mulkeen says, “Hugh stands for tradition and the warrior past, but ... his tradition is cut off from its roots and dying.” (Anne Mulkeen, Wild Thyme, Winter Lightning: The Symbolic Novels of L.P. Hartley, p. 108.)
Sir Clifford's snobbishness is clearly shown up to be sterile and his privileged position artificial:

You don't rule, don't flatter yourself. You have only got more than your share of the money, and make people work for you for two pounds a week, or threaten them with starvation. Rule! What do you give forth of rule? Why you're dried up! You only bully with your money, like any Jew or any Schieber! 67

Trimingham is shown to be of quite a different calibre, however. First of all, his personal style is vital and gentle. While Lady Chatterley contrasts her class's "cut-to-pattern look" negatively with Mellors's "natural distinction" 68, and says that her husband was only at ease in aristocratic society, but "shy and nervous of all that other big world which consists of the vast hordes of the middle and lower classes, and foreigners" 69, Trimingham manages with ease and a kind-hearted panache and show of personal style to transform the tie Leo has received as a birthday-gift from his aunt, "a common thing", to something "outré but elegant" 70. Furthermore, Leo says about Trimingham, "I felt he had some inner reserve of strength which no reverse, however serious, would break down" 71, and Marian's own final comment on her husband is, "Hugh was as true as steel." 72 There is thus an implicit contradiction between what the symbolism suggests and what the characters actually do and say in the novel.

Hartley's ambiguity on the issue finds it clearest expression in

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68 Ibid., p. 287.
69 Ibid., p. 10.
70 L.P. Hartley, The Go-Between, p. 249.
71 Ibid., p. 92.
72 Ibid., p. 277.
the description of the cricket-match between the Hall and the village in *The Go-Between*. The cricket-match becomes a dramatization of the social conflict of the time, between tradition and revolution, dramatizing also Leo’s, and as I suggest Hartley’s, ambiguous response to the struggle. Peter Bien says,

[The cricket match] epitomizes the struggle not only of Hugh [Lord Trimingham] against Ted, but of Hall against Village, and by analogy, of the English against the Boers, order against anarchy, and the nineteenth century against the twentieth.\(^73\)

Watching Ted’s innings, Leo feels that it represented something more than the conflict between Hall and village. It was that, but it was also the struggle between order and lawlessness, between obedience to tradition and defiance of it, between social stability and revolution, between one attitude to life and another. I knew which side I was on; yet the traitor within my gates felt the issue differently ... I wanted the other side to win.\(^74\)

Here Leo admits to sympathy with the forces of revolution, set against "detached, leftover standards" as Bien calls them. He does not, however, follow through his intention. In the end it is none other than he himself that catches the ball from Ted’s bat, bringing Ted’s innings to a close and ensuring the victory of the Hall, even though he does so with a sharp "pang of regret."\(^75\) The next day, having capped his cricketing feat with an outstanding performance as a singer at the party afterwards, once again outdoing Ted, he feels that he has never had "such a

\(^{73}\)Peter Bien, *L.P. Hartley*, p. 175.


\(^{75}\)Ibid., p. 139.
supreme sense of personal triumph."\textsuperscript{76} Like Leo, Hartley appears to favour a new, more democratic dispensation, the breaking down of outdated divisive structures. (The moral of the novel appears to be that there is "no spell or curse except an unloving heart"\textsuperscript{77}, the last redemptive message Leo carries as a go-between from Marian to her unforgiving grandson.) In the end, intensely suspicious of the modern age, "this hideous century we live in, which has denatured humanity and planted death and hate where love and living were"\textsuperscript{78}, he nevertheless upholds the standards of the old order. When Leo decides to act against Marian and Ted, it is so that "order would have been restored: social order, universal order".\textsuperscript{79} In the end the terrible price they all pay is clearly not only the result of Marian and Ted's iniquity of abusing Leo for their own purposes, but also the consequence of an attempt to tamper with the "social order", and particularly with the class structure. Elizabeth Boje states that an "inability to transcend class barriers precipitates the tragedy of Leo's life, epitomized in his analysis of himself as 'a foreigner in the world of emotions, ignorant of their language but compelled to listen to it'"\textsuperscript{80}.

In the epilogue, the older Leo encounters Marian's grandson, Edward, the eleventh Viscount Trimingham, who closely resembles his actual grandfather, Ted Burgess. The suggestion here appears to be that the feeble, sterile blood of the Triminghams has been replaced by the more vital, natural force of Ted Burgess's genes, implying some kind of belated victory of the village over the

\textsuperscript{76}L.P. Hartley, \textit{The Go-Between}, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{77}Ibid., p. 280.
\textsuperscript{78}Ibid., p. 279.
\textsuperscript{79}Ibid., p. 235.
\textsuperscript{80}Ibid., p. 280.

Hall. Even here, however, Hartley cannot leave it at that, and intimates that the young man will marry his Winlove "cousin", of the blood of the Viscounts Trimingham, thus legitimizing Ted’s progeny’s usurpation of the Trimingham heritage. The decadence of the old order, represented by the aristocracy, is suggested and intimated, but it is not finally affirmed; and while the infusion of Ted’s vital farmer’s blood might be regarded as suggesting a kind of revitalization of the family, it is finally overlaid or neutralized by its integration with the older, aristocratic and presumably decadent heritage.

Hartley’s ambivalent attitude to the aristocracy and the class structure as such is particularly evident in his short novel, The Hireling. The novel focuses on the relationship between an upper-class woman, Lady Franklin, and a chauffeur she hires to take her on a number of trips through the English countryside. Anne Mulkeen states,

More simply and essentially than almost any of Hartley’s works, The Hireling is a novel of the marriage of opposites: masculine and feminine, time and eternity, reality and imagination, earthiness and aspiration, life and art - even upper and lower classes.\(^2\)

Lady Franklin is suffering from depression as a result of the death of her husband, Sir Philip Franklin; particularly because she feels guilty that she had not made her affection sufficiently clear to him during his life-time and because she was not with him when he died. Somebody, possibly a psychiatrist, advises that for therapy she should find someone unlike herself: "... a waiter, a porter, a taxi-driver. Button-hole him, victimize him, be an Ancient Mariner; pour your story into his ear; don’t let him get away. Make him listen to every word, and see how he

As Lady Franklin’s husband was an architectural enthusiast with a particular interest in cathedrals, she sets out on a number of "pilgrimages" to various English cathedrals, and the chauffeur who drives her on these trips, Steve Leadbitter, becomes her confessor, her sounding-board.

Like Lady Franklin, Leadbitter is also a misfit in society. As she has been distanced from life by sorrow and guilt, he has cut himself wilfully off from society in bitter misanthropic self-sufficiency. He wishes, for example, to buy a car with a sliding panel between him and the passengers so that "he would remain shut off from them - shut off from their voices, shut off from their feelings, shut off from any interference they might make in his life. Shut off from the outside world - shut off ... shut off." 84

Having spoken of her own grief, Lady Franklin enquires after Leadbitter’s family, and to entertain her he invents a wife, Frances, and two children, regaling Lady Franklin on successive trips with the weal and woe of the Leadbitter family, his own "Canterbury Tales" as they are appropriately called. The relationship becomes mutually beneficial; Lady Franklin is drawn out of her self with these stories of other people’s joys and tribulations. Helping Leadbitter financially after a particularly affecting tale of impecunious necessity (callously spun to exploit her kind-heartedness), provides a crucial release of life in Lady Franklin:

Her heart swelled with the joy of giving, swelled almost to bursting, like a fruit when ripeness overtakes it. She seemed to feel vents and fissures opening through which her spirit breathed. 85

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84 Ibid., p. 188.
85 Ibid., p. 67.
Likewise, Leadbitter is forced to face the emotional meagreness of his actual existence in contrast to his imaginary one. "Frances" comes to resemble Lady Franklin closely, in appearance, in interests and in quirks. Leadbitter comes to feel that "the stranger, love, now occupied his heart". 86

The Hireling is a fairly simple fable on the theme of "No man is an island". One of the central images is the cathedral, denoting the interpenetration and harmony of human relationships:

'These arches and pillars aren't made to a pattern like those others in the nave - those are Perpendicular, as I expect you know, and too cold and uniform for my taste. But these don't repeat themselves, or not exactly. There's a kind of living relationship between them, if you see what I mean, as there is between human beings, not just structurally, but spiritually as well, the likeness and the unlikeness, which somehow draws us to each other - the contrast you sometimes see between ill-matched couples which helps to make them one.' 87

The harmony between human beings who are unlike, "ill-matched", points us towards what is particularly interesting in the novel as an object for analysis: its treatment of the class issue and particularly the discrepancy between "intention" and "performance" in this regard, to use Hartley's own terminology.

At a first reading, the novel appears to be a consistent attack on the divisions of the class structure. Leadbitter is described on the first page as being of a "patrician cut" 88, even though the "material" is plebeian, calling into question the validity of these distinctions. Leadbitter clearly regards himself as Lady Franklin's equal and thinks, "Man for man, he was a better

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86 L.P. Hartley, The Hireling, p. 146.
87 Ibid., p. 98.
88 Ibid., p. 7.
specimen than ninety-nine per cent of his customers, yes, better than Hughie [Lady Franklin's upper-class but penniless artist suitor, who plans to marry her for her money] for all his face-fungus." 89 As a friendship gradually develops between them, their own awareness of their class-differences appears to be eroded in their private world in the automobile:

Only in the automobile are the four characters of the novel [Leadbitter, Lady Franklin, Hughie, and Constance, Hughie's mistress] able to transcend the barriers imposed by profession, class, and financial status and to reveal themselves to each other as human beings. Leadbitter's car encloses a world of fantasy in which Lady Franklin is free to enjoy the stories the driver creates about his imaginary family, but the effect of these stories is to encourage in both of them the desire for emotional fulfilment deriving from contact with people. 90

When Leadbitter enquires, "And doesn't class make a difference?" 91, Lady Franklin consequently answers ingenuously, "No, ... class-distinctions add richness to life .... At least they used to, but there aren't any now." 92 Taking her at her word, Leadbitter stops the car and kisses Lady Franklin on their way back to London. Although lady Franklin "closed her eyes in rapture", she "opened them in outrage". 93 The class system breaks brutally into the private classless world of the car. Leadbitter cannot but conclude, "She led me on, she played with

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89 L. P. Hartley, The Hireling, p. 185.
91 L. P. Hartley, The Hireling, p. 98.
92 Ibid., p. 99.
93 Ibid., p. 107.
The tenor of the novel is quite clear at this stage, though class divisions are artificial and insignificant by comparison to the need for human proximity and communication. They cause artificial divisions among people who, like the arches and pillars of the cathedral, would otherwise form patterns of beauty and harmony. This is confirmed by the fact that Lady Franklin appears to have benefitted greatly from the encounter. It provides, in fact, the last step in her progress to full humanity. Hughie confesses to Constance: "She's changed in the last few days." Trying to explain the change, he adds, "You see, now she has an expression on her face, whereas before she had a look of impersonal sweetness and happiness, like a nun's."

Hartley cannot, however, bring himself to pursue his defiance of the aristocratic regime through to the end. Once again he stops short of confining obsolete convention - as he clearly indicates the artificial divisions of class to be in this novel - to extinction. First of all, he depersonalizes the forbidden relationship between Lady Franklin and Leadbitter by describing it in semi-religious, almost mystic terms:

> Of all the images associated with Lady Franklin, a cathedral was the one that occurred to him most often ... it had an entity, a self, and that self was his: to admire, to adore, to add to his pleasure.\(^97\)

The second device he uses in order to avoid denouncing the class tradition, is more crude. After the betrayal of Hughie is brought to Lady Franklin's attention by an anonymous letter sent


\(^{95}\)Ibid., p. 117.

\(^{96}\)Ibid., p. 121.

\(^{97}\)Ibid., p. 148.
by Leadbitter and prompted by his concern for her, she experiences a relapse, and is only brought back to significant life by Leadbitter's last message, that he loves her. This is dutifully conveyed to her by Constance, the only survivor of a deus-ex-machina car-crash which kills Leadbitter and Hughie. By making use of this somewhat heavy-handed device, Hartley remains faithful to the moral of the story as expressed by Lady Franklin early in the novel: "I think that love should always be told" and "... don't wait until it's too late, or it may spoil your life ..." while at the same time avoiding incensing his readers' and, I suspect, most of all his own, sensibilities, by countenancing a union across the class-barrier. Once again, the novel appears to wish to oppose the class structure, yet ends up by endorsing it in several significant ways.

As in The Go-Between, Hartley's instinctive attachment to the order of the past, his innate sympathy for an aristocratic dispensation, precludes the complete execution of his intellectual and ethical intentions to portray the triumph of love as a redemptive force. As in The Go-Between, Hartley hesitates in The Hireling to undermine certain conventions - such as the class system - in the pursuit of these intellectual aims and thus exposes a discrepancy between the "intention" in his work, and his "performance" - the carrying out of his purpose in the substance of his writing. Faced with the realization of the egalitarian ideal in the rising welfare state of Britain of the nineteen-fifties, Hartley vacillates between a recognition of the aristocracy as a class and value-system in decline, decadent, redundant and obstructionist, and an instinctive admiration of those lasting qualities of individuality, panache, elegance and a chivalric concept of honour embodied by Lord Trimingham, for example, that have carried the aristocracy from century to century.

98L. P. Hartley, The Hireling, p. 27.

99Ibid., p. 50.
century, and which Hartley appears to hope will yet again carry
them through what is for them another "dark age".
VI. RESURGENCE

Noël Coward

In the general election of 1979 the Conservative Party swept to power under the leadership of Mrs Margaret Thatcher. The success of the party could partly be ascribed to a blurring of the line between manual and non-manual workers, often regarded as the distinction between the working and middle classes. Non-manual workers gradually became a larger proportion of the population. As they grew more prosperous, workers were more inclined to ignore traditional political allegiances - which would in most cases be to the Labour Party - and rather vote in accordance with their individual interests or preferences.\(^1\) The issues which traditionally had divided the two parties remained fundamentally the same, however, pitting those individualist values so highly prized by Hartley against the ideal of the common weal:

\[
\text{The line between collectivist and individualist values remained much the same as it had been most of the century, but workers no longer took quite so clear cut a view about which side of the line they were placed by their jobs.}^2
\]

This growing middle class found Mrs Thatcher's gospel of reducing the role of government, containing price hikes and "enabling everyone to be better off by individual effort"\(^3\), very attractive. Within the Conservative Party, these middle-class aspirations were opposed by an older, more aristocratic belief that it was the responsibility of those higher up on the social ladder to look after the interests of those less fortunate.\(^4\)


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 474.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 475.

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 475.
This "softer" line, characterized as "wet" by Mrs Thatcher herself, continued in mild resistance to her hard-line policies until it culminated unexpectedly in her being ousted as Prime Minister in 1991.

The Prime Minister's success in keeping the decade of the eighties strictly Thatcherite was facilitated by the fact that the Labour Party was becoming increasingly radical in its policies. This extremism led to a split in the Party in 1981 with the formation of the Social Democratic Party by moderate Labourites. The success in 1982 of British forces in the Falklands War—so fiercely espoused by Mrs Thatcher—further increased support for her, as did the perception after an initial period of economic decline, that her policies were successful and that she delivered what she had promised.

Mrs Thatcher's government launched an unprecedented attack on collectivism. Between 1979 and 1983, Parliament sold off £1.4 billion of publicly owned enterprises. After her second victory at the polls, the pace was increased, and in the first fifteen months after the election sales amounted to another £1.7 billion. She also emerged victorious from a final confrontation with the power of the trade unions—a National Union of Mineworkers' strike lasting more than a year and involving more than 100 000 men in 1984 to 1985. This left the trade union movement emasculated, and hastened the steady decline of the Labour Party. A great quantity of public housing was sold off successfully, the populace as a whole grew wealthier, the pound strengthened as a result of the government's monetary policy and Britain once more became a considerable force.

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5In the general election of 1983, after the Falklands War, the Conservative Party pushed up its number of seats in the House of Commons from 339 to 397, while Labour representation declined from 269 to 209. (T.O. Lloyd, From Empire to Welfare State, pp. 474, 494.)

6T.O. Lloyd, From Empire to Welfare State, p. 496.

7Cf. ibid., pp. 497 - 499.
particularly in the European context. Between 1980 and 1986, the number of millionaires in Britain doubled from nine thousand to eighteen thousand: "Wealth became a thing to be admired in itself".

In scaling down social services while encouraging private enterprise, Mrs Thatcher’s government directly favoured the rich and those intent on becoming rich, rather than the poor or destitute. The question arises how this change in accent affected the aristocracy, formerly the richest in the land, but having lost considerable ground by now. It appears that this change in the course of British social history came as an almost God-given last-minute reprieve to the survivors among the aristocracy and most of them appear to have seized it with enthusiasm and flair. In *Friends in High Places*, his recent study of power structures in Britain, Jeremy Paxman points out that no-one did better out of the reduction in tax-levels in the nineteen-eighties than the aristocracy:

> ... where once they surrendered ninety-eight pence in the pound they now gave only forty pence. Penalties on unearned income were slashed. Rocketing property and land prices hugely increased their worth, while those with portfolios of stocks and shares saw their value more than double in real terms.

A list of the two hundred richest people in Britain published in the *Sunday Times* in 1990 showed that over half were the proprietors of "Old Money" and more than a quarter were aristocrats, most of whom had been to Eton. Likewise, the magazine *Fortune International*’s annual list of the richest people in the world for 1992 shows the largest British fortune -

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9Ibid., p. 32.

10Ibid., p. 20.
the sixth largest in the world - to be that of Queen Elizabeth II, estimated at $11.7 billion. The fortunes of the Earl of Iveagh and his family, and the Duke of Westminster and his - each estimated at over $4 billion - are among the thirty largest in the world.¹¹

While, as has been pointed out, large numbers of aristocrats have had to sell their ancestral lands, and the wise among them substituted investments in other commodities, remarkable numbers of land-owners still survive. Titled families are still estimated to own one third of Britain¹². In Great British Families (1988), Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd estimates that there are still over 2000 family estates - defined as an estate of at least 1000 acres with a country seat, inherited from at least one earlier generation and with a family tradition of local responsibility and public office - in Great Britain.¹³ In the light of the new prosperity, and particularly new and favourable inheritance tax laws, some aristocratic families, like the Clive-Ponsonby-Fanes of Brympton D’Evelcy in Somerset, have actually managed to buy back their family seats! (Brympton D’Evelcy had been taken over by a school). The 7th Lord Camoys spent the money he had made from a share-option scheme at Rothschilds to buy back Stonor Park, which had been in his family since 1150, from his father’s estate.¹⁴

The main casualties of the attack on private wealth launched by successive Labour governments were members of the landed gentry who did not have other investments to cushion the blow¹⁵ and


thus did not survive to experience the heady days of Thatcherism. Those members of the upper class who did survive, found themselves enjoying more affluence than they had in many years. Many have turned their aristocratic inheritances into money-making ventures, renting grouse moors out for £1 000 or more per gun\textsuperscript{16}, or inviting the public to visit their homes: by the mid-eighties over eight hundred English country houses were open to the public and more people visited historic houses than attended all live arts performances in Britain\textsuperscript{17}. Aristocrats have been the greatest beneficiaries of the heritage trade, one of Britain's main growth industries of the eighties.\textsuperscript{18} The 10th Duke of Richmond has turned his Goodwood estate in Sussex into a business with an turnover of £1,6 million and a staff of 180.\textsuperscript{19}

This exhilarating return to affluence has, however, been accompanied by a significant change in the role of the aristocracy in the latter decades of the century. The ideal of dutiful service - noblesse oblige - has disappeared, or at least diminished, to a large extent, to be replaced by the naked pursuit of private wealth and personal well-being. The vast estates still held by most of the surviving great landed families, such as the Dukes of Devonshire, Buccleuch, Northumberland and Westminster, are underpinned by extensive stock-exchange holdings and investments abroad. Some aristocrats, while keeping up the family seats and estates rely almost entirely on other sources of income. Many have proved adept at all kinds of new professions: Lord Polwarth and the Earl of Airlie are virtually full-time businessmen, acting as directors or chairmen of the board for many companies; Lord Carrington became chairman of GEC when he left the Foreign Office

\textsuperscript{16}Jeremy Paxman, \textit{Friends in High Places}, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., pp. 34 and 338.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 33 et seq.

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 42.
in 1982; Lord Farnham is chairman of Brown, Shipley and Co. as well as of the Avon Rubber Co.; Lord Brabourne is a film producer and Lord Lichfield an internationally acclaimed photographer; the Earl of Kintore is a mining engineer and the Earl of Westmorland works for Sotheby's.\textsuperscript{20}

As Paxman points out, the aristocracy discovered during the nineteen-eighties that they could survive and even prosper if they turned their inheritances unsentimentally into business ventures, but a price has had to be paid for this transformation: "What has disappeared is not the aristocracy but many of their better qualities."\textsuperscript{21} As late as the nineteen-sixties, one could find 4 dukes, 1 marquess, 9 earls, 4 viscounts, 5 viscountesses, 27 barons, 34 baronets, 52 knights and 15 titled wives sitting on English county councils. By 1990 these categories were represented by a total of 9 individuals. In fairness to the Lords, one could add that a part of this decline in public representation can be ascribed to a feeling among the general public in these egalitarian times that people of such privilege are perhaps not best suited to represent their interests. As the Duke of Devonshire comments with disarming frankness:

> How could I have been given a post talking about unemployment or health or social services, when everyone knows I've got all my millions here at Chatsworth? If you are as privileged as I am, and you have the material good fortune ... then you must realize that the price you pay for that is that you cannot have influence.\textsuperscript{22}

Nevertheless, the implications of this decline in the ideal of service - defined by Nancy Mitford in her novels as the quality


\textsuperscript{21}Jeremy Paxman, Friends in High Places, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 29.
that distinguishes the nobility from the money-making upper middle class - has significant and far-reaching implications for the aristocracy’s concept of itself and for the perceptions of the wider public:

The 1980s was the decade when greed became respectable, and the owners of the great estates did better out of them than most. But if their properties are now no more than businesses, like foundries or amusement arcades, whatever residual legitimacy the old order had has gone. 23

The transition of the aristocracy from an ideal of high-minded service to the nation, to one of self-seeking self-enrichment, is perhaps the most significant issue that Emma Tennant addresses in her aristocratic novels The House of Hospitalities and A Wedding of Cousins.

23Jeremy Paxman, Friends in High Places, p. 46.
EMMA TENNANT: RETROSPECTIVE

Emma Tennant came to concentrate on her own aristocratic background only fairly late in her writing career. Her apparent hesitation may be the consequence of a reluctance on her part to be identified as an "aristocratic writer". In an interview with Moira Monteith and Sue Roe, she talks about the obstacles someone from her background faces to be taken seriously as a writer:

I think to come from the background I come from and to be taken seriously, not to be humiliated by jokes about your privileged background, I think it’s not as difficult or as horrible [as coming from an extremely deprived background]. But if you look at my background and you look at who has come as a serious writer out of it, and Nancy Mitford\textsuperscript{24} for instance is a good writer, but she went off very quickly into doing historical biographies. I don’t think Vita Sackville-West was much good. You name to me somebody who’s actually taken seriously, isn’t thought to be a bit of a laugh who comes from my background. It’s a very difficult thing to fight against. Confidence can be removed at once.\textsuperscript{25}

It is only with her latest writing enterprise, a series of novels collectively designated \textit{Cycle of the Sun}, that Miss Tennant turns the spotlight fully on the aristocracy, the society from which she originates. However, if her earlier work is scrutinized, glimpses of a pre-occupation with this background do emerge. In

\textsuperscript{24}Emma Tennant belongs to the remarkably wide-reaching extended family circle of the Mitfords (cf. chapter 3): her brother, Hon. Tobias Tennant, is married to Nancy Mitford’s niece Lady Emma Cavendish, daughter of Debo Mitford and her husband, the 11th Duke of Devonshire.

a review of Emma Tennant’s poetic novel, Alice fell, Carol Rumens remarks, for example:

Large, faded country houses ... form an important part of the imaginative terrain of Emma Tennant. They seem to provide a metaphor both for the individual human consciousness and for historical change, particularly as it is played out between the generations.  

In a television interview Emma Tennant herself confirms the significant role of houses in her work: "My work always goes back to a house ..."; she cites Freud’s theory that when one dreams of a house, one dreams of oneself and concludes: "A house is my autobiography." Miss Tennant explains this tendency in her work as being the consequence of having grown up in an "architectural fantasy" built in the mid-nineteenth century, a "sham baronial horror", with passages leading nowhere, embellished with strange labyrinths and turrets. The house in question is The Glen in Peeblesshire (now Borders county) in Scotland, at present the seat of her elder brother, the 3rd Lord Glenconnor. Miss Tennant’s remarks confirm the influence her

29Ibid.
30Sir Colin Christopher Paget Tennant, 3rd Baron Glenconnor, b. 1926 m. 1956 Lady Anne Coke, eldest daughter of the 5th Earl of Leicester and succeeded his father as 3rd Baron in 1983. Lord and Lady Glenconnor have had three sons and twin daughters. (Cf. Burke’s Peerage and Baronetage, 105th Edition, 4th Impression, London: Burke’s Peerage (Genealogical Books), 1980, p. 1106 and Debrett’s Peerage and Baronetage, London, Debrett’s & Macmillan, 1985, p. 499.) The family has been beset by personal tragedies, including the death of their second son. Colin Tennant - as he was known until his accession to the title - and his wife are well-known members of the social set in London and are among
privileged aristocratic background has had on her writing.

Hon. Emma Christina Tennant was born in 1937, the first child from the second marriage of the Second Lord Glenconnor\textsuperscript{31} to Elizabeth Powell.\textsuperscript{32} Shortly after her birth the family moved to the family seat in Scotland where they remained until after the Second World War. Both Emma's parents were deeply involved in the War effort and travelled extensively during those years, so that she and her siblings to a large extent grew up isolated from other society - even their parents' - in a rather extraordinary baronial Castle in an isolated part of Scotland. In her interview with Moira Monteith, Miss Tennant ascribes some of the poetic, fantastic impulses in her writing to her isolated childhood in a secluded Scottish valley and quotes Sir Walter Scott's lines:

\begin{verbatim}
Caledonia, stern and wild,
Fit [sic] nurse for a poetic child\textsuperscript{33}.
\end{verbatim}

The castellated manor was built by Miss Tennant's great-grandfather Sir Charles Tennant, who had made a fortune in the Princess Margaret's closest friends. She has a holiday house on their private Caribbean island, Mustique.

\textsuperscript{31}Sir Christopher Grey Tennant, 2nd Baron Glenconnor, Chairman of Tharsis Sulphur and Copper Co., b. 1899, succeeded his father as 2nd Baron in 1920, m. 1stly 1925 Pamela, daughter of Sir Arthur Paget, Bt., by whom he had two sons before being divorced from her in 1935, and 2ndly Elizabeth, daughter of Lt.-Col. Evelyn Powell of Oxford, by whom he had a further son and two daughters. (Burke's Peerage and Baronetage, 1980, p. 1106.)


\textsuperscript{33}"Women Talking About Writing" in Moira Monteith (ed.), Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory, p. 128.

The lines from Scott's 	extit{The Lay of the Last Minstrel} (1805) should read:

\begin{verbatim}
O Caledonia! stern and wild,
meet nurse for a poetic child!
\end{verbatim}
manufacture of chemicals in Glasgow, was granted a baronetcy in 1885 and set himself up as a landed gentleman at The Glen. His children married into the established nobility of the time and his eldest son, Emma's grandfather, was raised to the peerage as Lord Glenconnor in 1911. He married a member of the intellectually influential Wyndham family, who with a few other aristocratic families formed the core of "the Souls", a turn of the century aristocratic society with political leanings, composed of younger members of the smartest aristocratic society in the 1880s. Bence-Jones and Montgomery-Massingberd describe them as renowned for their intellectual conversation, while being, at the same time, witty and light-hearted; in short, they continued to live up to the concept of the 'Complete Man'... 35.

Two of Lord Glenconnor's own sisters, Laura Lyttelton 36 and Margot Asquith 37, wife of the Prime Minister, were prominent

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36 Octavia Laura Mary Tennant, m. 1885 Hon. Alfred Lyttelton (1857 - 1913), 8th son of the 4th Baron Lyttelton. He was a Privy Councillor, M.P. for Warwick and Leamington (1895 -1906) and St George's, Hanover Square (1906 - 1913), and Secretary of State for the Colonies (1903 - 1905). The Hon. Mrs Lyttelton died in 1886, less than a year after the marriage. (Burke's Peerage, 1980, pp. 590, 1108.)

37 Emma Alice Margaret Tennant m. 1894 as his second wife, Herbert Asquith (1852 - 1928), 1st Earl of Oxford and Asquith, K.G., P.C., Chancellor of the Exchequer (1905- 1908), Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury (1908 - 1916), also Secretary of State for War and President of the Army Council (1914, 1916), raised to the peerage in 1925. The Countess of
members of this coterie, described by Lady Sophia Murphy as a group of intelligent and artistic men and women who had reacted against the typically society lifestyle of gambling, illicit love affairs and sporting activity which they despised.\footnote{Lady Sophia Murphy, The Duchess of Devonshire’s Ball, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984, p. 77.}

In *The House of Hospitalities* (1987), the first novel in Emma Tennant’s *Cycle of the Sun* series, the legacy of Marguerite, Lady Azeby (Margot, Lady Asquith?), the grandmother of the aristocratic central character, Hon. Amy Lovell, is constantly felt at the manor house of Lovescombe, and her ethereal portrait presides over the dining-room. Lady Azeby is described as "a Soul". Miss Tennant’s family background infuses her imagination and her writing.

After a few years at St Paul’s Girl’s School in London (probably the model for St Peter’s, the school attended by the four main characters in *The House of Hospitalities*), Emma Tennant went to Paris to study history of art at the Ecole de Louvre - just like Robina, the hard-pressed nineteen-fifties débutante heroine of her novel, *The Adventures of Robina* (*being the memoirs of a débutante at the court of Queen Elizabeth II*)\footnote{Emma Tennant, *The Adventures of Robina* (*Being the memoirs of a débutante at the court of Queen Elizabeth II*), London: Faber, 1986.}. She did not attend University, because she "did what was expected of a woman of class"\footnote{Quoted by Georgia L. Lambert in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 14, Part 2 (edited by Jay L. Halio), p. 708.}, and returned instead to London for the débutante season (once again like Robina) when she was seventeen, being presented at court in 1956. At the age of nineteen, she married Oxford and Asquith, a very forceful and colourful - not to say outspoken - figure in the political world of her time, died in 1945. (Burke’s Peerage, 1980, pp. 1108, 2057 - 2058.)
Sebastian Yorke, son of Henry Vincent Yorke (better known as the novelist Henry Green), and had a son, Matthew, in 1958. During this period she became an "occasional journalist." Her first novel, The Colour of Rain, published in 1964 under the pseudonym of Catherine Aydy is a comedy of manners, strongly influenced by her father-in-law's style. By this time she had, however, divorced her first husband and remarried the author and journalist Christopher Booker, whom she soon divorced as well to marry Alexander Cockburn, son of the political writer Claud Cockburn, in 1968. From this marriage, a daughter, Daisy, was born in 1969 before it also ended in divorce in 1973. In that year her second novel, The Time of the Crack, the first of three novels which are categorized as "allegorical science-fiction" or (by herself) as "comic apocalypse," appeared under her own name. The novel describes the appearance of a huge crack in the bed of the Thames, separating North London from the South: "Lewis Carroll technique applied to H.G. Wells material." Like its successor, The Last of the Country House Murders (1974), it is obviously satirical. The third of her novels in this "genre", Hotel de Dream, is a particularly vivid illustration of Tennant's technique - pervasive in her work - of juxtaposing and blending reality and illusion. The novel is set in the Hotel Westringham and deals with the dreams of a number of its inhabitants. The dreams gradually start to seep out into the outside world and into the dreams of the other characters, with calamitous results. Again "comic apocalypse" is a vehicle for satire, for a "... parable inside the fantasy about the condition of England today.

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42Ibid., p. 709.

43In the TV interview with James Buxton: Writer's Talk: Ideas of Our Time, from the series Writers in Conversation.

lost between illusion and reality ....

Also in 1973, Tennant's younger daughter, Rose Hippolyta Tennant Dempsey was born from her relationship with Michael Dempsey (deceased since).

In 1974 Emma Tennant established the literary magazine Bananas, which she edited until 1978. The journal became known and was widely appreciated for publishing unconventional work which might not otherwise have seen the light. She gave up the magazine in order to devote herself full-time to novel writing.

Miss Tennant has turned her hands to a surprisingly wide range of styles and genres. She has been described as

a Houdini among writers. With her pastiches and parodies, her experiments with futurism and history, her tart sense of social absurdities and her bitter feel for social injustices, she can wriggle free from any category. At her ironic best, she wears the shackles of very particular genres as if they were bright, self-conscious pieces of jewellery.

Inspired by the Scottish landscape of her childhood and the writings of the Scottish writer James Hogg, Miss Tennant published The Bad Sister in 1978. The book is directly based on Hogg's prose masterpiece The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner. She parallels Hogg's story of a young man who murders his mother and brother with the story of Jane Wild, the "bad sister", who causes the deaths of her father and sister.

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The force of Calvinist repression in the early novel is replaced by feminist concerns in Tennant’s work. The Bad Sister has been one of Tennant’s most acclaimed novels and she has called it her most “topical” work - feminism carried to the extreme.48

This novel was followed by Tennant’s two “poetic novels”: Wild Nights (1979) and Alice fell (1980). She describes these works as “slow prose poems”49. Miss Tennant claims to draw on a Scottish literary tradition where the “fabulous” is not merely or necessarily (as in the English tradition) “whimsical”.50 Both works make use of the child’s eye. Wild Nights takes place in Tennant’s Scottish childhood home. It is peopled by fantastical members of the narrator’s family, such as Aunt Zita, who brings the north wind and a change of season with her, “a sharp blue night coming on sudden and unexpected as a finger caught in a hinge”51, but who is also able “to string herself with light, and sparkling goblets, and the fire festivals where she used to dance”52, whisking off the child of the house through the sky to a magic ball. Even in this extremely poetic other-worldly fable, Tennant deals to some extent with the situation and predicament of her family and her class. Describing the house in Wild Nights, she writes,

The money that had built the great revolving house, and the iron dust in the air, and the thick curtains and sinuous drapery which had more vigour than the women who lived among them, had killed the daughters of the house. But the strangers saw only a great monument to the Industrial


49Ibid.

50Writer’s Talk: Ideas of Our Time, TV interview with James Buxton, from the series Writers in Conversation.


52Ibid., p. 194.
Here she already introduces the idea of the aristocracy as victims of their own privilege, which would be dealt with more fully in particularly *A Wedding of Cousins*, the second novel in *Cycle of the Sun*. The other "poetic novel", *Alice fell*, is an allegory based on the myth of Persephone. It was particularly commended for the beauty of Tennant's writing.⁵⁴

The idea of writing a novel intimately referring to, or based on, another work of fiction was first thoroughly explored by Miss Tennant in *The Bad Sister* - although *The Time of the Crack* already owed some debt to *Alice in Wonderland*. She continued for some time to explore this idea of overt literary parallel. In 1982 she published *Queen of Stones*⁵⁵, which she calls her "feminist answer to *Lord of the Flies*"⁵⁶. *Woman Beware Woman* (1983), a revenge thriller, obviously refers to Middleton's revenge tragedy *Women Beware Women*, but was actually inspired by Prosper Merimée's novella *Colomba*.⁵⁷ The Corsican story of vendetta is transposed to Ireland and takes place in the family of a famous English writer. (Miss Tennant was perhaps drawing on her experience as the daughter-in-law of Henry Green.) *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Ms Jekyll and Mrs Hyde*⁵⁸ (1989) reworks its Stevenson predecessor, setting it in the


⁵⁶In the TV interview with James Buxton: *Writer's Talk: Ideas of Our Time*, from the series *Writers in Conversation*.

⁵⁷Miss Tennant discusses this derivation in her interview with Moira Monteith and Sue Roe, published in *Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory*, edited by Moira Monteith, p. 132.

London of 1988, dressing it with feminist implications, and giving it "a horror of its own."  

In *The Adventures of Robina* (1986), the adventures of a nineteen-fifties débutante are recounted in the style of eighteenth-century picaresque, drawing on writers such as Defoe, Smollett and Boswell. This is done not merely to amuse, but as a satiric tool, to point out the parallel between the experience of upper-class girls in the twentieth century and in the eighteenth century. In the "Editor's Note" with which she prefaces the novel Tennant remarks:

> And I found, as I followed her adventures, that the ways and manners of a certain section of society in which we live, are virtually unchanged since the early eighteenth century.  

Although the novel is interesting as marking an increased focus on the writer's own aristocratic background, this specific blend of style and subject-matter was not particularly effective. As David Nokes points out,

> in seeking to maintain the parallelism, Tennant presents travesty versions of both Augustan style and post-war society, reducing them both to a kind of fancy-dress masquerade.  

In her interview with James Buxton, Miss Tennant confirms that she has found that "the experience of people with inherited

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60 Emma Tennant, *The Adventures of Robina* (being the memoirs of a débutante at the court of Queen Elizabeth II), editor's note.

wealth and privilege" has not changed very much over the last 200 years, and that this society is still (in the 1980s) "well-supported by Mrs Thatcher" - a testimony from the horse’s mouth, so to speak, of the resilience of the aristocracy in the latter half of the twentieth century. In The Adventures of Robina, eighteenth-century rakes are replaced or paralleled by the "rich and drunk and lecherous people" of London society in the nineteen-fifties, which she satirizes. Like Sackville-West, Miss Tennant appears to be pre-occupied with the negative effects of in-breeding in the aristocracy. One of Robina’s suitors is Lord C-, who, "although sweet by Nature and as fine as an Eagle to look at, had also the Brain of a Bird: in short he was almost idiotic ... ". In the guise of the naive seventeen-year old Robina, Miss Tennant does not spare her own society: "... I feared the Long Hours of Drudgery and very Small Pay at the end of them, for the Nobility thinks it is put in the World to be served"; "... but as I was soon to Discover, the Nobility have no Care for their younger Sons and their Daughters and will treat them Lower than Servants or throw them out altogether to Starve." If the reader should be inclined to ascribe the more outrageous behaviour of the aristocratic characters as being inspired by the eighteenth-century parallels, he is soon adjured by Robina to take her at her word:

In some instances of Tales of the Nobility, there must be a Lack of Credibility, for it hardly seems Likely that they would Act the way they do: let it be said, however, that at no Point have I made up or embroidered my Accounts of them

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62TV interview with James Buxton: Writer’s talk: Ideas of Our Time, from the series Writers in Conversation.

63Ibid.

64Emma Tennant, The Adventures of Robina, p. 83.

65Ibid., p. 89.

66Ibid., p. 98.
Miss Tennant enhances the intimation of veracity in the novel by introducing an element of roman à clef. No-one could miss the allusion to Lord Lucan:

... and then he tells me as we entered the great Salon the names of the Gamblers, who were many of them Earls (and one to be a Wife Murderer but missing his Prey killed the Children's Nurse, all this in later times) ...  

It is probably dangerous to extend the parallels too far, especially in the light of the rather startling activities of most of the aristocratic characters, for indeed, "it hardly seems likely that they would act the way they do", but "the Park of L- where Lions Prowled"\(^69\), seat of the "Marquess of B-", is clearly Longleat, where the Marquess of Bath attracted much attention by the introduction of lions into his private zoo in order to boost tourist numbers so as to help with the upkeep of the magnificent sixteenth-century manor. The Marquess of B-’s heir, Viscount P-, who "was very fine in appearance and like a falcon; and his hair, which was in long braids, was plaited with ribbon and hung down his back"\(^70\) clearly also resembles the Marquess of Bath’s eldest.

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\(^{68}\) Ibid., p. 131.

Richard John Bingham, 7th Earl of Lucan, b. 1934, m. 1963 Veronica, daughter of Major C. Duncan, and had issue 1 son and 2 daughters. Lord Lucan disappeared in 1974 after the murder of his children’s nanny, whom he was suspected of murdering. It was surmised that he may have mistaken the nanny for his estranged wife. Lord Lucan is or was a second cousin of the Princess of Wales’s father, Earl Spencer. (For genealogical details, cf. *Burke’s Peerage and Baronetage*, 1980, p. 1667.)


\(^{70}\) Ibid., p. 99.
son, Viscount Weymouth, who, now living at Longleat with his family, to some extent still sports the appearance of a nineteen-sixties hippy.

The "Eleventh Duke of P-", who

has a Castle so vast that there is a train in the Basement and the Servants load it with Food to take along to the Dining-Room; and that they have lived with their Families on the Estate so long that they have no Idea what Government is in, or how to Vote, which Old Slicer [the Duke of P-] does for them, thus ensuring that his Son, which is second only to the Royal Fog in his Thickness, may stay in as Tory M.P., which indeed he does...  

may refer to the 6th Duke of Portland (who died, however, in 1943, a decade before The Adventures of Robina are supposed to take place), whose ducal seat, Welbeck Abbey, was renowned for its vast subterranean halls and passages, built by the eccentric 5th Duke. The Duke’s attitude towards his tenants is described by Brian Masters in his book, The Dukes, as “feudal in its condescension.” Like the Duke of P-‘s heir, Portland’s son, later the 7th Duke, pursued a political career before his accession to the title, as M.P. for Newark from 1922 until 1943. The Duke of D-, who “has great Estates in Ireland too

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71 Alexander George Thynne, Viscount Weymouth, eldest son of the 6th Marquess of Bath by his first wife Hon. Daphne Vivian, b. 1932, m. 1969 the actress Anna Gael, and has issue: 1 son, 1 daughter. Lord Weymouth achieved a certain notoriety as a "hippy nobleman" in the nineteen-sixties and seventies and is himself the author of a novel Pillars of the Establishment, which also reveals elements of being a roman à clef about his eccentric family. (For genealogical details, cf. Burke’s Peerage and Baronetage, 1980, p. 197.)


and a Castle there ..."75 may owe something to the Dukes of Devonshire, who, apart from owning great estates in England, notably Chatsworth in Derbyshire, are lords of the picturesque Lismore Castle in Co. Waterford, Ireland.

While the work of Emma Tennant is characterized by its great diversity, it is possible to discern some strands which appear common to many of the novels: a pre-occupation with fantasy, a concern with social and feminist issues, and a penchant for comedy. These features would culminate in her later work, Cycle of the Sun. In her interview with James Buxton, Miss Tennant states that she realized more and more that comedy was "the way I would like to go"76. In the light of this realization, she conceived the idea for her Cycle of the Sun, a "conceivably unending series"77 of novels which would deal with the period 1953 to 1981, a period of 28 years, which is apparently the time it takes the sun to complete a full cycle. The novels focus on the lives of four women, who are roughly contemporaries of the author. (They are fourteen in 1953, when she would have been fifteen.) The novels are intended to give a picture of British society evolving over this period, from 1953 - the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II - to 1981, with "Mrs Thatcher on the throne"78. Miss Tennant says that in these novels she hopes to combine social comedy with a huge cast of characters, "representing the extraordinary changes" of the period.79 The first in the series, The House of Hospitalities appeared in 1987 and the second, A Wedding of Cousins, in 1988. Publication of The Christening Party, expected in 1989, has apparently been delayed. In this series, the author's depiction of her own

76Emma Tennant in Writer’s Talk: Ideas of Our Time, TV interview with James Buxton from the series Writers in Conversation.
77Ibid.
78Ibid.
79Ibid.
aristocratic background, of which there had been glimpses in her earlier work and a more sustained view in The Adventures of Robina, becomes more precisely focused.

Jenny Carter, the narrator, is a fairly colourless middle-class girl, who, in the second novel, becomes a gilder of mirrors, denoting her function to reflect the reality she perceives, but also her tendency to indulge in fantasy, as she herself puts it mournfully: "... a fatal flaw in my make-up, this being the confusion of fiction and reality". Seduced by the "fatal sense of privilege ... seen in every gesture and thought of the Lovescombe family", Jenny feels herself participating in the preservation of the charmed existence of the aristocracy "who saw themselves reflected as the fairest of them all (albeit slightly distressed by the vagaries of war and taxation)". Her confusion of fact and fantasy is inevitably involved with the aristocratic family of her friend, the Hon. Amy Rudd, the second of the four central characters. Jenny's neutrality in the novel is functional as she is in fact the lens through which the reader perceives the momentous, often chaotic events depicted in the two novels. Her normalcy and median quality is anchored in her social and personal circumstances. Her background is characterized in terms of her Aunt Babs, an antiques stall-holder.

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82 Emma Tennant, A Wedding of Cousins, p. 81.
83 At the risk again of overestimating the significance of biographical evidence in the text, it may be pointed out that the names Amy and Emma are historically related. Emma Lady Hamilton, Nelson's mistress of legendary beauty, started life as Amy Lyon, for example. Miss Tennant also has twin nieces, the daughters of her brother Colin (Lord Glenconnor), called Amy and May. There are also other evident similarities between the Tennants and the Rudds. Both families have an impressive Castle in Scotland as their seat and in both cases the family fortune was derived from industry, however aristocratic the descendants may be.
in the Portobello Road who votes for the Labour Party, representing liberal values and common sense ("Nurture not Nature produced the end result, the Child was but a poor shadow of the Man"\textsuperscript{84}), and Aunt Babs's friend, the Brigadier, who expresses a traditionalist point-of-view. Between the two of them they provide a solid middle class perspective on the hectic events in the novels, establishing a kind of ethical touchstone for Jenny and for the reader. As Jenny admits quite early in \textit{The House of Hospitalities}, "I did not know then ... that Aunt Babs' Sunday School feelings of what was 'right' and what was wrong would bias her automatically against Amy's parents."\textsuperscript{85}

In contrast to the solidity of Aunt Babs's world stands the turbulence of the world of Lovegrove, the estate of the aristocratic Rudd family. The plot of \textit{The House of Hospitalities} is set in motion when Jenny is invited to spend a week-end at Lovegrove with Amy, daughter of Lord and Lady Lovescombe, after Candida Tarn, Amy's self-appointed best friend, has fallen ill. Attracted by the indefinable glamour of the patrician school-girl ("... she shone like some distant, pale star - fallen among us, but not to stay for long ..."\textsuperscript{86}), Jenny accepts the invitation, in spite of her aunt's objections. "All I knew, after the drab months of a London summer, still threadbare after the war, was that I wanted magic ..."\textsuperscript{87}, Jenny says, suggesting the element of fantasy in the Rudd establishment which gradually emerges as a dominant feature. The "otherness" of Lovegrove is immediately brought to the reader's attention by the change in Jenny's reaction to her environment. As the two girls are driven through the Lovegrove Valley on their way to the estate, Jenny muses:

\begin{quote}
The countryside was as familiar and comforting as a
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., p. 8.

\textsuperscript{86}Ibid., p. 11.

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., p. 9.
childhood blanket, worn in places, with holes of blackness where the night fell in a combe or dip. Nothing would surprise me here: I knew it all even though I had never been before.  

When they arrive at Lovegrove, her response changes at once:

... I felt on the one hand that I must abandon my case, flee down the drive, take shelter in the squat church and then creep in the direction of home as it grew dark and the shadows from the tall oaks came across the road with their festoons of smaller ivy shadows; and on the other that in this plethora of shade and obscurity I might lose myself altogether.

The full unknown-ness of the country came home to me.  

The darkness and obscurity of the landscape is predictably a metaphor for the psychological and moral turmoil Jenny will encounter in this phantasmagoric aristocratic abode. Jenny's confusion is soon increased as she becomes a chance spectator to a nocturnal encounter in the garden between Amy's father, Lord Lovescombe, and a "naked form, almost pearlized, waxy and with a black triangle at the base of the slender stomach" who turns out to be Jasmine Tremlett, wife of one of the other weekend guests. Jenny finds herself in a twilight world, anticipated by the "plethora of shade and obscurity" at her arrival, where there are no limits on modes of behaviour. Here reality and fantasy merge imperceptibly (Aunt Babs afterwards refers drily to the week-end as the "Lovegrove Fantasia"), people appear to

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89 Ibid., p. 23.
90 Ibid., p. 37.
91 Emma Tennant, A Wedding of Cousins, p. 11.
have licence to be "sick all over the place". Lady Lovescombe unperturbably bathes naked in the garden pond with a male guest, and blasphemy and Marxism are propounded by drunken guests midst the most splendid manifestations of capitalist materialism.

The comedy in the first novel reaches a climax during dinner in the magnificent dining-room of Lovegrove. Owing to an unfortunate combination of circumstances, Jenny escorts Lord Lovecombe's drunken brother-in-law, Victor Crane, a writer with revolutionary sympathies, into the dining-room, starting an evening which would become for her "the most painful and frequent" of returning memories. Crane's drunkenness to some extent precipitates the chaos:

His mouth was right down in the soup plate, showing only the alternate baldness and hirsuteness of his scalp .... Lapping sounds, outdoing even my inexperienced attempts to drink the soup, came up from his plate ...  

When his plate is forcibly removed by the butler, who, maddened by the usurping of what was presumably his proudest moment of the day [presenting the first grouse of the season], tugged at the plate; Crane's head, dislodged by the action, lolled on to the table and lay still.

A battle for the platter of grouse breaks out between the butler and the parlourmaid, with surreal but farcical Walpurgisnacht consequences:

By this time Vine, who was in the midst of handing Victor 

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92 Emma Tennant, The House of Hospitalities, p. 29.  
93 Ibid., p. 57.  
94 Ibid., p. 61.  
95 Ibid., p. 62.
Crane’s soup plate to the parlourmaid while simultaneously relieving her of the silver dish, had reached a position midway between Walter Neet [a plump, elderly painter of popular landscapes] and Mary Crane. A leg of grouse came down fast, its accompanying garnish of feathers going up in the air as if the bird had just been shot ....

‘How exciting!’ cried poor Mary Crane, as the claws, sharp as old heather roots and, with what seemed at a distance to be Chinese-yellow toenails, fastened on her shoulders. ‘Did you have a good bag this year?’ Mary Crane went desperately on, while small moans, interspersed with ‘I’ll clear this up’ and apologies which seemed totally unnecessary, proceeded also from her. Neet, who had only received a small stream of gravy from the sloping hand of the now-flustered parlourmaid, mopped himself with an air of importance, as if he had just been awarded an accolade or an invitation at least to paint the mountains of Lord Lovescombe’s northern seat. ‘How disgusting,’ Amalia Drifton said coldly.96

The farcical events are interspersed with graphic and unsparing descriptions of the various diners in their most unadorned state: Lord Lovecombe’s “twisted, rather rubbery lips thickened considerably in a downward pout” while a “ridge of flesh across the brow - which gave him the slightly unreal expression of a clown who has hastily pulled on a mask with attached hair - contorted itself into a contour-map frown”97; Victor Crane sports a “filthy dog-collar and stained front”98, while Walter Neet’s “face and neck, never a calm colour, had turned from a rough putty to a deep brick, and various pustules, not noticeable before, had pushed up under the strain”.99 After the incident

96Emma Tennant, The House of Hospitalities, p. 64.
97Ibid., p. 58.
98Ibid., p. 59.
99Ibid., p. 63.
with the grouse he displays a "gravy-darkened face"\textsuperscript{100}, just as Mary Crane finds herself in a "grouse-spattered state"\textsuperscript{101}. Over this riotous spectacle presides the sublime portrait of Lord Lovescombe's mother, Marguerite Lady Azeby, the Soul, "the paragon of sweet manners, ethereality and joy, the cloud-washed woman in white"\textsuperscript{102}, suggesting the contrast between the intellectual and moral vitality of a pre-World War I aristocratic society such as the Souls, and the dissolute profligacy of their post-War heirs, as well as the contrast between the superficial perception of contemporary aristocracy entertained by most people (to Jenny's imagination life at Lovegrove was personified by the elegance of a Chinese bowl) and the gruesome reality of their self-indulgent, harsh fleshly humanity.

As Jenny learns more about the fantastic life of the people of Lovegrove, she begins to understand the reason for the complete freedom from constraints, the libertinism which holds court at Lovegrove. It appears that Lovegrove has detached itself from the flow of history, it is caught in the bubble of a past still manifest in its material grandeur and grace, but shorn of any behavioural or ethical responsibilities or constraints:

... Lovegrove simply didn't exist. Caught in a warp of time which had somehow been 'blown' by the Lovescombe money, ... Lovegrove would go at the prick of a pin, vanish into the clouds of its own long-lost assumptions. The trouble was, there was no pin to prick it with.\textsuperscript{103}

The magnificent surroundings in the dining room appear to eclipse the inhabitants and their activities:

\textsuperscript{100}Emma Tennant, The House of Hospitalities, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{101}Ibid., p. 65.
\textsuperscript{102}Ibid., p. 61.
\textsuperscript{103}Ibid., p. 72.
Between her [Lady Lovescombe] and her husband stood two gold candelabra the size of small trees. Deer reclined at their feet, satyrs circled the heavy bases and leaves of an exquisite delicacy in both gold and silver fluted out on all sides, thus further obscuring Lord and lady Lovescombe from each other ....

It is ironical that Lady Azeby, who is artistically portrayed as ethereal to the point of being ephemeral, presides over the meal as "the most remarkable woman of her time". The very nature of the intellectual commitment and eminence that rendered her circle superior to the flippant society life of her time, now trivializes the buffoonery of her progeny.

It seemed that in surroundings like Lovegrove, any behaviour could be tolerated, because none of it made the slightest difference. The surroundings, and their dead progenitors, were all.

The superior vitality of the past over the present at Lovegrove is also suggested by the fact that Jenny is struck by the contrast between her first impression of the interior of Lovegrove - "all around was dead", and her impression of the ancestral portraits later encountered on the walls of Lovegrove:

They were put about so naturally, somehow, their faces, glowing and ruddy, looking as if they had just been painted, and the odd wig or lace ruffing seeming no more than a slight affectation. They were alive, certainly, unlike the parlour of dead game which was the first sight

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105 Ibid., p. 65.
106 Ibid., p. 74.
107 Ibid., p. 23.
of Lovegrove ....

Jenny’s feeling that the household has been caught in a spell, "an enchanted sleep"\(^{109}\), is not far wrong - Lovegrove and its inhabitants are in thrall to the past, and this ironically liberates them from all behavioural constraints to conform to the demands of the present. The House of Hospitalities concludes with a strong suggestion of incest in the Lovecombe family and A Wedding of Cousins with an intimation of sexual deviance. The reviewer of the Times Literary Supplement comments on the implications of the absence of any behavioural restraint:

What seems shocking is not their coldness or their sexual peccadilloes, but that of which they are the symptom: their self-image as the most powerful, the autonomous, a contrivedly in-bred race who will own Lovegrove and England for ever.\(^{110}\)

It gradually becomes clear that the nature of the spell that the past has cast upon the aristocracy - the malaise that pervades Lovescombe and lies at the root of the chaotic behaviour of its inhabitants - is one of glorious immaturity; the aristocracy is characterized as being caught and revelling in a kind of permanent childhood:

... the permanent childhood of adults decked out in the contents of a dressing-up box where the fabulous furs are real and the great paste stones in the tiaras prove, on closer examination, to come from the mines of South Africa.\(^{111}\)


\(^{109}\)Ibid., p. 51.


\(^{111}\)Emma Tennant, The House of Hospitalities, p. 127.
It appears that the matriarchal superintendence of Marguerite Lady Azeby is perpetuated in that the fantasy gardens she designed becomes a symbol of life at Lovegrove - a children's playground for her heirs. These gardens astonish Jenny on her arrival there, with slender bridges, which seemed, in the last setting of the sun, to be painted crimson and gold: gently humped, in a crisscross pattern over innumerable streams, each choked with water-lily pads and wild nasturtiums .... Somewhere in the middle distance, ... was a flat stretch, an artificial stream wider than the rest, spanned by a small house.\textsuperscript{112} 

Amy, "clearly enjoying herself" reverts to the behaviour of "a younger child, conspiratorial, whispering even"\textsuperscript{113} and explains that her grandmother used to go out at night in the boat - in this boat - and she used to take the children with her .... She built all the little houses for the children, you see, Jenny. And they loved her so much too.\textsuperscript{114}

Lovegrove is a permanent children's playground, inhabited by overgrown children, a "kind of refuge against the grown-up world"\textsuperscript{115}. Jenny's instinctive reaction, "which much later I

\textsuperscript{112}Emma Tennant, \textit{The House of Hospitalities}, pp. 32 - 33.

\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., p. 33.

\textsuperscript{114}Ibid., p. 35.

\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., p. 116.

As has been mentioned elsewhere, the childlike quality of the aristocracy is depicted in a considerable proportion of aristocratic novels. Like Amy and the Rudds, Sebastian with his teddy in \textit{Brideshead Revisited} (cf. chapter 2) also seeks refuge from an uncongenial "grown-up world". The childish amusements and occupations of aristocrats are also described or discussed by V. Sackville-West, Nancy Mitford and Molly Keane, each author
was able to identify as an unease - or disease - caused perhaps by too much exposure to the Lovescombe family"\textsuperscript{116}, recognizes the permanently immature condition of the Lovescombe family as unhealthy. She would later refer to "Amy's sometimes barbaric fairytale life ..."\textsuperscript{117} and come to the conclusion that "Amy's own brand of childishness was of a more perverse kind. Amy was capable ... of involving another person ..."\textsuperscript{118}, likewise suggesting the pernicious quality of the aristocracy's refusal to grow up and accept the ethical burden of their inheritance and all it entails.

The theme of childishness reaches its climax with the visit to the house of Uncle Si\textsuperscript{119}, one of Marguerite's children, in the fantasy garden of Lovegrove. Jenny is "awestruck at the enduringness, the solidity of this fantasy of permanent immaturity."\textsuperscript{120} She comes to understand that Lovegrove: "the village, the green, the timber house with gabled roofs high in giving it a particular significance according to his or her own pre-occupations. Miss Tennant's treatment of the topic is, however, the most comprehensive and the most penetrating.

\begin{itemize}
  \item[iii] Emma Tennant, \textit{The House of Hospitalities}, p. 36.
  \item[iii] Ibid., p. 79.
  \item[iii] Ibid., p. 102.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{119} The face, I saw, was made up: powder, a bright white with a tinge of green - 'an arsenic Burne-Jones', as Walter Neet was to pronounce later .... Vermilion lips made up the rest, eyes languorous under lids so innocently a blue as those Arabian skies so hated by Aunt Babs. He must have been at least fifty-five. A straggle of blond, greying chest-hair poked out from the opening of the djellaba ....

\textsuperscript{120} Emma Tennant, \textit{The House of Hospitalities}, p. 130.

the trees were the playthings of a giant, a gigantic infant\textsuperscript{121}, a fake world, where she finds herself uncertainly on "terracotta rather than terra firma"\textsuperscript{122}. Gradually Jenny arrives at an appreciation of the moral implications of the contemporary aristocracy's continuing infancy:

... this meant too, an absence of judgment of what is right and wrong, the whole place resembling somehow the mind and preoccupations of a child before the age of moral sense sets in.\textsuperscript{123}

Lovegrove is thus a kind of artificial Eden-before-the-fall, in which the Rudds and their circle, unaware of or insensitive to the knowledge of good and evil, can enjoy all the benefits of a world artificially protected from material want, while at the same time enjoying a complete liberty of behaviour far exceeding that which Adam and Eve enjoyed before their summary expulsion from paradise. The Brigadier would later jestingly refer to Jenny and her friends' dismissal from Lovegrove at the end of the week-end as their having been "thrown out of the garden of Eden"\textsuperscript{124}. We are not to think that the Lovescombes' absence of judgment constitutes a benevolent "innocence", however. The author leaves us in no doubt as to "the extraordinary damage and unhappiness the Lovescombe family could cause, not only to its own members but to anyone who happened to cross its path."\textsuperscript{125} It also emerges that for the Lovescombes - "in a warp of time" - the Edwardian creed that principle is subservient to appearances, so clearly demonstrated in V. Sackville-West's *The Edwardians*, a kind of perversion of *noblesse oblige*, still applies as rigorously in the second half of the century as in the first

\textsuperscript{121}Emma Tennant, *The House of Hospitalities*, p. 131.

\textsuperscript{122}Ibid., p. 138.

\textsuperscript{123}Ibid., pp. 139 - 140.

\textsuperscript{124}Emma Tennant, *A Wedding of Cousins*, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{125}Ibid., p. 163.
What shocked me too much at that point ... was that the Lovescombes were perfectly happy with their 'arrangement' [of mutual infidelity]; that as long as 'appearances' were kept up they felt free to do as they pleased ...."^{126}

Amy's earlier assertions about her grandmother's love for children is also balanced by Jenny's later understanding that the fact that the garden had been screened off ... from the house was of course symptomatic of the Lovescombe - or Edwardian - way of treating children: most of the time to be neither seen nor heard, but 'spoilt' with gifts, inheritances, gardens of their own."^{127}

The prevalence of Edwardian values in modern aristocratic families paradoxically also confirms their resilience in the face of hostile historical developments:

It took me a long time to understand that although most people believed, as Aunt Babs did, that a certain way of life had gone forever with the war, it did in fact linger on in pockets and was about to reassert itself with astonishing vigour."^{128}

What makes it possible for the Lovescombes to maintain their fairy-tale in the face of twentieth-century social reality is quite simply their monumental wealth: "That money was the very pigment that ran through the pictures at Lovegrove, the cement of the fairytale construction, was undoubtedly true."^{129}


^{127}Ibid., p. 160.

^{128}Ibid., p. 60.

^{129}Ibid., p. 181.
Jenny’s statement about the future resurgence of the aristocratic way of life is one of the many bits of evidence dispersed through the novels to indicate that while the action of the novels take place in the nineteen-fifties (1953 and 1957 respectively), it is written with hindsight from a later vantage point, that the Cycle of the Sun indeed constitutes a perspective on the progress of the aristocracy through the second half of the twentieth century, observed from the nineteen-eighties "with Mrs Thatcher on the throne". In A Wedding of Cousins in particular, the reader is reminded throughout that he or she is participating in a retrospective view from the Thatcher era, across the turbulent nineteen-sixties to the nineteen-fifties. Jenny comments for example

It is possible, I suppose, to see the evening of Amy’s ball in Regent’s Park as a kind of signpost ... to the new age .... I saw only the first manifestations of the casual violence which was to be taken for granted before long; and too, the first sign of the craze for personal publicity ... which was to overtake society, turning people and things into saleable commodities and promoting money before all else, so that those values, however easily ridiculed, of the Brigadier, say, or Aunt Babs herself, with her dedication to art and frugal pleasures, were totally swept away.\(^{130}\)

Other reminders include references to the hippy era, to the Harrods bomb, and to later conventions as regards morality and speech. One of the other central characters in the series, Candida Tarn, another school friend of Jenny and Amy’s and "clearly marked out as one of Nature’s Head Girls\(^{131}\), is according to the author’s own avowal the Mrs Thatcher of the series, who in the course of the Cycle will rise through the

\(^{130}\)Emma Tennant, A Wedding of Cousins, pp. 23 - 24.

\(^{131}\)Ibid., p. 151.
ranks of the Conservative Party and become Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{132} Candida’s revolutionary brother, Leopold Tarn, representing the rise of the left-wing movement which would culminate with the dominance of the Labour Party in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, remarks with prophetic insight: “My sister wishes to save the ruling class.”\textsuperscript{133} According to Miss Tennant, Candida/Mrs Thatcher has been very successful in achieving her aim. The patronage by the Lovescombes of the middle-class immigrant Candida also raises the possibility that she may have been purposefully selected for her saving mission by the manipulative aristocracy.

While \textit{The House of Hospitalities} is structured around a single disastrous week-end at Lovegrove, \textit{A Wedding of Cousins} has a more episodic structure. The development of the plot is punctuated by a number of intensely chaotic farcical scenes (or "anarchic incidents")\textsuperscript{134} taking place at for example, Amy’s coming out ball, the bridal department at Harrods, the "Bunch of Grapes" saloon bar, a political demonstration for disarmament, Aunt Babs’s cocktail party and finally Amy’s wedding. Patricia Craig comments,

> With this novel sequence, Emma Tennant is attempting, and in the course of bringing off, a review of social history as contretemps, with every conjunction of Jenny and the Lovescombes sparking off an outbreak of pivotal disorder – disorder pointing forward to the hedonism of the 1960s, as it may be, while post-war austerity and the English decorum remain officially in force.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{132}In the TV interview with James Buxton: \textit{Writer’s Talk: Ideas of Our Time}, from the series \textit{Writers in Conversation}.

\textsuperscript{133}Emma Tennant, \textit{A Wedding of Cousins}, p. 148.

\textsuperscript{134}Patricia Craig, "Exorbitantly upper", a review of \textit{A Wedding of Cousins} by Emma Tennant in the \textit{Times Literary Supplement}, 30 September – 6 October 1988, p. 1068.

\textsuperscript{135}Ibid.
All the main characters appear to gather in these pivotal farcical scenes, however unlikely their convergence (for example at Aunt Babs’s cocktail party), and the fourth central character, Carmen, is usually at the heart of the chaos. Carmen appears to represent the very principle of anarchy: she is the bad girl, the "dirty girl" of the fifties, who we are informed will be heavily involved in the drug scene of the sixties ("... he's got the most heavenly consignment of kif, from Tangier" she already remarks in 1957) and with the terrorism of the seventies. She personifies anti-social forces, inimical to both the establishment represented by Aunt Babs and the Brigadier, and to the self-satisfied plutocracy of the Lovescombes. She is not without charisma: "... there was something magnificent, almost mythical about her" and

... like Picasso's many-faceted woman, she could be seen as saint and sinner, harlot and madonna, bluestocking and sorceress all in one - but could wreak transformations, sometimes, it had to be admitted, of the most sadistic kind, on her fellow human beings.

Carmen appears to be improbably well-informed on the intricacies and activities of the world of high finance, as of the underworld and the private privileged world of the Lovescombes. She is the first to warn Jenny that Amy is not happy with her engagement to her distant cousin Crispin Hare, son of the novelist J.D Hare, and that she is being forced into the marriage by the Lovescombes.

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136 Emma Tennant, A Wedding of Cousins, p. 4.
Cf. also Emma Tennant’s discussion of the character in her TV interview with James Buxton, Writers Talk: Ideas of Our Time, from the series Writers in Conversation.

137 Ibid., p. 104.

138 Ibid., p. 105.

139 Ibid., p. 107.
for financial and family reasons. (Miss Tennant herself married Sebastian Yorke, who was the son of the novelist Henry Yorke - Henry Green - and was related to her through the Wyndham family, at the age of nineteen; the marriage did not last.) Here Tennant suggests that people like the Lovescombes are not only the perpetrators of unhappiness through their callousness and imperviousness to the well-being or even existence of others, but also sometimes the victims of their class attitudes. Amy's brother Ludo, with whom Jenny appears to be hopelessly in love, ruefully betrays an attitude of: "I am nothing ... I can do nothing, the place and possessions are everything."¹⁴¹ Likewise, when an anguished and unwilling Amy is forced to select presents for her bridal attendants in a glass shop, Jenny observes:

Their [the Lovescombes'] indifference to Amy's red eyes and obvious unhappiness could be explained this way, for happiness or unhappiness had nothing to do with settlements, rites, inheritance, succession, indeed, as I saw - and shuddered at seeing it - those red eyes could, for all they cared, have, like the mice's, been made of glass.¹⁴²

With a characteristic concern for the social dilemma of women, Miss Tennant also deals with Amy's situation in terms of sexual prejudice. In an era when a woman for the first time "could see the possibility of an interesting life, a life more interesting and independent than that led by her mother's generation", Amy "saw herself offered only the option of a conventional marriage, childbearing and, if her father was generous to her, continued shopping and travels abroad."¹⁴³ Whereas Vita Sackville-West, the other aristocratic writer interested in gender issues, suggests that the aristocratic woman (e.g. Lady Viola in The

¹⁴¹Emma Tennant, A Wedding of Cousins, p. 66.
¹⁴²Ibid., p. 114 - 115.
¹⁴³Ibid., p. 124.
Edwardians and *Family History*) is in a better position to overcome sexual prejudice because of her material and social advantages, Miss Tennant suggests the opposite. After a brief and rather feeble attempt at rebellion, an observably subdued Amy is inevitably married to Crispin Hare, and Jenny is forced to contemplate the repellant probability that it could "be true that money was really, as Carmen would claim, the arbiter of all men's actions; and if so, wasn't poor Amy more of a victim of an eighteenth-century type of society than even of a Victorian one?"  

Jenny's conclusion illustrates what distinguishes Emma Tennant from other literary commentators on the aristocracy - the radical difference with which she regards the aristocracy's relationship to the past. Almost all the novelists are pre-occupied with the past, but they inevitably look upon it as a golden era, longed for and missed, replaced by the unpalatable mediocrities of a democratic present. Miss Tennant, witnessing the remarkable financial recuperation and even resurgence of her class, focuses on the hold of the past as a *malaise* which imprisons the existing aristocracy in a self-indulgent paralysis, condemning them to a perpetual intellectual and moral infancy. In the novels of Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane, attachment to the past originating in a reverence for expired vitality and a reluctance to come to terms with the drab present, is also shown to cripple the modern progeny of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy (cf. chapter 4). Emma Tennant, however, concentrates on the lucrative legacy of the past, which, rather than preserving and sustaining the vitality of a social order that is intellectually beneficent, in fact putrefies its beneficiaries. While in other aristocratic novels, there is a play-off between the decadence of the class on the one hand, ascribed either to an internal decline in principle or to external circumstances (the war, the loss of political power, for example), and its resilience on the other, Miss Tennant unexpectedly and powerfully fuses the two forces in

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a paradox. In her work, the resilience of the class depends on, even resides in its decadence. She suggests that it is because the aristocracy negate the high principles of service and example traditionally associated with their class, and have dedicated themselves with all the vigour at their disposal to the callous preservation and accrual of their wealth and privilege, that they have achieved a remarkable and unanticipated resurgence in the latter half of this century. These first two novels in Miss Tennant's Cycle of the Sun disabuse the reader about the nature of the contemporary aristocratic world as powerfully as Jenny Carter, the middle-class narrator is disabused. Far from sinking into a romantic twilight of helplessness and collapse, these latter day patricians exhibit a ruthless determination to preserve their environment of privilege on any terms. Miss Tennant exposes the eccentricities and child-like qualities of the aristocracy in her graphic humour, but also proves herself a penetrating interpreter of Golding's Lord of the Flies in her clear-headed grasp of the savage self-concern which is an integral part of the childish, petulant will of a spoilt class.

Emma Tennant is unsparing in her anatomy of her own class, just as she is Swiftian in her use of satire to search out truth. In this way, she herself ironically re-asserts the neglected values of her intellectual predecessors, personified by Marguerite Lady Azeby in her novels, and emulates the social consciousness and dedication to service which distinguished the Souls from the self-indulgent and pleasure-seeking pampered set of the time. Her work may perhaps thus be said to represent those values which characterize the aristocracy as representative of an ethical excellence rather than material pre-eminence. In an aristocrat's satire of the aristocracy, she recalls her class to a sober reckoning and invites the reader to consider their true value rather than gape at their opulence. Miss Tennant may be a modern Soul to her family and her class in her capacity as an artistic monitor. One can only assess the quality and nature of her contribution to the genre of the aristocratic novel by the two works which have already appeared in the Cycle of the Sun series,
and it is of course possible that Miss Tennant may modify or even reverse her stance. Judging by the two novels that have been published, this appears unlikely; an astute perspective and an ethical structure have been established. While the London share index may testify to the material resurgence of the British upper classes in the last decades of the twentieth century, the stringent self-appraisal and unflinching honesty of a writer like Emma Tennant paradoxically witnesses to the intellectual resilience of her class.
Then he took her back to his kingdom, where all rejoiced to have their Prince back again, and he lived with Rapunzel for many years in joy and happiness. No one knew what had become of the Witch, nor did they care.¹

In his pioneering work on myth, the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss uses myth to discover "principles of thought formation which are universally valid for all human minds."² In the light of his work, it would appear not unfounded to suggest that the prevalence of the aristocracy in Western myth, such as one finds in Grimm's fairy-tales, reveals a certain predisposition to that privileged class of men in the Western mind. In her authoritative study of fairy tales, Marie-Louise von Franz remarks,

Fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes. Therefore their value for the scientific investigation of the unconscious exceeds that of all other material. They represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest and most concise form. In this pure form, the archetypal images afford us the best clues to the understanding of the processes going on in the collective psyche.³

In *Queen of Stones*, Emma Tennant's "feminist answer to *Lord of the Flies*", she sets out to expose "the kinds of myths, kinds of


lies"⁴ that society puts into girls. She makes a group of girls who have been isolated from their elders act out the fairy-stories, myths, ways they should behave, instilled in them by their upbringing. The dominant myth they eventually enact centres on the cousins Queen Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots, so that the novel supports the pre- eminent occurrence of aristocratic myth in Western thinking.⁵

Lévi-Strauss asks us to believe that category formation in human beings follows similar "universal" paths. It is not that it must always happen in the same way everywhere but that the human brain is so constructed that it is predisposed to develop categories of a particular kind in a particular way.⁶

It would thus appear that in Jungian terms, the noble characters prevalent in Western myths are in some way archetypes of the "collective unconscious". In an interesting article on the astounding and perennial popularity of the Princess of Wales, a South African journalist has suggested that the Princess's fame and staggering public favour can be traced to her role as the modern embodiment of the mythical fairy-tale princess.⁷ The author takes individual aspects of Diana's personality and allure, and compares them point by point to the characteristics of the heroines of some of the better known traditional fairy-tales. Likewise, in The Ultimate Family⁸, his study of the Royal family, John Pearson ascribes a great deal of the Royal


⁵Emma Tennant, Queen of Stones, London: Jonathan Cape, 1982.

⁶Edmund Leach, Claude Lévi-Strauss, p. 39.


family’s contemporary public-relations success, and particularly the Diana phenomenon (“A Megastar is Made”), to the perpetuation of the "transformation myth" (in the Princess’s case shy kindergarten teacher into glamorous radiant princess), revitalized and reinforced by the power of television, bringing the fairy-tale into the households of millions of fantasy-starved viewers. He describes the Royal Wedding of 1981 - like the coronation of 1953 - as a "ritual television transformation scene" and refers to the "Cinderella quotient" involved:

Once the simple heroine was so magnificently and so romantically inducted into the fabled world of royalty, that billion-strong audience ... needed to know what happened next ....

Indeed, Diana appears to reflect the Cinderella story more than any other myth: of noble birth she had yet suffered unhappiness (her parents’ divorce, a "wicked stepmother") and had found herself in an occupation associated with the lower orders (nanny). Beautiful, gentle and kind, she then married Prince Charming, who had unsuccessfully been looking for his ideal bride for many years. Pearson comments: "To date, the most extraordinary thing about Diana has been the total dedication and success with which she proceeded to respond to the dream-role the world expected her to play."

What both Lévi-Strauss and these journalistic writers suggest appears to be in fact an expression of a basic human requirement.

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10 Ibid.
11 Cracks have started to appear in this particular fairy-tale perception in 1992 with persistent allegations that the marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales is in trouble. However, support for the Princess of Wales appears not to have diminished and the rumours probably merely indicate a new phase in the myth surrounding the Princess: the martyrdom of Diana.
The aristocracy holds or commands the attention of modern readers because the class, or perhaps the idea of the class, answers a universal desire for the personification of the heroic. Just as Homer's tales of god-like warriors held both reciter and audience in rapture, so there seems to be an urgent primal need amongst modern urbanized citizens for the myth of an heroic order of human beings, larger than life, supplying the cramped imagination of listless suburban inhabitants with the sense of a larger, freer existence. The aristocracy appears to possess this greater strength to the point of mythic potency. Deriving a principle from Freud, Lévi-Strauss suggests that "myths express unconscious wishes which are somehow inconsistent with conscious experience". The transformation of goose girl into princess, of frog into prince, is surely an expression of man's desire to escape from uncongenial circumstances into a fantasy world of mythic power. The House of Windsor makes it to some extent possible to believe that this fantastic transformation is a living reality.

This explains the perpetual success of the best-selling novel with an aristocratic bent in this century. Barbara Cartland, Victoria Holt, Dorothy Eden, Josephine Edgar, Catherine Gaskin, Catherine Cookson, Georgette Heyer, Baroness Orczy and others of their ilk have fascinated, entranced and entertained millions of readers with their romantic tales of ladies and gentlemen of the nobility or gentry, in novels ranging from the frankly abominably written and hideously sentimental to the sometimes meticulously researched and authentically humorous. In an article on the historical novels of Georgette Heyer, Booker Prize winner A.S. Byatt makes out a very convincing case for the merits of this author's writing as "good" escapist literature. She

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13 Edmund Leach, Claude Lévi-Strauss, p. 61.

14 By 1985, Miss Cartland was for example credited with approximately 370 books, with sales in the region of 370 million. (Cf. L.H. Hugo, "A Defence of Popular Fiction" in the South African Journal for Library and Information Science, Vol. 53, number 4, 1985, p. 174.)
refers to the aristocratic world in Miss Heyer's novels as a "myth ... we were brought up to believe in":

I think the clue to her success is somewhere here - in the precise balance she achieves between romance and reality, fantastic plot and real detail. Her good taste, her knowledge, and the literary and social conventions of the time she is writing about all contribute to a romanticised anti-romanticism: an impossibly desirable world of prettiness, silliness and ultimate good sense where men and women really talk to each other, know what is going on between them, and plan to spend the rest of their lives together developing the relationship .... It is a myth and an idealisation, but it is one we were brought up to believe in .... And because of Georgette Heyer's innocence and lack of prurience we can still retreat into this Paradise of ideal solutions, knowing it for what it is, comforted by its temporary actuality, nostalgically refreshed for coping with the quite different tangle of preconceptions, conventions and social emphases we have to live with. Which is what good escape literature is about.¹⁵

Also on the credit side, Catherine Gaskin's work normally demonstrates intensive research on the background of her best-selling novels, e.g. the English porcelain industry in The Tilsit Inheritance (1963), the Irish glass industry in The Edge of Glass (1967), the Scottish whisky industry in A Falcon for a Queen (1972) and the Spanish sherry industry in The Summer of the Spanish Woman (1977). Susan Howatch, another popular romance writer, surprises the discerning reader, probably only a small percentage of the millions who read her blockbuster novels, with a penetrating knowledge of English history and literature - allusions to T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets intriguingly woven into tales of great fortunes, sex, intrigue and international business

All of these authors make use of aristocratic characters and an aristocratic ambience to glamorize their stories and imbue them with the heroic, for which there appears to be a universal yearning, ironically but understandably even more so in an age which has postulated the equality of all men. An aristocratic presence appears to concede a dimension of wealth and privilege, of ancient tradition, of gracious living, of mystic power to any tale, however mundane it might otherwise be. There is a persistent though illogical conviction that somehow the members of the aristocracy are intrinsically different from ordinary mortals, a belief exemplified by the very term "blue blood", suggesting a physiological distinction, depicted for example in the attitude of the school girls at St Peter’s to the aristocratic pupil Amy Rudd in Emma Tennant’s novel, The House of Hospitalities:

For in a school with three hundred and upwards girls (and all in the hideous uniform of St Peter’s in that day, which was, I suppose, 1953) she stood out absolutely. In a sea of blue-and-white ruled blouses, under a gym slip of barbaric cut, she shone like some distant, pale star - fallen among us, but not to stay for long. Different.¹⁶

Many of the best-selling romances appear to follow a formula very similar to the "transformation myth" defined by Pearson, and thus make it possible for the reader to enjoy vicariously the magical transformation of an ordinary girl (usually), like the reader, to the mystic heights of aristocratic privilege and empowerment. Contemporary romance writers have changed their approach to adapt to ruder tastes and recent blockbusters such as Sally Beaumont’s Destiny (1987) and Dark Angel (1990), and Susan Howatch’s historical novels, follow a formula containing considerably more sex, depravity and squalor than would have been countenanced in

earlier exponents of this genre, but still maintain the aristocratic ambience as a sine qua non.

A number of non-romance popular authors have also used the aristocratic element to lend additional appeal to their novels. Of these the most famous is probably Dorothy L. Sayers whose sleuth, Lord Peter Wimsey, is at once a consummate detective and a representative of a disappearing caste, "an eighteenth century Whig gentleman, born a little out of his time"\(^\text{17}\), a survivor from the generation and dispensation that had been destroyed by the First World War, embodied by such historical figures as the Hon. Julian Grenfell and his brother William\(^\text{18}\), romantic handsome men, poets, soldiers and sportsmen, who approached life with the chivalric principles espoused by their class since the Middle Ages, enhanced by the intellectual interests of the eighteenth century. It is the aristocratic elegance, courage, phlegm, intelligence, sportsmanship, scholarship, sartorial panache and general blue-blooded savoir-faire that have made Lord Peter Wimsey the perennial success that he is.

In a discussion of popular aristocratic writing it is impossible to omit reference to that master of comic diversion, P.G. Wodehouse, who depicts the life and mores of the upper classes in his countless humorous novels. Although the upper crust appears to be the butt of Wodehouse's wit, he does actually suggest a distinctive code of behaviour which positively distinguishes the upper-class gentleman from other mortals. The ironic self-revelation of Bertie Wooster's earnest confidences reveals a man who is certainly - by his own admission - dim-witted, but nevertheless decent, loyal and chivalrous, and endowed with a kind of instinctive discretion which sees him


\(^{18}\)Hon. Julian Grenfell (1888 - 1915) and the Hon. William Grenfell (1890 - 1915), sons of Lord Desborough, were both killed in action within three months of each other in the First World War.
through most difficulties, albeit usually with the invaluable help of his competent "gentleman's gentleman". The contrast between Wooster and Jeeves is also more complex than the simple inversion depicted in *The Admirable Crichton* - competent servant versus incompetent master. Wooster reveals a certain aristocratic panache, even if it surfaces in such inconsequential matters as a penchant for snappy socks, which is beyond the understanding and reach of the staid though incomparably more intelligent Jeeves.

Lady Antonia Fraser has followed in Miss Sayers's footsteps with a series of aristocratic detective novels. While her sleuth, Jemima Shore, is a liberated middle-class feminist, many of the novels, such as *The Wild Island* (1978), *Oxford Blood* (1985) and *Your Royal Hostage* (1987) have aristocratic settings or characters, the aristocratic world being, of course, a familiar and therefore natural one for Lady Antonia to write about. Even Science Fiction has its share of aristocratic symbols and characters as is illustrated for example by the chivalric quest of Luke Skywalker to defend "Princess Leia" in *Star Wars*, perhaps the most popular science fiction work of all.

What then distinguishes the novels discussed in this thesis from the popular aristocratic novels in the best-seller mould? The former often also depend on the appeal of "the aristocratic myth" in order to reach a wider audience, and there are many coincidences of motif and character types. As far as the aristocratic appeal is concerned, V. Sackville-West wrote unapologetically that she hoped her novel, *The Edwardians*, "packed with the aristocracy" would be popular if "for snobbish

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19 The *Wild Island*, set on an estate in the Scottish Highlands belonging to an aristocratic Jacobite family is dedicated to "All at Eilean Aigas", the Fraser family's similar Highland estate. (Lady Antonia Fraser, *The Wild Island*, London: Methuen, 1987, first published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson in 1978.)
reasons alone. Waugh's Brideshead Revisited was severely criticized for its child-like reverence of the aristocracy and yet - at least partly because of its aristocratic theme - became his most popular novel. Likewise, as has been suggested in the chapter dealing with her work, the commercial success of Nancy Mitford's entertaining aristocratic and partly autobiographical novels certainly derive to some extent from the British public's enduring fascination with the British aristocracy as exemplified by her own family, causing her to define herself as "their chief purveyor of fairy tales."

The difference lies in the fact that the authors of the aristocratic novels discussed in this study do not only use an aristocratic hue to glamorize incident and character, but to deal with the very heart and nature of the aristocracy and with the dilemma and significance of this class in the twentieth century; the novels are moreover usually works of some intellectual and literary complexity in which social distinctions or class differences and preoccupations generally amount to more than mere social commentary, but form part of a larger intellectual or artistic configuration. In the finest aristocratic novels the myth of a superior order fully empowered and mythically derived from ancient forbears is used to rally a consciousness of a venerable ethical establishment. What is threatened or already lost is not only wealth and privilege, but also the aristokratos, government by the best.

If these works are compared inter pares, significant similarities and patterns emerge. One is for example immediately struck by the central symbolic position that the houses or estates of the aristocracy play in virtually all aristocratic novels, suggesting that "landedness" lies at the heart of the British aristocracy's

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concept of themselves. Preoccupation with the manor house is usually coupled with a preoccupation with a better (heroic) past. Both these thematic concerns, the manor house and the past, are manifestations of a central concern that runs through these novels and has formed a constant thread in my discussion of the genre, the awareness of the decay of their class among aristocrats and observers of the aristocracy alike, and paradoxically of a resilience shown in the face of sometimes overpowering evidence that it is on its last legs and heading for extinction.

Chevron, in Vita Sackville-West's *The Edwardians* is based on Knole, the author's ancestral home and passion, and becomes in the novel the symbol of a moribund but gracious and better past, a feudal but formerly healthy symbiosis of lord and tenant, denigrated by latter-day decadence and inevitably to be replaced by "tenement buildings, alike in every particular".²² For the middle-class Theresa Spedding, Knole is an embodiment of the aristocratic myth that causes her to follow the fortunes of aristocrats with trembling dedication and precipitates her fateful association with the Duke. An important distinction between the best-selling aristocratic romances and the serious aristocratic novel emerges here. The aristocratic myth is functional in both, but its function is disparate. In the romances the myth acts as a divide of shimmering gauze between the reader and the text, colouring the reader's perception and enjoyment of the writing. In novels like *The Edwardians* the myth itself is objectified thematically in the text, dealt with intellectually and responsibly. It is Theresa's unquestioning allegiance to the aristocratic myth which leads to a traumatic reassessment of herself when the reality of arrogant and callous imperious rapacity threatens to break through the glamour of her idealized perceptions. The disintegration of Theresa's belief in the myth is furthermore significant in Sebastian's progress to self-knowledge, the primary action in the novel. The novel

gains further complexity through the fact that Chevron is not only the embodiment of the myth or an icon of a better past, but also constitutes a magnificent contemporary prison, incarcerating its inhabitants in privileged mummification. Sackville-West shows an awareness that a future of tenement houses is inevitable and even possibly just, but cannot refrain from mourning the gracious past associated with her own class.

Evelyn Waugh’s Charles Ryder is an architectural painter in *Brideshead Revisited* and paints the condemned stately homes of penniless peers before they are demolished, a metaphor for the decline and probable extinction, as Waugh foresaw it at the time, of the aristocracy. The symbolically named Anchorage House in *Vile Bodies* with its handsome and dignified façade again suggests a better, but virtually extinct past, while the restructuring (falsifying) of both Hetton Abbey in *Decline and Fall* and Brideshead in *Brideshead Revisited* implies a decline of contemporary aristocrats from an earlier truth, "high-spirited, serious, chivalrous, other-worldly"\(^{23}\) which remains Waugh’s ideal and which he identifies with the old Catholic aristocracy. For Waugh the resilience to combat the decadence of his time lies in the individual affirmation of Christian faith. Like Theresa Spedding, both Paul Pennyfeather in *Decline and Fall* and Charles Ryder also suffer from their encounters with a glamorous or "charming" aristocracy, Pennyfeather’s illusions leading to disgrace and imprisonment before he emerges as a clergyman, and Ryder’s engagement with the class to a harrowing but eventually liberating and even redemptive spiritual self-appraisal.

Nancy Mitford’s comic novels come closest to the best-selling romances in their use of the shimmering gauze of the aristocratic myth. The inhabitants of Alconleigh, Merlinford, Hampton and the other country houses she describes with such striking comic perspicacity are flagrantly and unapologetically aristocratic. The myth is nevertheless objectified by means of Miss Mitford’s

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piercing humour; however charming they may be, her characters do not emerge as fairy-tale princes and princesses. While the humour reinforces the human limitations of her characters and keeps them back from the worst excesses of sentiment and romance, it is also Miss Mitford's strongest weapon in the defence of her class. She takes up the cudgels to defend the aristocracy - a threatened species - and devastates its opponents with lethal swipes of raillery. The acerbic effectiveness of her wit derives from its function as defense mechanism; her sister Jessica writes of Nancy's "lightly worn yet adamantine protective armour of drollery." For Miss Mitford, resilience lies in humour; comedy is her defence against a world in which she as aristocrat feels increasingly isolated and alien. She breaks down the reader's defences against the less attractive characteristics of such august personalities as the irascible Lord Alconleigh and the egocentric Lady Montdore with her humour and surreptitiously introduces the values of the narrator, Fanny Lady Wincham, as the criterion by which all other creeds and tenets are judged.

The Big House in Ireland dominates literature dealing with the Protestant Ascendancy to such an extent that the genre is sometimes referred to as Big House Fiction. Both Elizabeth Bowen's and Molly Keane's Irish novels are firmly rooted in this tradition. Danielstown in Bowen's The Last September, like Montefort in A World of Love, denotes the order and harmony intrinsic to tradition - again the "better past" motif - but it is a tradition paradoxically turned upon itself, a vital past casting a spell of inaction and isolation on a dislocated present. The Last September concludes with the burning down of Danielstown, actualizing the dissolution of the order the house represents. Miss Bowen is particularly adept at enmeshing the social and historical aspects of her work with her general artistic concerns and her Irish novels are characterized by the transection of the historical with the personal or individual, so that the broad historical and social concerns of the novel,

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symbolized by the Big House, become indistinguishable from her treatment of the psychological development of the characters, for example. Lois’s ability to come to terms with her own existence, her competence to seize life in the latter novel, is directly related to the suspension of the historical paralysis symbolically extending from the Big House, to the eradication of the aristocratic myth. These Irish novels are perhaps the most elegiac of the aristocratic novels, mourning the passing of their golden age. Resilience here is purely personal and in fact resides in an adaptation of the (formerly) aristocratic inhabitants of the Big Houses to a non-aristocratic present, to the abandonment of an aristocratic past that holds them in thrall. Only because Danielstown burns down, can Lois embark on a new life. As an aristocracy, the Irish Protestant Ascendancy remains doomed.

In Hartley’s novels, manor houses are equally central to theme. It is the aristocratic ambience of Brandham Hall, as much as the unprecedented summer heat and his successes at Black Magic that causes Leo to overestimate his power in The Go-Between, and precipitates the tragic outcome of his sojourn and the destruction of his own capacity for life: “To be in tune with all that Brandham Hall meant, I must increase my stature, I must act on a grander scale.” Likewise, Eustace in the Eustace and Hilda trilogy, refers to the aristocratic Anchorstone Hall as the “lodestar of his childhood,” encouraging his illusions and beckoning him on towards his disastrous involvement with the aristocratic Staveley family. This is one of the most significant exposures of the aristocratic myth and the destruction it can wreak on uncritical adherents. Hartley’s novels are also particularly interesting as representative of the ambiguity towards the aristocracy as class which has characterized this century. While he appears to criticize the


class structure as befits a denizen of the twentieth century, his work nevertheless reveals a fascination with the magical myth of the aristocracy, a fascination which Emma Tennant demonstrates in her novels as being instrumental, even callously and deftly exploited by aristocrats, as a means of survival.

Emma Tennant explains her own preoccupation with houses as being the consequence of having been reared in an "architectural fantasy" 27, the family home in Scotland. Miss Tennant’s treatment of the topic is complex. On the one hand, Lovegrove, home of the noble Lovescombes, is a fantasy, caught "in a warp of time which had somehow been blown" 28, a souvenir of a defunct era, but paradoxically its out-of-place conspicuous splendour also confirms the endurance of the aristocracy in the face of hostile historical developments. It is at once the fairy playground of a child and a brutal testimony to the cold-blooded and calculated, not to say triumphant survival of its inhabitants. As has been suggested in the chapter dealing with her writing, Miss Tennant paradoxically fuses the two forces of decadence and resilience, so that the survival of the class is shown to be dependent on the abandonment of those aristocratic values of dedication to service - noblesse oblige - which had redeemed it in the eyes of its adherents. Miss Tennant turns the spotlight most uncompromisingly on the aristocratic myth and exposes the rot that has set in. Lovegrove's depiction as a children's playground, "the whole place resembling somehow the mind and preoccupations of a child before the age of moral sense sets in" 29, is also the culmination of another theme that can be traced through the genre - the childlike quality of the aristocracy, an ability to disregard - sometimes callously - the harsher aspects of life in the bleak outside world from the

27 In the TV interview with James Buxton: Writer's Talk: Ideas of Our Time, from the series Writers in Conversation.


29 Ibid., pp. 139 - 140.
safety of their own privileged niche.

What emerges in the course of the thesis is an interesting and somewhat unexpected progress from elegy to satire, the writers of the greater part of the century mourning the imminent extinction of the aristocracy, clinging on somewhat perversely and resiliently, while the satiric approach of contemporary writing witnesses to a new intellectual vitality emerging from the aristocracy's surprising resurgence during the Thatcher era.

In spite of a somewhat ambiguous critique of the decline of her class, Sackville-West's writing demonstrates an elegiac sadness over a disappearing civilisation, a society that "had mastered the problems of civilisation more truly than the Greeks or Romans".\textsuperscript{30} Evelyn Waugh, regarding the decline of the aristocracy as synonymous with the "Century of the Common Man where vice no longer pays lip service to virtue"\textsuperscript{31}, was consciously aware of the elegiac nature of his writing, commenting in 1960 in the preface to the revised edition of \textit{Brideshead Revisited}:

\begin{quote}
It was impossible to foresee in the spring of 1944, the present cult of the English country house. It seemed that the ancestral seats which were our chief national artistic achievement were doomed to decay and spoliation like the monasteries in the sixteenth century. So I piled it on rather, with passionate sincerity .... And the English aristocracy has maintained its identity to a degree that then seemed impossible. The advance of Hooper has been held up at several points. Much of this book therefore is a panegyric preached over an empty coffin.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30}V. Sackville-West, \textit{The Edwardians}, p. 32.


\textsuperscript{32}Waugh, Evelyn, Preface to \textit{Brideshead Revisited}, p. 10.
In *Brideshead Revisited*, the author delineates the aristocracy as an icon of cultural excellence, using the elegiac quality of his writing as a backdrop for the bright myth of what could and should be. His writing invokes a reverence for the best of a class and his most plangent evocations are of the pity of losing the flower of the nation. In his depiction of Sebastian as an immature alcoholic, it is clear that Waugh does not glamorize or idealize the aristocracy. The last stage of their rule is flawed, decadent, even squalid. His writing evades the use of myth as cardboard fantasy, as Cinderella-like metamorphosis; he rather insists on healthy aspiration, a fundamental desire for a better order, which is the mytho-poetic register of *Brideshead Revisited*. He deploys the myth as a means of enlivening man’s admiration for the heroic individual, with whom he identifies a freedom from that blind social conformity which blights so much of contemporary society - Waugh’s detested Age of the Common Man. Sebastian Flyte, like Lord Alconleigh, Lady Montdore, Aunt Anna Rose and the host of other eccentrics that emerge in these aristocratic novels, identify the aristocracy with the belief, or the desire to believe, in the liberty of the private conscience to fulfil itself on the strength of wealth, breeding and force of personality. In mourning the loss of such potency in the depleted character of a man never grown to manhood - Sebastian hugging his teddy-bear - Waugh intimates the qualities of the heroic individual that modern society seems so painfully to lack and therefore require.

Waugh and Sackville-West were not the only writers among their contemporaries to believe that the aristocracy was nearing extinction and in the September 1930 edition of *The Bookman*, Hugh Walpole writes with conviction:

> Now that the aristocracy in England is disappearing it would be an interesting thing for English letters if we had one or two representatives of it. It is absurd to say that duchesses, because they are called duchesses, are not so
Nancy Mitford echoes this perception in one of her early novels when a sophisticated socialite says to a would-be writer,

... it's no good writing about the upper classes if you hope to be taken seriously. You must have noticed that by now? Station masters, my dear, station masters.  

Especially in her last novel, *Don't Tell Alfred*, Miss Mitford regretfully depicts the world of the aristocracy fading and being undermined even by their own younger generation, with commercial pre-occupations supplanting those ideals of service and honour so dear to the cantankerous Uncle Matthew, who despite his rough edges embodies the best of heroic English manhood for Mitford and her characters. Miss Mitford bravely defends the position of her class through her humour, but we are nevertheless left with a lasting impression of regret in Fanny, the moral arbiter in the novels, at the passing of the "old world as it had been for a thousand years, and which, in only thirty years, has crumbled away ...."  

This tone is echoed by some of the popular authors of the time. P.G. Wodehouse's *If I were You* (1931), the story of an Earl whose title is contested by a barber, is permeated with an awareness of the precariousness of the position of the aristocracy. Lord Droitwich must find a wealthy bride to keep up his crumbling estates. He adheres to obsolete values which plays into the hands of the egalitarian masses and yet distinguishes him from them as he contends with his own conscience: 

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And I should have thought the only excuse for people like us is that we’re sportsmen. Every time, in the old days, that I got a twinge of conscience at the thought that I was living off the fat of the land and doing nothing to deserve it, I used to console myself by reflecting: ‘Well, at least I am a sportsman!’ And here I am, lending myself to a conspiracy to cheat this poor blighter out of his rights.\textsuperscript{36}

Likewise in \textit{Ring for Jeeves} (1953), P.G. Wodehouse’s perennial gentleman Bertie Wooster has gone to a school designed to teach the aristocracy to fend for itself should the social revolution set in with greater severity.\textsuperscript{37} In \textit{The Royal Box}, Frances Parkinson Keyes describes the plight of Lady Laura Whitford, who has had to divide her London house "up into flats - and then to move from the best one to the next best one and finally down here [to the basement]."\textsuperscript{38}

Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane’s depictions of the world of the Protestant Ascendancy in decay and L.P. Hartley’s reluctance to embrace the vulgar timbre of egalitarian society confirm the elegiac aspects of the aristocratic novels in this century. In Keane’s novels, Aunt Anna Rose and her generation represent an old order adored for their untrammelled force of character, their freedom to indulge and live out their personal dreams. The aristocracy mythically incarnates the liberated individual, fully adult, fully individuated. Opposed to such admirable autonomy is the diminished second generation, exemplified by Hercules and Consuelo in \textit{Treasure Hunt} for example, arrested in development, deluded and emasculated, counterparts of Sebastian Flyte, suggesting the galloping decay of the class. In exposing the

\textsuperscript{36}P.G. Wodehouse, \textit{If I were You}, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 104.

\textsuperscript{37}Cf. David Cannadine, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy}, pp. 639 - 640.

\textsuperscript{38}Frances Parkinson Keyes, \textit{The Royal Box}, London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1954, p. 19.
lamed existence of the displaced aristocracy, the truly heroic aristocrat is again revealed by implication and contrast - the heroic individual who is able to rise above the constrictions of new and straitened circumstances and can accept the challenge to change and adapt even to the loss of all inherited privilege.

Elegiac regret is a particularly effective means to convey the mythic desire for a better order. Heroic glory is dimmed and at the same time enhanced in for example the Homeric epic or Norse saga by the lapse of time and the absence of truly heroic contemporary figures. Sackville-West, Waugh, Mitford, Bowen and Keane deftly employ this technique to suggest both the decadence of the aristocracy and the heroic ideals implied by the decline. There is a marked distinction, however, between the depiction of an admirable order to be aspired to, the more precious for being the more threatened, and the shallow idealization of the aristocracy as a glamorous coterie, in the novels of Cartland, Holt, Eden and their like.

The elegiac tone is notably absent from the novels of the eighties. Emma Tennant’s writing is strongly critical of the spiritual decline of her class; it is unflinchingly honest and unsparing in its depiction of the condition of the aristocracy who in the 1980s profited enormously from the resurgence of wealth in Britain under Mrs Thatcher’s capitalistic matriarchy, so that

the carefully nurtured picture of a nation’s aristocracy in irresistible decay, selling off their art treasures, then their land, and finally the great house and its possessions is just no longer true.39

Paradoxically, the ironic relentlessness with which the class is (self-)anatomized by Miss Tennant is symptomatic of a renewed strength and vitality appearing among the intellectual exponents of the class. No longer romantically expiring, it can afford to

look at itself uncompromisingly and to cut deeply and effectively into its self-assumptions. This self-satirizing tendency is again confirmed by contemporary popular writing. Charlotte Bingham’s intelligent comic depictions of the aristocracy in *Belgravia* (1983) and *Country Life* (1985), have a strong satiric inflection and exude confidence in not only the survival, but the flourishing of the aristocracy in the latter decades of the twentieth century.40

The evolution from elegy to satire together with the inverted circular historical development from a golden Edwardian sunset to a gilt financial fin-de-siècle sunrise, form an underlying pattern in the thesis and underline the astonishing resilience of the ancient institution of the aristocracy. The economic resurgence of the nobility raises hopes for a concomitant spiritual and artistic renaissance. The Marquesses of Lansdowne are an exemplary aristocratic dynasty, the 1st Marquess having served as both Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister in the eighteenth century, the 3rd as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Home Secretary in the nineteenth and the 5th as Governor General of Canada and Viceroy of India at the height of the Pax Britannica, while the 7th was killed in action in Italy during the Second World War.41 In keeping with historical tendencies the fortune of the Lansdownes started its decline during the nineteenth century. The fifth Marquess declined a Dukedom on the grounds that he was not sufficiently wealthy to keep up the necessary state. During the Irish independence struggles the family first lost a considerable part of their income as tenants refused to pay rent, and then the family house, Derreen, which

40 Hon. Charlotte Mary Thérèse Bingham, daughter of the 7th Baron Clanmorris, b. 1942, m. 1964 Terence Brady, actor, with whom she has written innumerable Television plays. She published her first novel, *Coronet among the Weeds*, when she was twenty and has written some international bestsellers. (Cf. *Burke’s Peerage* 1980, p. 555 and cover information on her novel *Country Life*, London: Bantam, 1991.)

was burnt down in the "troubles". Lansdowne House in London was sold during the nineteen-twenties. Death duties during this century crippled the family fortunes even further. The family's magnificent art collection lost its Michelangelos, Raphaels, Tintorettos and Turners.\textsuperscript{42} Rembrandt's The Mill was sold before the First World War for 500 000 dollars and the marbles from Lansdowne House during the depression.\textsuperscript{43} However, the Earl of Shelburne, heir to the 8th Marquess, having turned the remaining family assets into a business empire, is estimated to be worth about £30 million today. The art collection, still containing Gainsboroughs, Reynoldses and Ciprianis, is growing again instead of declining further.\textsuperscript{44} Financial recovery pays cultural and aesthetic dividends. Furthermore, the emergence of a dauntless aristocratic writer such as Emma Tennant holds out the promise that the aristocracy may also demonstrate the ethical courage required to make this resurgence more than a financial recovery, and to carry them into the twenty-first century with some of the original qualities of the aristocratic ideal - indicated by the very term aristokratos - intact. The aristocratic novel in the twentieth century provides an acute insight into the vicissitudes of the nobility of our time, as one pursues the diametric and sometimes synchronic trends of decadence and resilience. Moreover, in their embodiment and critique of the aristocratic myth, these novels foreground what appears to be a primal striving for distinction and excellence in the human spirit in an age which has been characterized to a large extent by the greyness of social conformity.


\textsuperscript{43}David Cannadine, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy}, p. 115.

\textsuperscript{44}Jeremy Paxman, \textit{Friends in High Places}, pp. 40 - 41.
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