The Gender of Modernism

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At a London dinner party in 1934, Virginia Woolf and Rose Macaulay debated the unity of character. “I’m a mere battlefield of opposite people—my ancestors,” Macaulay assured Woolf. “Take this as a simple illustration: I want to walk all day alone: but I also want to drive my car.” Woolf later recalled, “We called it having ‘battling lizards.’ That made us laugh” (Woolf, Diary 4, 249). The phrase captures Macaulay’s complex relation both to the high modernist tradition and to the female modernism so profoundly shaped by Macaulay’s dinner companion, Virginia Woolf.

Macaulay attributed her “battling lizards” to the impact of ancestry upon her character. Yet we could attribute to nurture as well as nature Macaulay’s ambivalence toward the British institutions that formed her. Born of a large and distinguished Cambridge family full of schoolmasters and clergymen, Macaulay belonged to the British intellectual aristocracy. Despite her orthodox heritage, childhood experiences angled her perspective, training her sensibility for the acerbic fiction, witty essays, and humorous travel writings for which she would be celebrated in her maturity.

We can locate in Macaulay’s childhood and youth the origin of some of her “battling lizards.” She spent her childhood in Italy, where the family lived for her mother’s health, and learned there to feel impatience with England’s pallid propriety. The devastating murder of her soldier brother Aulay led her
bitterly to resent woman's enforced domesticity, resentment that increased with the death of her friend Rupert Brooke in World War I. Later, her love affair with a married man, Gerald O'Donovan, caused her lengthy exile from the Anglican church (to which she had first been drawn following the death of her brother) and her lifelong, unashionable preoccupation with religious issues.

Macaulay's childhood and adult experiences did not produce a simple binary position of alienation from authority, however. She held herself aloof not only from the regnant social and aesthetic institutions of Victorian England but, eventually, from the social and aesthetic positions of her contemporaries. As a young adult she was part of a circle of experimental modernists. On her friend Rupert Brooke she modeled Basil Doye, the hero of her 1915 novel Non-Combatants and Others, and when she came to London in 1916 she frequented the Kensington salon held by Naomi Royde-Smith. There she met a diverse group of writers, both celebrated and obscure: Hugh Walpole, Storm Jameson, Arnold Bennett, W. B. Yeats, Edith Sitwell, Aldous Huxley, John Middleton Murry, J. C. Squire of the New Statesman, and her particular hero, Walter de la Mare. Following a fight with Royde-Smith in the early 1920s, she drifted over to join another group of friends: Dorothy Brooke, Humbert Wolfe, Victor Gollancz, Lancelot Sieveking, Viola Garvin. Macaulay was acquainted with Joyce, Beerbohm, Priestley. Her nodding acquaintance with Leonard and Virginia Woolf in the 1920s would grow into the closer friendship with Virginia of the 1930s (see Smith). Yet the "battling lizards" character marked Macaulay in this era, too. Though she was a part of the milieu of literary modernism, she still felt a distance from modernist concerns and tone, a result of her religious preoccupation and the reticence demanded by her love affair with O'Donovan. Reading Macaulay, we must do battle with her battling lizards, to tease apart the strands of female modernism from the orthodoxy of one who, as Woolf bitingly wrote, "likes authority; loves Winchester Oxford & the very urbane intellectual aristocracy" (Woolf 250).

The selections included here exhibit Macaulay's particularly conflicted, complex female modernism, as it figured in her war fiction (Non-Combatants and Others [1916] and Told by an Idiot [1923]) and her essays (Personal Pleasures [1935]). Certain themes dominant in the discourse appear here: the variety of women's responses to war, including women's complicity with and attraction to war making; the politics of canon creation; the relation between gender and literary style. Other themes, less typical of female modernism, express the concerns that kept Macaulay from meshing seamlessly with her male or female modernist colleagues or—because of our postmodern affiliations—with us: Macaulay's turn to religion to express a prophetic critique of patriarchal society within a discourse previously disabling for women; her preoccupation with the literary marketplace; her willingness to subordinate critical analysis to breezy commentary, perhaps as a Trojan horse solution to the problem of publishers' restrictions on female voice and subject matter.

"Afternoon Out," from Macaulay's autobiographical war novel, Non-
*Combatants and Others* (1916), exemplifies one of the distinctive contributions of female modernism to the literature of war: the linking—and consequent challenging—of the conventions of gender and war. Just as “Violette,” the conventional bourgeois household in which the heroine, Alix, lodges, forbids discussion of the biological facts of reproduction, so wartime conventions proscribe encounters between Nicholas’s German friend and the Belgian refugees, both temporarily lodging with him. Yet despite the conventions that would obscure them, Alix’s conversation with her brother acknowledges the facts of love and war: that “men’s” babies are born from women’s bodies; that both “the enemy” and “the ally” may be people whose “intentions are excellent.” Most disagreeably, their conversation reveals that unless their friends intervene the wartime British authorities may put innocent people in concentration camps. The breezy tone belies the seriousness of Macaulay’s assault on the codes governing gender and war relations, codes that divide the topics for conversation into “men’s” and “mixed company,” and that distinguish friend from foe, combatant from noncombatant.

While the Great War definitively undercut literary celebrations of the glories of battle, in this excerpt Macaulay skewers a mythology that persisted: the notion that war improves literature by forcing writers to confront the ultimate meaning of life. To *The Effects of War on Literature*, with its grandiloquent forecast for the epic greatness of postwar literature, her character Nicholas proposes to respond with a literary series of his own. His invention, *Some Further Effects*, is “designed to damp the spirits of the sanguine” by revealing the deeply destructive effects of war on literature: the proliferation of third-rate “patriotic claptrap” and the difficulty of sustaining intelligent vision during wartime disruption. Macaulay here takes issue with the critical canon that continues to favor war literature even in the wake of the Great War. Instead, she argues that the shattering distraction of wartime is fatal to art: “the first-rate people, both the combatants and non-combatants, are too much disgusted, too upset, to do first-rate work.” Macaulay would return in 1941 to the theme of the aesthetic disruption caused by war, contributing a short story, “Miss Anstruther’s Letters,” to *London Calling*, a collection edited by Storm Jameson, a fellow member of Naomi Royde-Smith’s salon of the twenties (Smith 159).

The human need for a retreat from the tumult of war provides the preacher’s text in the second excerpt from *Non-Combatants and Others*. The theme of religion’s inadequate response to the chaos of the Great War anticipates Eliot and Waugh, but the particular twist in Macaulay’s treatment of it illuminates her unique position within female modernism. Macaulay here joins other modernist women writers, among them Woolf and Jameson, in the reevaluation and reframing of religious discourse to accommodate feminist principles. First, like Woolf in “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,” she evokes Blake’s touchstone passage, “I will not cease from mental fight / Nor let my sword sleep in my hand, / till we have built Jerusalem / in England’s green
and pleasant land." Yet, while Woolf uses this text to build an alternative feminist vision of antiwar mental battle, Macaulay stops short of a feminist revision of her religious (and literary) text. Instead, she engages religious discourse to point out its problems and potential. Although the convention-ridden inhabitants of Violette commend the service placidly, objecting only to the preacher’s habit of presenting too many “ideas,” Alix marvels that the religious discourse is “dynamite,” disconcerting in its use of “words she didn’t like, such as tribulation and grace,” but potentially both destructive and liberating.

Jameson’s autobiography, No Time like the Present (1933), offers another instance of the feminist reconstruction of religion in its cry, “Why don’t they preach something in their churches which a grown woman could believe in without doing violence to all her other beliefs?” (160). Macaulay anticipates Jameson’s indictment of religion for its incompatibility with feminist principles. Yet Macaulay and Jameson differ on the nature of these feminist principles as well as on the war position they would advocate for women. In her autobiography, Jameson argues forcibly for what we would now identify as an essentialist vision of feminist pacifism:

There is a peculiar horror in the notion of women butchering their fellows—as if it were a self-abuse. As I think it must be, for a woman. . . . If civilisation as we know it ends in poison gas, the fault will be in part ours, because we have taken a hand in the game only as following and competing with men: and have not tried consciously to redress the imbalance of a social system shaped and directed by men. (Jameson 277–278, 280)

In contrast to Jameson’s essentialist vision, in Non-Combatants and Others Macaulay presents pacifism as the outcome not of gender but of social location (see Jameson 160). The Anglican cleric, West, asserts that war’s greatest pain comes to “non-combatants [who] are of all men and women the most miserable. Older men, crooks, parsons, women—God help them” (144). His parting words, as he returns “to his church to fight war by the means he had at his command”—invoke Woolf’s vision of a Society of Outsiders united against war. Tentative and offhand, still Macaulay suggests that a revised religion should respond to the needs of women and other outsiders, and so inspire pacifist battle for peace.

Macaulay’s 1923 novel, Told by an Idiot, returns to the subject of the war to offer a complex portrait of the human response to it, once again deliberately grouping people not by gender but by behavior and social place. Framing her discussion with the weary acknowledgment that “to the majority in each country” the war “was merely a catastrophe, like an earthquake, to be gone through blindly,” Macaulay subtly emphasizes the social nature of humanity’s response to this seemingly natural disaster. She surveys the range of ways women and men respond to war, profiting from it or protesting against
it, without attributing to gender the variations in behavior: Maurice is "violently pacifist," while Vicky is "enthusiastically pro-war," and Molly, who drives ambulances in France, "frankly enjoy[s] the war" (293–294).

Yet, while Macaulay refuses to use gender to organize her portrait of the war experiences of Maurice, Vicky, or Molly, a distinctly gender-inflected analysis figures in her treatment of the war's meaning to writers. The conversation between the war poet, Roger, and his mother, Amy, reveals Macaulay's ambivalence, articulating the positions both of postwar male literary orthodoxy and the challenge posed by female modernism. Roger is the prototypical modernist poet, who finds his subject matter and his transgressive posture in the trenches; his mother is a protofeminist reader, whose project is to challenge the ideology of the war narrative to give women their say on war. Amy anticipates contemporary feminist critics' understanding that in both form and content war literature is governed by deeply gendered literary conventions. She challenges Roger's construction of the proper subject matter of war poetry—the experiences (whether glamorous or horrible) of soldiers at the front, but not the privations experienced by noncombatants at home. She further asserts that such a masculinist war narrative is not, as Roger insists, true to life, but true only to his literary ambitions. Roger and his friends have invented the "glamour theory" of war in order to find something new to write about, and their vision of war is less mimetic than intertextual. In this interchange, Macaulay suggests that the nature of war narrative is implicated in the nature of war. Both the old men who glory in war and the young men who write to destroy war's "false glamour," both the disillusioned soldier son and the uncomprehending antiwar mother, are part of the war system. This binary system characterizing male war literature perpetuates the restrictive nature of the canon of war literature, and perhaps even war itself.

We can read Macaulay's multiple positions and her weary, even cynically indifferent stance toward war and peace in *Told by an Idiot* as attempts to escape the self-perpetuating binary construction of the war text. In her refusal to take sides, Macaulay anticipates Woolf's *Three Guineas*, with its eloquent call for female indifference to the male warrior. Woolf argued that indifference was the most potent weapon against the male drive for women's admiration from which wars spring. And in her indifference to literature praising or debunking the glory of war, Macaulay calls into question the central principle of canon creation in Western literature since Virgil: the centrality of the war text.

Macaulay defied the constraints of the canon, not only by resisting the glorification of war but also by choosing to write in uncanonized genres: the personal or topical essay and the travel book. In the twenties, Macaulay published her essays in a tellingly diverse group of papers and journals, including the *Daily Mail*, the *Evening Standard*, and the High Church weekly, the *Guardian* (Smith 106–107). While a number of the essays quite self-consciously address female readers, others seem to construct a male audience; the implied reader also seems to change with the shifts in tone from a female-oriented
breezy casualness to an acerbic satire that seems to invoke a male reader. Collected in 1925 by Methuen, her essays were advertised for "intellectual readers," thus perpetuating in the construction of its audience Macaulay's conflicting identifications with male intellectual authority and female intellectual challenge (Smith 108).

"Following the Fashion" demonstrates Macaulay's play with the gendered conventions of voice and subject matter. In this witty essay, Macaulay transposes the defiant self-assertiveness legitimately woman's prerogative when dealing with "trivial" matters of dress or pastime to the more serious literary arena, conflating social with literary conventions. The result is a biting parody of her modernist contemporaries Ernest Hemingway and T. S. Eliot. Beginning by asserting her female right to "follow the fashion" (to wear an elaborate silk dress and high-heeled shoes, to drive a smarter sports car, to paint her nails the latest high-fashion shade), Macaulay broadens her claim of self-determination to include literature, defiantly asserting, "I can write tough-guy stories." The proof follows—a Hemingwayesque tale of drunken driving and an accident leaving "a hell of a mess on the road. One of those little Austins, it was, and all crumpled up, and a man and a girl all crumpled up too" (232). Fashionably, the "tough-guy" protagonist appears most upset by the way his woman companion responds to the accident: "She never stopped crying and talking, it made me tired. Women can't get this: when a thing's done it's done. That's a thing no woman can ever get. They can't let it be. Hell, did I want that bloody little car to muscle into us that way?"(233). Macaulay's feminist sendup of modernist misogyny dramatizes its moral implications while ironically assessing its aesthetic and commercial values. If such "tough-guy stories," like the "tough-guy poem" that follows, can be tossed off at a whim as Macaulay suggests, they possess dubious aesthetic merit. Still their financial worth is evident: they sell—and sell well—to the magazines.

Another such hot property for the magazines is "To the Barricades," with its now familiar modernist multilingualism and its amalgam of military and urban imagery. The parody indicts Eliot's Waste Land, revealing its pose of brutally transgressive honesty to be a self-indulgent masquerade. When images of marching feet are jumbled together with "mermen and mermaids and old bowler hats," Macaulay's parody suggests, the poem trivializes both the war between the sexes and the Great War. Recalling the judgment of Amy, the war poet's mother—that reality lies not with the "glamour" of war but with the sacrifices of the noncombatants on the home front—this passage expresses Macaulay's perspective as a female modernist, writing in deliberate opposition to the machismo of her male colleagues.

The element of competitive bravado in Macaulay's parodies resurfaces in her fantasies of writing a critical assessment of contemporary writers or publishing her memoirs without concern for the feelings of her friends: "I shall bring in everyone I know, and have an index, so they can find themselves and their friends" (231). But "Following the Fashion" is more than a slap at
other writers for exceeding her in popularity. The parodies of Hemingway and Eliot establish Macaulay’s position in opposition to her male modernist contemporaries. In the tone of “Following the Fashion,” and in the plot of her “tough-guy” story, she expresses the pleasure in risk-taking that led her to drive a car without taking lessons, to swim avidly, to fly, and even to engage in acts of literary bravado (Smith 149–150). So, an essay criticizing the careless driving of a young nobleman, Lord de Clifford, resulted in her conviction for libel. Yet “Following the Fashion” also recalls the basis for her occasional retreats from such fearless positions: with tragic irony, only three years after the de Clifford lawsuit, her own careless driving was to cause a traffic accident leaving her lover with head injuries, and Macaulay with the permanent conviction that she was to blame (Smith 149–150). Perhaps this experience explains the threat to surrender all fashions—in clothes, cars, or literary creations—with which Macaulay ends “Following the Fashion”: “Sometimes I think I will give them all up, and just be dowdy” (236).

Characteristically modernist in its play with the rupture of the aura brought about by the development of photography, “Album,” with its wry summation of Macaulay’s life by an imaginary descendant, also expresses in its ironic subtext the vision of female modernism. The insistence on periodizing human character (“she just wrote away, as those Georgians did”) establishes her debt to Woolf’s construction of modern writing in her influential essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” while it testifies to Macaulay’s male-identified allegiance to the Georgian group of writers as Woolf constituted it: “Mr. Forster, Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Strachey, Mr. Joyce, and Mr. Eliot” (95). The essay reflects a sense of the impermanence of social structures and values, recalling not only Lawrence’s anatomy of love’s progress across the generations in The Rainbow, but also Woolf’s feminist play with generational change in Orlando.

In addition to revealing the “battling lizards” of her literary affiliation, “Album” also reveals Macaulay’s specifically personal anxieties: her scorn for the values of the literary marketplace, and her resulting sense of being a writer without the audience she deeply desired; her contempt for yet concern with material possessions; the conflict between risk-taking and responsibility that throughout her life characterized her relationship with Gerard O’Donovan, leading her to alternate self-assertion with self-repression, religious exile with religious involvement; and finally, her unwillingness to tell the unconventional, even forbidden story of her passionate love affair with a married man, and her recourse instead to the disguised, defensive self-estimation as “dull” or “tiresome,” based perhaps on her failure to marry. Gender is central to all these moments of conflict, whether it figures in relation to the construction of a literary audience, the ability to earn money and accumulate wealth as a woman, the expectations a woman relating to her sexual and social behavior, or the literary and social conventions governing her own estimation of the story of her life. So, “Album” is more than a modernist set piece on the photographic image; this casual literary autobiography reveals Macaulay’s con-
flicting male and female literary identifications and her strategies for dealing with them.

Constructing literary modernism based on a selective (male) canon ("like the little old lady on the quiz show, I prefer a reasonable disproportion to an egalitarianism founded upon sentiment"), a critic once dismissed Rose Macaulay as a writer whose range of vision "is confined to the upper middle-class, Anglican-Cambridge stratum of society" and indicated her for her inability "to deal with the disturbing personal repercussions of the world she represents" (Lockwood 136). Twenty years later, with the exclusively white male construction of modernism behind us, we condemn Macaulay neither for her privileged, bourgeois, Anglo-Catholic origins nor for her failure to solve the gender-inscribed conflicts her background bred. Rather, we appreciate the strategies she forged in the illuminating struggle against her "battling lizards."

NOTES
1. For discussion of the relation between female modernism and war, see Longenbach.
2. For a longer analysis of Woolf's use of this passage, see Squier, *Virginia Woolf and London* 180–189.
3. See Cooper et al.
4. I take this term from the introduction to Cooper et al.
5. For further discussion of this male drive for female glory through making war, see my "Mirroring and Mothering."
6. For the way the Western literary canon reflects a privileging of war and the war text, see "The Con(tra)ception and Contraception of the War Text," by Helen Cooper, Adrienne Munich, and Susan Squier. in Cooper et al. See also Huston.

WORKS CITED
Anyhow, this evening, when Alix came in, he was sulkily, even viciously, turning the pages of a little book he had to review, called (it was one of a series) *The Effects of the War on Literature*. He waved his disengaged hand at Alix, and left it to West, who had much better manners, to get up and put a chair for her and pass and light her a cigarette.

"Did you meet Belgians on the stairs?" inquired West. "They’ve put some in the rooms above us—the rooms that used to be Hans Bauer’s. Five of them, isn’t it, Sandomir?"

"Five to rise," Nicholas replied. "A baby due next week, I’m told." (Unarrived babies were among the things not alluded to at Violette in mixed company: no wonder Violette found Nicholas peculiar.)

"It’s awkward," West added, lowering his voice and glancing at one of the shut bedroom doors, "because we keep a German, and they can’t meet."

"What do you do that for?" asked Alix unsympathetically.

"Awkward, isn’t it?" said West. "Because they keep coming to see us—the Belgians, I mean (they like us rather), and he"—he nodded at the bedroom—"has to scoot in there till they’re gone. It’s like dogs and cats; they simply can’t be let to meet."

"Well, I don’t know what you want with a German, anyhow."

"He’s a friend of ours," explained Nicholas. "He was living in the Golders Green Garden City, and it became so disagreeable for him (they’re all so exposed there, you know—nothing hid) that we asked him here instead. If they find him he’s afraid they may put him in a concentration camp, and of course if the Belgians sighted him they’d complain. He means no harm, but unfortunately he had a concrete lawn in his garden, about ten feet square, where he used to bounce a ball for exercise. Also he had made a level place on his roof, among Mr. Raymond Unwin’s sloping tiles, where he used to sit and admire the distant view through a spyglass. It’s all very black against him, but he’s a studious and innocent little person really, and he’d hate to be concentrated." ("It would make one feel so like essence of beef, wouldn’t it?" West murmured absent.) "He’s
not a true patriot," went on Nicholas. "He wants the Hohenzollerns to be guillo-
tined and a disruptive country of small warring states to be re-established. He
writes articles on German internal reform for the monthly reviews. He calls them
‘Kill or Cure,’ or, ‘A short way with Imperialism,’ or some such bloody title. I
don’t care for his English literary style, but his intentions are excellent. . . . Well,
and how’s life?” Nicholas turned his small keen blue eyes on his sister. “You look
as if you’d been out for a joy-day. You want some more hairpins, but we don’t
keep any here."

“I’ve been wiggle-woggling,” Alix admitted, and added frankly, “I feel jolly
sick after it.”

“Our family constitution,” said her brother, “is quite unfit for the strains
we habitually subject it to. Mine is. I feel jolly sick too. But my indisposition is
incurred in the path of duty. I’ve got to review the things, so I have to read
them—a little here and there, anyhow. And then, just as one feels one has
reached one’s limit, one gets a handbook of wisdom like this, to finish one off."

He read a page at random from The Effects of the War on Literature. “The war
is putting an end to sordidness and littleness, in literature as in other spheres of
human life. The second-rate, the unheroic, the earthy, the petty, the trivial—how
does it look now, seen in the light of the guns that blaze over Flanders? The
guns, shattering so much, have at least shattered falsity in art. We were degener-
ate, a little, in our literature and in our lives: we have been made great. We are
come, surely, to the heroic, the epic pitch of living; if we cannot express it with a
voice worthy of it, then indeed it has failed in its deepest lesson to us. We may
expect a renascence of beauty worthy to rank with the Romantic Revival born of
the French wars. . . ."

“Who is the liar?” asked Alix.

Nicholas named him. “I am thinking,” he added, “of starting an Effects of
the War series of my own. I shall call it Some Further Effects. It will be designed to
damp the spirits of the sanguine. I shall do the one on Literature myself. I shall
take revenge in it for all the mush I’ve had to review lately. It’s extraordinary, the
stream of—of the heroic and the epic, isn’t that it—that pours forth daily. The war
seems to have given an unhealthy stimulus to hundreds of minds and thousands
of pens. One knew it would, of course. No doubt it was the same during the siege
of Troy, and all the great wars. Though, thank heaven, we shall never know, as
that sort of froth is blown away pretty quick and lost to posterity. It’s only the
unhappy and contemporaries who get it splashed all over them. And this war is
beastlier than any other, so the rubbish is less counteracted by the decent writers.
The first-rate people, both the combatants and non-combatants, are too much
disgusted, too upset, to do first-rate work. The war’s going on, and means to go
on, too long. Wells or some one said months ago that people don’t so much think
about it as get mentally scarred. It’s quite true. Lots of people have got to the stage
when they can only feel, not think. And the best people hate the whole business
much too much to get any ‘renascence of beauty’ out of it. Who was it who said the
other day that the writers to whom war is glamorous aren’t as a rule the ones who
produce anything fit to call literature. War’s an insanity; and insane things, purely destructive, wasteful, hideous, brutal, ridiculous things, aren’t what makes art. The war’s produced a little fine poetry, among a sea of tosh—a thing here and there; but mostly—oh, good Lord! The flood of cheap-heroics and commonplace patriotic claptrap—it’s swept slobbering all over us; there seems no stemming it. Literary revival be hanged. All we had before—and precious little it was—of decent work, clear and alive and sane and close to reality, is being trampled to bits by this—this imbecile brute. And when the time comes to collect the bits and try to begin again, we shan’t be able to; they’ll be no more spirit in us; we shall be too battered and beaten. . . .” Nicholas, wound up to excitement, was talking too long at a stretch. He often did, being an egoist, and having in his veins the blood of many eloquent and excited revolutionary Poles, who had stood in marketplaces and talked and talked, gesticulating, pouring forth blood and fire. Nicholas, reacting against this fervour, repudiating gesticulation, blood and fire, still talked. . . . But on “battered and beaten” he paused, in disgusted emphasis, and West came in, half absently, still turning the pages of the Challenge, talking in his high, clear voice, monotonous and fast (Nicholas was guttural and harsh). “You underrate the power of human recovery. You always do. It’s immense, as a matter of fact. Give us fifty years—twenty—ten. . . . Besides, look at the compensations. If the good are battered and beaten, the bad are too. It’s a well-known fact that many of the futurist poets, in all the nations, have gone mad, through trying to get too many battle noises into their heads at once. So they, at least, are silenced. I suppose they still write, in their asylums—in fact I’ve heard they do (my uncle is an asylum doctor)—but it gets no further. . . .” He subsided into the Cambridge Magazine.

“Well, I’d rather have the futurists than the slops poured out by the people who unfortunately haven’t brain enough even to go mad,” Nicholas grumbled. (“And anyhow, I don’t believe in any of your uncles—you’ve too many.) The futurists at least were trying to keep close to facts, even if they couldn’t digest them but brought them up with strident noises. But these imbeciles—the war seems to be a sort of tonic to their syrupy little souls; it’s filled them up with vim and banal joy. Not that the rot that has always been rot particularly matters; it merely means that the people who used to express themselves in one inane way now choose another, no worse; but it’s the silencing or the unmanning of the good people that matters. Here’s Cathcart’s new book. I’ve just read it. It’s the work of a shaken, broken man. It’s weak, irrational, drifting, with no constructive purpose, no coherence. You can almost hear the guns crashing into it as he tried to write, and the atrocity reports shrieking in his ears, and the poison gas stifling him, and the militarists and pacifists raving round him. His whole world’s run off its rails and upset and broken to bits, and he can’t put it right side up again; he’s lost his faith in it. He can only fumble and stammer at it helplessly, weak and mandering and incoherent. He ought to be helping to build it up again, but he’s lost his constructive power. Hundreds of people have. Constructive force will be the one thing needed when the war is over; any one with a programme, and the brain and will to carry it out; but where’s it to come from?
Those who aren’t killed or cut to bits will be too adrift and demoralised and dazed to do anything intelligent. We’re fast losing even such mental coherence and concentration as we had. Look, for instance, at the two, while I’m talking (quite interestingly, too); are you listening? Certainly not. West is reading a Church newspaper, and Alix drawing cats on the margins of my proofs. . . . I’m not blaming you; you can’t help it; you are mentally, and probably morally, shattered. I am too. People are more than ever like segregated imbeciles, each absorbed in his or her own ploy. Effects of the War on Human Intelligence: that shall be one of my series. . . ."

Evening in Church
(From Non-Combatants and Others)

. . . Some one got into the pulpit and preached. He preached on a question, "Who will lead me into the strong city?" A very pertinent inquiry, Alix thought, and just what she wanted to know. Who would? Who could? Was there a strong city at all, or only chaos and drifting ways of terror and unrest? If so, where was it, and how to get there? The strong city, said the preacher, is the city of refuge for which we all crave, and more especially just now, in this day of tribulation. The kings of the earth are gathered and gone by together; but the hill of Sion is a fair place and the joy of the whole earth; upon the north side lieth the city of the great King; God is well known in her palaces as a sure refuge. Above the noise of battle, above the great water-floods, is the city of God that lieth four-square, unshaken by the tempests.

Jolly, thought Alix, and just where one would be: but how to get into it? One had tried, ever since the war began, to shut oneself away, unshaken and undisturbed by the tempests. One had come to Violette because it seemed more unshaken than Wood End; but Violette wasn’t really, somehow, a strong city. The tempests rocked one till one felt sick. . . . Where was this strong city, any strong city? Well all about; everywhere, anywhere, said the preacher; one could hardly miss it.

"'Tis only your estranged faces
That miss the many-splendoured thing . . ."

and he quoted quite a lot of that poem. Then he went on to a special road of approach, quoting instead, "I went into the sanctuary of God." Church, Alix presumed. Well, here she was. No; it transpired that it wasn’t evening service he meant; he went on to talk of the Mass. That, apparently, was the strong city. Well, it might be, if one was of that way of thinking. But if one wasn’t? Did Kate
find it so, and was that why she went out early several mornings in the week? And what sort of strength had that city? Was it merely a refuge, well bulwarked, where one might hide from fear? Or had it strength to conquer the chaos? West would say it had; that its work was to launch forces over the world like shells, to shatter the old materialism, the old comfortable selfishness, the old snobberies, cruelties, rivalries, cant, blind stupidities, lies. The old ways, thought Alix (which were the same ways carried further, West would say), of destruction and unhappiness and strife, that had led to the bitter hell where boys went out in anguish into the dark.

The city wasn’t yet strong enough, apparently, to do that. Would it be one day?

“I will not cease from mental fight,” cried the preacher, who was fond, it seemed, of quoting poetry, “nor let my sword sleep in my hand, till we have built Jerusalem in England’s green and pleasant land.”

The next moment he was talking of another road of approach to the city on the hill, besides going to church, besides building Jerusalem in England. A road steep and sharp and black; we take it unawares, forced along it (many boys are taking it this moment, devoted and unafraid. Unafraid, thought Alix); and suddenly we are at the city gates; they open and close behind us, and we are in the strong city, the drifting chaos of our lives behind us, to be redeemed by firm walking on whatever new roads may be shown us. God, who held us through all the drifting, unsteady paths, has led us now right out of them into a sure refuge. . . . How do you know? thought Alix. Beyond the steep dark road there may be chaos still, endless, worse chaos: or, surely more natural to suppose, there may be nothing. How did people think they knew? Or didn’t they? Did they only guess, and say what they thought was attractive? Did Kate know? And Mrs. Frampton? How could they know, people like that? How could it be part of their equipment of knowledge, anything so extraordinary, so wild, so unlike their usual range as that? They knew about recipes, and servants, and dusting, and things like that—but surely not about weird and wonderful things that they couldn’t see? Alix could rather better believe that this preacher knew, though he did sometimes use words she didn’t like, such as tribulation and grace. (It would seem that preachers sometimes must: it is impossible, and not right, to judge them.)

When the sermon ended abruptly, and they sang a hymn of Bunyan’s about a pilgrim (402 in the green books), one was left with a queer feeling that the Church had its hand on a door, and at any moment might turn a handle and lead the way through. . . . Alix caught for a moment the forces at work; perhaps West was right about them, and they were adequate for the job of blowing up the debris of the world. If only the Church could collect them, focus them, use them. . . . Kate, and church people of Kate’s calibre, were surely like untaught children playing, ignorantly and placidly, with dynamite. They would be blown up if they weren’t careful. They kept summoning forces to their aid which must surely, if they fully came, shatter and break to bits most of the things they clung to as necessary comforts and conveniences. But perhaps people knew this, and
therefore prayed cautiously, with reservations; so the powers came in the same muffled, wrappered way, with reservations.

Such were Alix’s speculations as the music ended and the congregation filed down the church and shook hands with the tired vicar at the door and went out into the dark evening. The fog came round them and choked the light that streamed from the church, and made Alix cough. They hurried home through the blurred, gas-lit roads.

“Did you enjoy the service?” asked Kate.

“I think so,” said Alix, wondering whether she had.

“It’s queer,” she added, meaning the position of the Christian church in this world.

But Kate said, “Queer! Whatever do you mean? It was just like the ordinary; like it always is. . . . I wish Mr. Alison had preached, though; I never feel Mr. Daintree has the same touch. He preaches about things and people in general, and that’s never so inspiring; he doesn’t seem to get home the same way to each one. Now, Mr. Alison this morning was beautiful. Mr. Daintree, I always think, has almost too many ideas, and they run away with him a little. However.” Kate’s principle (one of them) was not to criticise the clergy, so she stopped.

“I wonder if Florence is in yet,” she said instead, “and if she’s left the larder open, as usual, and let that kitten get at the chicken? I shouldn’t be a bit surprised. She is a girl.”

Alix felt another incongruity. If Kate really believed the extraordinary things she professed to believe about the interfusion of two worlds (at least two), how then did it matter so much about chickens and kittens and Florence? Yet why not? Why shouldn’t it give all things an intenser, more vivid reality, a deeper significance? Perhaps it did, thought Alix, renouncing the problem of the Catholic church and its so complicated effects.

Alix, Nicholas, and West
(From Non-Combatants and Others)

Alix thought, “Christians must mind. Clergymen must mind awfully. It’s their business that’s being spoilt. It’s their job to make the world better: they must mind a lot, and they can’t fight either,” and saw West’s face, tired and preoccupied, in the darkness at her side.

“War Extra. ‘Fishul. Bulgarian Advance. Fall of Kragujevatz,’” cried a newsboy, as best he could.

“It’ll be all up with Serbia presently,” said West. “Going under fast. A wipe out, like Belgium, I suppose. . . . And we look at it from here and can’t do anything to stop it. Pretty rotten, isn’t it?” His voice was bitter.
"If we could go out there and try," said Alix, "we shouldn't feel so bad, should we?"

He shook his head.

"No: not so bad. War's beastly and abominable to the fighters: but not to be fighting is much more embittering and demoralising, I believe. Probably largely because one has more time to think. To have one's friends in danger, and not to be in danger oneself—it fills one with futile rage. Combatants are to be pitied; but non-combatants are of all men and women the most miserable. Older men, crocks, parsons, women—God help them."

"Yes," Alix agreed, on the edge of tears again.

Then West seemed to pull himself up from his despondency.

"But really, of course, they've a unique opportunity. They can't be fighting war abroad; but they can be fighting it at home. That's what it's up to us all to do now, I'm firmly convinced, by whatever means we each have at our command. We've all of us some. We've got to use them. The fighting men out there can't; they're tied. Some of them never can again. . . . It's up to us. . . . Good-bye, Miss Sandomir: my way is along there."

They parted at the corner of Gray's Inn Road. Alix saw him swallowed up in black fog, called by his bell, going to his church to fight war by the means he had at his command.

She got into her bus and went towards Violette, where no one fought anything at all, but where supper waited, and Mrs. Frampton was anxious lest she should have got lost in the fog.


Second Period: Smash (From Told by an Idiot)

1 Sound and Fury

The so bitter, so recent, so familiar, so agonising tale of the four years and a quarter between August, 1914, and November, 1918, has been told and re-told too often, and will not be told in detail here. It is enough, if not too much, to say that there was a great and dreadful war in Europe, and that nightmare and chaos and the abomination of desolation held sway for four horrid years. All there was of civilisation—whatever we mean by that unsatisfactory, undefined, relative word—suffered irretrievable damage. All there was of greed, of cruelty, of barbarism, of folly, incompetence, meanness, valour, heroism, selfishness, littleness, self-sacrifice and hate, rose to the call in each belligerent country and showed itself for what it was. Men and women acted blindly, according to their kind. They used the torments of others as stepping stones to prosperity or fame; they
endured torments themselves, with complaining, with courage, or with both; they did work they held to be useful, and got out of it what credit and profit they could; or work they knew was folly, and still got out of it what they could. They went to the war, they stayed at home, they scrambled for jobs among the chaos, they got rich, they got poor, they died, were maimed, medalled, frost-bitten, tortured, imprisoned, bored, embittered, enthusiastic, cheerful, hopeless, patient, or matter-of-fact, according to circumstances and temperament. Many people said a great deal, others very little. There were all manner of different attitudes and ways of procedure with regard to the war. To some it was a necessary or unnecessary hell, to some a painful and tedious affair enough, but with interests and alleviations and a good goal in sight; to some an adventure; to some (at home) a satisfactory sphere for work they enjoyed; to some a holy war; to others a devil’s dance in which they would take no part, or which they wearily did what they could to alleviate, or in which they joined with cynical and conscientious resolve not to be left out of whatever profits might accrue.

But to the majority in each country it was merely a catastrophe, like an earthquake, to be gone through blindly, until better might be.

2 The Family at War

Of the Garden family, Vicky was horrified but enthusiastically pro-war. Her two sons got commissions early, and she helped the war by organising bazaars and by doing whatever it was that one did (in the early stages, for in the later more of violence had to be done) to Belgian refugees. Maurice and his paper were violently pacifist, and became a byword. Rome saw the war and what had led up to it as the very crown and sum of human folly, and helped, very capably and neatly, to pack up and send off food and clothes to British prisoners. Stanley was caught in the tide of war fervour. She worked in a canteen, and served on committees for all kinds of good objects, and behaved with great competence and energy, her heart wrung day and night with fear for Billy. In 1917 she caught peace fever, joined the peace party and the Women’s International League, signed petitions and manifestos in support of Lord Lansdowne, and spoke on platforms about it, which Billy thought tiresome of her.

Irving lent a car to an ambulance, and his services to the Ministry of Munitions, and became a special constable. Una sent cakes to her sons and farmhands at the front, and employed land-girls on the farm. She took the war as all in the day’s work; there had been wars before in history, and there would be wars again. It was awfully sad, all the poor boys being taken like that; but it sent up the price of corn and milk, and that pleased Ted, for all his anxiety for his sons.

The younger generation acted and reacted much as might be expected of them. Vicky’s Hugh, who joined the gunners, was interested in the business and came tolerably well through it, only sustaining a lame leg. Tony, his younger brother, was killed in 1916. Maurice’s Roger, whose class was B2, served in France for a year, and wrote a good deal of trench poetry. He was then invalided
out, and entered the Ministry of Information, where he continued, in the intervals of compiling propaganda intended to interest the Greenland Esquimaux in the cause of the Allies, to publish trench poetry, full of smells, shells, corpses, mud and blood.

"I simply can’t read the poetry you write in these days, Roger," his mother Amy complained. "It’s become too terribly beastly and nasty and corpsey. I can’t think what you want to write it for, I’m sure."

"Unfortunately, mother," Roger explained, kindly, "war is rather beastly and nasty, you know. And a bit corpsey, too."

"My dear boy, I know that; I'm not an idiot. Don’t, for goodness’ sake, talk to me in that superior way, it reminds me of your father. All I say is, why write about the corpses? There’ve always been plenty of them, people who’ve died in their beds of diseases. You never used to write about them."

"I suppose one’s object is to destroy the false glamour of war. There’s no glamour about disease."

"Glamour, indeed! There you go again with that terrible nonsense. I don’t meet any of these people you talk about who think there’s glamour in war. I’m sure I never saw any glamour in it, with all you boys in the trenches and all of us at home slaving ourselves to death and starving on a slice of bread and margarine a day. Glamour, indeed. I’ll tell you what it is, a set of you young men have invented that glamour theory, just so as to have an excuse for what you call destroying it, with your nasty talk. Like you’ve invented those awful Old Men you go on about, who like the war. I’m sick of your Old Men and your corpses."

"I’m sick of them myself," said Roger gloomily, and changed the subject, for you could not argue with Amy. But he went on writing war poetry, and gained a good deal of reputation as one of our soldier poets. On the whole, he was more successful as a poet than as a propagandist to the Esquimaux, a phlegmatic people, who remained a little detached about the war.

Stanley’s Billy hailed the outbreak of hostilities with some pleasure, and was among the first civilians to enlist. Here, he felt, was a job more in his line than being secretary to his Liberal cousin, which he had found more and more tedious as time passed. He fought in France, in Flanders, in Gallipoli, and in Mesopotamia, was wounded three times, and recovered each time to fight again. He was a cheerful, ordinary, unemotional young soldier, a good deal bored, after a bit, with the war. On one of his leaves, in 1916, he married a young lady from the Vaudeville Theatre, whom Stanley could not care about.

"I know mother wanted me to marry a highbrow girl," he confided to Molly. "Some girl who’s been to college or something. But I haven’t much to say to that sort ever, nor they to me. Now Dot . . ."

But even Molly had her misgivings about Dot. She was not sure that Dot would prove quite monogamous enough. And, as it turned out, Dot did not prove monogamous at all, but rather the contrary.

Molly herself had become an ambulance driver in France. She frankly enjoyed the war. She became engaged to officers, successively and simultaneously. She acted at canteen entertainments, and gained a charming reputation as a
Following the Fashion

I have a dress with puffed sleeves; the skirt is very long and full; about ten yards of silk, I think it took. It hangs in the wardrobe, taking a lot of room, because of the sleeves.

I have shoes with high heels; about three inches, I dare say. I can wear them if I want to.

I think I shall change my Morris, and get a small stream-lined green thing, and look smarter in the streets. It will not be so good for touring, but it will look better.

I may paint my nails red; or green, if that is coming in.

I shall write my memoirs, I think. I shall bring in every one I know, and have an index, so they can find themselves and their friends. There are plenty of things I can say about them. If they do not like it, they can lump it. It will serve them right, for having met me.

I may write a book about contemporary writers, too. They won’t like that either, the things I shall say about them.

I can write tough-guy stories. What I mean is, I can write stories like this:

She was a grand girl. You’re drunk, she said. But I wasn’t so drunk, either. I mean, I’d had a few, but I could see straight; and I could hold the wheel. I had the headlights on, too. To hell with those lamps, she said, and switched them down. Do you want to dazzle everything on the road, she said, so it rushes into us? You’re nuts.

She was a grand girl. You’re a grand girl, I said, and I switched on the big lamps again, and I held her waist with my left, and hugged her up to me close, so as I felt her warmth. That’s the style, I said, and I saw the needle get up to sixty. Oh, you’re crackers, she said. Driving like hell with the big lamps on and necking me with one arm. How to-night’ll end, she said, I don’t know. I really don’t, do you? Like most nights end, I guess, said I, and that’s when comes the dawn. Aw, you’re crazy, said she. I told mother I’d be in by four. Well, you won’t be in by four; maybe by eight. That’s time enough for breakfast, isn’t it? I know a swell place down the river. Oh, for heaven’s sake, said she; we shall never get any place at this rate. And what must she do but start grabbing at the wheel, crying out I was all over the road. And so we were, after she started grabbing. Then she screamed out, and something hit us and we slewed right round.

There was the hell of a mess on the road. One of those little Austins, it was,
and all crumpled up, and a man and a girl all crumpled up too. There was blood and glass and things around. But my Buick had only buckled a wing.

See here, I said, we can't do a thing. We'd best get on. She was being sick in the road; the blood had turned her up, I think. That and the shock. And seeing those two.

Here, I said, come on out of this. We can't do a thing. I put her in the Buick, and slewed around again and drove off. There was something banging loose, and I got out to look; it was the number plate, so I wrenched it off and took it inside. We didn't have the headlamps on now; the off one was smashed, anyway, by that bloody little Austin. I drove away. The steering was a bit funny, too. She never stopped crying and talking, it made me tired. Women can't get this: when a thing's done it's done. That's a thing no woman can ever get. They can't let it be. Hell, did I want that bloody little car to muscle into us that way? Aw, forget it.

All the time as I drive I seem to hear that damned radio saying, in its polite Oxford-Cambridge voice, "Before the news, there is a police message. Between two and three on Sunday morning an Austin seven car came into collision with another car, which apparently failed to stop. . . ." Failed nothing. I did stop, see? I stopped, and saw there wasn't a thing I could do, so I went on again.

Oh, to hell with your noise. . . .

Yes: I could write a story like that if I liked. Perhaps I will. Fine magazine stuff. What I mean is, a magazine would take it.

And I can write tough-guy poetry. A magazine would take that, too. I can write poetry like this (I call this one To the Barricades):

Mr. Jiggins goes to the circus.
(The girls, the hoops, the clowns, the seals, the hoop-oers.)
He has donned his Harrow tie,
But Borstal was his alma mater true.
He meets Mrs. Fortescue-Fox,
With a jade cigarette-holder, long and green like asparagus or a dead woman's fingers
Or the pale reeds swaying in the duck-pond,
But never a sprig of rue.
You're so handsome, where you going?
Don't know where I'm going, where I am, where you are, where the sweet hell anyone is.
(Forward to the barricades! To the barricades—where else?)
Ohé! Ohé! mes brave petits! the fat is in the fire!
Εἰς τὸ πῦρ ἐκ τοῦ κάτωνου.
As Lucian pointed out, things can always be worse.
Pink and stout he was, pranked out with rings and gold chains, he was.
What a fool he looked!
Dites donc, monsieur, si qu'on trait se coucher, n'est-ce pas?
Festinare nocet, tempore quæque suo qui facit, ille sapit.
In fact, no hurry.
(March, march, march, the feet of a thousand men marching as one. No hurry?)
They trample like artillery in my head.
Allons, allons, faites donner la garde!
But Mrs. Fortescue-Fox,
Unable to wait, flung herself upon the obdurate rocks.
Like is like that.
"But never mine," Mr. Jiggins cried.
And up washed the running tide,
Flowing up, casting corpses on the slimy beach.
Casting statues, casting coins, casting mermen and mermaids and old bowler hats.
Ting-a-ling-a-ling ring the bells of hell; where you bound now?
Allons, companions, we march to the barricades.

In the grey dawn of yesterday
We wipe away all tears:—perhaps.

There's another I call Petrol Pumps. But that's longer, and I won't print it here. It's fine magazine stuff too.
I like being in the fashion.
I may join the Communists.
Or I may write a novel a million words long, and very strong; the longest and strongest novel of the season.
The trouble about the fashions is, there are too many going on at once, and you can't follow them all.
Sometimes I think I will give them all up, and just be dowdy.


Album

How enchanting your relations are! Mine, too, look much the same. I suppose people do; I mean, so much depends on the clothes, does it not? I like your aunts; how they ripple from the waist down, bending in the middle like swans; their hair piled high in chignons; see, how much of it they have—or was some, perhaps, attached, or rolled over cushions? Your Aunt Amy, did you say? What long ear-rings! She is very elegant, mondaine, refined, yet capable, do you not think, de tout? Or was she not? Married a curate, do you say? One wonders what life in the curate-house was like, after your Aunt Amy entered it. Nine children? So that was what it was like. Yes, I see, here they all are. The little boys in sailor suits or jerseys, holding bats; the little girls in sashes, their hair cut across their foreheads. Du Maurier children. Oh, yes, I see, that is Phyllis, and there are Olive and Ruth. I should know them anywhere; by the way, I hear Ruth's grandchildren are at that fashionable school in Dorset, and can already change
wheels, top batteries, and milk cows. They are going to learn to read next year, you say? At ten and twelve? Isn’t that a little soon? One is so afraid of over-exciting their brains. Still, if they want to learn, anything is better than repressing them. . . .

A clergyman: of course, Aunt Amy’s husband. A Tractarian, was he? Well, he was a little late for that; but I see what you mean, he was whatever High Church clergymen were in the eighties. Wrote tracts about the Eastward Position? I think he was so right. And, of course, they all face that way now, so that shows.

Who is that old military man? He looks like a splendid walrus, with his long whiskers. Your paternal grandfather? Of course; the General. Didn’t he fight in the Crimea? Charged with the Light Brigade? How exciting! And how fortunate that he was one of those who rode back. He looks the kind of military man who might have been very much annoyed with whoever it was who had blundered. I should not care to face your grandfather if I had blundered. The lady in the crinoline is your grandmother, of course. She looks full of spirit; I dare say she needed it all. A crinoline gives such dignity, such deportment. No one could look dowdy in a crinoline. How her chatelaine hangs over it, full of the store-room keys. What a bore, to have to unlock the store-room whenever anyone wanted stores. I suppose stores are used by the cook daily, and always at the most inconvenient moment.

Look at those lovely girls, all in crinolines, ready to swim along like balloons in a breeze. Your great aunts? They are very sweet. No doubt they had a delightful time, waltzing, shooting with bows and arrows, riding, skating with gentlemen (for there was real ice in those days, was there not?) See, there is one of them on a horse, in a long habit, her hair in a net under a dear little feathered hat. Great-aunt Helen? Famous all over the country for her riding and jumping? Broke her back at a water-jump, and lay crippled for forty years. . . . Oh, dear, let us turn the page.

Here we have bustles. Your mother? Now, that is really the swan period. What a bend! The Grecian bend, was it not? The Greeks were first with everything, of course; but I do not recall this bend in any of their statues. Perhaps they could not hold it long enough to be sculptured. Of course, it is not altogether genuine; the bustle helped. But how adorable! How sorry your mother must have been when she had to go into those horrible clothes of the nineties, puff-sleeved jackets (by the way, I see they are in again; strange how even the worst things always come round) and stiff collars and sailor hats—yes, there she is in them.

And your Aunt Elizabeth, in a college group wearing large cricket pads—Newnham, is it? What year? 1890. Well, of course Newnham had been going for about twenty years then. . . . It was quite the thing to go to college, I suppose; now it seems to be less thought of, to be considered no use for getting jobs. I dare say your Aunt Elizabeth didn’t have to think about jobs. Became a doctor, did she? I never knew Mrs. Robinson had been a doctor; why did she give it up? She left six forceps in? But that’s nothing, surely. . . . Oh, all in the same wound;
yes, I suppose that would be rather many. . . . And three swabs? Well, I dare say her mind was on cricket. It may happen to anyone, they say. Most people who have ever had an operation are simply full of forceps and swabs, I believe; they think it is rheumatism or neuritis. . . . It is wonderful, I often think, what additions, as well as subtractions, the human frame can stand. I suppose really we are put together quite at random, and a few objects more or less make very little difference; though I must say, when you see a picture of our insides, you wonder where extra forceps and swabs would go. But of course, they take the place of whatever the surgeon has just taken away, I forgot that. . . . Well, perhaps your Aunt Elizabeth was right; she goes in for chickens now, doesn’t she?

You as a child; how pretty. How people change; still, I would know you anywhere. Quite in the nude. That has the advantage that you can’t be dated by your clothes. Your school lacrosse team . . . and your first dance dress. Empire style. Clothes were pretty that year; nice high waists and simple lines.

But let us turn back to the Victorians. They fascinate me. There is a je ne sais quoi about them, a subtlety; they might have strange experiences, commit strange deeds, and say nothing. They are proud, reserved, self-contained. Your Aunt Geraldine looks like a mermaid, your Uncle Frank, behind his moustaches, seems to brood on strange lands. Had to leave the country suddenly? That would account for it, I suppose. Poor Uncle Frank. Did he have to be long away? It was hushed up? That always takes a little time, of course. And then Uncle Frank came home, and married a Miss Jones. Had to leave the country again? What bad luck he had! Now-a-days, they seem to manage better, without so much travelling. Was he long abroad the second time? Always? Dear me. Yes, I see, this is his hacienda in the Argentine, with himself and Miss Jones, grown nice and plump, in the porch. . . . Oh, not Miss Jones? She stayed in England, with the children? Then this would be some other lady, more of the Argentine type. . . . I expect your uncle Frank was wise to settle there, among cattle; as your Aunt Elizabeth was wise to settle among chickens. Animals are a great resource. And so much nicer to rear them than to go and shoot them.

Photographs of ancestors are really much more interesting than the paintings of them they had before, because the camera cannot lie, so we know that they really did look like that. Now-a-days they touch them up more; the camera has learnt to lie. Besides, do we look as interesting? I am sure we do not. I could look at our ancestors for ever. Thank you so much for showing me yours. It has been a charming evening. You must come and see mine.

A charming evening. But as I drive home, the small cold wind of mortality hums round me with sighing breath. The way to dusty death seems to stretch before me, lit by those fading yellow oblongs wherefrom someone’s ancestors gaze, pale pasteboard prisoners, to be wondered about, recalled, lightly summed and dismissed by us as we turn a page. So too shall we gaze out some autumn evening, imprisoned and defenceless, to stir in posterity a passing idle speculation, a moment’s memory. That? Oh, that is great-aunt Rose. . . . She wrote. Oh, nothing you would have heard of; I don’t think she was ever much read, even at the time; she just wrote. Novels, essays, verse—I forget what else; she just wrote
away, as those Georgians did. Rather dull, I think. What besides? Well, I think she just went about; nothing special. There was some story . . . but it's all so long ago, I've forgotten. She ended poor, having outlived whatever market she had, poor old thing. Yes, she went on writing, but no one read her . . . she died poor, killed, I think, in an aeroplane smash; she learnt to pilot too old; she should have stuck to motoring. But she would learn to fly, and finally smashed a friend's plane and herself . . . silly, really. She had grown very tiresome before the end, they say. But look, here is someone more interesting. . . .

It will be posterity's charming evening then, and theirs to pity, if they will, their pasteboard prisoners, as I now pity Aunt Geraldine with her mermaid's face and form, Uncle Frank who had to leave home so suddenly and so frequently, Great-Aunt Helen, of the rogue's face and little feather, who fell at the water-jump sixty years ago, Grandpapa General, who rode back with the Light Brigade, Grandmama, who had to be so often locking and unlocking her stores, Aunt Elizabeth with her forceps and her chickens, Aunt Amy rippling so elegantly from the waist down and marrying the curate who wrote tracts about the Eastward Position. . . .

Poor figures I feel we shall most of us cut beside them, when the Albums shall imprison us too.

*Personal Pleasures.* 15–21.