**University of Chichester**

**Department of English and Creative Writing**

**ERIC TRANSLATED:**

**An experimental family memoir**

**by**

**Emma Tristram**

**Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Revised version December 2016**

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***Peggy Sutton’s oil portrait of Eric Sutton reading, probably on the South Downs near Storrington c. 1922. Eric loved walking on the Downs and in the countryside near Marlborough.***

**ABSTRACT**

**(UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER: Department of English and Creative Writing,**

**PhD, Emma Tristram, ‘Eric Translated: An experimental family memoir’)**

This thesis attempts to write a memoir of someone I do not remember – my grandfather, the translator Eric Sutton (1886-1949). The Preface introduces him and my reasons for wanting to make a study of him. One is the mystery of his dual identity, as the witty, depressive, but loveable man I found in his letters, and as a ‘black sheep’, edited out of the family story. Soon after the start of my project, his equivocal status was partly explained by an unprovable suggestion from a family member that he sexually abused my mother. Trying to discover the truth about what sort of man he was is a main motive of this thesis. My materials include the letters in my family archive, my mother’s unpublished memoir, his appearances in other people’s memoirs, letters in other archives, some family traditions, and his 69 translations from French and German.

Chapter 1 forms the ‘literature review’. In search of a methodology for my memoir, it first discusses the now well-researched interlinking of biography, autobiography and creative writing during the Modernist period, in various forms of ‘auto/biografiction’, and some of their present-day descendants. It then examines the newly burgeoning – and academically neglected – genre of ‘family memoir’. I conclude that ‘family memoir’ is closer to the model I need than ‘auto/biografiction’.

The following chapters explore the possibilities of the ‘family memoir’ approach, with my search for information as part of the narrative. Though there are some frustrating ‘dead ends’ – his editorship of the Oxford Magazine, his possible intelligence career in WW1 – my evidence comes together to illustrate his life more vividly than I had expected. One reason for this is the quality of the writing both in Eric’s letters and in my mother’s memoir and letters; they share wit and literary influences, making this also a study of the passing of style from father to daughter.

As well as investigating family memoir, this thesis contributes to two other branches of academic research: translation, and letters or ‘epistolarity’. The chapters on his translations concentrate on two books, by Vivant Denon and Jean-Paul Sartre, which illuminate the question of identity – in books as well as people: a central problem of this thesis. They also track critical trends in translation and sketch the complete about-turn in criteria for ‘good’ translation since Eric’s time. His translation of Sartre’s great novel *The* *Reprieve* (1945) illuminates the English disease of bowdlerisation, and its startling effect on this book.

Chapter 8, ‘The events of 1940’, tells the story through letters of Eric’s attempt (successful at the time) to prevent my mother marrying my father in 1939-40. Chapter 9 studies the letters to and from his second wife, Jenny, then in the WRNS, both as examples of letters in wartime, and for what they can add to my portrait of him. The Conclusion asks whether I have answered the questions with which I began.

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Emma Tristram

declare that the thesis entitled

Eric Translated: An experimental family memoir

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

* this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
* where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
* where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
* where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
* I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
* where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
* none of this work has been published before submission

Signed: ………………………………………………………………………..

Date:…………………………………………………………………………….

***Contents***

**Abstract………………………………………………………………………………3**

**Declaration of Authorship…………………………………………………………..4**

**Cast of characters……………………………………………………………………8**

**Preface………………………………………………………………………………..9**

1. The starting point
2. The accusation of abuse
3. The structure of the thesis
4. My materials: description of the archive
5. Methods and themes
6. Am I experimental?

**Chapter 1 The formal choice………………………………………………………19**

1. Auto/biografiction
2. Family memoir as a new and problematic genre
3. The recent unease with memoir
4. Possible models to follow
5. The family memoir based on letters
6. New developments
7. Truth and performativity

**Chapter 2 Eric at Oxford: the case of ‘the case’………………………………….39**

1. The Oxford way of talking
2. The nature of Peggy
3. ‘Sottish drunkenness’
4. The Oxford Magazine
5. Oxford philosophy in Eric’s time

**Chapter 3 The young Bohemians………………………………………………….53**

1. The ‘general family dislike’ of Eric’s marriage
2. Artistic Chelsea
3. The affair with Fanny Wadsworth
4. Eric in WW1
5. Paris and Nina Hamnett

**Chapter 4 The unfreezing……………………………………………………………67**

1. Vyvyan’s attempt at rescue
2. ‘A nice lady who loves me’
3. ‘A Fair Adventure’

**Chapter 5 Commencing translator…………………………………………………81**

1. The risqué French novels
2. Pornography and identity
3. Eric on pornography
4. Eric’s ‘pompous’ style
5. The translator’s life
6. Changing standards in translation

**Chapter 6 ‘Sunk in work and povertude’: the 1930s……………………………..97**

1. ‘Esurient but laborious’
2. Felicity
3. Clayton Castle
4. Saving the Wadsworths’ marriage
5. The translating career leading up to WW2
6. ‘Nowhere but Chelsea’

**Chapter 7 Emissions and omissions: Sartre’s *The Reprieve*, 1945………………...115**

1. Censored strangeness
2. War as orgasm
3. Further omissions
4. Responsibility for the cuts
5. Michael Rubinstein’s letter
6. Eric and Sartre’s philosophy

**Chapter 8 ‘The events of 1940’: Eric’s attempt to stop my parents’ marriage….125**

1. Introduction
2. 1939: the start of the affair
3. The engagement
4. The summer at Eve’s
5. The escape

**Chapter 9 Postlude: Eric and Jenny in wartime……………………………………145**

1. A wartime correspondence
2. Circumstances
3. Eric the translator
4. ‘The Theises gave me a Malory’: Louise and Otto Theis
5. Eric and Felicity
6. Final goodbye

**Conclusion……………………………………………………………………………..157**

Bibliography…………………………………………………………………………...161

**Note to Examiners…………………………………………………………………......175**

**Cast of characters**

**Family 1: Eric William Sutton**, translator, 1886-1949.

Married (1, 1912): Emma Miles Kitchin, also known as Peggy Sutton, artist, 1885-1923.

**Their children**: Pamela Sutton, b. and d. 1913; Diana Sutton, 1915-26; Felicity Sutton, 1922-2007 **(my mother).** Married (2, 1929): Jennifer Dallas, 1898-1994, antique shop keeper and Wren, née Treleaven, ex-wife of Douglas Dallas, painter; mother (with Douglas) of Ronnie, Alec and Nicolette.

**Family 2: Eric’s daughter and grandchildren**

**Felicity Sutton**, 1922-2007, Eric’s daughter, artist.

Married (1948): Henry Arthur Pears Fisher, 1918-2005, son of Geoffrey Fisher (1887-1972, Archbishop of Canterbury 1945-1961) and Rosamond.

**Their children**: Emma Tristram (b. 1949), writer of this thesis; Lucy Fisher, writer and artist (b. 1951); Polly Mortimer, librarian and mental health commentator (b. 1955); Thomas Fisher, History of Art professor (b. 1956).

**Family 3: Charles Lawrence, draper,** Eric’s grandfather

Married Arenatt or Asenath Garrad; lived at 39A Queen Square, London in 1876 and 7. Henry Garrad, also a draper (recorded as a visitor in 1861 census), is likely to be Asenath’s father.

**Their children:** Augustus, b. 1839, d. 1877; William, b. 1844; Edward, b. 1846; Ellen, b. 1848; Jane, b. 1850; Mary, b. 1851, d. 1941; Amelia, birth date unknown. Ellen trained as a teacher and became head of a preparatory school, and married in 1876 William T. Sutton, book-keeper and later accountant, d.1901 – **Eric’s parents.** William T. was the son of another William Sutton, woollen-draper.

**Family 4: George Tansley,** ‘ball and rout furnisher’ and Working Men’s College administrator, c. 1837-1902.

Married in 1863 Amelia Lawrence who was a child of Charles Lawrence.

**Their children:** Maud (c. 1865-1946); Arthur (ecologist, knighted, 1871**-**1955) **– Eric’s cousin and guardian.**

**Preface**

1. **The starting point**

When my mother, Felicity Fisher, an artist, died in 2007 aged 85, I found among her papers hundreds of letters I had never seen before, from her father, Eric Sutton (1886-1949), a translator from French and German, to his second wife Jenny in 1940-46. I never knew him: he died the year I was born. His status in the family was that of a black sheep, never spoken about, who failed to fulfil his early promise, who drank and flew into rages. But in the letters I discovered a very different person, whom I liked: depressive, struggling to earn a living, but with a distinctive, ironic literary voice of his own. He was also a tragic figure, whose first wife and two of his children died very young. With my mother’s unpublished memoir, other family letters, archive research, and study of some of his 69 translations, I began to piece together my biography of him.

In Establishment terms (which meant a lot to him) Eric was a failure. At various times a don, a diplomat and a civil servant, he stuck to none of these careers. Born in 1886, to William Sutton, an accountant, and Ellen, principal of a school, he went to Merchant Taylors’ school (where he won a prestigious national prize for French) and then read Mods and Greats at Oxford (1905-9). After his first in Greats he taught Philosophy at Worcester College, Oxford for three years (1909-12), and edited the Oxford Magazine. He left to join the Civil Service, having married the same year Peggy Kitchin, an artist, who ‘wouldn’t live in the provinces, having been brought up in them’.[[1]](#footnote-1) In 1916, he joined the Army as a ‘Deputy Assistant Censor’ (his withered left arm, a congenital abnormality, prevented active service), emerging from obscurity next in 1919-21 as a diplomat in Paris, with the job of private secretary to Lord Sumner on the Reparations Commission. This career, too, came to nothing.

My mother’s letter to Nick Jacobs of 1996 suggests he could have had an academic career after WW1: ‘Eric should have been able to take up a fellowship at Oxford after 1919, but my mother wouldn’t move from London where she was becoming a known painter and etcher. Such a life would have been his metier. His old pupils at Worcester kept up with him for years. He taught me more about literature than any School Certificate syllabus, which was all I obtained. He read to us in the evening and my last conversation with him was about Henry IV part two – before the ambulance came from the hospital where he died a week after.’ Her description of his life goes on: ‘In 1923 my mother died and his anguish was intense. Then in 1926 his second daughter died. I don’t consider that Eric ever completely recovered from this tragic chain of events, although he adored my stepmother.’

Eric[[2]](#footnote-2) began to put his life back together two years after Peggy’s death, when he started his affair with his second wife, Jenny, in 1925 (they married in 1929), and around the same time started translating from French and German, encouraged by his friend Vyvyan Holland, son of Oscar Wilde and also a translator. Eric was a translator most of his life, from the 1920s to the 40s, in the intervals of civil service jobs, and could be said to have been respected and successful; he played a role in forming the literary canon with his translations of novels by Hans Fallada, Arnold Zweig and Heinrich Mann, though others translated the works of the more famous Stefan Zweig (no relation) and Thomas Mann (brother of Heinrich); the pinnacle of his career was translating the first two volumes of Sartre’s *Roads to Freedom* trilogy of novels (now a tetralogy, as a fourth volume has been published), but someone else translated the third. He ‘hated translating’ (as Jenny said in a letter);[[3]](#footnote-3) he saw it as ill-paid drudgery and was often in trouble through lack of money. He spoke of the years spent mainly doing translations as ‘years of self-eclipse’.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In spite of Eric’s low opinion of translating, his translations illuminate an important turning point in European culture. Their literary and historical background is the period of Modernism, the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. His translations from French and German relate to a period when European thought was becoming more important in English culture, and political events – particularly in Germany – were being watched anxiously; the translations include not only novels but political works such as the papers of the German politician Gustav Stresemann, edited as well as translated by Eric. The novels of Sartre which he translated, as well as being in themselves a moving record of the effect of WW2 on ordinary lives, were part of Sartre’s attempt to express his Existentialist philosophy through fiction; they take the courageous decision to show shattered lives in shattered prose, which jumps from one person’s thoughts to another’s within a sentence. Eric’s shattered life seemed, therefore, to be worth investigating, not just from my point of view as his granddaughter, captivated by his newly discovered ‘voice’.

1. **The accusation of abuse**

Once I had started my investigation, one possible reason for Eric’s black sheep status soon became clear. When I described my project to my siblings, my sister Polly told me (on a postcard) that my mother had said to her in old age that she was glad she had had a dog, ‘to keep Eric out of her bedroom’. I asked whether my mother ever told her anything more about this fear, or any actual abuse. I received another postcard (somehow the least awful way of communicating about the subject). She replied that ‘she once said something like “Eric mistook me for my mother” – rather gnomically, can’t remember exact words, and open to interpretation’. She repeated the previous story: ‘In late life she said she was glad she had a dog, because it kept Eric away/out of her bedroom. I didn’t pick up on that but always meant to ask more in a roundabout way, but couldn’t face it’.

The same sister also told me that my mother said that Vyvyan Holland, a very good friend of Eric’s, ‘molested’ her. But I have to be cautious about interpreting this accusation. There is an ambiguous statement in my mother’s memoir. She is 12 and living with Eric and Jenny at 5, the Mall, East Sheen. ‘Vyvyan came one night. He came up to say goodnight. Since Clayton Castle, these ‘Goodnights’ had taken rather an intimate turn. In a way I dreaded them. But this time he read me some poems by Louis MacNeice.’ He goes on to invite her to a children’s party.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The simplest interpretation of this, and my mother’s statements to Polly, is that Eric and Vyvyan were both guilty. Another reading is that as they stand these statements (almost) exonerate Eric, by attributing molesting to Vyvyan, and only a ‘mistake’ and her own fear to Eric. But this may be too neat, and what I would want as someone interested in Eric. Another possibility is that it was Eric who ‘molested’ her, and this made her misunderstand Vyvyan’s ‘rather’ intimate goodnights as molestation. A fourth possibility is that by her statements to my sister my mother was trying – but failing – to disclose Eric’s molestation. So she used the word ‘molest’ about Vyvyan because she could not bear to use it about Eric, whom she loved. And she saved for him the less direct statement about her fear, and the attribution of the ‘mistake’. Though it may sound convoluted I feel it is a real possibility. When she occasionally mentioned Eric’s name in old age there was some agony in her voice.

Far from putting me off, my sister’s evidence made it more important to find out what can be known about him. She loved and admired Eric, as she states many times. For instance, she says ‘he was a most delightful companion when we were together’, in her letter to Nick Jacobs of 1996. She also says ‘This [her letter] doesn’t really give you the relevant details of a man, the like of which I have searched [for] all my life and been disappointed. …Jack Beazley perhaps, but he was immersed so in the Greek vase culture – but an angelic man’.[[6]](#footnote-6) I feel that whatever the true history is of her relationship with Eric, she would approve of my writing about him. Indeed, she says in the same letter to Nick Jacobs: ‘I have quantities of his letters, which are wonderful to read. Once I thought of doing a book of the best of them, but perhaps one of our four children will do that.’ I am not making a book of his letters, but their concise wit will shine through many of the chapters that follow.

1. **The structure of the thesis**

As part of my search for the truth about Eric, I am investigating the genre of memoir. Chapter 1 discusses the now well-researched interlinking of biography, autobiography and creative writing during the Modernist period, in various forms of ‘auto/biografiction’, and some of their present-day descendants. It then examines memoir and its offshoot, the recently flourishing genre of ‘family memoir’. I conclude that ‘family memoir’ is closer to the model I need than ‘auto/biografiction’, partly because of its closer relationship to the truth. Rather than a straight biography, I am writing a family memoir, since the story includes not only Eric but also my parents and myself as a researcher.

The penultimate chapter of the thesis recreates, through letters, my mother’s affair with my father in 1939-40, and Eric’s attempts to prevent their marriage. In making this chapter I am conscious of the effect on me of Sartre’s philosophy as he expressed it in *The Reprieve.* I am putting together the thoughts and feelings of Eric, my mother, and my father during the same period – the year before WW2 – and the year that followed. In this wartime struggle of wills Eric can be seen as interfering and culpable; conversely, he may just have been cautious, loving and sensible. The relationship between Harry and Felicity was difficult anyway. My mother was 17, my father 21, when they first met in 1939; he asked her to marry him that summer and she said no. The affair begins again in 1940, and they plan to marry; Eric reluctantly agrees (once my father is made a captain), though he requires a delay; all is jubilation over the summer, but at the end of 1940 the affair breaks off again – seemingly Harry’s decision this time, because Eric has asked for a further delay.[[7]](#footnote-7)

My final chapter sketches the remaining wartime story of Eric and Jenny: these are part of the story of WW2, as well as part of these characters’ lives. Between these chapters – the formal exploration, and the wartime events - the thesis traces Eric’s life and career, and my mother’s life to early adulthood, from the evidence I have. It also examines closely two of Eric’s translations – from the French of Vivant Denon and Jean-Paul Sartre. My examples are chosen from his 69 translations as exemplars of unstable identity, in both authors and books; a key underlying theme of this thesis. They are also relevant to questions about pornography and censorship – another connecting thread. I also ask how his translations stand up to the shift in standards of translating, from the old-fashioned commitment to ‘invisibility’ to the more modern preference for letting the translated language show through, and make strange, the language of the translation.

1. **My materials: description of the archive**

My mother’s archive – really, a houseful of mostly unsorted papers which I took home after her death – contains thousands of letters, and together with her unpublished memoir, written in 2000, forms my basic material. Eric is the least well-known personality to be found in this archive. I could have chosen other potentially interesting subjects from my family, which joins together establishment figures with wilder, more creative, more ‘Bohemian’ people. The archive contains masses of unpublished material about my father Harry Fisher (lawyer, judge, President of Wolfson College, Oxford), and about the Fisher family. The family produced many headmasters of public schools; my other grandfather, Geoffrey Fisher, started his career as headmaster of Repton school, and went on to become a bishop, then Archbishop of Canterbury from 1945 to 1961 – notable mainly for having crowned the present Queen, and himself the subject of two biographies.

The Bohemian, artistic side of the archive contained much material about an important, but less well-known figure: my mother’s godmother Gladys Peto, a successful popular artist of the 1910s, 20s and 30s. I had her enormous, heavy stick-in books, full of cuttings of all her journalism mixed with photographs, and also a file full of fan letters from soldiers during WW1 about her column in the *Sketch*.[[8]](#footnote-8) Then there is my mother’s own art: trained at Chelsea and the Slade, she gave up her professional career when she married Harry Fisher in 1948, but continued to paint all her life, always experimenting – therefore rather uneven in her achievement – but with a brilliant and remarkable *oeuvre* both in oils and watercolour. Her paintings and prints, and photographs and catalogues of her exhibitions, form an important part of the archive.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Any of these people could have been my focus, instead of Eric. But when I took the archive home after my mother’s death in 2007 it was the discovery of the small brown suitcase full of hundreds of letters from him that attracted me most, partly as having the potential for a scholarly use which would provide something completely new. This cache contained his hundreds of letters to Jenny Sutton, my mother’s stepmother, written between 1940 and 1946: they were easier to understand than the rest of the papers, as they were carefully preserved by Jenny, filed in order, along with her letters to him, tied in piles with ribbon and wrapped in newspaper. Jenny was away in the Wrens at the time when they were written, while Eric clung to a job in the civil service (with spells of extra work as a translator). They wrote to each other nearly every day – Eric asked for ordinary, humdrum letters about everyday affairs simply as a comfort.

As well as the wartime correspondence between Eric and Jenny, the archive also contains hundreds of other letters, including Eric’s letters to my mother through her childhood and young womanhood, and my mother’s early love letters to my father, Harry Fisher. These are listed in more detail in the Bibliography. I soon discovered the existence of another cache of letters from Eric, this time to his friend Vyvyan Holland, in the 1920s and 30s. These letters are in the possession of Vyvyan’s son Merlin, who kindly allowed me to copy about a hundred. They show a rather different, younger Eric, depressed and sparing of words as often in the later letters, but also rather louche, sharing many jokes with Vyvyan about drink and women. Another cache of letters from him, this time to Otto Theis and Louise Morgan, literary figures of the 1920s and 30s, was discovered at a late stage of the thesis. My ‘epistolarium’ or set of letters from Eric therefore shows him both as a young man, and as an older man surviving World War Two; they cover nearly the whole of his translating career. My mother’s memoir, and her letters to my father, fill in many gaps.

The genesis of her memoir, a cornerstone of this thesis, needs to be described. Covering the period from her early childhood to marriage in 1948, it was written more than 50 years after that endpoint, laboriously by hand in an exercise book, which I then typed from. When writing it, she had no reference material, no computer, no Google, no easy way of checking things: just her memory and a notebook. When I quote from it in the following pages, I often have to correct inaccuracies. By this time her rheumatoid arthritis was very bad and writing was painful; her style therefore is notably compressed, very unlike the outpourings of her early letters. It was hard reading for some of the family, who could not bear to hear about the unhappy time she had had after her mother’s death. Later, she told me that she wished she had never written it. But there it is, titled by her with typical wryness ‘From Then to Then’.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The memoir’s submerged literariness, and its tone combining naivety and wit, affect the ways it can be treated as evidence. Take, for example, its opening sentence: ‘A very long time ago I was born in a nursing home at Teddington, which is the highest place on the Thames river still tidal. Surely this had some bearing on my future?’ This is enigmatic; it may be a literary joke, recalling openings such as G.K.Chesterton’s in his autobiography: ‘I was…baptised in the little church of St George opposite the large Waterworks Tower [in Campden Hill]…I do not allege any significance in the relation of the two buildings …Nevertheless, the great Waterworks Tower was destined to play a part in my life’.[[11]](#footnote-11) Unlike G.K., she is alleging significance, though leaving it to us, in her elliptical way, to decide what that is. Perhaps she is seeing herself as in some way a ‘child of nature’, connected with the sea and its vastness and universality, a sea which in old age she loved to go and look at. But her humour was very dry, and she may mean that it had no bearing on her future whatsoever.

1. **Methods and themes**

My project may be useful to those (many of them now) who find themselves in possession of a large family archive on the death of a parent. I am trying to find ways of comprehending it and telling its story, or one of its stories. There is no perfect way, but I read, select, filter, interpret, narrate, and follow clues. My course through it is governed by my personal connection with Eric and my mother. Some of the subjects I touch on which may be of interest to other researchers are translation, publishing, little magazines, the study of letters or ‘epistolarity’, Bohemians in Chelsea in the 1900s, teens and 20s, and London in WW2.

My study of Eric belongs in the subgenre of ‘literary memoir’, which can illuminate the question of creativity within the family, where creativity comes from, and how the family provides a model for it. My mother is descended from Eric as a letter-writer: both love books and quote from them all the time. He does it in a well-turned paragraph or in quotation marks with an author’s name lovingly referenced; she does it as naturally as breathing, in and through her own words.

My mother’s letters, literary, naïve and stream-of-consciousness all in one, are the antithesis of Eric’s stylistically. Eric wrote in a style people sometimes criticised as ‘pompous’, literary, well-turned, elegant, satirical, often using it ironically about very mundane things. (This style is often summed up as ‘Oxbridge’.) In one letter he says that Jenny accuses him of not being able to write a letter without using the expression ‘indeed’. Both Felicity and Eric are conscious of the letter-writing tradition, and both are worthy of their place in it. He comments on her letter-writing style, advising her not to be too lyrical. The opposition of their styles mirrors the struggle between them as people, and shows how an influence can be just as potent in a negative way as in a positive one. My mother’s decision to become an artist, in spite of her skill as a writer and her writing prizes at school, was an aspect of her desire to be different from Eric, and more like her dead mother, Peggy.

In using the letters to trace part of the emotional history of Eric and my mother I will also encounter questions about social class and about gender roles. Felicity saw herself as ‘belonging’ either to Eric or to Harry. When the marriage is three months away, Eric asks for another delay, which is negotiated down from six months to three: Felicity comments that Eric has ‘saved her for himself’ for another six months.[[12]](#footnote-12) This belonging was emotional, financial, and practical; she washed Eric’s underpants when still living at home with him. It was a servitude as well as a companionship, with Harry as well as with Eric. In some ways, in choosing to marry my father my mother chose another Eric – a very clever, gifted, driven man, who saw himself as logical, but tended to fly into rages. (I can remember as a child occasions when my mother ‘left home’ because of my father’s rages – she drove off in the Morris Minor into the darkness of the home counties, and came back some time later.)[[13]](#footnote-13)

As well as finding out what I can about Eric’s life - as if I was supplementing, with my greater resources, the bare account my mother gives in the memoir – my project has included archival work on the letters. Many of them are undated, and mean little when read on their own. But most can be dated, from postmarks, internal evidence, relation to other letters, or mention of world events. I have also explained things, traced quotations, guessed connections, made gaps clear, pointed out things I cannot be certain about. This curating act saves many of them from oblivion (I hope) and may be seen as ‘curative’. But making literary use of the letters of people who have died can also been seen as a suspect enterprise, especially when it shows them in a bad light – as this thesis may show Eric. So the feeling of curativeness may be an illusion. I have to take my cue from the letters: my father kept my mother’s letters; Jenny and my mother kept Eric’s; Eric kept Jenny’s. I feel I am honouring their decisions by deciding to keep them and not only to keep them, but to look after and annotate them.

Another question arising from my act of curating is whether family memoir can have a curative effect in general. This would certainly be one way of reading the occurrence of the spate of memoirs about childhood sexual abuse. It is tempting to think that now privacy has been removed or watered down, we are able to speak about such things more honestly, and this could perhaps both help survivors and create a climate where abuse might happen less often. At the very least, the new honesty could help in understanding family relations. Even if this is too utopian, family memoirs can be seen as useful, rather than curative – good things to have in the broom cupboard, rather than powerful medicines. As Nancy K. Miller puts it, her book ‘is not only about me but about the uses (and abuses) of personal history in the making of cultural memory’ (*But Enough About Me*, p. xiv).[[14]](#footnote-14) According to her, ‘personal history’ has uses, even though it has abuses too.

The use she highlights is in ‘the making of cultural memory’, and this is the key point about memoir/family memoir; how it can connect the individual’s story to larger cultural concerns. What connections can be made, and how a family’s story can illuminate subjects of academic interest, are further questions I will need to ask. With these tantalising, and difficult goals in mind, the first thing to do is to look more closely at the two genres I could have contributed to – auto/biografiction, and family memoir.

1. **Am I experimental?**

First, to justify my subtitle – what is experimental about my family memoir, since I choose not to practise biografiction’s current major experiment, by writing fiction about Eric? One factor is that I am writing my family memoir as an academic thesis. Another is that I am writing a memoir of someone I have never met. (A recent survey states that ‘Memoir can only concern someone known to, and remembered by, the author’.)[[15]](#footnote-15) Another factor in choosing the title is that I am leavening biography/memoir with literary criticism by analysing some of Eric’s translations. The attempt to find out about a minor figure, through a very gappy record, is another experiment. I am pursuing my task ‘through a glass darkly’ even though there are large areas where I have no knowledge, such as his childhood, his possible work as a spy, and his diplomatic career. And finally, family memoir, especially about a family member not known to the writer, is a minor and still experimental genre.

In a cancelled chapter of this thesis I described finding the four Sutton graves at Storrington, West Sussex – first, Peggy’s, in the Anglican graveyard, 1923, handsome, lichened, designed by Eric Gill; then Pamela’s, their daughter who died as a baby in 1913, a neat sad kerbstone nearby; then Eric’s, in the Catholic cemetery, 1949; and near his, Diana’s, their daughter who died aged 10 in 1925. All had Latin inscriptions, presumably chosen by Eric: Peggy’s is ‘sub umbra alarum tuarum’, ‘Under the shadow of thy wings’. The reason for cancellation was that I never did discover why first the baby, then Peggy, were buried at Storrington. (Once they were there, if followed that Diana, then Eric would be.) It says firmly on Peggy’s grave ‘wife of Eric Sutton of Chelsea’; on his, ‘Eric Sutton of Chelsea’. The answer probably lay in his friendship with Maude Petre and George Tyrell, modernist Catholics of Storrington, both buried in the Anglican graveyard as the Catholic church refused them burial as heretics; he also knew their friend Arthut Bell, poet and raconteur, buried next to them. But I have little evidence for this.

When researching that chapter I decided to have a memorial tablet made for my parents, Felicity Fisher and Harry Fisher, and to carry on Eric’s tradition I chose a Latin inscription. It comes from one of my favourite passages in the Bible, ‘For now we see through a glass, darkly: but then face to face’ (1 Corinthians 13.12). The condition of doubt, confusion, not knowing, is a familiar, almost an essential one. What about the second half of the sentence on its own, ‘tunc autem facie ad faciem’?[[16]](#footnote-16) This contains within it the first half of the sentence for anyone who knows the passage. The ‘then’ which St Paul speaks of may not be Heaven, but a state of perfection on earth. ‘When that which is perfect is come’ is what he says. So my ‘tunc’ also refers to a hypothetical perfect time. If all things were perfect, you would see each other face to face; Pamela, Peggy, Diana, Eric, Felicity and Harry.

And me, perhaps? I never saw Eric face to face, as he died (in May) in the year I was born (in September). The ‘now I see through a glass darkly’ rather well describes the feeling of writing a memoir about someone in the family whom you never knew, someone with a cloud of suspicion around their name, someone obscure and forgotten, but whom you feel you are getting to know through the documentary trail he left behind. ‘Tunc facie ad faciem’ might stand for the hypothetical perfect memoir, when I really do see Eric face to face. Of course this will never happen. But I can continue to pursue the enigmas, with faith, hope and perhaps love (the subject of the earlier part of this famous passage from St Paul).

**Chapter 1**

**The formal choice: auto/biografiction or family memoir? A brief review of the literature**

1. **Auto/biografiction**

One possible way for me to deal with Eric’s life, and the gappiness of the information I have about it, would be ‘biografiction’ - some kind of crossover work which combined elements of both biography and fiction. ‘Biografiction’ is a development from ‘autobiografiction’, where fiction is combined with autobiography, and the word ‘auto/biografiction’, spelt with a slash, seems to mean two things: it can be a short way of mentioning both these forms, but it can also be an acknowledgement that all three elements (biography, autobiography and fiction) are now often intermixed in various combinations – or, more philosophically, are inevitably intertwined.

In 2010 a book was published which describes this development very clearly: Max Saunders’ *Self Impression*.[[17]](#footnote-17) First, it revealed that, perhaps surprisingly, autobiography and fiction had been approaching each other more closely, and formally cross-fertilising each other, ever since the modernist period began, partly due to the feeling that the ‘self’ was becoming fragmented, or was a chimera. In 1896 Conrad said ‘When once the truth is grasped that one’s own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown, the attainment of serenity is not very far off’. This feeling of an ungraspable self was one reason for the trend identified as early as 1906 by the critic and novelist Stephen Reynolds in his essay ‘Autobiografiction’. His definition of ‘autobiografiction’ was ‘a record of real spiritual experiences strung on a credible but more or less fictitious autobiographical narrative’ (Saunders, *Self Impression*, pp. 505, 167 and 171). The concept of ‘autobiografiction’ has widened since then, with a new postmodern currency, often as if it was a newly coined word.

Saunders describes this development in detail and coins another critical word from it: ‘Just as ‘autobiografiction’, in its broadest signification, represents a variety of interactions between autobiography and fiction, we need a term that covers the variety of interactions between biography and fiction. I propose ‘biografiction’…which has anyway been implied by the umbrella term ‘auto/biografiction… Biografiction, then, could include biographical fiction…such as a novel based on another life than the author’s’ (*Self Impression,* p. 216). Saunders’ book mainly covers the period from 1870 to 1930. By the early 1930s, he says, ‘the New Biography had been identified, and has shown itself to be at the same time auto/biography, biografiction, and auto/biografiction. The story of what this multiple personality did next would be another book. That would need to chart how modern literature’s escape out of ‘personality’, and into auto/biografiction, was interrupted by two world wars, which forced people back on their selves, their memories, their illusions, and their hopes and projects for humanity. The prevalence of this form of personal testimony has contributed to a new understanding of autobiography’ (*Self Impression*, p. 484). Saunders here sees ‘personal testimony’, which could be understood to include the new popular form ‘memoir’, as a regression – for good, humanitarian reasons – from the modernist and postmodernist trends to make auto/biography interact with fiction.

In his ‘Conclusion’ Saunders understandably values most the modern literary forms which continue the fruitful formal experiments which he has so carefully enumerated in his book, and is dismissive about others. Summing up, he describes his central strand thus: ‘How auto/biography and auto/biographical writing from the 1870s to the 1930s became shadowed by an increasing scepticism’. He goes on: ‘Certainly not all auto/biographic production has been affected. The majority of biographies and autobiographies that flood the market are still predominantly realist, bourgeois, and formally and technically null. But the conceptually and technically more sophisticated versions…increasingly come to question and transform the form’ (*Self Impression*, pp. 500, 501). It would be interesting to see how Saunders would subject the recent flowering of memoir since the 1980s to formal analysis; memoir, itself, has no entry in his index, and is not included in his apologetic sentence above the index: ‘Note: the following terms occur too frequently in this book to warrant indexing: autobiografiction, biography, fiction, life-writing.’

Still less does Saunders mention the new form ‘family memoir’, well known to readers and publishers, but little acknowledged in the academic world. He does notice that ‘there has been a particular surge recently in what might be called ‘relational memoirs’ – voyages round one or more parent, a sibling, or a friend’ (*Self Impression*, p. 6). This is mentioned in the context of the necessity for two meanings for the word ‘auto/biography’ – ‘both as a shorthand for ‘autobiography and/or biography’…and also as a term for individual works that fuse together autobiography and biography’. The recent surge in ‘relational memoirs’ is given as the reason why this second sense is still needed, as Saunders ‘sees such work as developments of the experiments in auto/biography of a century earlier’.

Saunders’ implicit quotation is from the title of John Mortimer’s autobiographical play, *A Voyage Round My Father*, which first appeared on radio in 1963. In a way I am continuing and developing the trend that Saunders has noticed, with my ‘voyage round my grandfather’, except that instead of a radio play, I am writing a PhD thesis. If I include myself and my quest for information about Eric in my thesis - as I think I will have to do – but write it in a traditionally ‘biographical’ way, it will be an example of auto/biography. If I had decided to make it into a novel, a play, a sequence of poems, or a postmodern biography with a fictional element like Julian Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot*, it would have been biografiction or autobiografiction (depending on whether I included myself in it).

The question of whether biography can be ‘fictional’ is still a confused one.[[18]](#footnote-18) Despite this confusion, things are moving very fast in the hybrid memoir/novel/biography field. It is as if the ‘autobiografiction’ genre first named by Stephen Reynolds in 1910, after a period of quiescence caused by two world wars and the need for ‘truth’, facts, history and testimony, is coming alive again. As the events themselves become further away, and memoirs of survivors become rarer, fiction is being used as another way of remembering them, or of reminding ourselves.[[19]](#footnote-19)

There is a ‘lest we forget’ motive behind ‘novels’ such as *Trieste* by Dasa Drndic or *HhHH* by Laurent Binet.[[20]](#footnote-20) Dasa Drndic says of her method: ‘In the spirit and established tradition of documentary fiction, I have incorporated the voices of many figures, and the words of many distinguished writers’. With a main story, presumably fictional, of an old woman – a Jew – waiting to find her son, whose father was a Nazi, Drndic takes us through and into the Holocaust as it affected Italian Jews. The reunion of son and mother (seen through the eyes of the son) is delayed again and again by more harrowing details of Holocaust narrative. Laurent Binet’s book is different; it might be called a struggle against fiction, rather than a historical account that uses fiction. It recreates the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the Nazi Secret Service, by two Czech partisans; but ‘alongside the nerve-shredding preparations for the attack runs another story: when you are a novelist writing about real people, how do you resist the temptation to make things up?’ (from the blurb of *HhHH*).

There are other formal possibilities in auto/biografiction; another way for me to write about Eric would be a ‘pseudo-autobiography’ by him, like *The Mirador*,[[21]](#footnote-21) a recently published book by Elisabeth Gille. Published in French in 1992, and in English translation in 2011, the book seems to me to be formally very interesting, and to ‘question and transform’ the auto/biographical form, in Saunders’ words. It is therefore not what he calls ‘technically null’ or ‘realist’. It announces in its title that these ‘memories’, presented in the first person as if by Némirovsky, are fictional – or ‘dreamed’. These make up the bulk of the book; but there are also short, paragraph-long sections in italics, about Gille herself, referring to her in the third person as ‘the child’ – some are fragments of what might be ‘real’ memories. Leaping over what Nancy K. Miller called ‘a very powerful anxiety about memory… about gathering the testimony of the last living survivors of the Holocaust’ (Miller, *But Enough About Me*, p. 14), Gille goes so far as to create what her mother never gave – testimony about her own life.

It is not, however, testimony about Auschwitz, where she died. Gille leaves that unspoken. The title of the book, *The Mirador*, refers to the kind of watchtower that concentration camps had to look out over the camp; the whole book is therefore looking out over the events described towards that unspoken ending. ‘Writing’, as she quotes Perec as saying, in other words the writing of this book, ‘*is* the memory of *their* death’ – not just her mother’s death, or that of both her parents, but, perhaps, of everyone who died in that Holocaust. This book successfully unites memoir, biography, autobiography and fiction in a new way. It is related to my project both as a direction I do not go down – the imagined autobiography of a parent or grandparent – and also as a kind of opening door into more and more different combinations of genres, which is, perhaps, wide enough to include my academic-auto/biographical hybrid. Its ‘Mirador’ looks out over the whole field of auto/biografictional writing, further than I will be able to look, but its gaze might include me.

Gille last saw her mother when she was five years old; I never met my grandfather, since he died in May 1949, five months before I was born in September of the same year. She has imagined an autobiography for her mother (or ‘memories’ – a version of the more personal, impressionistic ‘memoir’ rather than an autobiography); I am not going to imagine memories for my grandfather, but pursue him through his paper trail, which – unexpectedly – is considerable. Finding him through his translations might seem an even more difficult enterprise than Gille’s finding of her mother through her novels; but I have letters and other archival supports, as Gille presumably did too. Gille has cut herself off from the concept of ‘truth’ to find an emotional, textural, sensual truth in her ‘imagined memories’; I am sticking to the old-fashioned concept of truth as something I may be able to find – perhaps with the unfindable truth about Eric’s possible abuse of my mother as the enigma that motivates my formal decision. I will not, I think, find out the truth about that; but the suggestion that it happened commits me to a truth-based approach rather than the springing free of ‘imagined memories’.

If I imagined his memories, I would have to decide whether the abuse happened or not. To decide it happened, and write creatively about it, seems morally objectionable, abusive in itself. To decide it did not happen, and write absolvingly, is unfaithful to my sister’s memory of my mother’s enigmatic words. There is a third path between these two: to write creatively about Eric without making it clear whether the abuse happened or not. This path (for my project) seems objectionable too, as it would put the not-knowing about the possible abuse at the centre of the project, as an ontological, enigmatic, scandalous ‘black hole’ which sucked all the rest of the project into it. Still worse, it would use the unknowability as something technically ‘interesting’ to create a work around. While the possibility of the abuse is, in some way, central to the project, it is central in a different way – something I cannot know about, which impels me to move away from it towards things I *can* know about, in a historical way.

Before going ahead, I need to look more closely at the ‘family memoir’ genre, which might be seen as following a path opposite to that of ‘auto/biografiction’, because of its commitment to some version of ‘truth’.

1. **Family memoir as a new and problematic genre**

Family memoir is a branch, now quite a big branch, of memoir. Before discussing ‘family memoir’, I need to deal with the question of whether there is a distinction to be made between memoir and autobiography (or auto/biography). Some writers about ‘personal writing’ – Nancy K. Miller, for instance – prefer to use the two terms as if they were indistinguishable. In her 2007 essay ‘The entangled self’ (p. 547), she remarks in her last footnote ‘Throughout this essay I have used the terms autobiography, memoir and life writing more or less interchangeably’. [[22]](#footnote-22) Another critic of memoir, Thomas Larson, rejects this trend: ‘Critics have conflated autobiography and memoir throughout our literary history. But what we need to do is sharpen their growing distinction’.[[23]](#footnote-23) Memoir might be seen as countering the modernist and postmodernist trend, analysed by Saunders, to give up on the self as something with a distinct reality of its own, and instead remaking the self as an entity intended to be convincing, a self which can give important ‘testimony’ (his word). The position of the self, or rather, the creating of the self and its relation to what it has witnessed, are perhaps more central in ‘memoir’ than in ‘autobiography’. The varying usage of ‘memoir’ and ‘autobiography’ (with or without a slash) may also be connected with the recent anti-memoir critical trend, as I describe below.

The many-faceted family memoir is undergoing a resurgence now. There are many published books which describe themselves as ‘family memoirs’ – and more appear all the time. A search on Amazon will now bring up many books that use ‘A Family Memoir’ as a subtitle. But often the books that use the term focus not on the family as such, but on the content and context of the family story that is being told.[[24]](#footnote-24) Through the self, parents, and grandparents, a look is being taken at the great themes of history. The publishers have felt these themes make the books compelling enough to be read by people outside the family. Internet searches give similar results, though this field is a constantly changing one, and the need felt by publishers for a connection to an established ‘theme’ is rapidly disappearing with the advent of e-publishing, which is putting publishing into the hands of those with a story to tell, without their having to persuade a mainstream publisher to invest in it.

Because family memoir can adopt so many forms and guises, and because of its problematical nature, it has a hidden history. A typical example of the problems associated with the truth-telling, intimate family memoir is William Godwin’s memoir of Mary Wollstonecraft, *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798). It caused a storm in its time by revealing Wollstonecraft’s unmarried liaisons, ‘illegitimate’ child and suicide attempts, and effectively ruined her reputation for many years. Despite some changes in the second edition the same year, ‘it remained a work of astonishing outspokenness, revolutionary in its implications’ and ‘as such it was inevitably condemned to obscurity’, with no English editions between 1802 and 1927 (Richard Holmes, *Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer*, p. 219).[[25]](#footnote-25) Such problems led to the suppression of the intimate family memoir genre during the nineteenth century and still pose difficulties today.

Virginia Woolf was a pioneer in renewing the family memoir as a genre. Her essays for the Bloomsbury ‘Memoir Club’ in 1920-22, ‘22 Hyde Park Gate’ and ‘Old Bloomsbury’, daringly introduced (even if in a satirical and sensational way) the subject of the sexual abuse of her by her step-brother, George Duckworth. Other contributors to the genre in the twentieth century were gay writers such as J.R.Ackerley, Christopher Isherwood and Quentin Crisp, and feminist memoir writers, especially from the 1960s onward; they were recreating their family past in the search for explanations of the present, whether probing the roots of their homosexuality or tracing their consciousness as women in a patriarchal society. None of these writers called their books ‘family memoirs’. With the burgeoning of the intimate memoir from the 1980s, and the backlash against it (of which more below), the phrase ‘family memoir’ gained a doubly off-putting ring – the ‘family’ element can be seen as only of interest to the family, and the ‘memoir’ element as self-indulgent, self-regarding and sensationalist.

Such feelings may partly explain why my searches for previous discussions of family memoir in recent academic works on life writing were unproductive. The *Encyclopaedia of Life Writing*, edited by Margaretta Jolly, published in 2001, contains no entry for ‘Family memoir’, though it does include one for ‘Family relations and life writing’. A search of the electronic ‘Index of Theses’ (covering 500,000 theses) for the phrase ‘family memoir’ brings up very few theses that used the term in their abstracts; two of those were focused on other subjects, such as the Holocaust, or post-colonial history and literature.[[26]](#footnote-26) The search did, however, reveal one thesis which is relevant to the family memoir. It describes a certain kind of family memoir without calling it by that name, though it uses the phrase once in its abstract. This was G. Gudmundsdottir’s thesis ‘Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodernist Life-Writing’.[[27]](#footnote-27)

She devotes a chapter to what she calls ‘Biography in Autobiography’: ‘Many of the texts I have chosen for my enquiry are not only concerned with telling the life of the narrator, they also, and some even primarily, tell the lives of the narrators’ parents, and some cases grandparents…I have included these texts in my study of autobiography as I believe this type of text to form a significant strand in recent life-writing’ (p. 142). Gudmundsdottir goes on to discuss the ‘family secret’ and the ‘quest’ for a solution to a mystery as types of ‘biography in autobiography’, both themes which we will see arising in family memoir. She is certainly right in identifying a significant strand in life-writing; in 2000 the phrase ‘family memoir’ was not yet popular for describing this kind of book. By limiting her discussion to ‘biography in autobiography’, she also leaves out certain kinds of family memoir – those which concentrate on the biography, rather than the autobiography strand (the kind I hope to write).

The kind of family memoir in which there is little or no autobiography possibly arose in tension with, and as a reaction to, the problems posed by the truth-telling memoir. If family memoir is a development of autobiography, this less intimate kind of family memoir descends from family memoir’s other parent genre, biography. Michael Holroyd, the great biographer and family memoirist, describes the post-modern splintering of biography into different genres: ‘Biography is beginning to have as many forms as fiction: it exists as detective work, as melodrama, as crime reconstruction, as pastiche, as physical and metaphysical travel, as interrelated non-fiction stories’ (Holroyd, *Works on Paper*, p. 26).[[28]](#footnote-28) He made this hydra-headed list in 1998, before he became a practitioner of family memoir himself, so it is unsurprising that he leaves it out of the list.

The titles of Holroyd’s two family memoirs illustrate nicely the developing consciousness of the family memoir genre – as do the books themselves. The first of the two, *Basil Street Blues*, 1999, is simply titled *Basil Street Blues: A Memoir.[[29]](#footnote-29)* By the time the second book, *Mosaic*, was published in 2004, Holroyd could insert the word ‘family’ into the description of the earlier book: *Mosaic*, he says (in the 2005 preface to the paperback edition, p.1) ‘arose out of the letters I received from readers of my family memoir, *Basil Street Blues*’.[[30]](#footnote-30) He uses the phrase again on p. 6, saying teasingly (as if ignoring his many biographies) that everyone has a book in them, and ‘Mine was a family memoir’. Although the genre has come of age between the writing of the two books, so that Holroyd can use the phrase ‘family memoir’ freely in his preface to the second memoir, the phrase was still not wanted in the title; its full title is *Mosaic: Portraits in Fragments.* Only in America, where memoir is now more accepted than in England, could the phrase take its rightful place in the title of the new book and, by implication, the previous one; the American edition, published in 2004, has the subtitle *A Family Memoir Revisited*, thus claiming the title ‘family memoir’ both for the new book and for *Basil Street Blues.*

Books and websites giving advice on writing memoir are further evidence that acknowledgement of the ‘family memoir’ as a genre of its own is relatively recent. A ‘how-to’ book for American readers published in 1995, Kirk Polking’s *Writing Family Histories and Memoirs*, treats ‘family history’ and ‘memoir’ as two kinds of writing without any overlap.[[31]](#footnote-31) A more recent web search for ‘family memoir’ showed some sites with the Polking approach, others that had moved on. It found one very memoir-centred definition, on a site called ‘ehow.com’,[[32]](#footnote-32) under the heading ‘How to write a family memoir’. ‘Family members and ancestors are at the center of a family memoir and you are part of the narrative’. Here, in a definite change from the 1995 how-to manual by Polking, the idea of writing about the family has been fused with writing about the self. Like the book by Polking, such websites are aimed at people who are educating themselves about memoir, or at those providing classes, or evening classes, for such people. But now it is less likely that they will buy a book: instead, they will look for advice on the internet, and his 1995 book looks very old-fashioned.

They are part of the very strong upsurge of interest in memoir, which is related to the passion for research into our family backgrounds, both in Britain and the US – the upsurge which has created ‘ancestry.com’ and ‘ancestry.co.uk’. The burgeoning of the two parallel strands, ‘memoir’ and ‘ancestry’, suggests that there is great potential for more ‘family memoirs’ – whether biography-focussed, as research into ancestors, or memoir-focussed, with personal memories playing a large part, or a fusion between the two. A concept of ‘truth’ or ‘how it was’ or ‘who I am’ seems to underlie both trends, with little room found in them for melding with forms of fiction as in the ‘autobiografictions’ analysed in Saunders’s book, though boundaries continue to blur, and combinations of fiction with memoir are on the rise.

1. **The recent unease with memoir**

Larson makes a convincing case for memoir as a fruitful new genre. ‘Passionate, contrary, innovative, undefined: memoir today has the energy of a literary movement, recalling past artistic revolutions that initiated new ways of seeing…indeed, we may be living in the age of memoir. How might we know? Sheer numbers’ (Larson, *The Memoir and the Memoirist*, p. 21). But his overall advocacy is typical of the more accepting American stance on memoir, rather than the English. There is some feeling against memoir in America too, as he points out: ‘The form is regularly slighted as exhibitionistic, confessional, whiny’ (p. 4). In America these attitudes seem, in the year 2014, to be softening: in England they go very deep, though they are easing here too. The anxiety about memoir seems to be connected not with doubts about the reality of the self, or awareness of its ungraspability or chimerical nature, as described by Saunders in the early modernist period; rather, it is a moral unease – the self is accepted as real, but its position in the foreground causes problems of acceptability.

The questionable status of memoir may be involved in the fluctuating usage of ‘memoir’ and ‘autobiography’ for personal writing. ‘Autobiography’ and ‘an autobiography’ are not seen as the same thing, with ‘an autobiography’ having the more epic reach of writing a whole life, and ‘autobiography’ (without the article) functioning as a less time-defined type of writing, making the word usable as an alternative to the disliked or devalued term ‘memoir’. The uncertain status of memoir may also partly explain the new ubiquitousness of the alternative terms, ‘life writing’ and ‘auto/biography’. There is an International Auto/Biography Association, which holds biennial conferences all over the world. Life writing and auto/biography have an academic respectability that memoir does not seem to have. ‘Memoir’ has been connected with self-obsession and an ‘almost religious’ hatred of the self; ‘biography’ is cool, calm, scholarly, empathetic but respectable. There may be an emotional explanation such as this for the various admixtures of memoir (as opposed to biography) into the family memoir genre.

William Fiennes, himself a family memoir writer, highlighted the recent unease with memoir felt in the UK, when speaking at a meeting reported in the Journal of the English Royal Society of Literature (2011, p. 27). Richard Davenport-Hines, author of the report on the meeting, wrote that: ‘Fiennes winces when his books are docketed as memoirs…The Frenchiness of the word ‘memoir’ with its egotistical syllables ‘me’ and ‘moi’, makes him recoil. The word seems so limiting of aesthetic ambition and imagination when the genre is so expansive, versatile, unbounded.’ Memoir’s equivocal status in England has continued to surface in journalistic writing on other subjects, such as fiction: a review (by Jenny Turner) of the new novel *C* by Tom McCarthy in the *London Review of Books* (09.09.2010) calls ‘memoir’ ‘obvious and compromised’, speaks of ‘our great generational collapse into trite self-centred confessional’, and goes on to praise *C* for getting away from this. Another novelist, A.S.Byatt, in a recent interview in the *Guardian*, described her ‘suspicion’ of memoir as a form, as if her decision to write novels was partly a flight from the memoir, even though she may need memoirs as raw material. ‘However well you write about your friends or family you diminish them…and it haunts me’ (*Guardian*, ‘Festival diary’, 20.08.2010).

The revulsion felt by Fiennes, Turner and Byatt, and many others, about memoir has also been an American phenomenon, and an American has produced an interesting analysis of it. Nancy K. Miller, in *But Enough About Me: why we read other people’s lives*, traces the current disgust with memoir, and the self, back to seventeenth-century France, and Pascal, who said ‘The self is hateful’ (p. 13). In justifying memoir, Miller sees it as above all an aid to memory. ‘One of the meanings of the word ‘memoir’ is memorandum. And this meaning surfaces in another French expression that has passed into English: the aide-mémoire. Something that helps memory. I want to propose the notion of memoir as a prosthesis – an aid to memory.’ Miller goes on to relate the rise of memoirs to the Holocaust and to the increase of Alzheimer’s. ‘We are witnessing a very powerful anxiety about memory, about remembering, very particular to our time: about gathering the testimony of the last living survivors of the Holocaust’ (p. 14).

There are also more practical ways to justify memoir which should not be forgotten. A typical forthright expression of this is a ‘Thought for the day’ by the feminist journalist Bidisha, headed ‘I hate novels’: ‘I’m on the side of life writing, testimony, witness, letters, diaries, memoir and reportage. I believe they can change the world, and have – the real, important world of human rights campaigning, research, legislation, social change. Via the power of testimony we understand the dynamics and consequences of domestic abuse’ (*Guardian*, 27.08.11, p. 41). In spite of the problems associated with telling the truth, family memoir can play its part in this public-spirited approach to memoir and its testimony.

Miller’s connection of the rise of memoir to ‘gathering the testimony of the last living survivors of the Holocaust’ links back to Saunders’s observation that two world wars have turned people’s attention away from modernist and post-modern experimentation with auto/biografictional forms and back to ‘their selves, their memories, their illusions, and their hopes and projects for humanity’. Saunders, Miller and Bidisha all use the word ‘testimony’; a word which has (as Bidisha states) an anti-fictional charge, as if countering the old Conradian feeling (described by Saunders) that the self is an illusion, and asserting instead that the self is not an illusion, nor are the events it has witnessed. Such an attitude is needed in a world where there are Holocaust-deniers, and the political consequences of the Holocaust to be argued over; the backwash of the titanic disaster of WW2 is still with us, and in its small way my experimental memoir is caught up in it.

The above justifications find uses for memoir (and family memoir). These assume that it needs justifications, that it is not obviously worthwhile in itself. But the new genre of memoir and its offshoot, family memoir, have behind them the increasingly accepted idea that anybody’s experience can be remarkable. This is not just a question of the uses mentioned above, or finding an interesting angle or context, a ‘unique insight’, or an associated interest such as creativity in families; it reflects a new philosophical stance associated with postmodernism, and new trends in history. This new attitude may be the driving force behind the current spate of memoirs, and the growing number of family memoirs. But in practice, the past still has to be actively recovered and remade. The experience still has to be shaped, worked on, and made into a new work of art. Many people have interesting old documents in their attics; but there is still a difference between the newly-available old document, and the created, specially written, memoir or ‘family memoir’, which aims to be something new, even if it uses old materials.

Family memoir seems like a genre whose time has come; it may be found to have inherited the good side of its parent, the memoir – which William Fiennes sees as ‘expansive, versatile, unbounded’, Thomas Larson as ‘passionate, contrary, innovative, undefined’. Its complications, paradoxes and difficulties, and its equivocal status, add to its attraction as a subject for investigation. This is, perhaps, a genre in which my experimental family memoir might find a place. To confirm this suggestion, and find a methodology which might be workable, I looked further at some particularly successful literary family memoirs. In particular, I was looking for guidance about how much of myself I could, or should, put into it.

1. **Possible models to follow**

None of the memoirs I have studied combined a biography of a family member with a discussion of that member’s work as a translator. But some did have themes that could be illuminating for my own planned memoir. The most obvious of these are two: first, looking for a lost or unknown family member and making the quest for information into part of the story; second, the study of creativity in families and how it is passed down through the generations. The first memoirist I discuss here, Michael Holroyd, combines both these strands. He is also an interesting example of the reluctant memoirist, only gradually including the more intimate self-revelation of memoir, as opposed to autobiography.

Holroyd’s first post-biographical book, *Basil Street Blues* (1999; American ed. 2000), recorded, in an autobiographical way, as events witnessed by him or connected to him, some of his family history, his childhood and youth, his parents’ marriage and love affairs. His father’s love of Lalique glass, which he imported into Britain, and both his parents’ attempts at autobiography, introduce the theme of creativity – though it is a creativity that is unsuccessful. The book also described his grandfather’s unhappy marriage to his grandmother (leading to a brief affair with a mistress, Agnes May), and the unfulfilled life of his aunt, Yolande, who acted as an unpaid carer to Holroyd’s father, grandmother and Old Nanny. Wondering about the rights and wrongs of reading his aunt’s small cache of letters from her mysterious lover, Henry Haslehurst, Holroyd quotes from his own lecture on biography: ‘It is understandable and right that people should seek to protect themselves and others close to them during their lives…But I make a distinction between the living and our friends the dead. I believe we pay a compliment to the dead by keeping them in employment to assist the living’ (2000 edition, p. 144). His justification is that his aunt’s story can ‘remind us of what families may inflict on themselves’, and through the letters ‘an outline of my aunt’s predicament may be traced’. He feels the need to give this partial answer to critics of family memoir as too self-absorbed or too intimate.

His second family memoir, *Mosaic*, is very different. It introduces the search for an ‘unknown person’, and is also – ultimately – much more self-revealing. The book initially ‘arose out of the letters I received from readers of my family memoir, *Basil Street Blues*’ (*Mosaic*, p.1). He ‘thought of it at first as a sequel or postscript, even as a “postmodern interactive” work. Beginning as a requiem, it evolved into a love story, then a detective story, finally a book of secrets revealed’. One layer of ‘secrets’ contains the successful search for the true identities of both his aunt’s lover and his grandfather’s mistress – two people who were very elusive to the researcher, who changed their names several times in their ascent from obscure backgrounds to greater success in society. Another layer of secrets is about himself. After two introductory chapters about his aunt’s death, and readers’ letters responding to the first memoir, there follows a very short, but pivotal chapter: ‘Self-seeking’. It is pivotal because the very title poses the dilemma which faces all memoirists: he wants to ask whether ‘self-seeking’, i.e. writing about oneself, is ‘self-seeking’, i.e. too selfish.

He quotes a letter from Margaret Forster, in which she says that in *Basil Street Blues* ‘You stay hidden’. She asks how his mother’s beauty and elegance influenced him: ‘What kind of ideas did it give you about women in general, and how did it influence your love life?’ (*Mosaic*, p. 107). ‘I do not know the answers to these questions, and feel a great resistance to answering them’, he says. But then, painfully but vividly, he does write the story of his love life. These secrets about himself which he has at last ‘revealed’ have a thematic connection with the secrets he goes after in the last section about his grandfather’s mistress and his aunt’s lover. They are connected by the thread of how to be happy, how marriage works or doesn’t work, even how to have a sense of self and how it is connected with the ability to love.

It is typical of Holroyd’s postmodern, almost flirtatious attitude to the genre, and of the necessity to keep things hidden even while revealing some of them, that he did not call this book *A Book of Secrets*, but used the title for his next book, which is not nearly as self-revealing. He speaks of *A Book of Secrets* (2010) as a third volume in the ‘trilogy’, but it teasingly deviates from the prototype created by the first two books.[[33]](#footnote-33) The book has the subtitle *Illegitimate Daughters, Absent Fathers.* It combines biographies of two people - Eve Fairfax, Rodin’s muse and model, and Violet Trefusis, novelist and lover of Vita Sackville-West – with narratives of Holroyd’s visits in pursuit of his research to the Villa Cimbrone in Italy, accompanied by two women also on biographical quests. The new book repositions Holroyd in his old persona, as the questing biographer.

The book was sympathetically reviewed by Kathryn Hughes (in the *Guardian*, 13.11.10), who points out that the journey to the Villa Cimbrone did not solve the mysteries that were being pursued in the book, ‘and that, really, is the point. The villa, and Holroyd’s book, comprise a kind of endless hall of mirrors in which the seeker is thrown back upon her own desires. …Indeterminacy is what Holroyd is after here. And just as his earlier biographies captured the desire to read about lost lives in all their teeming detail, so in his *Book of Secrets* he has once again caught the present moment, what we might call the post-biographical mood, perfectly’. In an article in *The Times* (2.10.2010), Holroyd himself wondered, post-biographically, ‘is this the end for biography?’ He thinks that with the abandonment of strictures about the invasion of privacy, there is ‘a crisis in contemporary biography’, as there is nothing left to reveal. Biography is learning from history, so there are more group biographies, and biographers are learning ‘from novelists how to tell a story, using quotations from letters to gain the immediacy of dialogue…how (like detective writers) to filter in research as part of our quest.’ Both these new techniques are relevant to my project. I can use quotations from letters as a form of dramatic dialogue, and I can include my research quest as part of the story.

Although I am planning to put myself into my memoir, if only as a researcher, I need to look at the other option: leaving oneself out altogether. *The Knox Brothers*, Penelope Fitzgerald’s memoir of her father and three uncles, all very distinguished men, contains very little about herself.[[34]](#footnote-34) She is not in the Index. In this non-memoir, then, Fitzgerald is another kind of ‘lost’ person – a memoirist who puts nothing at all of herself into her memoir. This book is superbly done, so there is no sense of something missing. The book is – as the blurb says – ‘the story of a deeply attractive family mind, a mind shared by their biographer’ (back cover, 2000 edition). So is her book a family memoir at all? I have called it a biography; her blurb calls it a biography. She herself calls it a biography. Someone else could have written a book about all four Knox brothers. But it would not have been quite this book, describing all four by their first names or nicknames, cutting easily between all four life stories, speaking of them all with an understanding born of affection and of coming from the same roots.

At the beginning of the Foreword, she makes discretion a stated goal: ‘In this book I have done my best to tell the story of my father and his three brothers. All four of them were characteristically reticent about themselves, but, at the same time, most unwilling to let any statement pass without question. I have tried to take into account both their modesty and their love of truth, and to arrive at the kind of biography of which they would have approved’ (2000 edition, p. xiii). It would be possible to see her book as an example of female writing which follows the conventions of self-abnegation and of the suppression of female selfhood – conventions which are now breaking up. I will be encouraged, by my position in the development of the family memoir, to put more of myself into my memoir than she does.

Fitzgerald’s stratagem, of writing about close family relatives without saying anything, or anything much, about oneself, is used by other writers less successfully. I came to Barbara Wadsworth’s life of her father, the artist Edward Wadsworth, because it contains an important scene where Eric plays a part (as the life and soul of a dinner party when Fanny Wadsworth is engineering the breaking-off of Edward’s affair with his mistress, Kathleen).[[35]](#footnote-35) The book’s resonance for me will be the information it provides for my discussion of Eric’s life: its resonance for the genre is that Barbara suppresses herself in the book almost entirely. A character called ‘Barbara’ is sometimes mentioned, and she has a small entry in the index, unlike Penelope Fitzgerald. But the index entries tell a story not present in the text of the book: ‘learns of father’s affair with Kathleen Dillon, 175…disturbed at witnessing row over Kathleen, 185…disillusionment with father, 186… antipathy to father’s acceptance of ARA, 303’. That index entry says that she was ‘disturbed’ at witnessing the row over Kathleen; on page 185 itself, her ‘disturbance’ is not mentioned – just ‘Barbara’s’ memories of two dramatic scenes that she witnessed.[[36]](#footnote-36) Wadsworth’s ‘portrait’ memoir is a useful example to follow in my ‘portrait’ of Eric, especially as Wadsworth and Eric knew each other and moved in the same circles (Bohemian, artistic, country-loving) and her book can provide context for my memoir’s background. Wadsworth’s book is old-fashioned in terms of the family memoir genre; I will not be writing about myself in the third person or keeping my feelings about my family members for the Index. But it is a relevant and fascinating book for my particular search.

The above books tell a story about the changing position of the memoirist in family memoir. Fitzgerald’s family memoir, 1977 – no mention of the memoirist; Wadsworth, 1989 – memoirist hardly mentioned, her feelings confined to Index; Holroyd, 1999 and 2005, the reluctant memoirist, at last coming forward. In 2013, a more typical book is Elisa Segrave’s *The Girl from Station X: My mother’s unknown life*, in which her mother’s diaries from girlhood and wartime, discovered by Segrave in 1997 shortly before her mother’s death, change her view of her mother completely. [[37]](#footnote-37) Segrave really only knew her mother as an alcoholic, damaged by the death of her son aged 5, then as an old woman with dementia.

Her mother had been most needy at bad times in Segrave’s life, and at times she had wanted to kill her mother. The book describes her gradually reading the diaries, and finding a lively, competent and more sympathetic woman who worked successfully at Bletchley Park during WW2. In this memoir Segrave and her mother have equal prominence, and the memoirist’s changing view of her mother is central. This will not be the case with my memoir, as I did not know Eric, and had no relationship with him. But Segrave’s book suggests that the process of writing about the family member, and its effect on the writer, are now not just a legitimate component of family memoir, but an essential part of the story.

Family memoir may be about people who are not remembered, even if their importance and interest are through a family member who is remembered. Holroyd’s search in *Mosaic* is for the mistress of his grandfather, and the lover of his aunt, neither of whom he ever met – though his did know and love his aunt, who stood in for his mother in many ways. My search is for my grandfather, who died the year I was born; his importance to me is through my mother, his daughter, whom I did know and love. But it is also *because* I can’t remember Eric that I want to research him. It is because I thought he was, and would forever be, unknown, that the discovery of his letters was such a revelation, such a coming back from the dead.

1. **The family memoir based on letters**

There are so many letters – many millions, or trillions, probably, stashed all round the world waiting to be quoted and written about, or thrown away or burnt. Yet they are becoming rarer and young people no longer write letters. They use emails, texts, and Facebook messages instead.[[38]](#footnote-38) So there is a generation of people, like me, whose parents and grandparents left letters, but whose children don’t write letters. The letters that are left, even if they were not kept deliberately but were just not destroyed, seem more and more precious – particularly if, as in my family letters (I think), the letters have literary merit, or at any rate literary interest as being by a translator. But even if that is an illusion of mine as a fond grand-daughter, the letters seem more and more extraordinary in their very ordinariness, their closeness to life, if they are properly read and understood.

Blake Morrison, who has written two family memoirs, one about his father and one about his mother, felt similarly about the cache of wartime letters between his parents that had been kept. ‘It wasn’t a tale of derring-do or epic grandeur. There were no weekends at Chequers with Churchill or plots to assassinate Hitler. But in its quiet way – *her* quiet way – it touched on what touches everyone: love, identity, family, gender, work, nationhood and faith. ’ This is an eye-level, domestic, private view of our past. Morrison went on to make a successful book, *Things My Mother Never Told Me*, out of his parents’ wartime correspondence and the story of his mother; it acts as a sequel to his first memoir, *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* which was written therapeutically in the aftermath of his father’s death. Morrison’s successful retelling of their story is likely to inspire many more family memoir writers.[[39]](#footnote-39)

‘Identity’ is a crucial part of his mother’s story. She had never quite told him how many sisters and brothers she had. She came from a Southern Irish family, and there was something disreputable about large families and about Irishness. When Morrison goes to Ireland after her death in search of information, he is astounded to find out that she came from a family of 20 brothers and sisters. She suffered from the effect on her career of assumptions about women’s role: her work during the WW2, as a successful hospital surgeon, was much more demanding than Arthur’s as an Air Force medical officer, yet after the war she dwindled into ‘Mrs Doctor’ in the general practice they ran together. Her Catholicism was a terrible drawback in Arthur’s family’s eyes, with his father threatening to commit suicide if he ‘marries an R.C.’. Compromises were made, and the marriage went ahead.

Of the family memoirs I have looked at, Morrison’s example is perhaps the most useful one for me. He uses the realness of letters, their dramatic representation of the thoughts and feelings of the writer at that moment in history, to give his parents’ story breadth and weight – almost like a kind of cloth; they provide a material which he can construct his story from, without having to spin it all from his own literary body. His book also shows something important that helped me to deviate from the idea of a simple ‘biography’ of Eric based on the letters: he uses letters to tell the story of his parents’ developing relationship, and this is something letters can do very well. This is what I am going to do in the penultimate chapter of this thesis – tell the story, through letters, of my parents’ developing relationship, despite Eric’s disapproval.

The letters I use in that chapter have other links with Morrison’s. As well as being generated by the wartime situation, as his parents’ were, they show religion as an obstacle to the relationship, as in the Morrisons’ case. Eric was a Catholic, having converted after the death of Peggy in 1923; so was Felicity by upbringing. Eric saw Felicity’s religion as an absolute bar to her marrying Harry (an atheist) in wartime because the Catholic church forbade birth control and she might be left a widow with a young child. (There was disapproval on both sides: Harry’s father, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1945, disapproved of his son marrying a Catholic, and when the marriage eventually went ahead, in 1948, did not attend the ceremony.) My family letters are, however, different from his since I value them for the way they use language as much as for the story they tell. My memoir may therefore have more in common with those of Holroyd and Fitzgerald, who are writing in the sub-genre of ‘literary memoir’.

1. **New developments**

I seem to have found a niche for my project in the ‘family memoir’ genre. I can write about my search, like Holroyd in pursuit of his aunt’s lover and grandfather’s mistress; I can treat my discovery of Eric as a quest, and look for ‘secrets revealed’, even if, again like Holroyd in *A Book of Secrets*, I do not solve the mysteries that are being pursued; I can trace the creation of creative selves in my family through artistic and literary influence; I can write about Eric’s own body of work, the 69 translations and now the letters, and analyse his methods and his literary voice; I can recreate through the letters the development of my parents’ love affair and Eric’s attempts, successful at the time, to stop them getting married. Before I start, there is time for a quick look at new developments in the other genres to which my project is related – biography and memoir.

I began this theoretical chapter with an account of new developments in auto/biografiction. The genre of biography itself, to which my project partly belongs, has been developing just as fast. The biographer Kathryn Hughes wrote an article in 2008 about the ‘death of biography’; in 2013 she wrote another article[[40]](#footnote-40) reversing this decision. ‘Each year since 2008 more and more interesting books have been published which deal with the lives of others. They may not announce themselves as ‘biographies’ but that doesn’t mean they aren’t. The genre is in fact alive and well.’ She has been to a conference about new kinds of biography, ‘Turning points’, with the subtitle ‘the event, the collective and the life in parts’.

My biography of Eric (for it is that) will partake of all three of these new forms of biography. It is ‘collective’ in that it is also in part a biography of my parents, as it includes the story of their meeting and falling in love, and makes use of my mother’s unpublished memoir; it draws strength from Eric’s reaction to an ‘event’, Peggy’s death, which almost freezes the biography in time, until Jenny comes along to unfreeze it and the narrative can move on; it is a ‘life in parts’ in that it has chapters on the translations as well as on Eric’s life.

The memoir scene has also been changing. A journalistic, but pithy account of this came to my notice in the magazine *Stylist*, left out on the table for customers to read in a fish and chip shop.[[41]](#footnote-41) Under the heading ‘Memoirs get a very modern makeover’, an unsigned article states ‘The non-fiction genre has moved on in 2013. Welcome to memoirs 2.0.’ It goes on: ‘Could the word ‘memoir’ be any more off-putting? It seems to conjure either ghost-written celebrity booky wooks of vaguely interesting anecdotes or the bleakest accounts of childhood misery…Thankfully, the age of the misery memoir has passed and a brilliant new form of dynamic and intelligent memoirs is rising from, erm, *Angela’s Ashes*. Leapfrogging conventions, the revamped genre encompasses everything from stalkers’ emails and fictional non-fiction to begrudging gonzo life-analysis.’ Reviews follow of seven books under seven capitalised headings indicating different kinds of memoir: the Kafkaesque horror; the unlikely star story; the reportage memoir; the terror tale; the tabloid exposé; the memoir travelogue; the comedy-misery-memoir.

My memoir is none of these things, but in its way, my mother’s unpublished memoir, written in 2000, anticipates the last trend by being a kind of comedy-misery-memoir; someone she knew in her convent days, on reading it, summed up its style as ‘a combination of Daisy Ashford and Evelyn Waugh’,[[42]](#footnote-42) and it describes her emergence as a person and as an artist from her unhappy childhood, ending with her marriage in 1948. Inevitably my memoir includes a critique of hers, often correcting her facts, but always grateful for her style.

1. **Truth and performativity**

While feeling at home in this kaleidoscopic mixture of genres, I also need a theoretical background for my academic-memorial hybrid. Here Saunders, in what sometimes seems an all-encompassing book, again offers some help. Running through his book is an awareness of later trends in critical thought (after his chosen period to 1930), such as structuralism and deconstruction. He also usefully, if pithily, discusses performativity theory: ‘If deconstruction argues that performance is textual, the more recent theorizing of performativity has sought to regain the initiative in a different way, by arguing the case that text is itself inherently performative. Performativity has increasingly become *the* influential paradigm for thinking about literature…Autobiography does not transcribe a self that already exists. The act of narrating brings that self into being’ (Saunders, *Self Impression*, p. 511).

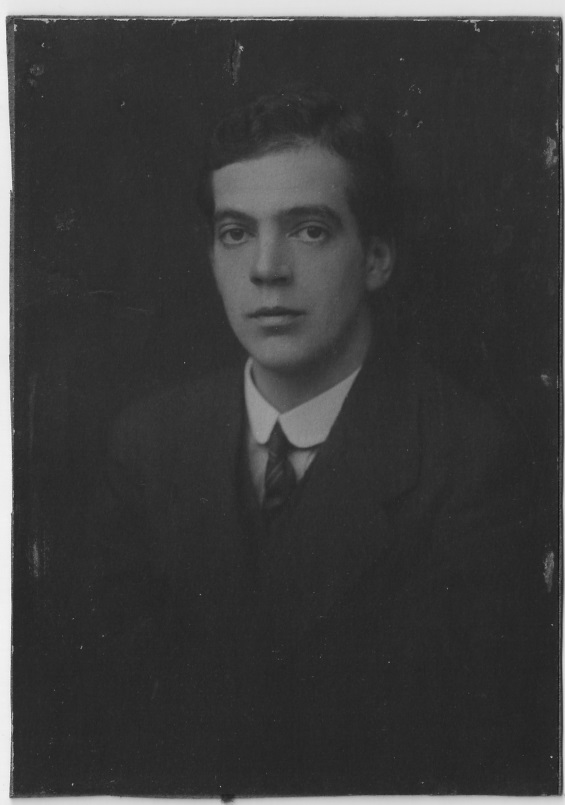
Saunders is not just suggesting ways of using a modern theory to read the texts he has been discussing, but also suggesting that ‘auto/biografiction can help us understand the origins of performativity theory’ (p. 515). Saunders’s comments bear mainly on autobiography/fiction hybrids, but he implies that he could widen the net to include biography as well, especially the formally experimental kind which he prefers.

If text is performative, and the act of narration brings a self into being, then biography could be said to do this equally with, even if differently from, autobiography. This suggests to me that even if I fail to find out truths about Eric, and even if the very idea of truth is doomed in such an enterprise, the act of ‘narrating’ his life, or putting it together in whatever way I decide to, will create a self for him – of a kind. It may be the only kind that can be found. With this possibly supportive theoretical thought in the background, I will start with one of Eric’s own self-descriptions and see where it leads me.

***Eric Sutton aged 2 in 1888***

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***Eric Sutton at about the time he was a don at Worcester College (1909-12)***

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**Chapter 2**

**Eric at Oxford: the case of ‘the case’**

1. **The Oxford way of talking**

*‘I had a most pleasant lunch at the Oxford and Cambridge Club with my old friend Geoffrey Webb (recently Slade Professor at Cambridge) who always reminds me of you by the particular intonation with which he says things like “which was, in fact, the case”. Is this Oxford? Also by the slightly sardonic way he revels in his own erudition.’* [[43]](#footnote-43)

I am grateful to Duggan for her illuminating description of Eric’s way of talking, which I found early in my work on the archive. Already, before I had begun looking for him, I could hear his voice. His voice, and his way of talking, were things about him that people found memorable; as they were about my mother.[[44]](#footnote-44) ‘Is it Oxford?’ I think it is. Duggan’s description also reminds me of my father, Harry Fisher’s way of talking – like Eric, he went to Oxford and read Mods and Greats. He used to say he was a Logical Positivist and would revel in paradoxes and proofs that nothing could be proved – except, it often seemed, the fact that one was wrong and he was right. And he would fly into a rage if one tried to argue. Eric’s time at Oxford as a Philosophy don (1909-12) came before Logical Positivism. But this hint from Duggan’s letter suggests that Oxford was an important part of his makeup, as it was of my father’s. I must do what I can to find out more about his time there.

One reason for pursuing the Oxford period is the paucity of information about his early life. The bare bones of dates and job titles can be found in his letter to Vyvyan Holland of 11 November 1923, describing himself so that Vyvyan can propose him for election to the Savile Club.

‘I send a few [?’factual’/’futile’/’further’][[45]](#footnote-45) details about myself. Quelle histoire morne et pénible!

… E.S. Born 1886.

St John’s College Oxford 1905-1909.

Fellow and Lecturer in Philosophy Worcester Coll. 1909-12.

Board of Education 1912-15.

Army 1915-1919. [VH’s own note, attached to the letter, says: ‘1916-1919, Staff Lt, Special List, Intelligence’.]

1919 Peace Conference Treasury Delegation – Private Secretary to Lord Sumner.

1919-1921 Private Secretary to the Assistant British Delegate to Reparation Commission – Paris.

1921 Principal, Ministry of Pensions.

Literary activities few, I fear. I have written a little – reviews etc for the Daily News and Nation and edited the Oxford Magazine.

I get my hats, or rather my annual hat, at Scott’s.’

The basic facts of this melancholy description seem to be correct, though his Army file shows that he joined up in 1916, not 1915. The Merchant Taylors’ School Register, 1561-1934, Vol. II, L-Z, provides a little more; his parents lived at 38 Gloucester St, Belgrave Rd, SW; he was Sir Thomas White Scholar at St John’s, Oxford; he got a First in Greats. But like fairy gold, his ‘details’ have tended to crumble into dust when I have tried to find out more. For instance, since I discovered the letters in 2007, and realised what a stylish, affecting, funny writer he was, I have been keen to find more writings by him. But I find there was no paper called the *Daily News and Nation*. There was the *Daily News and Leader*, a popular daily newspaper with a small section on books, ‘News of Books’; and there was the *Nation and the Athenaeum*, a liberal weekly which later became the *New Statesman and Nation*, then the *New Statesman*. Eric’s cousin Arthur Tansley, a botanist and expert on Freud, wrote for it, as did his friends Geoffrey Garratt and J.B.Trend; and it is full of articles by members of the Bloomsbury Group. But an Index to it, recently announced on the internet, has no references to Eric as a writer in it – only to reviews of his translations.[[46]](#footnote-46)

What is happening here? His ‘reviews, etc’ in one or both papers may have been unsigned, or signed only with initials. He may have been mis-naming the more downmarket *Daily News and Leader* as the *Daily News and Nation* because of an unconscious wish to have written for the more respectable paper. Or he may have been mentioning both papers, and lying about *The Nation*! There is no Index for the *Daily News and Leader*, and reading it involves casting the eye down enormous, fuzzy pages of microfilm, in which the tiny ‘News of Books’ section is surrounded by acres of fashion plates, politics, stocks and shares, sport, racing, and news photos. Until someone makes an Index to that paper, or digitises it, I have no hope of finding writing by him in it. [[47]](#footnote-47)

1. **The nature of Peggy**

Looking again at the self-description, one wonders what the gloomy and painful nature of the life story thus revealed (‘histoire morne et pénible’) consisted of for Eric. In 1912 he had married Peggy Kitchin, an artist who painted under the name Emma Miles Kitchin.[[48]](#footnote-48) The most obvious reason for unhappiness would be the death of Peggy earlier in that same year – 1923 – but he does not mention it. When he wrote the description, he was trying to re-invent himself as a literary person living in London without Peggy. Perhaps the unhappiness of the story includes the frequent changes of job. Word of mouth (a comment on the phone to me from Fé Potter - the long-time later female partner of Jenny, Eric’s second wife - who died in November 2008) seems to confirm my mother’s story in her letter to Nick Jacobs, quoted in the Preface, that Peggy found Oxford life boring, and refused to live ‘in the provinces’, and that influenced his decision to leave. Fé also suggested that Peggy had a drink problem, and that was why Eric had to leave his diplomatic job after WW1. ‘She got tight and banged some bigwig on the head with a balloon’. (Fé’s own voice, that of an upper-class Wren, can be heard clearly here.)

This picture of Peggy (drunkenness, contempt of ‘the provinces’, deciding where they should live at the cost of her husband’s career) is very different from the one given in my mother’s unpublished memoir of 2000.

*My mother’s talent was considerable. She thought out a way of doing delicately coloured portrait etchings, one of which can be seen in the picture gallery at Chatsworth entitled ‘Diana Duchess 1919’, signed ‘Emma Miles Kitchen’. (Later, she signed herself Peggy Sutton). She showed her work at the NEAC, at Goupil and other galleries in London. But, most of all, as Gladys Peto has always told me, she was adored by everyone and was the most delightful company.*

*She died of a heart complaint in 1923.*

*This tragedy broke my father, Eric Sutton, and he never mended*.[[49]](#footnote-49)

My mother was born in 1922, the year before Peggy died. So her image of Peggy was based not on memory, but on what she had been told, presumably including what Eric told her. No trace filters through to her memoir of any resentment on Eric’s part at having to leave his job at Oxford or his diplomatic job after the war. She simply says that at her birth:

*My father, who had begun his career in 1910 as a fellow of Worcester College, Oxford, teaching logic and philosophy, was working as a civil servant, having passed high into that service as well as achieving a First in Greats. At that time there were only five other Fellows of Worcester; one was always described as Old Lee. Came the 1914 war, my father worked with MI5 in the field and London. He was born with atrophied muscles in his left arm. This did not prevent him from being a tennis and golf player, and an excellent dancer.*

It sounds as though Eric played down his time at Oxford to my mother, making it sound small-time, unimportant, and old-fashioned.

There seem to be two traditions about Peggy, one more critical than the other. The more critical one has come to me through my mother (in her letter to Nick Jacobs of 1996), and Fé; neither of them knew Peggy, though Jenny may have done, so it may originate with Eric (or Jenny). The more uncritical one – ‘adored by everyone’ – in my mother’s memoir of 2000 comes, as she states, from Gladys Peto, her godmother. Gladys did know Peggy: they were artists in London together in the 1910s and 20s. ‘As Gladys Peto has always told me’ suggests that Gladys repeated the story of Peggy’s loveability many times to my mother – perhaps to counter other suggestions about Peggy’s character. They may both be true; to be ‘adored by everyone’, and delightful company, can go together with despising the provinces, drunkenness, and ruining one’s husband’s career.

1. **‘Sottish drunkenness’**

A letter dated soon after the one above (Letter 4, ‘late 1923 or early 1924’, suggests Merlin Holland) shows that Eric was elected to the Savile; it also gives a feeling of his state of mind soon after Peggy’s death, his writing style, his character (the wry self-knowledge, the application of his love of literature to the minutiae of his own life), and his drink problem.

‘My dear Vyvyan,

I have just heard that I have been elected to the Savile. V. many thanks for your kind support. I forward for your inspection a statement (by Daniel Defoe) of the events of Saturday and, still feeling rather ill, am

Yours

Robinson Crusoe’.

Over the page:

‘When I had, in some measure, recovered from my condition I fell to drawing up, in the manner of accompts, a statement of the loss and gain coming from this singular and hateful indulgence. Thus:

Credit Debit

A false and unworthy exhilaration By cash £2 (or more)

(passing notwithstanding into 1 Hat burnt (through carelessness owing to

lassitude and disgust) intoxication)

1 glove lost, ditto

1 new, tho’ bad, hat.

1 sick headache accompanied by

nervous irritation not yet subsided’

Over the page:

‘Carried forward

Credit Debit

Nil Item. Offence to Almighty God

When I had read this [?unreadable] I fell to lamenting and beating my breast that I had so far forgotten the sacred purposes for which man is placed upon this Earth and had given way to Sottish drunkenness. After spending some hours in this condition I drew up for my guidance a schedule to regulate my consumption of intoxicating liquor when I should visit that part of my island called Chelsea which appears (to me) to be exposed to particular danger in this regard, but with which I will not here trouble the reader.’

This is the man, in pain, witty, literary, loveable, drunken, whom I am searching for. (That ‘the reader’ seems to refer poignantly to me.) My mother was one year old at the time he was writing; her words many years later, when she wrote her memoir in her 80s, ‘This tragedy broke my father, and he never mended’ echo through this letter as I read it.

Going back to his self-description, it is clear that there is much that is left out, and what there is may not be trustworthy. But the tone of it, self-deprecating, sad but jocular, is very characteristic, and like the other letter that I quote here, even to the mention of hats. There is one hint that I have followed in more detail. I think I can take it as certain that Eric did edit the *Oxford Magazine*, a dons’ journal, during the time that he was a don (1909-12). So one of my first research trips was to the Bodleian library to look at the volumes of the *Oxford Magazine*. I confidently expected to find lots of journalism signed by Eric, to add to the one article, ‘A Fair Adventure’, which I had found in my mother’s archive.

1. **The *Oxford Magazine***

In April 2008, I visited Oxford to see the files of the magazine, which are kept in the Bodleian. I knew he graduated in 1909, and began his teaching job at Worcester the same year, so I began with an hour browsing in the earliest volumes I had ordered, which were 1908-9 and 1909-10 (each volume goes from autumn one year to summer the next). They seemed deadly dull and everything was unsigned, except for a few poems with initials.

I then went to Worcester College to see their file on Eric. This gave me a much better idea of his Oxford career and when he might have edited the Magazine. The chronology it suggested was: in December 1909 he was just starting as a Tutor, not yet a Fellow (so his claim to have been a Fellow from 1909 was incorrect). In June 1910 he was elected to a Fellowship. In an undated letter about filling in a form for the Fellowship, Lys (Senior Tutor – later Provost, 1919-1946) asks him if he would like to drop ‘Honour Mods Compn’ (perhaps ‘composition’). Would he like to be ‘more free to devote yourself to philosophizing and other great things’? In September 1911, Lys agreed to his taking on some teaching at Queen’s (‘philosophical work’). In November 1911, he asks Lys in a letter if he must give Greats lectures? Lys answers yes, he must. In October 1912 he had left and was at the Board of Education. An undated letter from him to Lys says: ‘I need not say how sorry I am in many ways to be going. I have been very happy here…I hope I have not proved wholly incompetent. But I think that I am doing the right thing. I’m not sure that I’m cut out for a philosopher.’ In December 1912 his remaining furniture is sold to the College for £6.00.

I had been looking at the wrong volumes. I got out the 1910-11 volume, and it seemed to have Eric all over it. It is critical, well turned, funny, readable, irascible. There are witty short reviews, such as: p. 275, Vol 29. ‘*Martin the Mummer*, by Margaret Stewart. A historical novel of considerable prolixity; but not very skilfully constructed, and written without any great power of drawing character or holding the reader’s attention. Good enough for reading in bed by those afflicted with insomnia, but not otherwise to be recommended with any enthusiasm.’ On *The Year’s Work in Classical Studies*, ed. W.H.D.Rouse: ‘We read the section upon Literature…with an impatience bordering upon wrath.’

When did this Eric-like feeling come over it? I went back to October 1910 in the 1910-11 vol. It starts (p. 22) with an editorial giving hearty congratulations to Mr Ball, the Senior Tutor at St John’s College. He has got a fellowship allowing a visit to the East. This sounds like Eric. He started his tutor job at Worcester in December 1909. In June 1910 Ball recommended that Eric keep his St John’s Scholarship and the income it brought, even if elected to a Fellowship. He is thanking Mr Ball for his support. Short reviews continue to be Eric-like in this volume. On p. 47 (November 1910): a review of vol. 3 of *A History of English Prosody* by George Saintsbury. ‘The Prosodist, inevitably perhaps, over-estimates the importance of Prosody. What makes ‘I settled my hat on my throbbing head’ better than ‘I put my hat upon my head’ (if it is better) is not the trisyllabic rhythm, but the epithet ‘throbbing’.’ This could perhaps be by anybody, but it has an Eric-like feeling about it – the bathos, the talk of hats [‘I get my hats, or rather my annual hat, at Scott’s’], even the throbbing head due to alcohol.

In the 1911-12 volume, which I got out next, there are many other hints of Eric’s interests; references to French matters appear: a note of a lecture on the French author Romain Rolland, at Worcester; a note on 19 October 1911 that an article in the *Westminster Gazette* is just ‘a dish of *marrons surannés*, flavoured with a somewhat inharmonious *jus personnel*.’ A note (p. 81) that ‘The term “Arts and Crafts”, now so familiar, was invented by Mr Cobden Sanderson’, reminds me that he lodged near Mrs Cobden Sanderson in Long Crendon during WW2.[[50]](#footnote-50) But there is not the same sense of recognition as in the previous, 1910-11 volume. Might he be editing it but not writing so much of it?

Fortified by these discoveries, and feeling that his editorship definitely showed from autumn 1910, I went back to the volume for 1909-10. Perhaps, if he became editor that autumn, there might be contributions from him in the previous volume, although the overall tone of the magazine was dull.

On 10 February 1910 (p. 194) a poem appeared over his initials, E.W.S.

*‘Aes triplex*

Look, the reeling standards,

The broken spurs of truth;

And oh the shivering pennons

In the splendid rout of youth.

The haggard ranks are gathered

And formed for fight again,

Close-lipped, a ceaseless army,

The rhythmed march of men.

No wings upon their helmets,

No fires upon their crests;

But triple bronze the armour

They bind about their breasts.’

It was exciting to find, at last, something signed by Eric, even only with initials. ‘Aes triplex’ means ‘triple bronze’, from a line in Horace's *Odes* (Book 1, Ode 3), that reads ‘Oak and triple bronze encompassed the breast of him who first entrusted his frail craft to the wild sea.’ Triple bronze about one’s breast seems to mean one is very brave; so perhaps the poem is simply saying that the ranks of youth (marching on year after year, the ones he is teaching) are brave – brave in their pursuit of truth, or their battle with it, though unsuccessful. On 26 May 1910, p. 343, there is another poem initialled E.W.S.:

‘To \_\_\_\_\_

‘*Mit Unfreien streitet kein Edler*’.

You’ve joined them now – the sordid crew,

The armies of the Lord;

You’re marching to their music – you! –

Flourishing that foolish sword.

Why, we have watched them, heard them come,

You and I;

Marked the momentous rolling of their drum,

Mocked their set lips and, with inverted thumb,

Laughed to see them die.

And now, at last,

You’ve joined them, caught their silly stride,

And I must see you, once my merry guide,

Uniformed, spurred, accoutred, clanking past.’

The title is a quotation from Wagner’s *Ring* – meaning something like ‘no noble person fights with a slave’. Here, though the imagery is similar, of Roman soldiers marching past, the thought is different. These are ‘the armies of the Lord’, not a those of a philosophical battle with truth. I think someone who was his friend, who mocked religion along with him, has ‘got religion’ and is now marching with the enemy. Perhaps the implication of the title quotation is that this person is now a slave, of religion, and Eric feels it is beneath him to fight him or try to argue him out of it.

If they are by Eric, these poems are a more intimate glimpse of him and his thoughts than that provided by the slim file at Worcester. In the first, he sees Truth as something you have to fight with; an insight, perhaps, into his struggles with Philosophy, and his transformation from someone who might ‘devote himself to philosophizing and other great things’ into someone who thinks he is ‘not cut out to be a philosopher’. This attitude that truth is hard to define, hard to reach, wearisome and destructive to pursue, is perhaps linked to the scorn he feels for religion in the second poem.

I wondered who the second poem might be about: someone who initially shared Eric’s then freethinking views, but then ‘got religion’. The student diaries of Ronald Knox, who came up a year after Eric and like him went straight on after his degree to be a tutor, are mentioned in correspondence between Eric and Knox, and looked promising as a source of possible names; they knew each other, and both were members of the Orthodox Club, an un-orthodox club of what Penelope Fitzgerald calls ‘pretend Socialists’. Another member was Robin Laffan. In 1941, when Eric was trying to find lodgings in Oxford for Felicity for her term at the wartime Slade, he wrote to Knox, who was helpful, and also to Laffan. But Knox’s student diaries ‘seem to have disappeared’.[[51]](#footnote-51) I cannot use them to find likely people who might be the addressee of Eric’s poem. I say ‘Eric’s poem’; it is also possible that the poems are by someone else with the same initials.

I do, however, have one serious poem in his handwriting from my mother’s archive – untitled, undated:

‘By doing neither ill nor well

Can I shake this citadel.

Nor move the older me within,

To truth nor hatred, love nor sin.

Not though I drag and tire this husk

That is my body, dawn till dusk.

With my own hands he takes his meat,

And when he eats I too must eat.

Still he breathes with my own breath

Tireless, yet in league with death.

Still he sits, his stronghold held,

Uncompelling, uncompelled

A visitant within my head,

Who must possess me till I’m dead.

Then at last he will arise

And purge the darkness from my eyes.’

This sounds and looks like a composition by Eric. (It shows second thoughts: one couplet, ‘With my own hands…must eat’, which he has first written after ‘in league with death’, is marked to go one couplet earlier. So it is almost certainly not a copy in his writing of a poem by another.) It describes a feeling of dissocation from oneself, of being as if possessed by a self (an ‘older me’) which does not feel like one’s own, but goes through the motions of everyday life. This is combined with a blankness or deadness, an inability to be moved. After Peggy’s death (1923) he says in a letter to Vyvyan (letter 17, dated ?Sept 1924 by Merlin, but to be redated mid-1925) ‘I thought about nothing but Peggy for 18 months, indeed I fell into a dangerous and frozen state’. This poem could be associated with that period. The ‘older me’ will ‘arise’ after death; perhaps this is evidence of his religious conversion which happened at about this time. But whenever the poem comes in his life, it shows that he did sometimes write serious verses. ‘Truth’, as an abstraction, also appears, as it did in ‘Aes triplex’ above. And there is military imagery – ‘citadel’, ‘stronghold’ – reminding one of the imagery in both the E.W.S. poems. Its existence, I think, clinches the case that the E.W.S. poems are by him.

One more piece of writing from the Magazine, which reached me by a roundabout route, is certainly partly by Eric. In a letter of 22 December 1941, he writes to Jenny: ‘I found a bit about A.E.Housman that Garrod and I wrote in the Oxford Magazine 30 years ago, quoted in I. Richards’s life of Housman. It is quite good. But I expect Garrod wrote the best of it.’ Nothing is included with the letter, but I found what looks like this ‘bit’ in the scrapbook of Nicolette Dallas.[[52]](#footnote-52) In the scrapbook is a page of United Universities Club headed notepaper, the kind which Eric so often wrote on during WW2, with a short article or letter copied in his handwriting. There is no heading or salutation. It starts: ‘That the electors to Professorships never elect the best man is a truth which all the best men (i.e. all the candidates save the Professor, in his blindness) clearly recognise. And that the best man is sometimes not elected even disinterested persons are often driven to allow. Fear and Favour, ancient and discreditable powers, sometimes dominate the academic mind, and things go wrong. But nothing went wrong at Cambridge last week when the electors to the Chair of Latin elected Mr. A.E.Housman…’ And ends: ‘A banquet seems clearly indicated, with much Samian wine and Ludlow beer – a banquet to which we trust that a generous Foundation will invite both the Editor of the Magazine and the writer of this note. Oxford Magazine Jan 26th 1911.’

‘Quite good’ – in a sonorous, orotund style, influenced by Sir Thomas Browne (or is it Jane Austen?). But how much of it is Eric’s work, and how much Garrod’s, it is impossible to tell. The phrase ‘the Editor of the Magazine’ must refer to Eric, confirming my guess that he became editor in October 1910. If Garrod is the main ‘writer of this note’, the appeal for wine and beer sounds like Eric. H.W. Garrod (1978-1960) was a classicist and a Fellow of Merton for over 60 years. He and A.E. Housman both edited Manilius. I guess that he taught Eric. A faintly homosexual tutor/student relationship is suggested by Eric’s letter to Jenny of 23 March 1941: ‘I took Felicity to see Garrod, who was at his most charming. He was truly excited to find that F. was even more like Botticelli’s ‘Young Man’ than, as he used to say, I was.’[[53]](#footnote-53) Eric was dazzlingly attractive when young (as was my mother).

1. **The case of ‘the case’; Oxford philosophy in Eric’s time**

In the Magazine itself, as well as the poems, I found three articles headed ‘Jargon Illustrated, I II and III’, from February and March 1910. These are witty, typically donnish articles about misuses of language, in particular the phrase ‘the case’, which read to me as at least partly by Eric. The first one is unsigned, the second is signed ‘Horatio Quillet’, the third is signed with the initials ‘H.W.F. and F.G.F.’ ‘Horatio Quillet’ might be a pseudonym of Eric’s; in letters to Vyvyan he signs himself ‘T. Bibulus Edentatus’ and ‘John Whisky’. I tried to find out whether there was an ‘Oxford Magazine archive’ anywhere which might help with attribution. There wasn’t.[[54]](#footnote-54) I had to accept that the articles were a dead end.

Even if I could find an archive and attribute all the articles, the articles on ‘the case’ are about the phrase ‘the case of’, and do not cover the use described in Duggan’s letter – the phrase ‘to be the case’ as in ‘to be true’. This is really a philosophical subject. The phrase ‘to be the case’, meaning ‘to be true’, will forever be associated with the first sentence of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, ‘The world is everything that is the case’ (in the translation by Ramsey of 1921). I wondered if it had been used in Oxford philosophy before WW1, and wrote to a philosopher, Brian McGuinness, who has written a book on Wittgenstein (*The Young Wittgenstein*). He replied: ‘I don't know of anybody using the phrase “to be the case” in a technical sense before Wittgenstein… It may have been used by new realists Cook Wilson and others in Oxford before the war. …I dare say it was then a more pedantic expression than it seems now.’ I decided to do some reading about Oxford philosophy before WW1, partly looking for the phrase ‘to be the case’, partly to get some background to what Eric would have been reading and teaching.

Professor John Cook Wilson, the ‘new realist’ mentioned by Brian McGuinness, never published a book. His lecture notes on logic were collected and published by H.A.Prichard. Prichard also wrote an obituary article in *Mind*, which gives some idea of Cook Wilson’s philosophical thoughts; this contains no use of ‘is the case’ as meaning ‘is true’ – just one use of ‘case’ as meaning ‘example’. ‘Is the case’ meaning ‘is true’ does not appear in an article, ‘Achilles and the tortoise’, by Lewis Carroll, originally published in 1895 in *Mind*,[[55]](#footnote-55) which must have been current reading when Eric was at Oxford; Carroll taught Mathematics at Christ Church for years and had died in 1898. The article is about the difficulty of making a deduction from a logical argument; the tortoise starts with ‘two steps, and the conclusion drawn from them….Let’s call them A, B and Z.’ The tortoise accepts each hypothetical premise, but denies that the conclusion necessarily follows. This teasing article has a thought behind it - that logic can never prove anything. (Just the triumphant conclusion my father used to enjoy stating for us as if to deter us from ever arguing any case on family matters; so it was possible to use philosophy to show this even in Eric’s time, before Logical Positivism.) I wonder if this is at all similar to Eric’s feelings about philosophy, which may have been one of the reasons why he abandoned his career as a don and applied to the Civil Service.

A fascinating and relevant account of Oxford philosophy from 1910, a year after Eric started teaching it, is given by R.G.Collingwood, in *An Autobiography*. [[56]](#footnote-56) This certainly suggests grounds for a young philosophy tutor to feel disillusioned and to wish to leave the job for something else entirely. According to Collingwood, one school of philosophy was in the process of being superseded - a school influenced by Kant and Hegel, one of whose exponents was T.H.Green, who had died aged forty-six in 1882, after being a professor for four years. He had not had much influence in Oxford, but he had nationally: ‘The school of Green sent out into public life a stream of ex-pupils who carried with them the conviction that philosophy, and in particular the philosophy they had learnt at Oxford, was an important thing, and that their vocation was to put it into practice’ (p. 17). But his opponents were gaining ground – or regaining ground they had never really lost in Oxford.

Green’s supporters never wrote any notable books that the public could understand. ‘The game was thus left in the hands of their opponents. These called themselves ‘Realists’, and undertook the task of discrediting the entire work of Green’s school, which they described comprehensively as ‘Idealism’…the work of that school presented itself to most Oxford philosophers as something which had to be destroyed, and in destroying which they would be discharging their first duty to the subject’ (p. 19). (In a footnote to the word ‘Realist’, Collingwood adds: ‘Thomas Case (1844-1925), a leading Oxford opponent of Green’s school, had written books advocating ‘realism’, by that name, from the 1870s onwards.’) He describes realism with even more heat in the next chapter: ‘Its positive doctrine was nugatory, its critical technique deadly; all the deadlier because its effectiveness did not depend on errors native to the doctrines criticized, but on a kind of disintegration produced by itself in whatever it touched’ (p. 46).

Collingwood himself became a teacher of philosophy. He taught the history of philosophy, rather than logic – ‘My plan was to concentrate on the question, ‘What is Aristotle saying and what does he mean by it?’ and to forgo, however alluring it might be, the further question ‘Is it true?’.’ (p. 27). Then came WW1, and he went to work in the Admiralty Intelligence Division. During that time he worked out his own approach to logic, which was to replace the logic of propositions by a ‘logic of question and answer’. ‘Is this answer the right answer to this question?’ became the question he asked, rather than ‘Is it true?’. He went back to Oxford to teach after the War and found that the ‘realists’ were mounting an attack on moral philosophy. This had begun before the War while Eric was still at Worcester. ‘In 1912 Prichard announced that moral philosophy as so understood was based on a mistake, and advocated a new kind of moral philosophy, purely theoretical’ (p. 47). ‘Another traditional philosophical science which was thrown bodily overboard was the theory of knowledge…Another was political theory’ (p. 49). The effect on the pupils of these teachers was to ‘convince them that philosophy was a silly and trifling game, and to give them a lifelong contempt for the subject and a lifelong grudge against the men who had wasted their time by forcing it upon their attention’ (p. 50).

A new significance can be seen in Eric’s lines:

‘Look, the reeling standards,

The broken spurs of truth;

And oh the shivering pennons

In the splendid rout of youth.’

The battle seems to be between youth and truth, and both sides are losing. Truth, and ‘standards’, perhaps moral or philosophical absolutes as well as military objects born in battle, are reeling and broken, as ethics, political theory, and the theory of knowledge are ‘thrown overboard’. The youths who have come to do battle are also ‘routed’ and ‘shivering’. The subject they have come to study is ‘a silly and trifling game’; it is not important, so neither are they – although the poem goes on to pay tribute to their bravery in continuing.

To find out what was being taught in philosophy in the years Eric was at Oxford, I looked up the ‘Greats’ exam papers for the years 1906-14. The papers for 1909 are the ones Eric would have sat. It is moving to think of him translating into Greek a prose passage (unsigned) which includes: ‘If [Reynard] spent his time in splenetic atrabiliar reflections on his own misery, his ill-usage by Nature, Fortune, and other Foxes, and so forth, and had not courage, promptitude, practicality, and other suitable Vulpine gifts and graces, he would catch no geese.’ His later letters are full of splenetic atrabiliar reflections, and references to the difficulty of catching geese, i.e. making a living from translating. In letter 64 to Vyvyan Holland, dated Jan/Feb 1928, he writes: ‘Persistent rain has perhaps made me a little atrabilious.’

Curiously, the exam papers for 1912 are missing from the volume I consulted. In 1913, the year for which Eric escaped teaching by leaving in the autumn of 1912, the Logic questions include:

‘1. The function of philosophy is to comprehend, and from comprehension to criticize, and through criticism to unify. It has no positive and additional teaching of its own.’ Consider this dictum.

…4. ‘That all Berkeley’s arguments, though otherwise intended, are in reality merely skeptical, appears from this, that they admit of no answer, and produce no conviction’ (Hume). Examine this statement.

…11. Must a rational view of the world be optimistic?’

The latter expecting the answer no. It is possible that this negativity weighed in Eric’s decision to leave Oxford at least as much as Peggy’s refusal to live in ‘the provinces’.

**Chapter 3**

**The young Bohemians**

‘Et j’irai loin, bien loin, comme un bohémien…’[[57]](#footnote-57)

1. **The ‘general family dislike’ of Eric’s marriage**

The ‘provincial’ world of Oxford, as Peggy saw it, seems far from events elsewhere in the years 1910-12. Arthur Tansley, Eric’s cousin, for instance, was much more in the swim of the changing intellectual and political climate of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His father, George Tansley, had been a good friend of Richard Litchfield, the husband of Charles Darwin’s daughter Henrietta. Both Litchfield and George Tansley were important figures at the Working Men’s College, which had been founded in London in 1854.[[58]](#footnote-58) George had gone there as a student in 1855, and been taught drawing by Ruskin; he then became a Fellow and a teacher there, and after he sold his family business,[[59]](#footnote-59) ‘de facto the chief administrator’ of the College for many years (Ayres, *Shaping Ecology*, p. 31). This background ‘where socialism was practised, albeit of a gentle, Fabian kind’ (Ayres, p. 35), and closeness to the currents of new thought such as the ideas of Darwin, enabled Arthur to create for himself a career first as a botanist and then as an ecologist, interested not only in the advancement of science but also in the creation of nature reserves and the burgeoning movement for National Parks.

George had probably been introduced to his wife, Amelia Lawrence, Eric’s aunt, by her brother, also a member of the Working Men’s College (Ayres, p. 27). Amelia’s sister Ellen married Eric’s father, William T. Sutton, in 1876. Eric, their only child, was born in 1886. He had a congenital deformity, a withered left arm – something which links him to his cousin Arthur, who was born with a deformed left hand (‘two fingers were fused at the base, their nails badly twisted’, Ayres, p. 23). I know almost nothing about his childhood, such as whether there was a progressive intellectual atmosphere similar to that of his cousin’s household. One fact that makes me think there was certainly a trace of it is that among my mother’s papers was a cheque for ten pounds made out to John Ruskin, signed William Sutton, together with a short note from Ruskin returning the cheque without explanation.[[60]](#footnote-60) Eric’s two marriages, in 1912 to Peggy and in 1929 to Jenny, took place after his father William had died; on one certificate William is listed as ‘deceased, Accountant’, on the other ‘deceased, Chartered Accountant’. This chartered accountant may have wanted to help some good cause with which Ruskin was associated – though it is tantalising not knowing why the cheque was returned.

What I do know is that when Eric married Peggy, an artist, there was a falling-out with the Tansley side of the family, also with the Lawrences, his mother’s family. On 30 May 1941 Eric wrote to Jenny: ‘Arthur Tansley wrote to tell me that my Aunt Mary had died. She was my mother’s youngest sister, and about 90. She had been very kind to me, as a boy, in their little house at Epsom, but ‘got lost’ in the general family dislike – I never could understand why – of my marriage in 1912; and I had not seen her for many years. It seems that Maud, Tansley’s sister, who has always refused to see me since 1912, wished me to be told.’[[61]](#footnote-61) The reason for the ‘general family dislike’ of Eric’s marriage among the Tansleys may have been to do with class and respectability. Arthur himself was the first member of the Tansley family to go to University; his father’s former profession of ‘ball and rout furnisher’ counted as being ‘in trade’, although it was a very successful business: when George Tansley retired in 1884 the business was sold for £70,000 (equivalent to £5m. today).[[62]](#footnote-62) When Eric’s father died, Eric was only 15, and Arthur had become his guardian; presumably Arthur, as well as his sister Maud and Eric’s aunt Mary, joined in the ‘general family dislike’ of the marriage, and saw it as an unwise alliance and a step down in social standing.[[63]](#footnote-63)

My mother’s memoir contains a summary of this family coldness. She ends her memoir with a description of her wedding in 1948 – after which, she says in her last sentence, ‘life, real life, began in earnest’. The wedding was controversial, since she was a Catholic, and my father’s father Geoffrey Fisher had become in 1945 Archbishop of Canterbury. ‘We had only twenty-five guests to the wedding, mostly Harry’s aunts and uncles…Sir Arthur (Professor) Tansley came with his Chick wife [his wife Edith, née Chick]. This was a great coup. Tansley had been Eric’s guardian. When he (Eric) got a fellowship at Worcester College, after completing four years of ‘Greats’ and getting a double First, Sir Arthur was very pleased and proud, but when Eric moved to the Board of Education and married my mother he had a fearful row with him and they did not meet or correspond until the Tansleys accepted my wedding invitation’.[[64]](#footnote-64) As usual there are mistakes in this; ‘Greats’ refers to the last two years of the degree, not all four; Eric actually got a Second in Mods, the first two years’ course; he did not get a fellowship at first, but was only a tutor; and we know from the letter above that Arthur had written to Eric in 1941. But the causes of the row seem to have been equally the move to the Civil Service job and the marriage to Peggy.

My mother is quite scathing in her memoir about her Kitchin ancestors, Peggy’s family; they came from Whitehaven, were in ship-building, and she sums them up ‘Dirty British coasters with salt-caked smoke-stacks was about their mark’.[[65]](#footnote-65) On Eric and Peggy’s marriage certificate, Peggy’s father Harry Kitchin is named as a ‘Dynamite agent (retired)’ under ‘Rank or Profession of Father’. This was certainly ‘trade’, though dynamite was an important business by 1912.[[66]](#footnote-66) In another part of the memoir my mother describes her Kitchin cousins a bit more temperately: ‘All my uncles had been, or were, engineers of some kind, apart from the one who worked at Bradford Infirmary as a surgeon. One uncle had gone to Canada, another to South Africa and Uncle Jack to South America where he built magnificent bridges…[but] lost all his money in a dodgy financial venture in Argentina’. This Jack’s son, another Harry, ‘whose lovely voice was being trained in Vienna’, had to return to England and find a 9-5 job.

There seems to have been some coolness, at any rate lack of contact, between the cousins, so perhaps also between Peggy and her brothers. My mother met her cousin Harry in 1939 when his wife, Eve, ‘called on Eric one afternoon, quite unannounced, and told him she was a relation by marriage’. Eve was American and seemed to have money of her own, which enabled her to ‘pursue a literary career’. Eve figures in this story later, when she has my mother to stay during the first year of the WW2; but the memoir’s description of Harry Kitchin contains a throwaway remark by Eric which tells us much. ‘Harry Kitchin spoiled me and I enjoyed that [she was 17 in 1939]. I met his father and mother, going to see them in their council flat near Arding and Hobbs. I met his fierce sister Mary, known as Jerry, and gentle brother whose name was James, I think, who worked in a cardboard box factory in Clapham. As Eric said – even Harry, with all his talent, had to sink into the cardboard box world.’[[67]](#footnote-67) Eric was viewed by the Tansleys as having sunk in society by marrying Peggy; but Eric was worried all his life about ‘sinking into the cardboard box world’ himself. Behind this phrase looms, not just the idea of being a member of the working class, but the prospect of living in a cardboard box on the Embankment.

My mother overdoes the roughness of her maternal ancestors. Peggy’s aunt and uncle lived in a council flat; but three of her uncles ‘had been, or were’ engineers, and another was a surgeon. Peggy’s own family could afford to send her to Cheltenham Ladies’ College (as we know from the article about her in *Pearson’s Magazine*); and Peggy’s mother left some money in trust which paid for Felicity’s education. Perhaps even more than the class objection, the nature of Peggy herself, as a professional artist leading an independent life, and a Bohemian living in Chelsea, was objected to by the Tansley family and the Lawrences. The description of Eric and Peggy as young married Bohemians by Stella Bowen in her memoir suggests a ménage which would certainly have upset any family worried about respectability.

1. **Artistic Chelsea: ‘Queer, noisy, exotic folk’**

Stella Bowen was one of Ford Madox Ford’s many lovers. They met towards the end of WW1, and the portrait in his novel tetralogy *Parade’s End* of Valentine, the girl the hero spends most of four novels loving, but unable to act on his love because of the war and his marriage, is partly based on her. Ford was almost twice Stella’s age (born in 1873, while she was born in 1893), and had had an early marriage, children, and then an unhappy liaison with the novelist Violet Hunt. After WW1 he and Stella lived together in Sussex and Paris and had a child; they separated in the later 1920s. Stella was Australian, and had come to England in 1914 to be an artist. Her memoir, *Drawn from Life*,[[68]](#footnote-68) describes the people she stayed with when she first arrived – a rather dull family she lodged with in Pimlico. She also knew a Bishop through connections in Australia.

‘Presently, however, I had to leave my Pimlico family…and then chance pitched me into a milieu so unbelievably different from anything I had known or imagined, that I nearly exploded in the effort not to seem non-plussed. It came about because the Bishop’s wife had a sister who was just a tiny bit flightier than herself, and the sister had a daughter who was a good deal flightier than her mother. This daughter had a friend who was an artist in Chelsea, and the Bishop’s sister-in-law arranged for me to go there for a visit as a paying guest – because she thought I needed young society. The artist was Peggy Sutton, a good-humoured and lively lady with a baby daughter and a lazy, intelligent husband with a civil service job – I think in the education office’ (pp. 35-6).

I know, because I have seen their gravestones, that Eric and Peggy’s daughter Pamela died in 1913, the year she was born; and their second daughter, Diana, was not born until 1915. Stella must have moved on, in her rather date-free memoir, to 1915, after Diana’s birth. She goes on:

‘They had a studio flat in the King’s Road and they said they would take me to the Café Royal and to the Crabtree Club. They did. At the Café Royal (which in those days still wore a cosy, old-fashioned aspect, with red plush and gilt curlicues) I saw all manner of queer, noisy and exotic folk. One glance sufficed to convince me that they were not actuated by any of the principles which guided the lives of those with whom I had hitherto come in contact. This, I said to myself, is a sink of iniquity, and how awful it would be if anyone were to see me here! The idea that nobody would care whether I was there or not, never entered my head, which was still filled with the naïve self-importance of the small-town dweller.’

I wonder, still, what a ‘studio flat’ was in 1914. Was it, as it is now, a one-room flat? How did Eric, Peggy and the baby fit in, with their temporary lodger, Stella? Or was it a flat, with a studio attached or as part of the deal? I know from addresses on letters that Eric and Peggy lived at 6, Carlyle Studios, 296 King’s Road; from the ‘Multiple Studios’ gazetteer in Giles Walkley’s *Artists’ Houses in London 1764-1914* I learn that Carlyle Studios are ‘known to have been demolished’, also that they were ‘sizeable spaces suitable for all trades; formerly stables’.[[69]](#footnote-69) A further glimpse of what the studios were like comes from Arthur Ransome’s autobiography: ‘In the winter of 1906 I moved … to Carlyle Studios in the King’s Road’. Ransome says the studios were ‘presided over by two very kind old ladies, the misses Grey, and they had a few rooms to spare in the part of the building that was too narrow to suit painters or sculptors. …I had two communicating rooms, and was very comfortable there, with my books and a tiny Adam fireplace with a hob that seemed designed for my kind of simple cooking’.[[70]](#footnote-70)  If this was the layout of Eric and Peggy’s flat, too, it sounds just big enough to have included Stella as a lodger, with Eric, Peggy and the baby Diana in one room, and Stella in the other. [[71]](#footnote-71)

Stella goes on: ‘The Crabtree nightclub was even worse than the Café Royal. Beer marks on plain deal tables, wooden benches, and a small platform on which a moon-faced youth made music for a bevy of gyratory couples. Models in trousers, page-boy hair bobs, mascara’d eyes, unmanly youths and unfeminine girls, and *nobody* in evening dress! To me, it was the acme of low life. I believe there were a number of distinguished and amusing artists there, but I wouldn’t know, though I do remember hearing Marinetti reciting his zoom-bang poetry in Italian.’ ‘Zang tumb tumb’, published in journals 1912-14, was a ‘concrete poem’ by the Italian Futurist poet Marinetti. Futurism was associated with the glorification of war and its technology, and the desire for Italy to enter the war.

The flat did at least have access to a bathroom. Stella continues: ‘With Peggy and her husband I visited my first English bar-parlour. It was in that nice pub on the Chelsea embankment at the foot of Oakley Street, but even there I suffered from a feeling that it wasn’t ladylike. I do blush for myself at this period. I have no idea whether the Suttons were aware of my amazement of all I saw and heard at their flat, or whether I succeeded in camouflaging my derangement. It was the sort of place where one would get up in the morning and discover that the bathroom was occupied by a Sleeping Beauty who had climbed in through the window at three a.m., having failed to get home to her suburb after a party. This was considered quite reasonable and proper.’ Stella sees that this Bohemianism is really only a front, or a phase, for many people. ‘It dawned upon me soon, however, that the young women in Chelsea who broke the rules all the time, were quite nice girls, and just like anybody else, except that they were rather better educated, and appeared somehow to have disposed of their families’ (p. 37).

She describes ‘the dishevelled host at a studio party, sitting on a rickety bed in an open shirt with a beer bottle between his feet and a girl in each arm’, rising to greet her with a ‘polished Oxford manner – the sort of manner which would have fluttered the dovecotes of Adelaide into getting out the best silver and ordering a chicken. …I could not guess that most of these people would end their days in prosperous bourgeous respectability, getting out the best silver themselves, and ordering many chickens!’ Prosperous bourgeois respectability was something Eric never attained, though my mother did, in spite of her Bohemian tendencies, through her marriage to my very successful father. How pleased Eric would have been to know that he eventually became President of Wolfson College, Oxford.

Stella moved to a student hostel and there met Phyllis Reid, an acting student, and the two girls set up house together in a borrowed studio. There they ‘got a pretty good introduction to all the arts’. ‘It began when Peggy, my former Chelsea hostess, turned up to ask if we would lend our studio for a party. We were naturally delighted with the prospect of seeing our big room at last filled with people. The party was to say goodbye to some artist going to the front, and to it came Ezra Pound’ (p. 48). Through Ezra they met ‘T.S.Eliot and Arthur Waley and [Edward] Wadsworth and May Sinclair and Violet Hunt and G.B.Stern, and P. Wyndham Lewis and the poet Yeats’. As to whether Eric and Peggy met all these people, I am sure they did meet most of them. Could the artist have been Henri Gaudier-Brzeska?

This wonderful, liberated, studio life may have been a factor in the family disapproval of Eric’s marriage. But there is more to this picture than Bohemian habits. Even if some of these liberated people later lapsed into bourgeois respectability, a liberated or experimental attitude to sex, infidelity, and adultery is also suggested, perhaps more liberal than the gently Fabian Tansleys could approve. Other evidence confirms that Eric had at least one adulterous affair (see iii below). Peggy’s encouraging attitude to a later flirtation of Eric’s suggests that she was not unhappy about the affair.

1. **The affair with Fanny Wadsworth**

Barbara Wadsworth’s life of her father, the artist Edward, describes the place where Eric and Peggy lived. ‘Important, too, amongst Fanny and Edward’s friends, were Eric Sutton and his first wife Peggie [misspelt], who was a painter. They lived in a ramshackle studio in the King’s Road, Chelsea, reached by a flight of dark and grubby stairs, maintaining a somewhat lackadaisical mode of life with their child Diana who was a god-daughter of Fanny’s’.[[72]](#footnote-72)Barbara, born in 1914, seems to speak from memory and to have visited Carlyle Studios as a child – Eric and Peggy lived there until Peggy died in 1923. My mother in her memoir says firmly: ‘My father’s house and studio were upstairs from the entrance from the King’s road’ (‘From Then to Then’, p. 3), as if the studio was separate from the living accommodation and that was grand enough to be called a ‘house’ rather than a ‘flat’. She herself did not live in Carlyle Studios except as a tiny child, before being ‘sent to board at a home for babies who weren’t thriving, in Tunbridge Wells’ at the age of ten months.[[73]](#footnote-73) Barbara’s description – a ‘ramshackle studio’, probably at most two inter-connecting rooms - sounds more like the reality.[[74]](#footnote-74)

The fragments about Eric in Barbara’s book suggest a rather different Eric from the tragic figure in my mother’s memoir. ‘Sutton was a big-boned, full-lipped and remarkably placid man with very defined eyebrows and an attractive and indolently amused personality. He remained a lifelong friend’ (p. 64). This is right except for the ‘remarkably placid’ – my mother often mentions his tendency to fly into rages; but perhaps he was placid before Peggy’s death, coping with the ramshackle, grubby studio, his job as a civil servant, and finding people to look after first Pamela, then Diana, then my mother and Diana.

More surprising is the news that he seems to have had an affair with Edward Wadsworth’s wife Fanny. On p. 69 Barbara describes ‘the first known instance’ of Edward’s unfaithfulness to Fanny. ‘Edward was not a faithful husband, but in this connection it may be interesting to know that when he returned from Mudros [where he went to do intelligence work in 1916] and learnt from Fanny that she had been having a violent flirtation with Eric Sutton, he was very much upset.’ ‘Violent flirtation?’ What does she mean exactly? On an earlier page (p. 68) Barbara describes Fanny’s friendship during WW1 with Wyndham Lewis, who ‘kept her sharpened, as she put it’. ‘Lewis and Fanny were good friends, what in France would be called “bons copains”. He once divulged to her that in his opinion the best women in bed were Germans; on being told this later, Barbara remarked that it had possibly been an invitation for her to disprove this theory, but she replied with a laugh “Oh no! There was nothing like that at all! My beau was someone quite different – my beau was Eric Sutton”.’

So there was ‘nothing like that at all’ in Fanny’s friendship with Wyndham Lewis, ‘that’ being sex. Her ‘beau’ was Eric, with whom she implies there was ‘something like that’. She is surely telling her daughter that she did not go to bed with Wyndham Lewis, but she did go to bed with Eric. After the passage where Edward is ‘very much upset’ to learn of Fanny’s ‘violent flirtation’ with Eric, Barbara adds: ‘Yet he had, since their earliest days together, often teased her about being too straitlaced and “green”, which she doubtless was with her background (she refused, for instance, to have sexual intercourse with him before the eve of their wedding [in 1912], an attitude strange to the circle he moved in). Very soon afterwards, however, keeping her eyes open in the clique into which she had married, seeing the state of things between [Ford Madox] Ford and Violet, between Arthur Waley and Beryl and all the various consorts of [Wyndham] Lewis’s life, she grew more lenient in her outlook and came to terms with what were then thought of as irregularities. When Edward admitted to her his side-step with his former mistress, it was perhaps as a retaliation that she revealed her escapade with Eric’ (p. 70).

My mother (b. 1922) does describe Fanny and Edward:

*Edward Wadsworth’s brother and sister-in-law took me in… Fanny Wadsworth was a fine musician and played her violin in ensembles. Eric had always loved and admired her and she had been Diana’s godmother. Fanny had also lost a daughter as a child of five. Edward painted meticulous tempera paintings of Marine subjects, which were popular at that time. He had been a ‘Dazzle Camouflage’ master during the 1914 war.*

*Edward’s brother’s house was a haven of stability and love. There were at least four young children and a baby in the Nursery at the top of the house – a particular smell of airing nappies and flannelette long-clothes was ever present for they hung over the brass rail of the huge old-fashioned fireguard.*

*Regularity, efficiency and plenitude were the order of days in this tall house near London somewhere. The snow came that Christmas. We gathered at the window and saw a Fox’s footprint cross the lawn at the front of the house. Boots were found for me and we all trundled down the stairs for larks in the snow. But O! the cold. Soon I was in tears and my boots full of snow*. [[75]](#footnote-75)

More divergences from the truth spring out of my mother’s description, moving and vivid though it is. For a start, Edward Wadsworth had no brother. Finding no brother mentioned in Barbara’s book, I checked the ODNB: ‘Only child’. So ‘Edward’s brother and sister-in-law’ must mean ‘Edward’s brother-in-law and sister-in-law’ – in other words a sister or brother of Fanny’s and spouse. Fanny was a Miss Eveleigh. Her father was the stationmaster at Horncastle in Lincolnshire when she was born. Barbara tells the story that one evening he brought home a violin and asked which of his daughters would like to try it. ‘Isobel, the eldest, Helen, and Gertrude, the youngest, remained silent, but Fanny piped up and said ‘Oh, yes! I’d like to!’ She had no idea what she was letting herself in for, but it was the key to her discovering a true musical talent’ (p. 34). The girls had never seen or heard a violin before. No brother is mentioned, so it must have been one of the three sisters who ‘remained silent’ – Isobel, Helen or Gertrude – who took my mother in to the ‘tall house in London somewhere’. I feel grateful to that sister for her ‘haven of stability and love’, which my mother, aged about 4, certainly needed.

There are further problems in the second sentence, ‘Fanny Wadsworth was a fine musician and played her violin with ensembles.’ Actually, Fanny was a professional violinist. A friend of the Eveleigh family, Canon Austin, had provided the money for Fanny to leave home aged 14 and go to the Royal Academy of Music. She ‘earned her bread and lodging’ by teaching at a convent near Gunnersbury, where she also lived. After the Academy, she played in orchestras, formed her own string quartet, and gave many recitals. ‘Fine musician’, though true, leaves a lot unsaid.

My mother’s remark about Edward – ‘he painted meticulous tempera paintings of Marine subjects, which were popular at the time’ – is rather dismissive. It is not clear whether she is saying that the subjects were popular, or Edward’s paintings were popular. She may have meant both, in her compressed, witty way. Either way, one implication is that they are no longer popular. She is content for this unclarity to curtail any mention of Edward’s other paintings or his value as an artist. There might be a slight sense of condemnation of him for painting popular subjects. ‘Meticulous’ is also a word with derogatory undertones. On artistic matters, she is withholding praise. She keeps her wholehearted gratefulness for Fanny’s sister’s welcome to her as a small child.

There is a question, too, about her description of Edward as a ‘Dazzle Camouflage master’. This was a form of camouflage which, far from hiding ships, ‘dazzled’ the enemy with misleading stripes which broke up their forms. Barbara says that ‘it seems now that he took no part in the designing of the camouflage itself…the most recent theory is that he was simply a supervisor who saw to it that the various patterns were correctly carried out in their transference to the ships’ (p. 76). So he was not exactly a ‘master’. My mother may have thought that Edward designed camouflage: either way, she is not very bothered. ‘Master’ is a conveniently vague word which does not specify his exact role. During WW2 she did a very similar job herself (her first job, aged 19) for the Camouflage Department in Leamington Spa – the transferring of designs that had been created by someone else. Perhaps a ‘camouflage master’ is a convenient category invented by her, which might possibly include herself.

These rather brief descriptions of Fanny and Edward in my mother’s memoir, slanted and sometimes incorrect, suggest that it is right to look for other interpretations of her sentence ‘Eric had always loved and admired [Fanny]’. When I first found Barbara’s book, I thought my mother probably knew of the affair, and was being just to it in her own private way by her choice of the word ‘loved’. I later found she had written the truth in her letter to Nick Jacobs of 1 Sept 1996: ‘Eric had a definite affair with Fanny Wadsworth, who was my sister’s godmother – Ah well, the world’s a strange place, full of jewels if you can find them.’[[76]](#footnote-76) A truly Bohemian attitude.

1. **Eric in WW1**

Eric’s WW1 record, at the moment, remains mysterious. ‘My father worked with MI5 in the field and in London’: for years I assumed my mother’s words in her memoir to be untrue, because MI5 under that name had not yet begun in January 1916 when Eric joined up as Deputy Assistant Censor, recruited by MO5(a), and was sent to Rouen (information from his Army file, WO 339/50990). But now I find it had, and it is perfectly possible that Eric was in it.[[77]](#footnote-77) My mother’s letter to Nick Jacobs of September 1996 gives more detail, at any rate of what Eric had told her: ‘The Great War saw him in MI5 and going over to France to interview prisoners’. By 1919 he was in his diplomatic post in Paris; but he was not demobbed until 1 September 1921, and on his release was still ‘Temporary Lieutenant, Special List’, so his Paris work could also have been connected with intelligence.

Intelligence records from WW1 have recently been made public after many decades of secrecy; but they are not searchable by name. But two things incline me to believe my mother’s account. One is that several items in his file have been removed or destroyed, though a note has been made of this: ‘Gazette memo removed 17/1/22’ on his Demob paper; ‘1 2 3 4 5 7 destroyed in 1932’ on the ‘Protection Certificate’ dated 28.2.21. The other is that in his WW1 spy novel *Ashenden*, more a collection of stories than a novel, Somerset Maugham makes Ashenden use ‘polishing his German for the Department of Censorship’ as cover when he is staying at a hotel in Lucerne to find out more about an Englishman, Grantley Caypor, who is spying for the Germans. His brief is to persuade Caypor to go to England. Under a pseudonym, he becomes ‘friendly’ with Caypor and his German wife, and takes conversation lessons with her. Caypor asks if there might be some work in the Censorship Department for him, in England – just the result Ashenden’s boss was seeking when he sent Ashenden to Lucerne with this cover story. [[78]](#footnote-78) MI5 are intending to assassinate Caypor when he reaches England – as, indeed, they do. I think I can deduce from this that working for the Censorship Department was sometimes used as a cover by spies in WW1. In the story Caypor, a spy, does not see through the cover, so presumably Maugham thought it was convincing that it would be an effective one. As the stories are based on his own experiences, perhaps it was one that he himself used.

1. **Paris and Nina Hamnett**

Having lived in Paris before WW1, the artist Nina Hamnett returned there after the war. This was during 1919-21, the time when Eric was still employed by the War Office, but working as Private Secretary to Lord Sumner on the Reparations Commission, and living in Paris, at times with Peggy.[[79]](#footnote-79) Nina’s memoir, *Laughing Torso*, recounts an outing with Eric with a peculiar bathos and sense of a cover-up, despite her down-to-earth honesty about most of her affairs. It begins:

‘I found a girl whom I had known in London, in fact she had been at Brangwyns with me and had married a very nice man who was in some government service in Paris. I had known him in London slightly. She did coloured dry points of people and made a lot of money. She had to go to London for a few days to see her children who were at school. She said “Take my husband out and keep him from being bored”.’

There is no doubt that this is Eric and Peggy. The original hardback of Nina’s memoirs was on the bookshelves when I was a child and had a peculiar aura about it – my sister Lucy confirms that my mother told us there was something in it about Eric. Peggy was, indeed, well known for doing coloured drypoint etchings, as my mother says in her memoir, quoted in Chapter 2. I am glad to learn from Nina’s account that Peggy had been at ‘Brangwyn’s’, or the London School of Art. At the time, Eric and Peggy only had one child, Diana, born in 1915; another instance of untrustworthy memory. Nina continues:

‘This, I think, was the time of Mardi Gras, and there were several holidays. We spent Sunday at the Rotonde drinking Vouvray with some friends, and he asked me to meet him there again on Monday and we would go to Fontainebleau, have lunch there, and then walk to Moret, where there was a little inn where Arnold Bennett had lived for some years. We decided that we would drink his health when we got there and have dinner. I had never been to Fontainebleau before and we went to a very nice restaurant and lunch and some white wine and started out to walk through the forest. It was a very hot day and there was nothing but four or five miles of forest. We rested by the road-side from time to time and about six o’clock we got to the inn, very hot and thirsty. It was about half a mile from Moret itself and a most charming looking little place. The café had a garden in front of it with some tables and we sat down and ordered bottles of beer. We were so thirsty that we drank eight or nine bottles which, one by one, as we finished them we placed under the table. We ordered dinner with a whole duck, chose the wine, and then went for a walk whilst they cooked it. We sat on the edge of the forest near a peasant’s hut. It was rather damp and marshy. I had never met mosquitoes before and did not realize what they were capable of. I began to scratch my legs, so did my companion. We went back to the inn and had a magnificent dinner and drank Arnold Bennett’s health again in white and red wine, then walked to the station at Moret, got into a train packed with French bourgeois, and, being very tired, slept one on each seat, packed like sardines between the French, until we reached Paris. The next day my legs were swollen to about twice their natural size and my friend telephoned to me at the Rotonde to say that he had to stay in bed as he couldn’t walk at all. I have since been careful of damp and marshy ground’ (pp. 132-33).[[80]](#footnote-80)

It is often not clear, in Nina’s memoir, quite who she has sex with and who she just ‘knows’. Peggy is telling her to keep Eric amused while she is away in London; there is a suggestion that Peggy would not mind if they slept together, or may even be expecting it, knowing Nina’s reputation. One wonders whether Eric and Nina did just ‘rest by the roadside’, in their walk through miles of forest after their lunch with white wine; and on their evening walk, whether they just ‘sat on the edge of the forest’ near the peasant’s hut after eight or nine bottles of beer. Nina enjoys our confusion, and the way the story ends with ‘I have since been careful of damp and marshy ground’ – as though she is not careful of much else.

Peggy seems to have been Bohemian through and through – but one who made a living for herself with her etchings, including the one of ‘Diana Duchess’ mentioned by my mother as being at Chatsworth.[[81]](#footnote-81) Like her friend Gladys Peto, she was that unusual thing at that time, a successful professional woman artist. But she and Eric were married, and surely marrying was not a terribly Bohemian thing to do? There were Bohemians who experimented high-mindedly with ‘open marriage’ – such as Naomi Mitchison and her husband Dick.[[82]](#footnote-82) No atmosphere of high-mindedness comes across from what little I know of Peggy and Eric at that time – rather, a sunny disposition on Peggy’s part, borrowing her ex-lodger’s studio to throw an enormous arty party, and wishing her husband to be ‘amused’ in Paris while she is away in London.

Perhaps Eric was less of a Bohemian than Peggy. He had a job in the Civil Service; he did not adopt Bohemian dress. He knew Augustus John, but avoided him whenever possible because of the temptation to drink too much. But there was, as Virginia Nicholson points out, ‘A minority of Bohemians…[who] preferred to look like… city men with their black umbrellas and bowler hats’ (p. 160). Certainly Chelsea, the beating heart of Bohemia in the 1910s and teens, was where Eric and Peggy felt they belonged. Both have the words ‘of Chelsea’ on their gravestones at Storrington: Peggy is ‘Peggy Sutton, wife of Eric Sutton of Chelsea’; Eric is ‘Eric Sutton of Chelsea’. Thus their Bohemianism, along with their marriage, is engraved in stone for all to see, when not forgotten about or overgrown with lichen – as is now the case with Peggy’s handsome stone, designed by Eric Gill.[[83]](#footnote-83)

***Eric and Peggy at the wedding of Gladys Peto and Lindsay Emmerson on 1 July 1922, the year before Peggy’s death***

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***Felicity Sutton as a baby with Diana Sutton, about 1922***



**Chapter 4**

**The unfreezing**

Able, at last, to move on to what happened after Peggy’s death in 1923 – after the ‘frozen’ period in Eric’s life with which I began in Chapter 2, when he was applying for membership of the Savile Club – I am in the lucky position of having my mother’s recollections of her life, and also the letters from Eric to Vyvyan which begin in the early 1920s. But this means I am telling two stories – Eric’s and my mother’s. And at first they are not very contiguous, as looking after a small child was not easy to combine either with the civil service job he had taken in 1921 (Principal in the Ministry of Pensions), or with translating work, so her early memories are of people with whom she was ‘put’, and those discomforts and mistreatments, recalled by her with clarity and a searing sense of injustice. She and Eric were unhappy at the same time and for the same reason, Peggy’s death, but apart and without yet knowing or understanding each other. So I see this period inevitably with binocular vision, and the two eyes diverge, as did my mother’s when she was a child.

1. **Vyvyan’s attempt at rescue**

It is not clear from my mother’s memoir exactly when Jenny appeared on the scene. This is how she describes the aftermath of Peggy’s death.

*My sister Diana was at the Holy Child Convent in Cavendish Square, and she continued there, spending holidays at home where my father struggled to organise and keep nursemaids and housekeepers in various lodgings that he took. Carlyle Studios died in his heart and devoted friends came and rescued my mother’s things. … I was 18 months old when my mother died.**There remains an early memory of being carried from a train on the shoulders of a gardener to a Convent at Tunbridge Wells, or perhaps St Leonard’s on Sea, where kindly nuns cared for small children.*

In Eric’s letters to Vyvyan from this period are glimpses of his attempts to organise care for the baby Felicity. On 20 February 1924 he writes (from the Savile Club, having been elected the month before) ‘I have just been buying a cot for my youngest daughter – they are terribly expensive these children. I have got a nurse/housekeeper of unimpeachable age and appearance and as soon as I can get some assistance from the village I shall collect the kids – du moins quand le temps devient un peu moins formidable.’ [[84]](#footnote-84) What village, I don’t know; possibly he ‘took lodgings’ somewhere outside London without yet having given up 6, Carlyle Studios – as my mother suggests. The nurse/housekeeper does not sound like Jenny yet – ‘unimpeachable’ might be understood as ‘not very attractive’, not a possible subject for gossip or accusations. ‘Youngest daughter’, referring to my mother as the youngest rather than the younger, as if Pamela had not died, is a description which appears in other letters too, so Pamela is also in Eric’s thoughts.

I have quoted the ‘Daniel Defoe’ letter to Vyvyan Holland in Chapter 2, showing Eric sad, drunk, funny and desperate after Peggy’s death. Close in time to that (dated by Merlin Holland to January 1924) comes another literary parody of his own drunkenness.

‘…Racked with confused pain, on Tuesday last

I took a taxi up to Wimpole Street.

‘O Dr Beaumont, I do feel so ill,

So damnéd ill, I feel that I shall die’.

With that he grasped his loathed implements

And beat and banged and poked and peered and listened:

And said ‘There’s no disorder in your blood,

No creeping scourge is eating out your life:

Cock, Balls and Belly, Kidneys, Heart and Lungs –

All, all are in most excellent condition.

But I will read the riddle of your case;

Look in my eyes and tell me about Drinks:

How much, with whom, how often, when, and where.’

And so I told him, mitigating nothing;

The Eye-opener, the Quencher, and the short one,

The Settler and the Final and the Next one,

Just one more, the Last one and Another.

Then Dr Beaumont: ‘Let the silver moon

Rise and fall twice over the Kentish woods

Ere alcohol bedew thy aching lips

Or the filthy weed Nicotiana –

More poisonous still – burn between thy fingers.

Then come again, and peace and health be thine.

Three guineas, please; good morning.’[[85]](#footnote-85)

He does add ‘N.B. This isn’t all true: but it is true that I’ve been knocked off all alcohol and all tobacco till further notice; and much better too, I’m sorry to say. E.S.’ Though he managed most of the time to cut down his drinking, the list suggests not only the excess he was escaping from all his life, but also a bingeing period after Peggy died.

Other letters from this time (early 1924) show Eric gratefully borrowing money from Vyvyan, and refusing invitations to go on holiday with him – including a golfing holiday at Cromer. One reason given is that he is going for another job, but in the next letter:

‘My dear Vyvyan,

1. I almost certainly haven’t got the job.
2. I can’t really play golf (or bridge for the matter of that).
3. I can’t bear strangers.
4. I have no conversation.
5. I do feel so ill and too depressed to do anything.
6. I am told the cold at Cromer is frightful.’[[86]](#footnote-86)

This is an Eric familiar from later in my mother’s memoir – the morose, unsociable, depressed Eric, all his art of conversation disappeared. He needed rescuing, and Vyvyan’s project for Chapman and Hall, involving Eric in the bulk of the work of translating twelve 18th-century French novels, must certainly have been an attempt at rescue.

A letter to Vyvyan of 11 June 1927, when the French novels series was in its third year, suggests the genesis of the project. Eric is suggesting an Italian series, edited by himself, for Chapman and Hall; it seems to have come to nothing, but he is asking Vyvyan to ‘translate one for us’, and goes on: ‘I’m afraid it sounds not a little improper, and, indeed, impertinent, for me to ask you, and not vice versa: and I do not forget that it was your kindness in giving me the French ones to do that has made me able to earn, in the future, some of my daily bread, in this way.’ Vyvyan not only helped Eric get elected to the Savile, and launched his translating career, but often lent him money as an advance on the translations – and even when one was not in the pipeline. I will discuss the translation project in more detail in the next chapter; meanwhile, my mother’s memoir, occasional dates and addresses on Eric’s letters, the dates of reviews of the French novels in the *Times Literary Supplement* (*TLS* from now on), and the dates in Douglas Dallas’s divorce petition, allow me to construct a rough timeline for this period.[[87]](#footnote-87)

**1925.** Eric is still living at 6, Carlyle Studios until October. In about July, the affair with Jenny starts. Felicity is boarded at the Heywoods’ in Stonor, aged 3, including for Christmas. In December Eric moves to 3 Tryon buildings, Chelsea, and Jenny lives with him. 29 October: glowing review of *Opportunities of a Night* in the *TLS* – first of the series.

**1926.** February or March: the flat is ‘bailiffed’. Eric and Jenny move to Flat 4, 26 Campden Hill Gardens. On 8 March, Diana dies, aged 10. The same month, Eric goes to Mousehole in Cornwall to finish translating *The Prophet’s Cousin* by Fromaget. In April he goes to Brittany for a holiday. He forgets to pay Felicity’s ‘family’, who are ‘poor and clamorous’.[[88]](#footnote-88) 17 June, *TLS* review of *The Queen of Golconda*; 11 Nov., *TLS* review of Fromaget, *The Prophet’s Cousin*.

**1927.** About March, or earlier, Eric goes to Newlyn to finish the translation of *The Coachman’s Story* by Caylus. April: divorce petition filed by Douglas Dallas. 28 April: *TLS* review of Cazotte, *The Masked Lady*. 26 May: *TLS* review of *The Coachman’s Story*. 2 Sept: Eric is researching Dorat/Denon (which stories to do); **he leaves his office job**. Before 2 Sept. he moves to a caravan at Boustridge Farm, Chalfont St Giles, at first commuting. He and Jenny are at Boustridge until Feb. 1928. Felicity goes to school at Chalfont St Peter, aged 5. She is there for Christmas. 27 Oct.: *TLS* review of *La Duchesse d’Abrantes.* On the same day, Eric says in a letter he must find an ‘honourable occupation’ such as working on Geoffrey Garratt’s farm: ‘I would sooner castrate cows than continually bend my brains to other men’s books’.[[89]](#footnote-89)

The last contribution of Eric to the French novels series – *Never Again!* – was published in 1928. Eric had taken more or less the whole series of 12 books to accumulate enough confidence to leave his civil service job; he had been doing the translating work outside office hours and on those trips to Mousehole and Newlyn. Even before the series is finished, he is utterly fed up with it and realises he needs another job to combine with the translating. This job was very hard to find.

1. **‘A nice lady who loves me and whom I love’**

Vyvyan’s comments on the advent of Jenny seem to have been at least partially unsympathetic. Eric’s letter to Vyvyan about Jenny speaks of being in a ‘frozen and dangerous state’ for 18 months after Peggy’s death; she died in September 1923, so the letter can be dated to after January 1925, perhaps a few months later, since Eric is looking back on those 18 months. The divorce petition suggests the affair began in July. He is back in Carlyle Studios, but not for much longer.

‘6, Carlyle Studios, 296, Kings Road, SW3. My dear Vyvyan, I am really very grateful to you for speaking and writing as you did. Notwithstanding all my pedantry and pomposity there is a simplicity about my personal feelings which prevents me seeing things from the outside: perhaps, strictly between ourselves, better call it common selfishness. It is difficult for me to realise why a nice lady who loves me and whom I love should not come and look after me and the children. However I realise that the world will not think so, and the matter shall be arranged and kept quiet as you suggest . One thing did hurt me and that was the suggestion about insulting the memory of Peggy. I know you don’t feel this and indeed the phrase and the idea belong properly to a story in a magazine. I thought about nothing but Peggy for 18 months and indeed fell into a frozen and dangerous state, and if Peggy thought any woman could get me out of this and make me reasonably effective and happy, she would be the first to say yes.’ He does add, in a PS: ‘Of course the children stick in my throat and that will be the count against me but, apart from my own feelings, I still think (foi de gentilhomme) that I am right.’[[90]](#footnote-90)

Jenny had married Douglas Dallas in 1919, and had three small children born in 1920, 1921 and 1922. But her marriage had collapsed. Vyvyan seems to have suggested some method of ‘keeping the matter quiet’ – perhaps the idea of saying that Jenny was moving in as a housekeeper or nurse.

But this did not work. This is how my mother puts it:

*Jenny had answered Eric’s cry for help and had left her three small children with a Nanny in Devonshire (her husband had absconded long since). She had been making ends, if not exactly meet, come closer together by taking a post as housekeeper to a Doctor and his wife.*

*She came to comfort Eric, having known and admired him since her husband had set himself up - he a military man, who lost a leg in the 1914 war - as a Society Portrait Painter in a studio in Chelsea. He had charm, but no talent, and soon became bankrupt.*

*Once having moved in she realised she could not move out. There followed an acrimonious divorce with my father cited as co-respondent, which was hardly the case. Her boys were taken in by a childless couple, old friends of her husband, and her daughter was taken care of by a grandmother. For some time she was legally prevented from seeing her children until Mrs Guy Chapman made a real disturbance and this ruling was withdrawn.*

As so often, this passage has to be decrypted. ‘Which was hardly the case’ can have two meanings. Jenny’s daughter Nicolette, one of the three children mentioned above, commented when she read the memoir in old age that ‘it WAS the case’, i.e. that she had understood that Jenny and Eric were living as husband and wife at the time of the divorce. But possibly what my mother meant was that Jenny’s affair with Eric hardly counted when compared with the affairs of Douglas, known to be unfaithful and a womaniser – in other words, that it should have Douglas who was seen as the guilty party.

Nicolette also objected to my mother’s phrase ‘fierce grandmother’ for the grandmother who took her in, so I have deleted ‘fierce’. The grandmother, Douglas’s mother, Mabel Alice Brooke Dallas, wife of Major-General Alister Grant Dallas, may have seemed fierce to my mother, and was connected with the ban on Jenny seeing her children. (My mother told my sister Lucy that this grandmother offered Jenny a deal: she could live with the family in an upstairs flat, but never be allowed to see the children. Jenny refused.) Nicolette also told me that Jenny had first gone to Eric as a job, after her job as housekeeper to the doctor; she had grown up with the story that Eric and Vyvyan invented between them.

Mrs Guy Chapman was Margaret Storm Jameson, the novelist. Both she and Guy Chapman had had to separate from previous partners through divorce before they married in 1926; Guy had agreed to be nominated the guilty party, although in fact it was his first wife who had been having an affair.[[91]](#footnote-91) Margaret had felt she was abandoning her son Bill, born in 1915. I cannot find any official ‘real disturbance’ that she made about divorced people being allowed to see their children, but perhaps she managed to see her own child through some legal means and this was helpful in Eric and Jenny’s case. Douglas Dallas’s divorce petition, filed on 12 April 1927, gives some dates and places for their affair.[[92]](#footnote-92)

Another letter to Vyvyan, dated October 1925, about leaving Carlyle Studios, shows (or does it?) Eric’s newly Catholic, much less Bohemian attitude to extra-marital sex – combined with a rueful knowledge that his reputation is that he is completely free and easy. (‘Placid’, in Barbara Wadsworth’s word; the acme of Bohemian Chelsea in Stella Bowen’s account.) He writes to Vyvyan: ‘I surrendered Carlyle Studios to Little Audrey on Saturday. I am distressed at leaving – particularly after spending two days in pitiless destruction of all manner of [?reductions? ?melancholia? – another important word impossible to read]. … Little Audrey’s heart I much fear is given to a young sculptor who (I could hardly believe my ears) appears to be going to live in the Studio. This seems to me very shocking. No doubt she told him of her acquaintance with me and some rumours of my character (and of the small circle in which I live) having reached him he hurried back from Italy (where he then was).’[[93]](#footnote-93) Or is the comment about being shocked a joke, since he was having an affair with Jenny (though not yet, according to the divorce petition, living with her), and he and Vyvyan were looking for sexy French 18th-century novels to translate and publish? He seems also to be suggesting that the sculptor was afraid he, Eric, would take advantage of Little Audrey, since that was his reputation.

My mother gives a chilling picture of the family she was sent to lodge with about this time. From a date she lets fall (the date of her sister Diana’s death), this passage describes 1925, when she was three. The parenthesis ‘Good Catholic’ confirms that Eric has now converted to Catholicism, and Jenny is on the scene – as this was the kind of phrase Jenny is quoted later as using about people who might take Felicity in.

*A family called Heywood was found (good Catholic) to take me in with their six children where they lived in the Dower House at Stonor. They ran the Home Farm. Hens wandered into the kitchen and would drop messes and be shooed out by the excellent Nanny who, when she wasn’t attending to the baby, would have me on her knee and sing songs. The animals I loved, but Nanny apart, the people not at all. The big girls stood me on a table in the conservatory and teased me mercilessly. The parents wouldn’t believe anything I said and accused me of a being a Liar. Hell was mentioned - a dreadful place where you got burnt up like a log on the fire.*

*Mr Heywood took me up to the Gothic Chapel on Sundays on his bicycle bars. He also tried me out on his animals, which I loved. The big rough horse was a bit too high off the ground but the heifer and the pig were fine. A woman used to sit in a shed plucking fowl for selling, throwing the feathers behind her in a vast heap. Collecting the eggs in the evenings was always a pleasure.*

*Gladys and Lindsay came to see me one day and found me swinging on a gate; they didn’t think much of the place or the people.*

Her much-loved and necessary toy monkey is removed and never seen again; she steals five chocolate cigarettes and is made to apologise and pay for them.

*Christmas came to the Dower House. A great table was put in the Dairy and round it the family gathered, including my sister Diana. What a thrilling pleasure that was. She had dark golden hair in a fringe over dark brown eyes; she wore a straight brown dress with a scarlet tie hanging down the front. Always calm, always delightful, I adored her. In the spring of the following year, 1926, she died from meningitis, aged ten, at the Holy Child Convent, Cavendish Square.*

*When I asked about her continued absence Mrs Heywood gave me a picture of Heaven as unreal and wan as the log in the burning fire was alarming and positive. All I understood was that she had gone for always and, although I knew very well how much she cared for me, she was never to come and see me again. This was difficult for me and I distinctly recall the feeling of belonging to no-one, and no-where in particular, excepting to my father, whom I never saw.*

Soon after Diana died (8 March 1926) Eric was working on translating *The Prophet’s Cousin* by ‘Cheeser’, the author Fromaget, and writes to Vyvyan from Mousehole in Cornwall:

‘I live rather in a sort of dream. I can’t believe I have parted from that beautiful child that I loved so much. Anyhow I have no regrets. Our relations were always exactly right. She was a friend, even at her age, and an equal and she knew it, I’m glad to say: we understood each other perfectly. One of the very few things I looked forward to was going about with her when she was older.

Well one survives and goes on with the wearisome business: but really it seems intolerable sometimes….Jane [Jenny] sends her love.’[[94]](#footnote-94) Jenny was helping him through this crisis. In a much later letter (from 1942) to Jenny, he comments that he is now reading Boswell’s *Journey to the Hebrides*, now published for the first time from the original ms, ‘found in a croquet box by his great-grandson, before B. purged and smartened it for publication’. He remembers Jenny reading it to him at Mousehole when he was ‘in great distress of mind’.[[95]](#footnote-95)

From the same visit to Mousehole – to hole up and finish his translating – comes a letter to Vyvyan which mentions the ‘bailiffing’ of ‘my flat’.[[96]](#footnote-96) ‘I hear of some extraordinary complication at my flat. I forgot – entirely forgot during the turmoil [of Diana’s death] to pay the rent for the last month only and it seems the landlords have bailiffed it. How this can be possible without any legal process I am not aware: but if I have incurred any extra liabilities I may want a little extra money. I have now paid the rent. I attribute it to the Porter who was rather unpleasant to J. I called him a syphilitic swine and ever so nearly kicked him downstairs. Somehow he seems to have extracted the key, I suppose by menaces, from the charwoman. …I have written a stinker to the landlords.’

‘A blur occurs here’ for my mother; perhaps for Eric too, in the form of a dream-like state. I do not know where she was at Christmas 1926. But there is a vivid memory from 1927.

*A blur occurs here, brightened by the recollection of an old fashioned caravan in a field belonging to a farm near Chalfont St Giles, with a small cat romping under the van and the horse cropping the grass, and Jenny around to take care of things while my father went early to work, across a small river, to the station and returned late, at my bed-time. I slept in the caravan, which was alarming because the horse occasionally, for companionship, put its head over the half door and blew very hard through its nose.*

Letter 44 from Eric to Vyvyan, dated 2 September 1927, tells me that the farm was called Boustridge Farm. (For once, Eric has headed the letter with an address other than ‘Savile’.) The previous letter, letter 43, dated 20 July 1927, ends with a little scene between Eric and Felicity – the first record of them together. ‘My daughter’ must be Felicity as she is now the only one. She is now 5.

‘I asked my daughter today who she thought paid for her pyjamas etc. She suggested all manner of people except myself, and was quite astonished to hear it. The philosopher Locke, I think, said that improbability was the concatenation of ideas manifestly disagreeable – a clear case!’

Absurdly, self-parodyingly verbose; but it shows Eric and Felicity having a conversation together about things, and Eric, perhaps, touched by her innocence about money, which is so hard to get. Also pretending that Felicity is somehow divining that he and money are ‘ideas manifestly disagreeable’ – only too true.

The interlude when my mother was with Jenny and Eric at Chalfont St Giles did not last long. But one aspect was most memorable – the Earth Closet. My mother always writes well about what she calls ‘lavatory arrangements’, and later prefers a convent school to home because these are so much better at the convent.

*At this farmhouse I was introduced to a three holer E.C. A discreet building on the way to the orchard. You opened the door and inside was a veritable throne up a step with a well-scrubbed bench on top in which were, side by side, one large, one medium and one small hole cut. ‘Yours is the small one’ Jenny said, but I still had to be lifted up onto it. The place, the smell, the spiders, the unseen horrors made an altogether awesome and terrifying experience of having to ‘go’.*

Later in 1927 my mother was sent away again. Since Chalfont St Peter is near Chalfont St Giles, perhaps Jenny and Eric found the school during the farm interlude.

*As Autumn came it was decided that a real school in Chalfont St Peter would be the best place. It was run by Mrs and Miss Hamilton. Both tall dominating women. They took in boys and girls whose parents were abroad or in some way unable to care for them, up to the age of ten.*

*It was at this school that I developed a hatred of small boys. My godmother, Gladys, being stationed with Lindsay in the Mediterranean, would send me some small toy or trinket once a month or so. I had to endure the brutal destruction of these by the boys, with tears and wails from me which brought no comfort or redress whatever. At the age of five I had to learn what an unfair world this is.*

*The front face of the school was very pretty, with a pediment hiding the roof in which was a circular window. The front garden was enclosed by a high hedge and the gate was high too. I remember the bell of the muffin man that winter and rushing to the window to see him push open the gate and come up the path to the front door, holding a tray covered in a green baize cloth on his head with one hand. The muffins were still hot.*

*Everyone seemed to have vanished away except for Mrs and Miss Hamilton and the fearful threat of Father Christmas coming down the chimney on Christmas Night (but only if I was Good). I lay trembling in my bed, expecting any minute to see a pair of sturdy boots poking into the room out of the old fashioned fireplace. Perhaps I was too bad for him to come? Perhaps he would be too large to get into the room? Perhaps his terrible white-bearded face would never come close to mine to croak a crooked Christmas greeting? I screamed loudly. The older girls in my dormitory had to comfort me for at least half an hour but never did they admit it was all a ‘story’; if they had I would have recovered sooner.*

*The passing of time held no meaning for me. Only when I lost my front teeth did I recognise that I was older than before.*

The passing of time in this memoir has been proceeding in a looped, uncoordinated manner. I have returned twice to Eric’s ‘frozen state’, partly because he wrote witty letters at the time which I possess, about his application for the Savile and about his visit to the doctor about alcohol. Each letter has become an introduction to a section on part of his life. Another letter to Vyvyan from the ‘frozen state’ period can introduce the early translations.

‘Savile Club, 107 Piccadilly W1.

My dear Vyvyan…our conversation now seems to turn so much on

1 Fucking

2a Not drinking

2b Drinking

That one gets a little confused.’[[97]](#footnote-97)

The translations Vyvyan and Eric collaborated on – of 18th-century French ‘licentious’ novels – could be seen as an extension of the first item in this list.

1. **‘A fair adventure’**

Before beginning to discuss them, one piece of published writing by Eric, titled ‘A fair adventure’, can act as a goodbye to the frozen, then dreaming, state and to his office job as a civil servant. The piece is undated: according to my mother it appeared in ‘The Times’, though I have not been able to trace it there. In it, he depicts himself by association as a ‘dreaming’ office worker, a Civil Servant, or even a ‘sad clerk’. It suggests a lunchtime visit to St James’s Park. So, possibly before 2 September 1927 when he left his job. He also recalls that the person he meets is someone he knew at University, ‘twenty years before’ – this would mean 1907, if this is 1927.[[98]](#footnote-98) Or we may still be in 1926, July 1926, in the ‘dreaming’ aftermath of the death of Diana in March that year.

*A Fair Adventure. A conversation in St James’s Park.*

*There are to all men remembered places that by a certain singular stability and peace have power to draw the tired spirit which, like a wounded bird, revisits them in thought or, when it may be, in the body. Some of them are stages on our own particular journey whose secret we cannot or will not tell; others have a common charm, and of these one is surely St James’s Park – I mean the end of the park that belongs to the birds. Who has not, years ago, longed to live in that dampish residence on the isthmus and explore the hidden mysteries of the Island of the Birds? To me, too, there comes back a summer afternoon and a reading of Homer; not far away was a man mowing the grass; and the back and forth movement of his scythe seemed as ageless and as terrible as the sombre rhythms of love and battle, death, and the unharvested sea.*

*Here, indeed, all men congregate: the sad clerk with his melancholy bag of lunch, nursemaids and their charges, the merely unoccupied, and the wholly derelict. In fact I often sit there myself.*

*To me thus dreaming the other day came a voice from twenty years before. Not, indeed, a recollection merely but gay and vivid and full of that July afternoon. Not too welcome: I* *began to remember the speaker as one who when not plunged in sins and eccentricities got religion, and inflicted it on others: I recalled his disappearance in disorder from the University to Paris, whence there came rumours of a threatened and placarded precipitation from the Eiffel Tower. (I was amused to note that Paul Morand had carefully recorded the incident in the tablets of his mind, and used it after many years in ‘Fermé la Nuit’.) I scented lunch and a loan: but asked him to sit down and tell me ‘what he had been doing’.*

*What had he not? I began to feel I had dreamed away my life in St James’s Park and other places. Schoolmaster in Fiji, Navvy in America, Professor in Australia, and all manner of things in Scandinavia, Denmark, in Finland, and in Russia.*

*‘America is the worst place,’ he observed. ‘You have to work there. Russia for me. There is a new Renaissance.’*

*‘How so?’ I asked. ‘Can idleness have a future?’*

*‘I don’t mean they do nothing,’ he replied. ‘But they have no moral sense and so they act slowly, and, as you would think, at random. A sense of duty speeds up life dreadfully: one naturally wants to get beastly things over. But the Russians enjoy and savour every moment of their lives, even when they are sad, because they are always sincere. There is nothing of the bad air which Freddy Nietzsche found so prevalent in the West. The smells in Russia are the* *excellent odours of the farmyard.’*

*He fell silent for a moment. ‘But, of course,’ he added, ‘this kind of thing needs a good deal of space and leisure, and God has seen to it that Russia is a large place.’*

*I have noticed that the windy Russian spaces seem to inspire this kind of talk. Even Bertrand Russell himself was unable to make clear what the wild Bolsheviks are saying. One thinks that there may be, and indeed there is, a veil of propaganda between us and the facts, but even those who get there bring back little information. Either Russia is too large or, as my friend suggested, there is little that a Western eye would recognise as a fact or a principle. After all, in Moscow one can obtain without much difficulty a licence to behave like a capitalist.*

*He proceeded with his adventures and I expressed a polite discontent with my own stabilised existence. But he pointed out that I had probably unfitted myself for any other.*

*‘After all,’ he pointed out, ‘you could not plump down in, say, Copenhagen, and maintain yourself as from the following morning: but I can and have done. You would be bewildered and discouraged.’*

*I gathered he usually resorted to teaching something – no great matter what: and, indeed, it is a characteristic not shared by the English that the foreigner is content to learn from anybody – he asks few questions and does not in general insist on what I have heard described as ‘the antecedents usually looked for’.*

*We spoke of old contemporaries, and he told me what he knew without approval or disapproval, but one felt he was not deeply concerned with anyone; indeed, he could not afford to be: his life demanded a good deal of self-preservation in this way. I looked him over most carefully. He was fresh, and of a good colour, inclined to corpulence – doubtless a good buffer against vicissitudes: and already in his middle years. But he was cheerful, solid, not ill-found, in no sense a derelict. His controls were functioning well. Tweed coat and flannel trousers – the sort of uniform one might run up against in Central Africa or the North Pole. Hat with a broadish brim as befitting a man acquainted with many arts but master of none (the real artist is, with one exception, disguised as a gentleman or a groom). Content? Contentment is an elusive bird; but certainly not unhappy. From real misfortunes, after all, he was immune; he never gave them time to gather any momentum for a blow.*

*‘Age,’ he said, ‘is the one enemy. But Death will, I believe, anticipate him. And death is certainly a friend and often very fortunate in his opportunity.’*

*We parted on my side with a vague disquiet, he to set sail once more, and I to take up my hat and my stick and to join the stream of gentlemen moving from Piccadilly to Whitehall, their heads slightly bent, their umbrellas at an angle under their left arms, their hands clasped behind them, and on their faces the concentrated gaze of inexorable impenetrability which seems so essential to the successful Civil Servant.*

I have not managed to find out who this article is about, despite the clues. The getting of religion suggests it could be the same person as the subject of Eric’s second poem in the *Oxford Magazine,* discussed in Chapter 2. The man was ‘in no sense a derelict’: the fear of becoming ‘derelict’ and ending up on the Embankment without a collar was one that haunted Eric in the 1920s and 30s. Earlier in the article, ‘…wholly derelict. In fact I often sit there myself’ is a joke about this fear. He was about to leave the safe Civil Service job and embark on a career much more chancy, with much more possibility of becoming ‘derelict’. The last image, of the civil servant crowd with their hats and sticks, or hats and umbrellas (is he one of them or not? – he is cagily not saying) combines a sort of Marx Brothers satire with an Eliot-like flow of workers:

*A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,*

*I had not thought death had undone so many.*

*Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,*

*And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.*

*… There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying ‘Stetson!*

*You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!’*

Eliot’s *The Waste Land* was published in 1922; though I have not found any evidence that Eric had read it,its picture of the numbed, even if secure, office worker is redolent of all he was leaving when, having tried out translating as a new career through the kindness of Vyvyan Holland, he left his job to devote himself to it full-time.He would no longer be numb, ‘dreaming’ – or secure.

***Jenny, then Jenny Treleaven, in the Royal Flying Corps in WW1, which she joined as a despatch rider; Jenny with her first husband, Douglas Dallas. She was 16 in 1914. From Nicolette Dallas’s scrapbook.***



**Chapter 5**

**Commencing translator**

1. **Pornography and identity**

‘The image of desire begets desire itself’. This (a quotation from Eric’s version of what he called *Never Again!*, by Claude-Joseph Dorat, p. 28)[[99]](#footnote-99) is the point of the titillating 18th-century French novels which Eric translated for the series Vyvyan was editing for Chapman and Hall. Eric and Vyvyan were having a joke, looking for what they called ‘poky’ French stories (i.e. with plenty of sex in them) to add to the series, and organising literary introductions for them by the great and the good. Vyvyan describes the series in his second memoir: ‘I translated four of the romances myself, and among those whom I got to introduce the books were Hugh Walpole, George Saintsbury, Havelock Ellis, André Maurois, Shane Leslie, Aldous Huxley, Augustus John and Compton Mackenzie and, to add a little dignity to the series, I did the introduction to the last one myself.’[[100]](#footnote-100) He does not mention that seven of the other eight titles were translated by Eric Sutton and one by Mrs Wilfrid Jackson. To me it is obvious that Eric and Vyvyan did find these stories arousing, and enjoyed the fun of presenting them as ‘literature’, in nicely produced limited editions, thus getting around the censors.

The above quotation raises the question of what pornography is. To Peter Brooks, who wrote the introduction to a recent translation by Lydia Davis of the same tale (though with a different author named, and this time called *No Tomorrow*),[[101]](#footnote-101) this work is not pornography. His introduction starts: ‘*No Tomorrow* may be the most stylish erotic tale ever written. Erotic, while not at all pornographic. The whole art here is to stage a scene – itself highly theatrical – of sexual bliss without naming names, or parts, or detailing the acts taking place. Yet it is all perfectly lucid, even precise.’ To Brooks, if something does not detail names, parts and acts, it is not pornography. This is a literal interpretation of the word. But there is a whole underworld of suggestive literature that does not detail names, parts and acts but could be said to be pornography. This is the world to which Vyvyan’s series of French Romances belongs. OED gets it right in its short definition ‘…the expression or suggestion of obscene or unchaste subjects in literature or art’ (OED, third edition). ‘Suggestion’ can be pornographic as well as ‘expression’. Another definition of pornography could be literature that arouses desire; and if details of names, parts and acts are not to be had, because of the prevailing winds of literary manners and definitions of obscenity, ‘suggestion’ can be just as effective, or even more so.

The period of these twelve ‘romances’, 1925 to 1928, is exactly the period when the censorship debate became fierce in the aftermath of WW1. ‘The noisy clash between iconoclastic early modernist writers and moralistically protectionist censors had been going on noticeably since 1915, when in England, 1,000 copies of D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* were seized and destroyed under the provisions of the Obscene Publications Act (1875), known as Lord Campbell's Act.’ James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) ‘epitomized the postwar assault on the puritanical and repressive values of the "censor-morons," as Lawrence called them’.[[102]](#footnote-102) Joyce’s book was published in France, and Lawrence’s in Italy, but shipments of these texts to England were intercepted, banned and destroyed. Meanwhile Eric and Vyvyan were seeking out erotic texts to publish from the French 18th century, an era when there was great interest in reading and writing the ‘libertine novel’ (a recent scholarly description), but parts were seldom named or acts described, though there was plenty of suggestion and elegant circumlocution.

The controversial background to these twelve books may support my suspicions that they were not what they seemed. But this particular book, *Never Again!/No Tomorrow*, introduces a stranger question: what is a book? Eric’s version, with the name Claude-Joseph Dorat on the title page, is prefaced by a ‘Note’: ‘*Point de Lendemain*, the authorship of which has also been attributed to Vivant Denon, was first published in 1777.’ Vyvyan’s introduction, however, accepts the attribution to Dorat and discusses Dorat’s life. The new, 2009 edition, translated by Lydia Davis, published by the New York Review of Books with a French text, ascribes the book to Vivant Denon.[[103]](#footnote-103) Even more confusingly, there are different versions of the text. The 1777 version (often attributed to Dorat, who wrote other erotic works) is the one translated by Eric; but the story was ‘republished in a revised and improved version in 1812’, and that is the one used by Lydia Davis in her translation. Having read both versions and compared them closely, I see 1812 as Denon’s rewrite of his own text to suit less cynical, more sentimental times. Eric pulls the 1777 text in the opposite direction, sharpening and clarifying references to sex. Davis’s rendition of the 1812 text goes further in blurring them.[[104]](#footnote-104)

The sentence I began with is typical. Eric: ‘The image of desire begets desire itself.’ Davis: ‘Desires are reproduced through their images’ (Davis/Denon, p. 25). ‘Les desirs se reproduisent par leurs images’ (1812 French). ‘Les desirs se reproduisent par leur image’ (1777). The lovers have flung themselves on some cushions, surrounded by mirrors. Eric’s ‘the image of desire begets desire itself’ describes frankly the possible impact of the scene; it is the image (written in the book) of the image of desire (the bodies reflected in the mirrors), begetting desire in the hero and heroine, which might beget desire in the reader. ‘Desires are reproduced through their images’ makes a similar point, but blurs it by making the desires plural, the verb passive. 1777 has only one plural; Eric has removed it, and in choosing an active verb, ‘begets’, has made the sentence into a much more pointed gloss on the French. I can see him chuckling – the sentence now reads like a sales pitch to their secret audience.

Another example shows Eric nudging the 1777 author to be more artful and aware of his art. A typical description from inside the dark grotto (the lovers having been propelled mechanically onto some more cushions) runs as follows in Davis’s version of 1812 (p.25): ‘Our sighs replaced language. More tender, more numerous, more ardent, they expressed our sensations, they marked their progression; and the last sigh of all, suspended for a time, warned us that we would have to offer thanks to Love.’ Eric’s version of 1777 reads: ‘Our sighs took the place of speech. More affectionate, more eloquent, and more sincere, they, and they alone, interpreted our feelings, and marked their rise and fall, until the last of them, somewhat long-drawn-out, warned us that it was time to go and render thanks to Love.’ ‘More sincere’ suggests a depth the Davis version does not have; ‘more sincere than speech’ is suggested, as well as more eloquent than speech, pointing up the insincerity of many of the speeches in the book. But ‘sincere’ is an addition of Eric’s. 1777 reads: ‘Nos soupirs nous tinrent lieu de langage. Plus tendres, plus multipliés, plus ardents, ils étaient les interprètes de nos sensations…et le dernier de tous, quelque temps suspendu, nous avertit que nous devions rendre grace à l’Amour.’ By translating ‘ardents’ as ‘sincere’, he has multiplied the artifice already present in the text, and so prominent in this man-made garden of love with its cage of mirrors, changing scenes and cunning devices. In comparison with Davis, he has also sharpened the sexual nature of that last sigh, by translating ‘quelques temps suspendu’ as ‘somewhat long-drawn-out’; her ‘suspended for a time’ seems weak translationese in comparison – word-by-word translation that does not really make sense.

The book opens with a lightning summary of the narrator’s affair with the Comtesse de -----; though it immediately moves on to his affair with Madame de T. Indeed, the whole short book tells of his seduction by Madame de T., in rooms, gardens and artificial grottoes. But this little sketch of the affair with the Comtesse sets the tone, and makes quite clear the difference between the two versions. It is one place where in the Boucher edition’s comparative text, showing the differences between the 1777 and 1812 versions, a whole passage is shown deleted and a new one follows. The Davis version, a very close translation of the 1812 French, runs:

‘I was desperately in love with the Comtesse de -----; I was 20 years old; I was naïve. She deceived me, I got angry, she left me. I was naïve, I missed her. I was 20 years old, she forgave me, and because I was 20 years old, because I was naïve – still deceived, but no longer abandoned – I thought myself to be the best-loved lover, and therefore the happiest of men.’ (Denon/Davis, p.5)

Eric/1777 is very different:

‘The Contesse de ----- accepted my addresses, though she did not love me; and she betrayed me. I was annoyed, and she left me; in all of which there is nothing unusual. I was then in love with her, and, the better to avenge myself, I thought that it would be amusing to win her favours once again, now that, in my turn, I loved her no longer. I succeeded, and quite turned her head, which was exactly what I had intended.’ (Dorat/Sutton, p. 3)

This, close to the 1777 French, is much more cynical, though Eric softens the bluntness of the plan: in French ‘win her favours’ is ‘ravoir’, in italics; ‘have her again’. [[105]](#footnote-105) In the 1777 version, the narrator is neither 20 years old (repeatedly) nor naïve (repeatedly); he is worldweary and manipulative. (He is later stated to be 25 years old.) Unlike the 1812 narrator, who is the willing toy first of the Comtesse and then of Madame de T., the 1777 narrator has the tables turned on him; at first he manipulates the Comtesse, then in the rest of the story it is Madame de T. who manipulates him. In fact, though this is never mentioned overtly, the 1777/Eric version makes me wonder if the manipulated Comtesse got her own back by inducing her friend Madame de T. to manipulate the narrator into enjoying her in a ridiculous series of initiatory rites and artificial settings. Perhaps this scenario was too theatrical, too unfeeling, for the more emotional 1810s. So the narrator was changed to a naïve, rather stupid and younger man, with repetitions, as if over-writing the more languid, angry 18th-century narrator as emphatically as possible.

Another comparison of the two translations suggests at first that what is going on in the 1812 version is not just a retreat from artifice, but a retreat from sexuality. This may be true, but Eric has increased both the artifice and the sexuality in his translation of the 1777 version. After his night of pleasure, the hero is back at the Chateau and bumps into the Marquis of -----, Madame de T.’s official lover. They converse and the Marquis turns out to think he has arranged the amorous encounter all along, so as to make M. de T. think the hero is Madame’s lover, not the Marquis. He also says of Madame de T. (in the Davis/Denon version) that ‘Nature, though it gave her everything, refused her that divine flame which is the highest blessing. She inspires everything, causing all sorts of feelings, yet she herself feels nothing. She is made of stone.’ This is much more explicit in the Eric/Dorat version: ‘She can inspire every imaginable delight, but she cannot feel them herself: she is marble.’ The Davis version suggests the Marquis’s comment is simply about ‘feelings’; Eric’s that it is about ‘delight’, i.e. sexual pleasure. Our hero, and we, the reader, both know (or do we?) that the Marquis’s comment is untrue if it is about sexual pleasure. A recent scholar comments ‘What are we to believe? Does Madame de T. feign her frigidity to preserve the space of her pleasures? Or does she discover pleasure by chance, that unexpected night? Or, finally, has she faked pleasure in order to better fool the narrator?’[[106]](#footnote-106) These layers of possibility, centring on sex, are an essential part of the appeal of the book.

The Davis version of the Marquis’s comment here takes attention away from the point of the scene. Along with a more naïve, younger narrator, it hints that the book is not really about erotic love but about ‘all sorts of feelings’ – a nice, all-covering phrase that disguises erotic love in something vaguer and less physical. Looking at the 1812 French, it does not go as far in this direction as Davis in her translation: ‘Elle fait tout naitre, tout sentir, et elle n’eprouve rien: c’est un marbre.’ ‘All sorts of feelings’ is Davis’s weakened version of ‘tout sentir’. But ‘delight’ does not appear in the 1777 version either – it is an introduction of Eric’s. In this case the 1812 French is exactly the same as the 1777 French. Again he has made an implied sexual point come out in the open. All this makes the blurb description of the Davis version of the book as ‘Davis’s definitive translation of Denon’s slim masterpiece’ (on the back cover) seem particularly ill-judged. It would be truer to say that Davis’s translation is a not very skilful rendering of the rewritten, less cynical, more sentimental later version of Denon’s slim masterpiece, while Eric’s translation is a stylish interpretation of the earlier, more erotic, more artificial version, bringing out the sexual content more than the original text does.

1. **Eric on pornography: evidence from the letters**

The two ‘faces’ of this book, and its hard-to-grasp identity, are somewhat similar to the two possible interpretations of Eric – tragic, admirable, gifted, misunderstood, or nasty, alcoholic child abuser to be wiped from the family history. One way to look at this problem, and at the question of whether they are pornography, is to look at the evidence – Eric’s letters to Vyvyan – and see what he thought he was doing in searching out and translating these books. So far, I have tended to quote letters in which Eric is witty about his drunkenness and despair, because this is the side of him I find most sympathetic. But his way of moving on from drunkenness and despair was this new career as a translator. What did he have to say about it?

The letters to Vyvyan from the 1920s are very revealing about the insecure, ill-paid, difficult new life he was leading. But since I started with a definition of pornography, I will go to that question first. Eric did have something to say about it. In a letter dated ‘7.11.27’, from Boustridge Farm, where he was living in a caravan with Jenny, he writes: ‘The Americans are really very tiresome. To my mind the line between pornography and Cheeser [Nicolas Fromaget, author of *The Prophet’s Cousin*, 6th in the series] is clear: the one is written to ‘arouse the passions’ as Dr Johnson put it, or, not to put too fine a point on it (if the trope be not inappropriate) to raise a c-ck stand: the other is to jest upon matters upon which man has properly jested since he became ‘merops’ [in Greek letters – ancient Greek meaning ‘articulate’]. And the intention of any given book is also to my mind quite obvious.’ He is claiming that if it is funny, it is not pornography. This may be true: but there are two problems – one is that not very much in the series of twelve books in their series really is funny, as he admits in other letters; the other is that his and Vyvyan’s criteria for choosing books, patent in the letters, is that they should be ‘pokey’, i.e. have lots of sex in them. He himself calls the books ‘dirty books’ in another letter – from Jan/Feb 1928: ‘You forget that I have not (as yet) complete leisure, a well ordered house, a secretary to look after me – per intervalla sportiviora [‘for more light-hearted intervals’?] – and a friend to edit my dirty books. [As he implies Vyvyan has.] I do my best. Yours, E.S.’[[107]](#footnote-107)

Earlier in the 7 November 1927 letter it becomes clear that Vyvyan, overall editor of the series, did not, at least in his previous letter, want books which were ‘very naughty’. They had to work with the prevailing winds of what was and was not allowed. Eric did much of the searching out of books. Eric writes: ‘My dear Vyvyan, notwithstanding your impression of the clear-headed man of business, your letter is not really clear. Do you want another title in any case? Or, upon assurance that Dorat is not ‘very naughty’, will that title stand? Taking Cheeser [Fromaget, no. 6, *The Prophet’s Cousin*] as the alpha ++ of naughtiness Dorat is about alpha minus or even beta +: there is poking, but really quite reasonably genteel. [Greek letters used.] But if you want another title, in any case, send me a postcard as soon as you get this and I will excogitate another.’ The desire for a book that is not ‘very naughty’ may have been caused by the ‘tiresome Americans’ who, it seems, were making a fuss about pornography; and Dorat/Denon was the 12th and last book in the series, so this possible extra book was not found.

The reception of the books, with respectful reviews in the *Times Literary Supplement*, suggests that the limited editions, at a guinea each, introductions by well-known authors, nice production values (heavy uncut pages, bindings in cloth with patterned paper on the covers and gold-stamped titles), and high standard of translation did mean they were accepted as legitimate editions and not as pornography. The *TLS*’s review (29 October 1925, by Richard Aldington) of the first two volumes, one translated by Eric and one by Vyvyan, pontificates: ‘It is only quite recently that the French have made a thorough and scientific classification of [18th-century] novels. A bibliography published this year gives the titles of nearly 2,000 novels published before the Revolution…and these are classified into a dozen or more types, including the sentimental…the licentious, the moral, the gloomy…The novels so far announced [in the Chapman and Hall series] belong to the category of ‘Romans et Contes Licentieux’, and though this is no objection whatever, one would like to see a representative or two from the other dozen of genres.’ Though quick to deny he would condemn licentious novels, the writer’s desire for other genres suggests uneasiness with the series’s concentration on what Vyvyan has announced as ‘Boudoir novels’. He goes on to describe Crébillon’s motive in writing his book (*La Nuit et le moment*, translated as *The Opportunities of a Night*) as ‘partly erotic and partly satiric’, thus putting paid to Eric’s claimed clear distinction between the pornographic and the funny.

1. **Eric’s ‘pompous’ style: a good start**

At least one thing came from this review – a very good start to Eric’s translating career, even if it may have soured relations with Vyvyan. Richard Aldington’s review ends: ‘The translations of these two books are good. Mr Eric Sutton deserves great praise for his faultless version of ‘La Nuit et le Moment’. Eighteenth-century French is always difficult to render well, and Crébillon’s is particularly hard because he is so idiomatic; conversational but never colloquial. Mr Sutton hits the right note at once and keeps it. To read his prose was a pleasure. Very seldom indeed would one be as willing to read a translation of a literary work as the original: in this case it is so. In fact, one is inclined to believe that Mr. Sutton has improved on Crébillon by making the style a trifle more rapid, which is exactly what was needed. H.B.V. [Vyvyan] is not quite so good, nor is his prose quite so distinguished and unfaltering, but it is very smooth and ingenious.’ This led Eric to write to Vyvyan (letter 23, ?1926): ‘My dear Vyvyan, I do hope as how you don’t think that the invidious comparisons in the Times Literary Suppt gave me the slightest satisfaction. I have many more than mortal weaknesses, as you know [drawings of bottles of drink and a naked woman], but this, where you are concerned, I have not. Moreover the view taken is, I think, untrue. Yours, E.’

This high praise continued. The *TLS* review of Dorat/Denon’s *Never Again!* (by Richard Aldington) kept the previous sympathetic attitude to the project: ‘Many readers will hear with regret that this is to be the last volume in Mr Vyvyan Holland’s series of 18th century romances. Most of the works which appeared had never been translated before. The pieces were tastefully chosen, and the translations have almost invariably been excellent.’ More praise for Eric follows, with another possibly galling sentence for Vyvyan. ‘Here, perhaps, the highest praise must go to Mr Eric Sutton, who maintains an unfalteringly high level of style. But Mr Holland must also receive praise for his work as editor.’ Vyvyan’s four translations are not mentioned.

Eric did not always regard his own style as being at ‘a high level’. On seeing the printed copy of his first translation in the series, he wrote: ‘I collected a copy of ‘Le Nuit’ [*La Nuit et le moment*] and was glad to see that really it is quite well done: just a little on the pompous side, which, I suppose, knowing the character of the translator, was inevitable’ (Letter 21, Tuesday 13 October 1925). He often refers to his pomposity, as in Letter 37, 11 September 1926; he has recently handed over to Vyvyan his translation of *The Masked Lady* by Durey de Sauroy. ‘I’m sorry you don’t think the Mask quite hits the mark: perhaps I’m stale…I’ve been feeling extremely tired of late. The style of the book itself is not too good: but I know my besetting sin is pomposity. Of course a lady wouldn’t talk like these intolerable bores and buffoons: but they did talk so in books.’

An example of pomposity in his own writing is his letter to Vyvyan of 28 September 1927. ‘Your suggestion that I am ‘conceited about my own knowledge and intolerant of anyone else’s’ is meaningless. If you had been properly brought up in the right places you would know that knowledge is one, that what you know (whatever that may be) is of just as much, or as little, value as what I know. In fact, to make the point clear to you, at the risk of being pedantic, the concept of value has no meaning in the intellectual, only in the moral, sphere. You must find it difficult to get along without these simple truths.’[[108]](#footnote-108) As well as being pedantic in the style of an Oxford don, to take Vyvyan down a peg, he employs an element of self-parody as usual. There is also a trace of the philosophical controversies about ‘value’ that were current in Oxford in the early 20th century, and the tendency, which came soon after the work of G.E.Moore in refuting idealism, ‘to avoid as far as possible the language of value’.[[109]](#footnote-109) Eric’s knocking-down of Vyvyan reminds me of my father’s use of logical positivism as a club to quell dissent within the family and win arguments. I also sense Eric’s disillusion with philosophy, which had led him to leave Oxford in 1912, saying he was ‘not cut out to be a philosopher’.

The ‘pomposity’ he complains of is really only the other side of his ‘good style’, an Oxford academic style which the *TLS* reviewer certainly appreciated, and which seems to have suited the ironically circumlocutory style of many of these tales rather well. In an earlier letter about *The Masked Lady* he estimates his own style more highly. ‘My dear Vyvyan, I duly left at your house today The Mask etc. [The typescript of the translation.] I have been rather disappointed with the name story on revising it: not my fault, I think. There is a hesitancy about his style which even I could not pull up very far: the only really good bits are the great ladies’ remarks on dealing with the impertinent young gentlemen. This seems always the case in these books. The women, confirmed and persistent ‘Pokees’ as they are, have a dignity which is, or was then, denied to our sex. Why is this?’[[110]](#footnote-110) He does not answer his own interesting question; but is happy to use a scale of value – of a literary kind – in discussing the books, whatever he has said to Vyvyan about value having no meaning except in the moral sphere.

Earlier in 1926 he thought he had conquered pomposity: ‘The Ship inn, Mousehole. [He went there to finish translating ‘Cheeser’, i.e. ‘The Prophet’s Cousin’ by Fromaget.] I have this day revised and sent off the last of Cheeser. Short of a few aporiai [Greek letters], I think it is all right, and I think you will find nothing to complain of this time. It reads well, lively and quite purged of Pomposity. The last 30 pages are the least convincing, but that, I feel satisfied, is not my fault. There comes a time as Robert Browning says ‘when the poking has to stop’.’[[111]](#footnote-111) He seems to associate a lack of ‘convincingness’ with the absence of ‘poking’ – which suggests his private estimate of the books, as already deduced, was ‘the more sex, the better’.

1. **The translator’s life: ‘I would sooner castrate cows than continually bend my brain to other men’s books’**

In the same letter comes one of many requests for money – in advance, from Vyvyan, or as a guarantee by Vyvyan of his bank account, to be paid back out of the proceeds of the books. ‘If necessary perhaps you would not mind my drawing upon you for a small sum against this security’ (the ms of the translation of ‘Cheeser’ which he has just sent off to be typed). Lack of money is a constant theme of the letters and his descriptions of it are often angry and picturesque. Letter 35, 19 June 1926: ‘I do hate asking you, but no sooner do I see calm waters than the poor bloody carrack is battered once more. I visited my bank this morning and found a minus quantity: and must pay some in by Monday.’ Vyvyan obliged, but seems to have asked for a change in habits in return: ‘…I thought I might tell you I have two bright new suitings coming home next week: and I’m buying some new shirts, and a dressing gown etc., so that you see I am following your advice and trying to fulfil my social obligations and struggle into gentility. If only I could keep my ears clean’ (Letter 36, 11 September 1926). When money was expected from the Cazotte translation things had eased a little: ‘How do we manage about the Cazotte cheque? Do you pay it to me and write to the Bank and withdraw your guarantee, or what? Fortunately, owing to my recent quiet, sober, and industrious life I have no overdraft, so it is all good money, I am thankful to say. Not but what, when I first left ‘the Pensions’ last month, I wasn’t what you might call sober for a fortnight. Which I suppose was natural’ (letter 51, from Boustridge Farm, to be dated soon after he left his office job: late September 1927).[[112]](#footnote-112)

But such moments of security never lasted long. Letter 52 (dated by Merlin Holland 25 September 1927, numbered with the two replies) is short: ‘My dear Vyvyan (sorry to bombard you like this). Don’t, please, pay the Cazotte cheque direct into my account. I have a particular reason for not wanting this done. Yours E.S.’ Vyvyan replies that he will ‘hold the Cazotte cheque if it ever comes’, saying he knows those ‘particular reasons’ and assuming the ‘reason’ is an overdraft. Eric replies that ‘The ‘particular reasons’ is, or are, not an overdraft (I must mention this as I so seldom have a credit) but a maudit épervier de créancier qui me guette’ [a cursed hawk of a creditor who is watching out for me]. …I write this while on a visit to my daughter’s school, in a foul joint which calls itself a hotel.’ This was the school in Chalfont St Peter. One is glad to know Eric visited her there. And when money did come, and was not removed by overdrafts or creditors, the typist had to be paid – since Eric wrote his translations in his inaccessible longhand. A letter three months later (21 December 1927, from Boustridge Farm) promises that: ‘Dorat, by the way, will, immediately after Xmas, be in the hands of Miss N. Macan who seems content to do my typing: c/o Jonathan Cape, 30 Bedford Square.’ (In the margin: ‘In case I commit suicide, not improbable.’) A previous typist needs to be paid, but ‘I would send miss B.M. a cheque now, but Jenny has gone to stay with a child of hers, and I am not wanted here as the Farmer is having Xmas parties etc. – so I shall have to stay away somewhere and inevitably be put to expense, which I shall with difficulty meet.’ This was the Christmas of Felicity’s ‘dread Father Christmas fright’, aged 5.

In October 1927 he is disillusioned with translating and wondering about looking for a job: ‘The fact is I must find some honourable and useful occupation. When my friend Geoffrey Garratt comes back from India, where he is now spreading sedition, I shall get him to give me a job on his farm. I would sooner castrate cows than continually bend my brains to other men’s books’ (Letter 54). In spring 1928, he is ‘sans le sou’ (letter 69). ‘There have been many visitors of late and difficult to get work done. However, where I am going, I believe few visitors are permitted: - no, I don’t mean the grave, where, I am told, none are permitted, but the Chelsea workhouse.’ Letter 65, ?Feb 1928, from Boustridge, suggests separate beds, Jenny being away as she so often was, squalor, and a return to drink: ‘Jenny was away last night and the cat pissed (a) on my bed (b) on her bed (c) under the Table. So I flung everything out of the caravan and left for London, on reaching which town I resorted, slightly, to the bottle; and returned much improved in spirits. Yours, Eric.’ He adds another vignette about Felicity: ‘P.T.O. My daughter is down for a few days: and J. says she overheard the following:

Felicia: It seemed shorter from 3rd to 4th berfday, than 4th to 5th.

Eric. The passage of time, darling Felicia, grows appreciably slower as the years progress.’

Felicity (called Felicia when young) was 6 in January 1928. I can’t help recalling her words, after describing the school at Chalfont St Peter:

*The passing of time held no meaning for me. Only when I lost my front teeth did I recognise that I was older than before.*

The realisation that time passed seems to have come shortly before that conversation with Eric. I can almost see her lost, or newly growing, front teeth in his perceptive spelling of the word ‘berfday’.

1. **Changing standards in translation: strangeness as a value**

As well as a few heart-rending glimpses of the young Felicia, who did sometimes see her father, the letters contain enlightening comments about Eric’s practice in his trade as a translator. Letter 22, ‘?end 1925’, is about *The Masked Lady* by Durey de Sauroy, no. 7 in the series, in which Olympia, Portia and Araminta appear. ‘I see ‘Araminta’ figures in the proofs: I have altered it to Araminte. I proceed on the principle of leaving everything in the French form – as you do also, I think – except when, often for some quite fortuitous reason, the French is inappropriate or ugly or ridiculous. E.G. Porcie I have written Portia: Porcie suggested (irresistibly to me) little ‘Piggy’, - little Pokey Piggy on a summer afternoon in a punt – not the Princesse: and Olympe is, I felt, ugly and so I wrote Olympia: but I’m not sure whether it oughtn’t to be left Olympe. What do you think?’ Despite his feelings, Vyvyan changed Araminte back to Araminta.

Eric’s ‘principle’ about proper names illustrates his attitude to a universal translation problem, how much to domesticate and how much to be ‘foreign’. He was, and continued to be, much more modern on this point than was the fashion in his time. The standard view then was that strangeness in a translation was something to be avoided, and the translator should be invisible. For instance, Vyvyan Holland said in his *Times* obituary note about Eric in 1949: ‘He had the gift of being able to make a translation read as though it had been written in English, a gift which is regrettably rare.’[[113]](#footnote-113) It was an attitude which lingered; in 1960 much the same point of view was expressed by Norman Denny in an article in the *New Statesman*: ‘…Perhaps his [the translator’s] highest if most melancholy triumph occurs when, as often happens, a reviewer praises the ‘style’ of the work without mentioning, let alone the translator’s name, even the fact that it is a translation.’[[114]](#footnote-114) Before coming to this conclusion, Denny discusses Eric and his preference for ‘foreignness’: ‘The late Eric Sutton, one of the best translators of his day, once said to me, ‘I like the French to show through’. He was right, of course.’ But Denny points out a problem. ‘The thing that ‘shows through’ can only be something extraneous, a foreign element not intended by the original author, writing French for the French.’ Denny therefore comes back to his preference for ‘invisibility’; but his rational objection is regarded as unimportant by proponents of the newer modern preference for ‘otherness’. In a complete reversal, strangeness or foreignness in a translated text is now seen by major writers on translation as desirable, even essential.

As George Steiner put it in *After Babel*: ‘…a translation must, in regard to its own language, retain a vital strangeness and “otherness”…The translator enriches his tongue by allowing the source language to penetrate and modify it’.[[115]](#footnote-115) Lawrence Venuti, both a practising translator and a writer on translation, states that ‘good translation…manifests in its own language the foreignness of the foreign text’ (*The Translator’s Invisibility*, p. 11).[[116]](#footnote-116) This new orthodoxy is resented or opposed by some translators: a letter from Stephen Romer to the *TLS*, 8 November 2013, states ‘The idea which has evolved in translation studies, notably, that a translation must somehow incorporate signs of the ‘foreignness’ or the ‘strangeness’ of the original restores a necessary balance, but to the poet-translator…it must seem at times a pious chimaera, or at least a weirdly inhibiting braking mechanism that no one in any case would quite know how to apply’. Nick Jacobs, translator and publisher, told me that he does not allow his translators to read Steiner and Venuti – or Walter Benjamin, father of the ‘strangeness’ lobby.

Venuti has moral or ethical reasons for his stance: ‘This translation ethics does not so much prevent the assimilation of the foreign text as aim to signify the autonomous existence of that text behind (yet by means of) the assimilative process of translation’. Eric’s reasons are more likely to have been partly personal preference, and partly that he could count on readers who were at least somewhat familiar with French and with French culture, even if they preferred to read a translation. The newer tendency to insist on foreignness has made into a shibboleth something which Eric had, actually, always valued. The problem arises again in Eric’s 1947 translation of *The Reprieve* by Sartre, discussed in Chapter 9, which was ‘de-foreignised’ by Penguin when they bought the rights from Hamish Hamilton in 1963. At the same time, they replaced the swingeing cuts which Eric had had to make, thus mending with one hand what they took away with the other.

1. **Old jokes and satin cushions**

It seems that Vyvyan always read the proofs (‘You always read the proofs’, letter 44, 2 September 1927), and sometimes changed things. A complaint about this from Eric illustrates the difficulty of translating jokes. ‘Boustridge, Jan 2nd 1928. Dear Vyvyan, you accuse me of inaccuracy: well, je vais te dire une bonne chose, où plutot deux. I was looking through Cazotte the other day [Jacques Cazotte, *A Thousand and One Follies and His Most Unlooked-For Lordship*, 1928, no. 11 in the series]…On p. 141 I find. (Richard speaking.) ‘I should like to be a Lord, or a Peer; and now where is my Castle’: what he really says (and what I wrote) is ‘where is my Peerage’: which is rather a delightful Gallicism, and indeed a goodish joke for Cazotte. But no, you must needs remove it.’[[117]](#footnote-117) The Captain (actually Richard’s mother, four months pregnant, in disguise), to whom Richard is speaking, assumes he means castle, and then points out to him several castles and takes him to one. The fact that ‘Le Lord impromptu’ says on the title page that it is translated from English, ‘Nouvelle Romanesque traduite de l’Anglois’, does not help. Perhaps I will never know why Eric thought this a good joke. As he said about another job he took on – translating *Monsieurs les Ronds-de-Cuir* by Georges Courteline (1893) as *The Bureaucrats* – ‘what a blithering pursuit’. (Trying to work out the meaning of ancient jokes.)

He had completed the translation of *The Bureaucrats*, one of the new translating jobs which followed from his success in Vyvyan’s series, but Michael Sadleir of Constable had returned it, ‘politely indicating that I was not expected to translate the thing accurately, and would I please rewrite the dialogue, without reference to the French text, and with a completely free hand. What a blithering pursuit’ (letter 57, 23 November 1927). Blithering or not, the translation sparked a leading article in the *TLS* (by Michael Sadleir) about the author and all his books: ‘Courteline: Scourge of Bumbledom’ (27 August 1931), though Eric’s translation was not mentioned. Translating it had been hard: in letter 54 (?October 1927, but more likely December as after no. 57) he says ‘My dear Vyvyan, indeed I think I shall call you in to deal with Ronds-de-Cuir, if I can’t liven it up (at the usual consultant’s fee). It isn’t the dull parts, it’s the funny parts, bedam.’ I have not space here to work out how much of *The Bureaucrats* was rewritten by Eric, let alone how Vyvyan ‘livened it up’ if he did; but the quandary illustrates an interesting aspect of translation, as an instance in which faithlessness to the text is thought to be the best option.

With another ‘blithering pursuit’ I will close this section. From his translating holiday at Mousehole in March or early April 1926 Eric writes: ‘I shall be back some time after Easter: indeed I’m not morbid about matters [Diana’s death] but I really am rather shaken…and find myself suffering from the oddest lapses of memory…What is to be done about the maculation of a white satin cushion in one of Mr Cheeser’s best efforts? I somehow feel that can’t go in: however I have gone through everything solid.’ This might have been a very interesting example of what could and could not go in, with echoes of Lytton Strachey’s seminal remark to Virginia Woolf’s sister Vanessa about a stain on her dress; but I have looked and looked in *The Prophet’s Cousin* (not an enjoyable task) and cannot find anything about the maculation of a white satin cushion. Perhaps Vyvyan did take it out the incident at the proof stage. It seems too blithering to comb the French original for the white satin cushion, even with the help of Google.

Going back to Eric’s two ‘faces’, or the contradictory images people in the family have of him, and what the letters reveal about his character, I think they do help towards making a judgement. I think Eric’s and Vyvyan’s way of getting round the censors with their literary project was ingenious; and one at least of Eric’s translations (*Never Again!*) is a brilliant version of a classic book. I don’t judge Eric harshly for talking so much about ‘poking’; it is laddish, but he does not seem to have behaved very laddishly; after the relaxed marriage to Peggy in which she encouraged him to spend time with Nina Hamnett, and the definite extra-marital affair with Fanny Wadsworth, he seems to have been faithful to Jenny, ‘a nice lady who loves me and whom I love’. As for pornography, what he and Vyvyan were doing seems a million miles away from free internet porn, films and images, which inevitably involve the exploitation of women and sometimes men and children, and stoke attitudes that accept this. Eric thinks the women in these books have a ‘dignity’ which the men do not have; and he clarifies a sentence to insist on the pleasure (probably) of Madame de T. in *Never Again!* A sausage/penis joke in ‘Coachman’ is only the same joke as is used by Sterne in *Tristram Shandy.*

My mother says she ‘never saw’ her father when she was at the Dower House at Stonor, before she went to school; but shortly after that he records visits to her at school, and episodes where she is visiting him, and she remembers the caravan at Boustridge Farm and the E.C. ‘lavatory arrangements’ which show that she went there. The glimpses of him and her in the letters show him talking to her ‘as an equal’, as he says he did with Diana. I find even these laddish letters treasurable. It’s not just ‘the funny parts, bedam’, but also the sad parts, or rather, the combination throughout of humour and melancholy; and also the picture they give me of his very difficult struggle to make a living from translating and build a new life with Jenny, a life which includes getting to know and love his one remaining daughter, Felicity.

***Self-portrait by Felicity Sutton aged about 18***

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**Chapter 6**

**The 1930s: ‘Sunk in work and povertude’**

I have almost too much material for a chapter on the 1930s. Eric’s later letters to Vyvyan; my mother’s brilliant but unreliable memoir; her earliest writings, such as essays for the Roehampton school magazine, and later unpublished short stories based on her life; the many translations; reviews of the translations; Barbara Wadsworth’s memoir of her father, with its insight into Eric’s role in the Wadsworths’ marriage. The nature of the writing in both Eric’s and my mother’s contributions – wonderful, in both cases - leads me first to try to elucidate further the illuminations contained in them.

1. **‘Esurient but laborious’**

A letter of ?September 1928 (letter 74) gives some interesting details of the amounts Eric was able to earn in the translating career which with difficulty lifted off from the beginning provided by Vyvyan’s French series. Vyvyan must have asked how Eric came to be translating for Martin Secker: perhaps he too would have liked more work of that kind. ‘My dear Vyvyan, so far as I can remember Martin Secker wrote to me about translating, and reading foreign books for him: he then asked about a fee, and I without committing myself said round about £1.1.0 per 1000 [words]. I then went away, and by letter suggested 25/-, thinking that about as much as I should get: and they agreed. But for long books they tend to pay less – they paid me a good deal less for Grischa [*The Case of Sergeant Grischa* by Arnold Zweig], £150 for something getting on towards 200,000 words. So there you are: I should go and see them.’ I make that 15s per thousand words. A website on comparative worth suggests that the relative value of £150 in 1928 was £7,416.00 in 2011 (the latest date available on the website).[[118]](#footnote-118) The figure comes from a ‘purchasing power calculator’, multiplying £150 by the percentage increase in the retail price index. It is a ‘historic standard of living’ equivalent. Not as niggardly as it sounds now; but an amount which could, and did, leave one as a struggling freelance.

The letter goes on to describe an evening of binge drinking (so hard not to quote, he puts it so well), and as usual ends with his poverty: ‘I want some work, or shall soon. I look like disposing of collar studs on the kerbstone by about Nov. Seriously if you know of a job that would suit me – I mean one involving no intelligence, responsibility, and at which it is not necessary to be either punctual or regular, I should be glad to consider it.’ No job appears and the theme continues. In letter 87, in ?December 1928, he writes ‘I am sunk in work and povertude. Jenny has gone to see her children and taken the war-chest with her. So, if, as I remember you still have a large cupboard of tinned edibles, you may bestow an item or two on the esurient but laborious Greekling, E.S. What the fucking Hell does hinschub mean?’ His German was never as good as his French. And on 1.2.29 (letter 89), having moved to 30 Tite St, Chelsea: ‘I must apologise for not have written before – but I have been coping with an ernste finanzielle Lage. I got badly caught between 2 books – or rather one was held up – and living as you know I do from hand to mouth, day to day, and c-ck to c-nt, I was high and dry. And have been living on

1 necklace

2 wristwatches

1 suitcase [which I assume he has pawned].

You are fortunate to have been in Switzerland ski-ing (so you say) – or I should, I fear, have broken my vow and borrowed a couple of pounds. However now I begin to emerge into daylight.’ A friend has suffered the fate Eric always feared. ‘I saw Tony Sprang the other day. He has got a job…He seems to have had a filthy time, poor man, and even has slept on the Imbankimento. He looks sadly battered.’ A letter of 23 December 1929 (letter 100) gives his income ‘last year’ as £668. The ‘measuring worth’ site suggests this was equivalent to £33,920 in 2011. Not so bad: ‘Yet do I ever have any money? No. I am really so sick of working so hard and getting no pleasuring out of life, that I shall shortly hurl myself from the Ditchling windmill which I see just above me’. The spell in a flat in Tite Street, Chelsea, lasted less than a year, and he and Jenny moved to Clayton near Hassocks, to a cottage near the windmill, partly to escape creditors – tailors, and the Tite street landlord, rather than moneylenders, he explains in a letter.

The endless difficulty of making a living and maintaining gentility, which carried on into the 1930s, along with the prevalence of people who asked you for money in the street and the ongoing struggle with drink, are suggested by a little incident in Oxford, described self-satirisingly pompously in a letter to Vyvyan of 10 May 1937 (letter 208). ‘An odd incident happened to me this morning as I was peering into Blackwell’s shop. A dubious individual lurched up to me, and said: ‘A word with you, guv’nor!’ To which I replied: ‘No, I can do nothing.’ He rejoined: ‘O come now, be a sport.’ I then observed: ‘Sir; you are smoking a cigarette, for which you presumably had to pay. Two of my senses inform me that you have quite recently been ingurgitating beer, and, obviously also, in such large quantities that I cannot conceive that you could have obtained it at anyone else’s expense. Now, although I am wearing a decent suit, I am, in fact, a very poor man, considerably embarrassed to meet certain liabilities with reasonable punctuality. Moreover I am free to confess that this embarrassment is partly due to the propensity under which you are at present labouring; and let me take this occasion of warning you what will be the result of a continuance in such courses. In the circumstances, therefore, I do not feel that I am a proper person to provide you with any relief – were it, indeed, in my power to do so.’ Upon which the fellow, muttering imprecations about ‘f-cking street preachers’, hurriedly withdrew.’

As well as ‘povertude’ Eric suffered from an inability to stand talking to people – sometimes. A despairing letter to Vyvyan from ?January 1929 (letter 88) describes this: ‘Please forgive me for putting you off. I know you must think it intolerable. But if I talked at all today, I should go mad. I am quite definitely neurasthenic now, and a curse to myself and my friends. At the same time I quite see that I must not go and see you, if I make this sort of return. So I won’t: indeed I have practically withdrawn from social life altogether. …Drinking is rather the effect than the cause. Farewell. Yours E.S.’ This letter is an extreme; but his unsociability recurs, described well and funnily by my mother in her memoir. After several moves, during the rackety 1930s, Eric and Jenny were in rooms at a farm near Branscombe in Devon; then they moved to a house called Sea View in the village. Jenny’s children came to stay and Eric moved to the ‘Mason’s Arms’. *Eric asked me to make a screen out of a cardboard box he had, cutting out one side, and on the front writing in large letters DO NOT SPEAK TO OCCUPANT – the other people in the pub* would talk *during lunch and supper. Jenny was completely taken in by this, but I knew he couldn’t really put it up in front of his place at table. It would offend so many, who wouldn’t think it funny.* A later move was to Bear House, Stanford-in-the-Vale: *It wasn’t really an unfriendly village but when the Vicar came to call, Eric, who was hopeless at really small talk, especially of the quasi-religious sort, had to go into the downstairs loo to be sick.* But she also shows him leading rather an enjoyable social life in some of the places he and Jenny lived in – see sections iii and iv below. His charm did not disappear.

1. **Felicity**

After the move to Tite Street, Chelsea, in late 1928 or early 1929, Eric and Jenny attempted to have Felicity living with them. Christmas of 1928 was the Christmas she had spent with the family she calls the Wadsworths, in that ‘haven of stability and love’, quoted in Chapter 3.

*That Christmas there were no dreadful frights about Father Christmas – only a wonderful surprise of a simply enormous doll with hair, clothes, AND a brush and comb. She was divine and it was bliss to care for her, but as a bed companion no good at all. I remembered the redoubtable Jacko and his loving arms and legs.*

Jacko was the toy monkey who had been painfully removed and destroyed by the family at Stonor.

*Between Christmas and Easter a day came when I was taken from this haven of order and sympathy and planted, it appeared to me, in a studio flat in Tite Street, Chelsea, which Jenny and Eric had rented. Jenny was out all day working happily at Peter Jones – the brave new modern building had just opened – and Eric contrived to take care of me and do the translating work he was engaged upon at that time. I wept for two days. Missing the companions of the Wadsworth nursery and the sedate comfort it had given me.*

Peter Jones’s new store was not built by 1929; the new building was started in the 1930s and completed by 1937. Jenny may have worked there then, but in 1929 she must have been working somewhere else.

Together with Eric’s ‘neurasthenia’, melancholy, and sometimes drinking, went the rages.

*In Tite Street life was all over the place. Much of it shocked me deeply. One day, in a rage, Eric said ‘If you don’t eat your lunch’ [to Jenny] ‘I will throw mine out of the window.’ She didn’t, and he did, and I watched the gravy and bits of meat slide down the outside of the window. Another day, when a manuscript was missing, my entire doll’s environment was torn asunder – grief and tears – and the missing sheets* were *discovered – somewhere else.*

Dolly falls off the window ledge and is shattered in the basement below. The nurses watching from the window of the hospital opposite laugh.

*Most of all, I was hurt by the laughter from across the street when the disaster occurred. …The basement children were solace of a sort. They used to ‘have’ me when Eric and Jenny wanted to go out. The fear that they might never come back was a very real anxiety at that time. You had to be very quiet in their dark front room and play mostly in the area, because the caretaker was asleep in the bedroom at the back, for he was a nightwatchman at the Gas Works across the river.*

At Tite street she first attempted to run away. Soon after, Eric and Jenny ended the experiment of having her at home.

*One day I was seized with a desire to escape. Eric had gone out ‘just for a minute’ to the paper shop on the corner. I decided I would walk (I was in my bedroom slippers) to ‘Betsy’ Park where we used to take the Sealyham every day. I was just about to launch out across the Embankment when Eric caught up with me. His legs were long. He was six foot three. I was chastised (not physically) and chastened. Tears flowed.*

*At Easter time it was decided that I should be boarded, or ‘put’, with either some nuns who dealt in looking after young children – or some ‘Good Catholic family’. ‘A cozy convent would be good’ said Jenny.*

*The very next day in The Times newspaper, among the advertisements on the front page for butlers, cooks, housekeepers, nursemaids and the like, was one from a family near Dover. ‘Companion wanted for own daughter, aged seven, share Governess. Good Catholic family…’*

*‘Magic,’ said Jenny.*

*‘Chance,’ said Eric.*

*Letters were exchanged, and photographs. Jean looked a bit ordinary and unsmiling. The only photograph we had showed a small girl in glasses, with a cast in one eye, but a happy grin illuminating a chubby face.*

*‘She’s* so *plain,’ said Jenny, ‘but has* such *a sweet nature.’*

The ‘Jacobean House’ episode which follows in the memoir is too long (and too painful) to quote fully here. The house *was a black and white sham-Jacobean house, on one side of a road which was very near the cliff edge. If you looked over the edge you saw an ‘undercliff’ which must have dropped away many years before… Every now and then you heard jolly toots from ferries setting out across the Channe*l. The beautiful sponge bag Eric has given her is taken away. Joan kicks her out of bed at night for refusing to say she ‘won’t win’. *I wasn’t going to say any such thing, it wouldn’t have been true, so onto the floor I fell and stayed there until Joan was asleep, counting the flashes from Folkestone lighthouse which shone through the curtainless windows*. An older sister, Maureen, taunts her about how babies are born. Another, grown-up sister, *chauffeuse to a wealthy lady in Folkestone*, steals the orange feather fan Gladys has sent. Other children come to tea to ‘play’, Felicity is blindfolded and put into her sleeping suit, carried outside, the blindfold is ripped off and she is tipped into a nettly ditch. *I am sure my howls could be heard as far as Folkestone. The grownups were crosser with me for making such a noise than they were with the visiting children and Jean and Maureen who had caused it.*

There is one speck of light. Miss Edwards’s lessons are easy and fun. *A greater world suddenly opened out*. The sham-ness, the vertiginous cliff edge, the unjolly toots, the curtainless windows, the taunting, the stealing, the torment – she will soon leave these behind, and I think with pleasure of the nuns she loved at the convent she next went to, the Sacred Heart convent in Upper Drive, Hove, their care for her and the worlds they continued to open out. Another small conversation with Eric from this time is recorded by her in the memoir, quoting a letter of Eric’s:

*I never knew what Mr Chevers* did. *After this episode was over Eric asked me.*

*E. What did he* do*?*

*F. Well, he was very quiet in the morning. Then he used to drive the car somewhere or walk about the garden.*

*E. Yes, but how did he get his money?*

*F. From the bank.*

*E. I know, but what did he really do?*

*F. O well, about six he used to get very restless and say ‘I think I will be going along now’, and go along to a S’loon bar and come home singing ‘Sonny boy’.*

Felicity is still vague about where money comes from and what people ‘do’. Perhaps Mr Chevers did not ‘do’ anything, instead relying on the income from having a small lodger; he sounds faintly sinister. *He had odd notions of how to entertain small girls. One ‘game’ was to stand on our heads for as long as we could. And I always won. Being upside down was no trouble at all.*

1. **Clayton Castle: the early 1930s**

*Eric thought that there was a definite deterioration in the literary style of my weekly letters and by the Christmas holidays [1929] I was at* home *in Clayton Castle, Hassocks, Sussex.*This refuge from creditors, at last feeling more like a home, is described minutely by my mother from a child’s point of view. C*layton Castle was a double cottage: the landlady, Mrs Amsden, and her small son John lived in one half and the other half was let. There were two connecting doors, one upstairs, one down. …The front door opened straight into the sitting room, which was the whole width of the house.* Mrs Amsden tries to help by bringing in milk puddings, *until Eric, who would be sitting at the Bureau at his typewriter, nearly exploded with wrath.*

It is not a cosy place. *The door sill was so worn away by nearly 300 years of feet, that the winter wind came whistling in. …Upstairs great oak planks were laid over the rafters of the rooms and you could drop a penny into the rooms below the gaps. …My bedroom had the water cistern in it which made gruesome noises in the night. Worse still was the presence of a low door immediately behind the head of my bed – opening into an attic under the slope of the roof where empty suitcases lay scattered about. Eric slept in the ‘back room’ where an owl used to blunder now and then against the window pane.* Jenny sleeps in another bedroom in a ‘vast four-poster bed with a canopy and curtains’.

*I soon knew the house was haunted. Someone came up the stairs once and did not go into either mine or Jenny’s room. The doors had wooden latches which you pulled up with a leather string and that was noisy. Several times I lay tightly tucked in bed with the darkness and silence pressing on my head, terrified – of what? The recurring nightmare was of a revolving drum stuck round with open-mouthed faces whose voices grew louder as they passed me till there was an intolerable Babel.*

*It was a most uncomfortable house. So desperately cold; the lavatory arrangement was hideously inconvenient and primitive. The E.C. was outside the kitchen door. Dark, odorous, full of creepy-crawlies and festooned with cobwebs. Lily, the sweet-natured maid who came every morning to light the fire, had to carry chamber-pots down the dark stairs, through the sitting-room, down the passage, across the kitchen and out of the back door.*

*Looking back now I find it hard to understand how it was that Eric’s friends used to come and stay, accepting such stark discomfort. Vyvyan (with different ladies in tow – always beautiful, always fun to talk to, even if you were only eight years old), John and Evelyn Heygate – Gladys and others whom I forget. The house, being what it was, could not have been a haven of comfort and joy. Of course it was the magnetic charm of my father which made life a joy for them all. Myself included.*

It is ‘home’, of a sort; but sometimes Jenny’s children come and stay. *Eric went to stay at ‘the Bull’ in Hassocks. I admit that I resented these invasions…In the Easter hols, I ‘ran away’. I had become ashamed of the dreadful rages which prevailed when pants or pens or a watch was lost, and I suffered with Jenny when she endured these storms.*

*It was very carefully thought out. I had a tiny Woolworth’s attaché case. In it I put some bread and butter and sugar sandwiches, given me by Lily. My great idea was to walk to Brighton over the Downs, and get on a boat going to France. What next did not appear to matter. I put on a red beret so that Nick [Jenny’s daughter] could see me from a long way off and bring me more bread and sugar sandwiches. I had not thought out the distance she would have to cover. We only told John Amsden.*

She meets the Butcher on the garden path who asks where she is going. ‘I’m running away from Home’. He replies ‘good luck to you’. *I left Nick at the garden gate and trudged up the steep hill towards Jack and Jill, the one black one white windmills. Then I turned right along the edge of the down. It was a beautiful morning. I felt hungry and sat down under a hawthorn tree and ate half my supplies. The mustard tin with the milk in it had leaked so that the sandwiches were by then sodden. They tasted all right and I scattered the crumbs to the birds, who were very grateful.*

*Then I saw the cortège. Climbing up the down was Mrs Amsden, John Amsden, Nick and Jenny. I had managed to get three quarters of a mile or so from Clayton Castle before I was ignominiously apprehended and taken home, where I was shut in my bedroom and no-one came to see me or ask me questions. I wept copiously, and at the end of the day, without any luncheon or tea, somebody asked me ‘Why’, and I told them why. They did not answer.*

*The rages eased off a bit, and soon I was going to the Convent in Brighton…I loved my father, in spite of the rages. My nearest approach to Bliss was to be read to in bed in the evenings, when we shared the pleasures of ‘Alice’ and R.L.Stevenson’s poems for children. My literary life started in glory.*

1. **Saving the Wadsworths’ marriage**

Knowing there was some joy, some glory, some love, and some bliss in my mother’s life before she went to the convent, I am also pleased to find that Eric and Jenny had a social life – as suggested by my mother’s account, but also confirmed by Barbara Wadsworth’s book about her father, the artist Edward. This scene, though, in which Eric and Jenny – mainly Eric – provide entertaining conversation at dinner to get Fanny Wadsworth through a terrible crisis in her marriage, may not have been typical. I don’t think they really went about much, and their fun was mostly provided, as my mother suggests, by people who came to stay at Clayton Castle and other country hide-outs.

Barbara’s book about her father does not suggest that Fanny invited Eric because he was an old lover of hers. But it can possibly be deduced. Edward, a rich and successful artist, married to Fanny for 19 years, had fallen in love with a dancer named Kathleen, married with a small son. Kathleen wished to marry Edward, and obtained a divorce from her husband. But Edward seemed to dither. Barbara writes: ‘From [Fanny] Barbara learnt that Kathleen wanted to marry Edward; from Kathleen (some fifty years later) that he had been all for her divorce but, when the decree absolute came through, it suddenly seemed to be of no importance to him’ (*Edward Wadsworth: A Painter’s Life*, p. 182). We are in 1931; in 1981 Barbara had been researching her book and must have interviewed Kathleen. ‘When Kathleen realised she was getting no further with him, she embarked upon tactics that proved ultimately disastrous – she drew two other men friends into the scene in order to arouse his jealousy.’ The two she ‘selected for her purpose’ were Angus Morrison and Stephen Guest, a young protégé of Edward’s. Unfortunately Stephen Guest was unaware of Kathleen’s relationship with Edward, and confided in Fanny about his feelings for Kathleen. ‘Fanny – unknown to Kathleen – was thus put into the position of being the recipient of all sorts of information about her husband’s inamorata, one akin in spirit to a Sheridan or Beaumarchais comedy, though bleakly uncomical at the time.’

Fanny decided to take action. She arranged for a confrontation to take place at their house, Dairy Farm, Maresfield, near Uckfield, over the weekend of 26/7 September 1931. ‘She invited Kathleen down for the Saturday night, arranging for Guest to appear the next day to face Edward. He was to be fetched from the station at Haywards Heath by the chauffeur so that he should arrive after lunch, and was to relate in his own words what his friendship with Kathleen had been. Kathleen was to defend herself as best she could before Edward, and in Fanny’s presence’ (p. 184). On the Saturday morning Fanny asked Barbara’s governess, Margarita Siniossoglou, to be ready to take Barbara to stay with the Siniossoglou parents if the Wadsworths’ marriage broke up, until a separation could be agreed. ‘Kathleen duly arrived in the afternoon, and two hours later Eric Sutton and his second wife Jenny, who lived near Lewes, made up a dinner party. It is questionable whether Fanny had taken Sutton into her confidence but he was in good form and, consciously or not, rose well to the occasion, carrying on an erudite conversation with Margarita throughout a great part of the meal regarding his inability to speak the German language in spite of being its best known translator in the country. Between them they kept things going’ (p. 185).

This ghastly evening was followed by a day of decision in which Barbara remembers two snapshots – one of seeing Kathleen spitting ‘Bitch!’ in Fanny’s face at the end of a scene between Edward, Fanny, Stephen Guest and Kathleen, shortly after which Kathleen drove away with Guest; one of Edward and Fanny walking in the garden early in the evening, ‘with slow, almost somnambulistic steps’. ‘For Fanny the battle for Edward’s future was fought and won.’ Eric’s small part in making this possible – or perhaps his importance as an ex-lover of Fanny’s – is acknowledged by Barbara’s including a photo of him (aged 45, still with hair, thick black eyebrows, eyes heavy-lidded, face obscured by his hand putting a cigarette to his mouth) on the same page as photos of Freddie Mayor, Ralph Keene and Max Ernst.

Barbara’s memory of the conversation more than 50 years before is interesting. Eric was translating German books without having a good enough knowledge of the language, and made this funny and a talking point. I recall his answers to whether he spoke, read, and wrote German when joining up in 1916: ‘slightly, fairly, slightly’. A *TLS* review of his translation of *War Diaries*, by Hoffman, 31 October 1929, corrects him: ‘There are a few technical slips. Thus he retains ‘Ober-Ost’, explaining that it means ‘Upper East – the usual term for the Eastern War area.’ It is really short for ‘Oberkommando Ost’; and means ‘Commander-in-chief East’.’ That aside to Vyvyan of December 1928, ‘What the fucking Hell does hinschub mean?’, is typical.

1. **The translating career**

However bad his German, his translating career was showing signs of success: he comments on *The Case of Sergeant Grisha* (published in 1928) that he is glad Vyvyan liked it; ‘it was, of course, an inspiring book, and one soon dropped into the habit of rewriting it. A German told me it was better in English than in German. Yes, I am going to do the others – 3 sogar [‘even’ in German].’ In other words, he has been asked to translate three more novels by Arnold Zweig, an internationally respected author now forgotten. *Grischa* was an anti-war novel about WW1, still highly readable now. Zweig’s novels suggest how hard it was being a left-wing, Jewish author in post-WW1 Germany. He went into voluntary exile when Hitler took power in 1933. A later novel by Zweig, *The Axe of Wandsbek*, also translated by Eric, includes a plot to assassinate Hitler.

I do not know how much input Eric had in deciding what books to translate; one or two of the 69 he translated are, to me, politically repellent. And he did have an anti-Semitic streak, as when he complains about Jews changing their names to English names. But as the career develops I see in him, or in the books which publishers asked him to translate and which he agreed to undertake, an anguish about the way things are going politically in Europe – particularly in Germany after the Treaty of Versailles, in which he had been involved, as private secretary to Lord Sumner on the Reparations Commission. The only book out of the 69 in which he did more than translate, the three-volume collected papers of Gustav Stresemann (1878-1929), a liberal German politician, published in 1935, edited as well as translated by Eric, and with introductions by him, reads very heavily now and is too badly presented to distinguish easily the words of Stresemann from the words of Eric. But surely it was an attempt by Eric to step out of his translator’s role and protest against the political events which were leading to Hitler’s takeover and eventually to WW2.

His comments in a letter to Vyvyan of June 12th 1937 (letter 209), about *King Wren: the Youth of Henry IV*, by Heinrich Mann, are revealing of his sympathies. The book had been published in 1935 with the title *Die Jugend des Koenigs Henri Quatre.* ‘I am sending you with my best regards a copy of King Wren. It is the best piece of translation I have ever done. I find myself very anxious that it should do well. The author is a refugee from Hitlerian Germany, and has put all his heart and soul and mind into what I believe to be a great book; and apart from that, in a sort of abstract way, for the sake of literature I have a quite impersonal hope that in these congested days of the publishing trade, it may not be missed. I have no personal interest in it, the translating fee having been long since paid, and well and truly spent. So read it, if you have time, and if you like it, tell those who might like it also.’ In the same letter he tells Vyvyan ‘I have decided to take up the study of Economics. I am going to the London School of Economics, and if it seems worthwhile I shall take a degree there. I have casting about for some time to find some means of making more and better money, and position, than by this cursed translating trade, so exhausting and demoralising, and with the grim spectre of unemployment always in the offing. I have learnt a good deal about economics from my work on Stresemann; I am sure there would always be an opening for anyone who can write clearly and with authority on the subject.’ Nothing came of this – although by the time WW2 began he had managed to get another civil service job in the Ministry of Economic Warfare. But it is interesting that he hoped the editing work on Stresemann would lead to a new career.

*King Wren*, the first book of a series of two about King Henry IV of France, was the novel into which Heinrich Mann put all his feelings as an exile about Hitler and the way Germany was going. Evelyn Juers’ double biography of Heinrich Mann and his wife Nelly, written in a free-flowing, stream-of-consciousness style, shows Heinrich’s brother Thomas, the more famous novelist, reading it on its publication in 1935: ‘It took three weeks for Thomas to finish reading Heinrich’s book, which he thought was unusual, superior to anything being published in Germany right now, rich in texture, restless, with a heightened sense of history. Clearly an analogy for the political errors and stupidities of the present time’.[[119]](#footnote-119) Of the second volume, also translated by Eric,[[120]](#footnote-120) she writes (the year is 1937): ‘He needed a rest, a holiday with Nelly … the chance to finish the second volume of his *Henri IV.* This book told the story of the Edict of Nantes, issued by the French King in 1598, drawn up to protect religious minorities and to end dissent: its focus was on civil rights and unity. In Heinrich’s eyes it was a model of reconciliation that might be adapted for the current crisis’ (p. 215). The current crisis was the approach of war, and the frantic efforts to oppose Hitler by the disunited international Left.

The tale told by Eric’s comments on these books by Zweig, Stresemann and Mann, of the difficulty and bitterness of the approach to war, and the developing English consciousness of what was happening to thinking people in Europe, is visible also in the reviews which his translations continued to receive in the *Times Literary Supplement*, though the anonymous reviewers sometimes miss the political point, or seem to show wilful blindness. A review of *A Room in Berlin*, by Birkenfeld (24 July 1930, reviewer G.O.Wood) complains: ‘An earnest and energetic piece of fiction of the Zolaesque kind…It is evidently meant to be depressing, and it is most successful on this score.’ A review of *Thoughts on Germany*, by Kuhlmann, 10 March 1932, describes it as ‘Commenting on the Treaty of Versailles, of all great international settlements ‘the worst and most unwise’.’ The book is about how Germany might recover from it – there was still hope for that then; and the dangers of dictatorship. A review on 29 September 1932 of another novel by Zweig, *Young Woman of 1914*, the first in narrative order of Zweig’s WW1 tetralogy (of which *Grischa* was the second, though published first), comments: ‘It is difficult for the reader to sympathise with [the main characters] in their emotional and aesthetic indulgences against a background of the horror and suffering of war.’ Actually this is one thing the novel is attempting to do – show what it is like to be immersed in one’s private concerns, such as an illegal abortion, amid the history happening all around one. Sartre eventually did it better in his WW2 tetralogy *Roads to Freedom*, of which the first two volumes were translated by Eric.

The *TLS* review of Heinrich Mann’s *Henri Quatre*, the second volume of the two, 10 December 1938, by R.D.Charques, rather misses Mann’s point. After praising it (‘A soundly conceived piece of work…with a fine dramatic sweep and a lightly philosophical touch, that appears to advantage in Mr Eric Sutton’s translation’) the writer complains ‘Was Henri quite the humanist and democrat that Herr Mann makes out?’ and ends ‘Always he [Henri] held in his mind’s eye the two-sided image of toleration and the unity of his people, and it is this that lends him added significance and provides Herr Mann with a discreet contemporary reference.’ In 1938, Mann might have hoped that his contemporary references were more than discreet. Fiction could not change politics, though it could illuminate the desperate situation of the human beings affected by it; and sometimes the struggle to be relevant was abandoned for a bit of escapism. A review of 13 November 1937 of *Sparrow Farm*, by Hans Fallada, as well as thinking ‘Mr Eric Sutton’s translation is excellent’, comments that ‘this kind of writing must be a light-hearted diversion from the rather sombre fiction in which the writer has otherwise engaged.’ The book is a fairy tale about office workers, one of whom turns into a sparrow. This is the author who had produced *Little Man, What Now?*, also translated by Eric, and described by the *TLS* (11 May 1933) as ‘a formidable picture’ of a young German married couple during the Depression (both reviews by R.D.Charques).

The *TLS* comments on all three volumes of Stresemann’s ‘Diaries, Letters and Papers’ which Eric edited as well as translated. On 3 October 1935 John Henry Freeman reviewed the first volume for it, remarking that it is ‘melancholy to think what might have happened had he lived’. Stresemann was hated by the Nazis, and ‘for the world outside’ he remained ‘a great and tragic figure’. It quotes Eric’s Preface: ‘Chancellors came and went, but for the time of his service Stresemann was Germany.’ On 11 December 1936 Harold Martin Stannard reviewed the second volume, pointing out a bibliographical difficulty. ‘The German editors…have arranged their matter under headings, not chronologically, so that the Locarno papers and the speeches Stresemann was making in Germany when he penned them are at opposite ends of the volume.’ Added to the difficulty already mentioned, that the typography makes it hard to distinguish between words by Stresemann and comments by Eric – more than one type size is used and the exact meaning of the different sizes is not clear – this makes the book hard to pick up, let alone read. The tombstone-like set of three volumes feels like an over-long tribute to a politician who died too soon and failed; or an R.I.P. for all hopes of peace or reconciliation in the years leading up to WW2.

On 20 April 1940 Harold Martin Stannard in the *TLS* reviewed the third volume of Stresemann papers, now still more overtaken by events . It becomes clear that this was an almost impossible editing project and it is not surprising that it led nowhere for Eric’s career. ‘Mr Sutton’s translation fully maintains the high standard set in the previous two volumes. His editorial activities, however, have been circumscribed by the outbreak of war and the consequent difficulties of access to documents, and both the general introduction to the volume and the preface to the selection from Stresemann’s correspondence are the work of unnamed German editors. Their language reflects the strain under which they have performed their task, and they do not make themselves wholly clear. Their very restricted choice of letters, for example, needs fuller explanation, particularly as the correspondence is of the utmost value. Special attention should be paid to the series of letters, begun in jest but continued in growing seriousness, in which S. impersonates his own private secretary and writes at length and in proper secretarial fashion of the foibles and characteristics of his chief…. It is easy to say now that he failed to appreciate the line along which German opinion was moving, but such a view is contradicted by passage after passage in this book.’

This reviewer was discerning; but another review, by R.D.Charques, of Eric’s translation of *Guiding Star* by Vercors, on 7 December 1946, has not understood the book. ‘The sentimentality, the imaginative falsity, the juvenile nationalist unction of this second tale by Vercors [after ‘La Silence de la mer’] are distressing in the extreme.’ It is the story of a German born in Bohemia who falls in love with France. But he has a Jewish grandmother and is made to wear the star and killed by Hitler. Neither Hitler, war nor Judaism are mentioned in the review. The war was by then over; but Vercors (pseudonym of Jean Bruller) had been in the Resistance when it was published in 1943. Such ignoring of the international situation in a leading literary journal is extraordinary.

1. **‘Nowhere but Chelsea’: Felicity and Roehampton**

My mother was happy at the Convent in Upper Drive, Hove. *Happiness was engendered in this gentle environment, where making up stories, making pictures and acting in plays presented no problems. I learnt from Mother Devlin that God, an unseen Spirit who somehow kept everything going in Earth and Heaven, loved all creatures and human beings which included me, that He would never forget me and I must use all the talents I had towards His pleasure. This was, indeed, comforting. But again there was a darker side to all activity and thought. The Devil. There had been a little girl saint who often* saw *the Devil…Thankfully, I knew I was not ‘good’ enough to see him.* She was baptised a Catholic and made her first communion.

But in 1932 she moved up to the middle school, and lost her ‘adored guardians’, mother Devlin and Mother Constantine; there was a very bad problem with arithmetic, and a *terrifying teacher called Miss Pond.* A pep-talk from Mother Bradshaw, the Mistress General, was no help. She had already instructed Felicity for her Baptism: *She was a very tall, bigly made nun, with a deathly pallor, lips pursed together in a line, and a stony gaze. Her eyes were like pale pebbles in a stream, her voice unpleasant and sharp.* While Felicity was wrestling with ‘ridiculous hypothetical problems’ in a piano cell, Jenny and Eric had moved to Cock Knowle, Church Knowle, Dorset. This did not last long; *Following the dreadful Arithmetic Problems term I found myself in a fascinating cottage rented to us by a Lady Doctor.* This was at High and Over, East Dean.

Her report came; Eric said *I’m saddened by all these remarks on almost every subject, ‘Could do better if she tried’.* They moved on again, to Branscombe in Devon, where Felicity had a governess, Miss Stephens, with lessons under an apple tree: *she taught me all subjects and very well indeed*. Jenny, who had left Eric for a while and gone to live in London, came back. *Not wholly, because she spent all week working in ‘Cresta’, a dress shop; things had improved between her and Eric. I recognised jealous feelings within myself, for I no longer had his undivided, loving attention. I felt ashamed.* After another move to Tin Town in Lymington, *as Autumn came, Eric and Jenny planned to go and live in London. I was to attend boarding school in Roehampton Lane – another Convent of the Sacred Heart. My heart sank a bit.[[121]](#footnote-121)*

But she loved Roehampton. *In January [1934] I had been dropped at the convent of the Sacred Heart, Roehampton Lane, SW15. I cannot forget the journey up the main staircase of the Convent on the day Eric and Jenny left me at the Lodge, with my new trunk. I found myself ascending an immense stairway with a very good-looking, mature girl of my own age [12]. We exchanged distant remarks as we went up, but by the time we got to the top these were closer and we were laughing.*  This was Roxane Covarrubias; *Roxane and I and Teresa Watkin found ourselves neck and neck where ‘English’ was concerned.*  *For the next four years we took it in turn to achieve the prize and second and third for ‘English Language and Literature.’* …*What pleased me more than anything else at this age (13 or so) was a correspondence with my father. We wrote to each other every week, even if he was planning to come and see me with Jenny on Sundays.* As well as an explanation of Eric’s role in her developing literary style, an economic query occurs here. How could Eric, the struggling translator, afford to send Felicity to Roehampton? This was the school described by Ford Madox Ford as the female, Catholic equivalent of Eton. In a cancelled passage of *The Good Soldier*, the narrator states of its main character, Edward Ashburnham: ‘Yes, every one of the girls he had ruined must be provided for as if she were at least the wife, say, of a bank manager, and every one of his illegitimate offspring must be sent to Eton or the convent at Roehampton.’[[122]](#footnote-122) The answer is that Felicity’s grandmother, Peggy’s mother – of the shipbuilding family in Whitehaven - had left some money in trust for Felicity’s education.

Eric and Jenny had moved from Lymington to 5, The Mall, East Sheen, but having got so near London, then moved to Bear House, Stanford-in-the-Vale, Berkshire, a house which had once been an inn. Eric describes his plans in letter 203 to Vyvyan, 24 June 1936: ‘Felicity is getting so tall and grown up and charming; she was delightful company for me this holydays. I am proposing to live here very quietly for two or three years if I survive, and then when it becomes necessary for her to go to an Art School I shall move up to town and settle in one of the Inns of Court. I think it better she shall have a home in town during that early period; she has a good deal of her mother’s temperament, who might have got into all sorts of trouble had she not met my agreeable self!’ An enlightening comment about the possible wildness of both Felicity and Peggy. But before the time came for Art School, he and Jenny moved again: he says in the last letter I have of his to Vyvyan (letter 215), ‘I realised I could live nowhere but Chelsea, so I have taken a flat – in Beaufort Mansions, no less!’ I don’t know what led to the cessation of the letters.

In the Roehampton School Magazine (1937) there is an essay by Felicity on the subject of ‘Queer Characters’, set mainly in Chelsea. ‘Eric Sutton of Chelsea’ was at last living there again, and she was at Beaufort Mansions in the holidays. Her ‘literary life had started in glory’ with Alice and R.L.Stevenson, at Clayton; now she has a literary persona of her own. [[123]](#footnote-123)

*Wherever one goes in the world one meets odd people. Anything strange is odd to the average Englishman. In London, either by mistake or on purpose, all the queer characters seem to live in one quarter, and that quarter is Chelsea. I, too, live in Chelsea, but I do not count myself queer – yet. So often I see people in the streets to whom I would like to say, ‘You like look someone of importance, who are you?’ But however queer the person may look I cannot find it in my heart to take advantage of them so.*

‘Queer’ had developed slightly into ‘important’. Before investigating this idea further, she gives a splendid sketch of still-Bohemian Chelsea.

*Chelsea is, notoriously, a place teeming with artists, poets, and writers, though why this should be I do not know, unless it is that landladies are lenient, or is it that these people like to be with others of their own temperament? Probably both.*

*At nearly all times of the day artists and writers sit in tiny, cheap cafés drinking black coffee and smoking strong pipes. The writers, a quieter race than the artists, sit in corners talking to their friends, or not talking at all, according to their mood, whereas the painters are more demonstrative and talk and laugh, sing or shout just as they feel inclined; with long hair and in shabby grey suits they argue with their brother brushes on form and colour. Long nervous fingers fumble in pockets that do not jingle as the meagre bill is paid with six reluctant pennies. Always poor, always generous, always optimistic, they laugh at the difficulties life puts before them. The poets, less eager to exchange their cherished ideas, hang round second-hand bookshops and pay for sixpenny volumes of Shelley with a florin.*

Beaufort Mansions was on the approach road to Battersea Bridge. I can see her looking out of the window. She knows more about money now, about the huge gap between rich and poor, and the occasional kindness of whelk sellers.

*Across the bridge from Battersea the white-jacketed whelk seller rides on his three-wheeled cycle. At night, he comes, and rings his little bell and shouts down the street a cry which sounds like anything but ‘Fresh Whelks’. The little, under-grown, badly-clothed ragamuffins crowd round him, dirty pennies held in dirtier hands. He shines his torch over his goods and gives them a cheery goodnight as they go home, unwittingly carrying three too many half-alive animals in their paper bags. He pedals up the narrow street, where no traffic ever passes and where the cats and dogs and children play in the gutters and down the areas; past the door on which I once found, written on a dirty envelope, ‘Dear Landlord, do not come today – No rent.’ And further up the street, ‘God Bless King Edward VIII, gone but not forgotten’ is painted in bold white letters.*

*Still shouting incoherently he turns into quite a different quarter of Chelsea. This is a street where shining Rolls-Royces stand crouching like metal dragons outside their respective gates. Yes, gates. These houses have gardens, and covered-in walks lead from the gates to the front door, so that Madam’s splendid Bond Street coiffure may not be ruined as she walks up her garden path in the rain.*

*What is the life that goes on behind those great eighteenth-century windows? Who knows? I often wish I did, as I walk over lighted patches thrown on the pavement at night. The people in these houses never close their damask curtains. I sometimes wonder whether they leave them open on purpose. Perhaps they themselves were once living in cramped lodgings and walked the streets at night because they had nothing better to do. Perhaps, at one time, they too had dug their hands into pockets that were filled with paint tube-caps and scraps of scribbled paper. So wishing to hearten the men who live as they have lived, who have to face odds as they have done, who despair as they despaired, they give them encouragement by showing them what they will one day achieve – a five hundred a year mansion on the Chelsea embankment.*

After this observant, but over-hopeful, panorama, linked by those incoherent shouts, she looks further into ‘queerness’ and why queer people might be important. These principles stayed with her. *Yet, are the artists and poets so very queer? Surely a man who can portray the life and soul of another on two feet of canvas is a genius and to be honoured for it? Surely a man who puts words together in such a manner that they sound like music to the ear, is almost a magician? And those men who write pure literature in the loveliest language in the world, are they not as mighty as kings? Just because such people have strange characters and temperaments, they are put down by the common, everyday person as odd, out of the ordinary, and therefore queer and to be treated as such.*

*But Chelsea will still go on harbouring her whelk sellers and street boys, her great men, her poets, her artists and her writers, her little known men who have such childlike souls and such a sense of humour that they can laugh at life and tell the landlord not to call today as they have no rent to pay him.*

*Felicity Sutton, aged 15 (Roehampton).*

So she shows herself to be an essayist at least the equal of Eric in ‘A Fair Adventure’, with an even greater command of the rhetorical questions. ‘Who has not, years ago, longed to live in that dampish residence on the isthmus and explore the hidden mysteries of the Island of the Birds?’ But still more typical of her is her poem, written a year later.

‘THE ROBIN, OR FELICITY.

The Robin is Felicity,

Most favoured with simplicity.

And in God’s great dignity

And in man’s humanity

There is simplicity.

And tingling with vivacity

The Robin sings a melody;

In all life’s obscurity,

In all death’s solemnity

There is a melody.

In all the world’s immensity

And in God’s mute infinity,

There is simplicity;

And sung as a melody

There is Felicity.’[[124]](#footnote-124)

Somehow, in spite of the loveless beginning of her life, she has found and held onto happiness; this is her crucial, typical poem of self, ‘tingling with vivacity’, as Eric’s depressed, tragic ‘husk’ poem is his. The attraction of this happiness for other people, in particular for my father Harry, is the source of the story told in Chapter 8 – their love affair, and Eric’s attempt to prevent it.

**Chapter 7**

**Emissions and omissions: Sartre’s *The Reprieve***

This chapter finds Eric’s translation of a great book soldiering on, still in print, but also acting as an outstanding example of a kind of vanishing: Bowdlerisation. The book, *The Reprieve* by Jean-Paul Sartre, is the middle volume of the trilogy usually known as *Roads to Freedom.* Its yawning omissions, required by the publisher, Hamish Hamilton, ruined much of the point of the book on its first English publication in 1947, and were quietly made good by Penguin Books, who bought the rights in 1963, and had the omitted passages translated by another hand.[[125]](#footnote-125) At the same time, Penguin altered some phrases they judged too foreign, toning down some of the salty Frenchness of Eric’s translation. The trilogy was never finished by Sartre, though a previously unpublished fourth volume has recently appeared.[[126]](#footnote-126)

1. **Censored strangeness**

Eric’s translations of *The Reprieve*, and the first volume in the trilogy, *The Age of Reason*, appeared in 1947, two years after their publication in France. The first striking thing about his translation of *The Reprieve* is another example of his preference for keeping some ‘foreignness’, against the trend of his time, as already noted. This is the opening of *The Reprieve* in the 1947 version. It is September 1938, Hitler has invaded Chechoslovakia, and Europe is waiting for war to be declared:

*Friday, September 23rd.*

*Sixteen-thirty o’clock in Berlin, fifteen-thirty o’clock in London. The hotel stood bleakly on its hill, a desolate, solemn edifice with an old gentleman inside it. At Angouleme, Marseilles, Ghent, and Dover, people thought: ‘What can he be doing? It’s past three o’clock, why doesn’t he come out?’… they waited, sickened by heat and dust and fear.*

The 1963 revision has:

*Four-thirty in the afternoon in Berlin, three-thirty in London.*

Following Sartre’s original French closely, Sutton opened the book with a ‘foreign’ way of stating the time. Not just foreign, but European, continental; plunging us straight into the minds of people on that continent, waiting minute by minute for the outcome of the diplomatic negotiations at Bad Godesberg – the desperate, timeless waiting which is the subject of the whole book. Something is lost by removing it, as Penguin decided to do. As Eric Griffiths puts it in his introduction to *Dante in English*: ‘Different responsibilities, different priorities, face a translator who works primarily for a monoglot or primarily for a bilingual audience’.[[127]](#footnote-127) It’s possible that Penguin were thinking of their audience, no longer assumed to be at least partially bilingual or cognizant of European languages, in making this and similar changes. Even if it reflects his time, when more people spoke some French, I admire Eric’s decision to be strange here; but there is something much stranger about this particular translation – important scenes were omitted. I quote this because it is a seminal example (appropriate word) of something being left out of a translation which changes the whole meaning of the chapter, if not of the entire book.

**ii. War as orgasm**

If you compare the 1947 edition of Sutton’s translation with the revised 1963 version, you find the following scene has been left out in the 1947 edition. It is about Charles, the boy with paralysed legs, and his nurse, Jeannine.

*He was stretched out with his hands behind his neck, feeling miserable. ‘We love our little doll’, he said. She shivered: ‘Yes’. She was frightened, just as she was every evening. ‘Yes, I do love you.’ Sometimes she said yes, sometimes no, but tonight she didn’t dare come out with a straight refusal. ‘Well then, we’ll give him his little petting, his little evening petting?’ She sighed, visibly ashamed – it was funny. ‘Not tonight,’ she said. He breathed heavily: ‘Poor little doll,’ he said, ‘He’s so restless, it would be good for him. Don’t you want to help him to sleep? No, you don’t? You know it always calms me down.’ She put on her matron’s face, the look she wore when she put him on a bedpan, her head stiffened up on her shoulders. She didn’t actually close her eyes but it seemed as though she wanted to see nothing, and underneath, her hands deftly unbuttoned him – skilful hands – and her face was so sad, it was very funny. Her hand slid in, soft as almond cream.* (Sartre, 1972, p. 59)

With the scene of the nurse masturbating Charles, Sartre is implying that the expected declaration of war is like an orgasm, a male orgasm in particular, actually the orgasm of a crippled male. Another quotation from two pages later makes this clear. The sentence is too long to quote in full. The italicised words, about Charles and his nurse, are of course omitted in the 1947 version:

‘…Chamberlain, Hitler and Schmitt awaited war in silence, and in a moment war would enter, his foot had swollen but in a moment he would wrench it out of his shoe, Maurice, seated on the bed, was tugging at his foot, in a moment Jacques would have finished drinking his soup, Odette would no longer hear that irritating little crackle of fireworks, the sizzle of rockets before they went off, in a moment suns would swirl upwards towards the ceiling, *her little doll, in a moment, a warm, copious discharge, smelling of absinthe, would flood his paralysed thighs*…: in that one moment…war…would enter clad in steel, the great stand-up war, the white men’s crazy war. In that one moment: it had exploded in Milan’s room, it was pouring out of all the windows, it surged into the Jagerschmitts’ abode, it prowled round the ramparts of Marrakesh, it breathed upon the sea…’ (p. 62)

The chapter ends with the diplomatic negotiations continuing, and Jeannine clearing up, after this moment in which the imagined war pours into so many small lives. ‘*Jeannine wiped her hands on a turkish towel, then she began to dry his thighs*. [These words were omitted in the 1947 edition.] Chamberlain said: ‘As regards the first clause, I have two objections’…’ This scene of war which both comes and doesn’t come is in chapter one, titled ’23 September 1938’; the rest of the book covers only four more days, and ends with the ‘reprieve’, the Munich agreement which removes the threat of war – though only temporarily.

The full meaning of Sartre’s use of Charles and his orgasm connects to Sartre’s attitudes to male and female, to sex, and to being and nothingness. When Sartre calls the war ‘the great stand-up war’, he is using Charles’s word for people who are not crippled – ‘stand-ups’; but in those words Sartre is also making a point about war, perhaps that war is mostly made by men, therefore that it is to do with erections, with maleness. Another, less anti-war interpretation is possible: the crippled man’s orgasm is like the ‘failed’ declaration of war, when the Czech prime minister responded to Hitler’s invasion by mobilising – this is the ‘important communication’ on the radio which so many of the characters are listening to – but the continuing negotations at Bad Godesberg, followed by the ones at Munich, put off the real declaration of war until September 1939, a year later. Having made that orgasmic point in chapter 1, the rest of the book could be seen as foreplay to the real war which started a year later. By leaving out the orgasm, a whole stratum of meaning is left out.

1. **Further omissions: war as shit, appeasement as vomiting**

This is not the only important scene that is omitted. Later in the book, in the chapter ‘Sunday, 25 September’ – two days later in the time of the book - Charles and some other stretcher-bound people are moved by train in a cattle-truck from one location to another. Due to a mix-up, men and women are put in together. Charles starts talking to the woman next to him, Catherine, an attractive blonde with a fur draped over her. They quickly become very close, and lie holding hands, with Charles promising to tell her about Plato, after he has compared their situation to the people watching shadows on a wall in the myth of the cave. Again all this is intercut with the diplomatic scenes. These two sentences appear side by side:

‘The council has unanimously approved the statement which Messieurs Edouard Daladier and Georges Bonnet propose to take to London for communication to the British Government.’

‘I thought so,’ said Charles to himself. ‘I want to shit.’

The nurse comes and offers the bedpan to them all: people begin to accept it, including Catherine. But Charles manages to overcome his urge. This is so feelingly described that it is possible to be absorbed in that moment and miss the obvious comparison between Charles’s situation and the political one.

The scene that is left out of the 1947 translation here makes this connection impossible to miss. The omitted scene, of half a page, can be found on p. 214 of the Penguin revised edition. It comes between Charles’s urge to shit and the appearance of the nurse with the bedpan. In the missing passage, Charles remembers Jeannine and the way she ‘slid the bedpan under him’, and sometimes held his penis ‘between her finger and thumb – he loved that’. He feels aroused now: he remembers her ‘almond cream hands’, the same words used earlier. By so clearly connecting this scene with the earlier scene of his orgasm, and its link to the war, Sartre connects the war more clearly with this scene too.

The intercutting with the diplomatic scenes goes on:

‘Charles found a hand and took it. The hand resisted, he drew it close to him, and squeezed it. A sick person. And there he was, compact and dry, a man delivered: he would look after her.

‘What is your name?’ he asked.

‘Well, read it,’ said Chamberlain impatiently.’ (Penguin edition, p. 216)

Sartre is comparing the continual postponement of the declaration of war to Charles’s overcoming of the urge to shit. It is a modern, and political, development of the technique used in a scene in *Madame Bovary,* in which Flaubert intercuts the flirtation of Emma and Rodolphe with the calling out of prizes for fertiliser and drainage at the agricultural show. The bedpan scene is strangely misunderstood by David Caute in his Introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of *The Reprieve.* He says of Charles, ‘Evacuated by train under gruesome conditions, mentally precocious yet physically dependent, rising to a ghastly copulation with another supine wreck, Charles is a bold and moving creation’ (Sartre, 1972, p. xvi). But there is no ‘ghastly copulation’. Charles and Catherine simply hold hands and touch each other’s faces. Caute may have been confused by Sartre’s technique of constant intercutting.

The coming, or not, of war and Charles’s bodily urges continue to be linked. During the next chapter, ‘Monday 26th September’, Charles is moved out of the train and separated from Catherine. A man dies on a nearby stretcher. ‘There’s going to be a war’, Charles says to the man next to him. ‘Five and a half feet or so above his head, it was war, tempest, outraged honour, patriotic duty: but on the floor, there was neither war nor peace: nothing but the misery and shame of the submen, stricken and laid upon their backs…’ He feels a qualm rise ‘from his stomach to his head’.

‘Madame!’ cried Charles. ‘Madame! Madame! Give me the pan – quick.’

Here he is! The thrusting crowd surged forward …He gripped his attaché case, brandished it, and shouted ‘Hurrah for peace!’ (Penguin edition, p. 260)

‘He’ is Neville Chamberlain. If the coming of war was compared to an orgasm, and then to the urge to shit, this one-sentence scene of vomiting (which was not censored) perhaps allows the interpretation that Chamberlain’s appeasement policy at Munich, and the applause with which it was greeted, were ‘sickening’. In 1945, the year the book was published, Sartre wrote a one-sentence summary of the book which supports this interpretation: ‘[It] aims to reinstate the disarray that overwhelmed so many people at the moment of the despicable reprieve of Munich’.[[128]](#footnote-128) Charles’s vomiting, intercut by Sartre with the very moment when Chamberlain triumphantly brandishes his ‘peace’ document, might easily be missed as a comment if the previous ‘emissions’ and their political meaning had also been missed, as they inevitably would be in the 1947 cut version.

1. **Responsibility for the cuts**

A letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* of 8 June 2001 from Nicholas Jacobs refers to Bowdlerisation as ‘the English disease’, and implicitly criticises Eric for the censorship in his translations of Sartre and Fallada. He refers to ‘the absurd bowdlerisation in Hans Fallada’s *Little Man, What Now?* (translated by Eric Sutton, 1933), where even the wiping of a baby’s bottom was suppressed.’ Jacobs then describes similar changes made in a translation of Erich Kastner’s novel *Fabian*, and adds: ‘The translations of those two books have been respectively redone and repaired. This is not the case with the translation of Sartre’s *Age of Reason* (Eric Sutton again) where abortion details are toned down or missing and a word like ‘sperm’ is simply not permitted.’

Fortunately some correspondence between the English publisher, Hamish Hamilton (known as Jamie), founder of Hamish Hamilton Ltd, and Blanche Knopf, the American publisher, illuminates the question of who was responsible for the cuts in the two novels by Sartre, and partially exonerates Eric. In a letter of 19 December 1945 Jamie says he has read a review of the first of the trilogy, *L’Age du raison*, by Raymond Mortimer which suggests it is ‘almost untranslatable in view of the number of outspoken passages’; but on 10 Jan 1946 he reports that he has conferred with Eric, ‘who said he anticipated no difficulty in translating’ the book ‘in such a way as to avoid trouble with the censors or their peacetime equivalent’. Eric was therefore being requested by his publisher to avoid trouble with the censors when translating the book, amounting to a license to make cuts. [[129]](#footnote-129)

Things did not go smoothly. First, Eric had a heart attack. He had completed one-third of the book in typescript ‘and the remaining two-thirds is in rough handwritten draft, which none but himself can decipher’ (Jamie Hamilton to Blanche Knopf, 19 February 1946). (He took six weeks off, but then recovered enough to continue work on the book.)[[130]](#footnote-130) Further, Jamie has seen the first third and is ‘uneasy about some of the scenes, and whether [Eric] has been as successful as he thinks in skating over thin ice’. In early September the translation is finished and reaches Blanche. On 3 Sept 1946 Blanche writes to Jamie to say she has seen the translation and does not like it. On 12 Sept she writes that her expert adviser has told her ‘The whole tone is somewhat less crude than the original’. She continues ‘This is one of my major objections – the fact that Sutton has toned the whole book down so enormously…I feel strongly, however, that the reasons for toning it down for England was because of censorship and does not apply to the same degree here’.

On 17 September 1946 Jamie suggests that, with her expert, she makes her own revisions, and that Eric has agreed to this. His name would still appear as the only translator. Blanche accepts this and chooses Justin O’Brien to do the anonymous repair work. She makes it clear on 26 November 1946 that ‘the translation will read quite differently from the English version as…we are reinstating some of the original Sartre which was (1) either left out, or (2) emasculated by virtue of necessity for the British market.’ Jamie repeats his assurance that Eric has agreed, and adds: ‘I am not in a position to speak on behalf of Sartre, but I am quite sure that he will be far more displeased with us for emasculating certain passages than with you for retaining them’ (Jamie Hamilton to Blanche Knopf, 2 December 1946).

‘Emasculating’ would be a good word to describe the cuts I have identified in the second book in the trilogy, *The Reprieve*. The existing correspondence at Texas suggests that Blanche wanted to do the same job on that book as on the first volume, by getting the missing passages translated and reinstated, as well as removing ‘Britticisms’ for the American market. But for reasons that are not clear, Knopf published Eric’s translation of *The Reprieve* unamended. The perceptive jacket copy of that edition suggests the regret Blanche must have felt in leaving out so many other parallels intended by Sartre: ‘Each chapter forms a tangle of scenes, appropriate to the feverish moment in history, the place and characters changing without warning in mid-paragraph or even mid-sentence. This technique reaches its high point and achieves its justification at the end of the novel when the rape of Czechoslovakia finds a running parallel in the rape of an innocent student in Paris.’[[131]](#footnote-131) The sex between Mathieu and Ivich in that scene is not quite a rape; she is willingly in bed with someone she decides she hates. But ‘running parallels’ is a good description of Sartre’s method, so much more obvious in the uncut version of the book.

1. **Michael Rubinstein’s letter**

When Penguin made their ‘restored’ version in 1962-3, the missing passages were translated by Pamela Tomlinson. Penguin consulted a lawyer, Michael Rubinstein, about whether they would be likely to be prosecuted for obscenity if the missing passages were restored. He had helped them in the ‘Lady Chatterley’ trial in 1959-1960, when a series of witnesses convinced the jury that Lawrence’s novel had literary merit and therefore should be allowed to be published under the new Obscene Publications Act, 1959. Rubinstein’s reply included these words:

‘I must say that this book has considerable literary (and probably other) merit and that all of the passages referring to ‘natural functions’ in the broadest sense are consistent with the whole fabric of the book as a diary of confused and interwoven lives during an historical period of concentrated events and I have no doubt at all that an expert witness would be prepared to give evidence that these passages are essential in the context of the book, taken as a whole, for their significance symbolically as well as for the purposes of realism (I do not know how to refer to existentialism in this context)’ (Letter from Michael Rubinstein to Charles Clarke, 1 February 1962).[[132]](#footnote-132)

Sartre himself commented on these passages in an interview with Christian Grisoli in 1945 (*The Last Chance: Roads of Freedom IV,* pp. 14-21)*.*  When *The Reprieve* first appeared, in the French edition of 1945, Charles’s relationship with Jeannine was condemned as ‘gratuitous obscenity’. Sartre said in the interview: ‘I think there is something very important and profound here, like a defense mechanism, a defiance. A man is his project, his future. Charles isn’t a man, because he is the future of other people. He’s an object, a potted plant. …That’s why he tries to establish relationships with the stand-ups …that will reduce them to the level of instruments, humiliating relations, relations from below.’ Of the bedpan scene he said: ‘The right-thinking have had their stomachs turned by the scene where the patients are relieving themselves. And yet, I think that in this world, where natural needs rule, Charles’ attempt to defeat his body, to overcome his needs, is a moving attempt to become human.’ I have interpreted the cut passages as direct comments on the expectation of war, the manoeuvres of the politicians, and appeasement. Rubinstein’s brilliant letter suggests that the relationship of these passages, and Sartre’s comments, to existentialism should also be explored.

1. **Eric and Sartre’s philosophy**

My aim here is to see how Eric reacted to the philosophy behind the novels he was translating. He wrote a letter to *Time and Tide* in April 1947 claiming to be ‘baffled’ by Existentialism and its concepts:

‘WHAT IS EXISTENTIALISM?

SIR: I have long been anxious to discover the meaning of Existentialism, and read with eager anticipation the article by Mr Dasien in your issue of April 12th. But I find in it the usual farrago of metaphor and paraphrase, and remain as baffled as before.

I used to teach philosophy at Oxford: my understanding is sound: and I translated Sartre’s *Age of Reason.* So I ought to know what Existentialism is. But I don’t. Will someone tell me?

I am, etc., ERIC SUTTON

United University Club, 1 Suffolk St, SW1.’

This led to a correspondence, including letters from Alex Dasien (whose article Eric had found baffling) and others. Dasien responded with a sympathetic letter, saying that Sartre means by Existentialism ‘that existence is the ultimate reality, that it is not conditioned by God or Nature working to some end or by the laws of matter. Man is free to will his own destiny and is responsible for it. Such a philosophy is well named Existentialism! It is existence existing in a universal vacuum.’ Eric’s comments on Sartre in his letters to Felicity show him aware of the effect existentialism might have on people’s lives, and place him in that post-war moment when, it seemed, received values and ways of thinking were breaking up, religion disappearing, and – as Eric saw it – a descent into triviality was the result.

I found an article by Austin Gill in the *Listener*, 10 October 1946, about the philosophy of Sartre, as a newspaper cutting among my mother’s papers. Given its date – the time when Eric was working on the translation of Sartre’s two novels, though before his letter quoted above – I think it likely that he cut this article out and kept it. Gill describes the Existentialist philosopher’s concern as ‘primarily with the individual human consciousness coming into existence in a world of existences, engaged actively through its body in a particular situation, and giving to the world its meaning, conferring essences’. He goes on: ‘The philosopher of existence, therefore, addresses his enquiries directly to human experience as the individual man lives it.’ The human experience of Eric Sutton, as he lived it, as newly seen through his letters, and the human experience of my mother as seen through the evidence of her memoir, have been my primary subjects so far in this thesis. I am not a philosopher of existence, but a memoirist; but Sartre’s philosophy might well prove useful in providing another justification of memoir as a genre, if one was needed.

And what of ‘the Other’? (This is how Austin Gill begins one of his paragraphs – ‘Now what about my relationship with other people, with ‘the Other’?’) Gill gives two definitions of the Sartrean Other. The first includes the words ‘The Other is a set of known facts making up the object I call a person…an object whose behaviour I can make use of.’ The second defines the Other as ‘something else…I am aware of the Other having, or being, his own freedom…The existence of the Other…is a continual threat to my freedom, and may interfere with it, ensnare it and partly paralyse it.’ Eric and my mother were each other’s Other. In the next chapter I will be studying among other things the conflicts between their freedoms, and the question of whether Eric’s freedom ‘interfered with, ensnared and partly paralysed’ that of my mother. Sartre’s own autobiography contains cruel words about fathers (‘There is no good father, that’s the rule. Don’t lay blame on men, but on the bond of paternity which is rotten’: quoted in Harvey, *Search for a Father: Sartre, Paternity and the Questions of Ethics*, p. 30). It seems at first from the correspondence that Eric was a difficult and possessive father, who valued my mother as a companion, was very unwilling to let her go and several times tried to prevent her marriage to my father. But is this the right conclusion to draw?

***Felicity aged about 17***



***Harry in uniform (having removed his glasses, which he always wore)***



**Chapter 8**

**‘The events of 1940’**

1. **Introduction**

The words ‘the events of 1940’ come from a letter from Eric to Felicity in October 1942. Harry has been sent abroad with his regiment in September, and Eric has asked how things are between herself and Harry. She must have replied that she had broken it off – true, as I have her letters breaking it off. (The breaking off in 1942 was a slow and agonizing process, but the most important letter was on 22 April.) Eric replies, referring to the earlier breaking off in 1940: ‘I must say quite frankly I am glad you have taken this decision…The events of 1940 made it plain to me how conceited and selfish he was, and then, when he thought himself injured because I, in my anxiety for your sake, asked you to postpone marriage for 3 months, he revenged himself on you – by breaking off the engagement, and writing you such a letter as makes me shudder (for his own credit) to this day. It was a bad act, and a dreadful letter – humanly speaking, unpardonable. …Felicity, he does not love you as a man loves a woman he means to marry. I will add that it is safe to say that no man who loves a woman in this way would have her other than she is … Harry’s attempts to subvert your religion are not merely in the grossest bad taste, but the last word of arrogance. He wanted to transform you into an admiring adjunct of himself.’ And he adds: ‘You are Harry’s superior, morally and intellectually: in time you would have come to realise this, and that is not a good thing for a woman to have to do. …When you write of him accepting you, my blood boils!’ For Eric, ‘the events of 1940’ means Harry’s arrogant behaviour leading up to the bad letter and the broken engagement. For me the phrase covers that crisis as well. I do not have the ‘dreadful, unpardonable’ letter, but I would like to see if I can work out from the letters I do have what went wrong, and now much was Eric’s doing.

I am writing about the major breaking-off in 1940; but Harry and Felicity soon got back together again, as soon as Felicity was in Leamington Spa at her war job, and out of Eric’s orbit. The breaking-off in 1942 was even more major, and lasted until they re-met in 1948 at a wedding; Felicity was reclaimed by Harry, and they married in December 1948. So their life before marriage, and before I was born in 1949, is like a play in several acts. Here, I concentrate on the earliest acts, which involve Eric. In the first year, colour comes into my father’s ‘grey’ life, and the darkness of winter in Oxford leads on to the summer colours of youth and sun and happiness. By the end of 1939, the first Christmas of the war, darkness has returned and the letters tail off for a time.

1. **1939: The start of the affair**

They first met on 20 January 1939. She was 17 (her birthday had been on 12th January), and had started studying art at the Chelsea Polytechnic in 1938. She was beautiful (‘like a Renoir model’ is something people say about her; someone else said she looked like the actress Wendy Hiller). He was 21, a ‘little grey man’, as he always described himself as having been before he met her.

*I went down to Sparsholt to stay with Joan. Before I left London Bill Armstrong had bagged me for his 21st birthday, going to dinner at the George and a play after. Naturally, I said I must include Joan in the invitation. ‘Alright, I’ll try and get someone to make a fourth, then.’ I imagined another Bill Armstrong. A spotty medical student deep in Liver or Kidney complaints, or embarrassing explanations of impotency. Oh, well.*

*I sat on the floor in Bill’s room in Tom Quad trying to enjoy smoking a black oval cigarette which would not fit into my cigarette holder. I had on the wine-coloured dress I had made, which had a zip down the front to the hem and had a pale blue velvet tie round the neck. Joan was just wearing clothes. Bill was telling us about the Bishop of Chester who was called Fisher, it was his eldest son who was coming to join us to make a fourth. (By a curious chance it was his 21st birthday too.) He was very ‘brainy’ and was a Greats Scholar and expected to get a First. I imagined a holier than thou, silent, dedicated student.*

*‘This is Harry Fisher’ Bill said, opening the door. I hadn’t heard the knock. A slight, dark-haired, bespectacled young man came in with his hands in his pockets. I reached up to shake hands with him (I didn’t rise to my feet because I had a pain) in a very nonchalant manner. The eyes were bright and quizzical behind the spectacles.*

When telling this story in later life, my mother used to say she was lying, not sitting, on the floor. Also, it was not just a pain, but a period pain that she had. The wine-coloured dress (surely it was red) means more with this knowledge. It seems like an emblem of femininity. Schiaparelli had promoted the use of zips in fashionable clothes in 1933; so it was also modish, if not completely new. The zip also seems almost too symbolic, not only of her Catholic upbringing and carefully guarded sexuality, but of her reckless character, her teasing flirtatiousness, and her openness to love – though it was Harry who loved first and most demandingly.

After the outing at the George, Harry rings up Joan’s family and is asked over to tea.

*We sat on the floor by the fire after tea and my cigarette holder, of which I was immensely proud, broke in two. ‘I know a chap in Oxford who could mend that’ – and Harry Fisher took down my address, writing it on his shirt cuff there and then.*

*Very soon, after term had started at Chelsea Art School, a small packet arrived through the door of 46, Beaufort Mansions. In it the broken holder mended and a letter inviting me to a dinner and the Ballet one Saturday quite soon.*

I have her first letter to him, dated 24 January 1939, in reply to the one enclosing the mended cigarette holder. They have been for a walk together, along with a friend of Harry’s. ‘Dear Harry, I liked your letter. Thank you for it. I like to hear you talk. And thank you for taking so much trouble about my cigarette holder. I, too, love writing letters. Happiness is so simple, if it is just walking over the hills into the sun with two other happy people. Yet that was happiness, wasn’t it? Your letter did make me laugh, and I shall keep it to make me laugh some other time when I need to laugh. As to the shortness of our happiness, Rupert Brooke said that ‘nothing remains’. And yet, you know, it leaves a warmth behind which lasts a long time, until it is killed by terrible things, or made to live again with more happiness. …You know, I hardly ever get such letters as yours. I wish I had been born otherwise than I was and then I should have gone to Oxford (Ch.Ch. of course).’ [[133]](#footnote-133)

For the next stage of their falling in love I have both her memoir account, and his amazed letter to himself. *Jenny lent me her best dress, which was navy silk with white dots and a white lace collar. Harry arrived to call for me and the usual glass of sherry was drunk. Eric and Jenny were plainly intrigued by this bright-eyed young man.* [Eric’s recollection that he first met Harry in December 1939 is wrong, if we believe this.] …*The ballet, a matinee, included ‘Les Patineurs’ and ‘Le Tricorne’. …. Picasso’s backdrop set the scene. …Harry called for me at the Art School one winter afternoon and we walked round the corner of Manresa Road to Carlisle Studios.* She has already described the studio in her memoir. *Biddy and I and the two Wedgwood girls and a student called Joan Engelbach rented (at 2s a week each) a tiny studio next door to, and up some steps from 6 Carlisle Studios.* [I assume she means 6, Carlyle Studios where Eric and Peggy used to live.] *We had a Tortoise stove that worked, two very large windows and a mattress which we manhandled all the way from Beaufort Mansions. We did do some painting there, but mostly the little studio was used as a rendezvous by the Wedgwood sisters with various of their followers, of which they had many, most of them Swedish.*

This time it was her rendezvous. *We had some tea, boiling a kettle on the Tortoise stove. Biddy had bought some buns. The others all talked to Harry as if he was a Bishop’s son, making very correct remarks. The winter evening closed in, and soon the others drifted away to their homes or to evening classes. It was very nearly quite dark; I said that we had better walk along to Beaufort Street. I forget what the plan was for the evening. We stood in the middle of the darkening room waiting, waiting for the courage for that first kiss which was like the meeting of two burning stars in the night sky, and bells rang in my ears so loud I felt deafened and quite dumb. Nothing like this had ever moved me so strongly before, and I walked along the King’s Road in a state of Euphoria which did not dim until nine years later, in 1948, when I married Harry in the Holy Redeemer Church, Cheyne Row.* At the moment she is writing this, for the family, in her memoir, aged 79 to 80, the unhappiness and breakings-off of 1940 and 1942 have dwindled to insignificance. There is also an acid hint that once she was married, the Euphoria disappeared; as was perhaps only right. She ends her memoir in 1948, just after her marriage, with the words *life, real life, began in earnest*.

Harry wrote, for himself, probably that same day – dating it, ‘March 16 1939’: ‘If it was in me to be in love, I should be in love with Felicity. She means more to me than any other girl ever has. I am happier being with her than I have been for a long time – she is incredibly young, and innocent, but she has something about her which I have never found elsewhere. She is free and unbound, and when I am with her she unbinds me and looses me from my stiffness and politeness and dignity. …I waited for hours outside the Chelsea Polytechnic in the rain, and when she came we went up to her studio and had tea with 3 other girls – Biddy…and ?Barbara and Joan. Sticky at first till I fell off a stool. Then they went and we washed up, and then sat by the stove as it got gradually darker and darker. We talked about – goodness knows what. We were very close to each other and we laughed and were very happy. We had one serious bit of argument about marriage – general and impersonal (?on my side). Her hair – she made me pull it. Then everything she is – brilliant, beautiful, sweet, young. Then she had to go. It [was] now quite dark. She let me kiss her. We went to her home for a minute: we walked through the wiggly streets and sang….she draws and paints most beautifully. She is more alive than anyone I know. All the dull and querulous part of me goes when I’m with her. God, she’s lovely.’

Felicity’s days at the art school – *It was such bliss to be young and studying ART* – continue to be *punctuated by visits to London by Harry Fisher.* In June, they went for a walk in a beechwood. She writes: ‘London is looking most lovely, but not so lovely as that Beechwood. Do you know, I have been told I am not fit to be alive. Think – when I do, it terrifies me and I feel like a criminal who has committed such a multitude of sins that he is not fit to meet man or God – and yet I love living; and even if I have done nothing magnificent by the time I die, at least I shall have lived. O Harry we had a glorious day. I shall never forget it. How short and sharp my sentences are. I shall reform this minute…How glorious if you had left me stuck in that tree. [She was very good at climbing trees and did it a lot.] Then five years hence you could say about me ‘O the last time I saw her she was stuck in a tree, and I guess she’s still there.’ And you’d go and look, maybe, and call up an Echo, and it would be I who answered you instead. On a still day, that Echo calls back three times. We should not have gone to look for it. But we did. What does Enigmatic mean? Tell me if this is too long. Love, Felicity.’

The letters gleam with offhand literary references, as well as colours and clothes. Asking him to come to dinner before a play, she says ‘Won’t you be dead with tiredness by the time you get home for breakfast? [He probably drove from Oxford in his battered old car, Gehu.] You will have to sleep all that day and get up for dinner; then you will grow to be like that and you will be ‘the man who was different’ – which sounds like a Chesterton or Belloc short story. …I shall not make a tie for Mr Monk [her art teacher] out of my cherry-red stuff because he has got one that colour already. ‘He came and found the door was shut,/He tried to turn the handle – But.’ …I shall see you soon, shan’t I? Have you seen a swallow yet? Here comes the swallow. Love, F.’ ‘Here comes the swallow’ is a quotation from an anonymous ancient Greek poem, no. 130 in the *Oxford Book of Greek Verse*, probably quoted by Harry. Her seemingly random quote from Lewis Carroll may be about her slight flirtation with Mr Monk – *Mr Monk came in and we both* [she and Biddy] *fell madly in love with him straight away –* which has come to nothing as he already has a tie that colour. (Geoffrey Monk did a *stunt with a chair* at the Christmas party, *into which he imagined a ‘Beautiful Girl – you know the kind I mean’, using his hands, indeed his whole body, to describe her attributes.*) But sometimes the references seem genuinely random, random because they are part of life. ‘Have you ever read ‘Dusty Answer’? You have a large heart, like clover leaves. I have been reading Matthew Arnold – simply cannot begin another page.’

Harry asks her to come and stay with his family in the summer holidays, at Stowey Court, Minehead. Originally a holiday home, it became the home of Harry’s mother Rosamund’s family when her father, A.E.W.Forman, a master at Repton School, died young aged 54, and Rosamund’s mother moved her whole large family of 11 children to live there. Harry’s five younger brothers will be there, along with several aunts. An invitation from Rosamund herself is required by Eric: ‘Please tell her thank you from me for asking me and that I am very excited and have bought myself a bright yellow shirt to celebrate; and have you ever read ‘Richard Yea and Nay’ by Maurice Hewlett?...Love Felicity.’ (‘Dusty Answer’, ‘Yea and Nay’? The titles she quotes are flirtatious, or undecided, or moving in the direction of ‘Yea’.) Once the invitation has come, as a harbinger of the yellow shirt with herself inside it, she sends a postcard to Stowey Court (as he is there already) with the time of her train: a painting by Gwen John called ‘Orange Jacket’. Eric, more practically, hearing that her mackintosh is stained, at first says ‘a stained mackintosh does not matter in the least by the seaside – indeed it is rather the thing.’ But he changes his mind. ‘Jenny and I decided that tho’ old Burberries were indeed distinguished, in this case the distinction was such as to attract undue attention – say – in church. So we sent you another, which you should have received this morning with due blessings.’

But the sun shone. She is met at Taunton by Harry, *his eyes shining*… *I was wearing a large straw hat, and a green dress I had made from curtain material, with a wide white collar. …One day Harry borrowed his mother’s Morris and drove us up the North Hill where a wonderful view of the coast and hills was laid out before us. He was very loving, gentle and funny too. But seemed to think we should be engaged immediately and married very soon after that. He was obviously disturbed by the threat of the coming war, as we all were, and wanted to ‘bag’ me before anything or anyone else did. I had to think hard, and the idea of leaving Eric, at that moment in my life, was more than I could contemplate. I did say something boring like ‘I should get to know you better, and you me.’ We didn’t cry but enjoyed the afternoon and promised to see each other as much as possible.*

Harry’s draft letter to his friend Pat Stewart shows him full of young sexuality, and gleefully not telling Pat much about Felicity. ’15 Aug. Dear Pat, I hope you don’t mind a rather comatose burble. I have overbaked myself consistently ever since the sun started shining (which was last Thursday), and as Felicity (who has been staying since Thursday) has done the same and is in consequence asleep I need a gentle and unenergetic occupation. Life is really rather good: I have made the momentous discovery that even second year existence is tolerable and even pleasant when one has something to look forward to; and I hope that to have something delicious to look back to will also make it tolerable and even pleasant as well. Of course neither of those is really what makes life rather good; but with the artistry of the true master of the prose style I delay my climax. However there does not seem to be [new page] very much to the climax when it does come, except that it has been a week of ‘ups’ good enough to outweigh the most abysmal and soul-destroying of Downs that could possibly happen.’ How unlike Felicity’s letters – a boring sentence to enable the ‘delayed climax’ joke.

Harry went on to a reading holiday at a farm in Cornwall. Felicity went to Doit and Geoffrey Garratt’s at Bishopsteignton, where trees were being chopped down for firewood, a paddock being converted to grow potatoes, and hens imported to the tennis court ‘because of the coming catastrophe’. Then, by train, to Bill Armstrong and his family at the Old Rectory, Queen Camel. Bill was Doit’s nephew; his father was a judge. She was at the Armstrongs’ when the announcement of war came. *On the 3rd of September, which if I remember rightly was a Sunday, Bill and I were up the enormous beech tree in the garden. The doors of the drawing-room, and the windows, were all wide open. The Judge had turned on the wireless rather loudly and we heard the announcement, introduced by Alvar Liddell, spoken by Chamberlain, that war had been declared against Germany. The ‘piece of paper’, by which Neville Chamberlain and this country had been hoodwinked the previous year, was less good to anyone than a used up lavatory roll.*

*…We were washing homegrown lettuces in the kitchen at about six o’clock that very evening when a figure pushing a bicycle was seen by me to pass the kitchen window. Harry had bicycled the 22 miles from Taunton to Queen Camel to see me, having heard the dread news with his family at Minehead. Mrs Armstrong tried hard not to look put out, but did not succeed. …Harry bicycled back to Minehead the next morning leaving me with the strong understanding that whatever came to pass he would see me as often as possible.* This was his intention; but her surviving letters suggest it was not hers, and Bill was still in play. She wote to Harry on 26 August: ‘My poor dear Harry, alone and working in Cornwall…I wish I was there with you to undepress you and to stare at the white faces of the hydrangeas in the dark. …We [i.e. she and Bill] have read the tragic story of Undine together and loved it. How faithless was the knight Hildebrand and how constant and beautiful was Undine. …Yesterday we walked to Camelot Castle, taking figs and apples and a coconut. We pierced the nut and drank the milk and smashed the nut on the rock of the great castle and ate it – what we could not eat we threw down the hillside for Lancelot and Galahad to pick up on the ends of their lances. It pricketh me sore that you should be alone and palely loitering, and it doth me repent that I cannot be there to blow away your depression and misery. But I cannot, dear – so that is that, and that is the end of this letter.’

She wrote to Harry on 2 September, the day before war was declared, angry because he had called her a ‘little bitch’ because of something she has told Roxy, her friend from the convent. ‘And when I see you again, which I am sure to sometime, you must be as calm as a mountain pool and remember fully that I do not love you and if you kiss me that that is not right or fair to either you or me. …I have never been told, but I know it, like knowing how to hold a soup spoon.’ Misleadingly, her memoir says the Art School was closed, and implies that she was sent to stay with Eve, her cousin by marriage, in Wiveliscombe in about September 1939, *until I was old enough (i.e. 18 years old) to take up some post in which to serve my country.*  She was 18 in January 1940, but in fact, she did not go to Eve’s until June 1940. I wonder if the way her memoirs skate over this period is a way of avoiding saying, even to herself, that there was anything serious about the relationship with Bill.

Letters from Eric show that she went back to Doit and Geoffrey’s for several months, possibly till Christmas. In the new year she did go back to Chelsea Art School, which had not closed but relocated. A sympathetic letter from Eric on 11 October, saying she can make up her own mind who to marry when she is 18, is my last one from that year. ‘My dear, you have been so much in my mind these last few days – and do you know, before you wrote to me, your mother’s presence, never very far away, had seemed curiously near.’ After this mysterious letter (who was she thinking of marrying? Bill?) there is a gap in the letters until January 1940. Darkness closes in again, the darkness of the first winter of the war.

1. **The engagement**

My letters from Felicity to Harry begin again in January, with plans for an outing to celebrate both their birthdays, her 18th, his 22nd, on January the 12th and 20th. He certainly wanted their love affair to begin all over again, though she continues to sound *insouciant*, and not quite so happy as before. He takes her to dinner at Fulham Palace, where his parents are now living, as Geoffrey has been elevated to Bishop of London. ‘Dear Harry, I loved my yesterday, and thank you for it …I am sorry if I was a depressing companion yesterday. Really and truly I am Blissfully Happy and nothing matters at all, or I pretend it doesn’t.’ Harry is at the Officer Cadet Training Unit in Colchester, having joined up on 15 September 1939. Eric is working at the Ministry of Economic Warfare, known to her as the Blockade Department. Jenny has joined the Wrens. Felicity is having ‘Teas’ at 46 Beaufort Mansions, before Eric comes home from the office. ‘He likes to be a hermit when he comes home at night. …I made some particularly good soup the other night. Dear H. Don’t get vanished into a heap of ashes, will you? [A reference to a fire at the Colchester Barracks.] Hardly anyone I know makyth me laugh so easily as you.’

Harry left OCTU on 9 February 1940 with a commission in the 17th Leicestershire Regiment, to go to the Barracks at Glen Parva, Wigton, for a few months until the formation of a new Battalion, the 7th Battalion, in July. Bill’s sister, Yolande, comes to see Felicity and makes her cry. A letter of 4 April 1940 suggests that Harry has told her to write to Bill breaking it off. ‘Dear sweet H….I’ve written. I sent it off yesterday. ‘Twas mighty difficult to write. …I laugh whenever I think of you (sometimes out loud and people think me silly (or mad)), and it is so good to laugh… O Harry, I did pray so hard that I might be doing the Right Thing. God and you and, most important, myself, have convinced me that I am. Why did God make me? Catechism says he made me ‘to know Him and love Him in this world and be happy with Him forever in the next’. Seems to me He made me to be a constant source of wretchedness for other people. [Bill?] But he made me very well. Eric is reading Aristotle again. One of his few recreations is to sit and read my Shakespeare.’

Then comes Eric’s letter of 29 April. ‘Felicity has told me about your proposal of marriage.’ He has sensible doubts and a warning. ‘Marriage is almost fatal to a young officer’s chance of making the best of himself. Moreover, how would you live? Do you expect Felicity – you must not mind my speaking plain – to share a small lodging in a provincial garrison town? I am very fond of my daughter, and rather proud of her. She is something of an artist. Furthermore, while she has an affectionate nature, it is (as with her mother, whom she is very like) backed by a resource of clear, even hard, common sense: and unless you could help her make the best of herself (which, after all, is the duty of all of us here below), you might find yourself up against something rather formidable later on.’ He writes again the next day. ‘…in order not to miss marriage to Felicity, you are prepared, in case you do not come back, to subject her to the risk of being left a widow at 18, possibly with a child, - remember, she is a Catholic, and there is for her no avoidance of childbirth. Surely, on reflection, you don’t think this is fair?’

There is an impasse. Felicity is sent away for a weekend to an address in Bucks, where she writes a short postcard from among the bluebells. ‘The cuckoo wakes me in the mornings and the sun shines down so warm and I am dressed in green. A hunter clad in green. I’ve been walking in the woods among the bluebells the bluebells Love F.’ No full stop – an endless ecstasy. Another letter sends as an afterthought (after ‘I must …go and peel the potatoes’) her poem about them:

‘Amazed she stood

Watching the bluebells in the wood.

And their silence and their secrecy

Fell around her as softly as the night.

And she felt as swallows feel in flight,

So near to earth and yet so near to God.’

She is sent away again (‘like a horribly precious Victorian vase’, 22 May 1940) to stay with Norah Cundall, Nicolette’s godmother, near Dorking. A suggestion of acceptance with a delay is in the offing. On 26 May Eric in a letter to Harry suggests a delay of a year and a half. A passionate, incomplete letter from Harry to Felicity (probably never sent) is furious. ‘Do you realise exactly what the position is? You have to choose now, between Eric and me, between your past and your future – he calls you one way and I call you the other – if you go his way, you are denying your future, you are going back into something which is past and over, you are returning to your childhood and refusing the joys and comforts which can only come to adult people. My darling a year and a half in these days is eternity – to put us off for a year and a half is equivalent to refusing us permission ever to marry.’

Harry explains movingly to his mother why he cannot wait. ‘She is religious, and she has got faith; but it is open to reason – she recognises my position and is not troubled by it, her religion (perhaps because she is an R.C.) is not the obtrusive religiosity which irks me, and her faith is not ‘simple’, not a shutting of the eyes, but rather a trusting attitude to life which provides part of the attraction for me – it is at the bottom of her gift for infectious happiness, and in a way makes up to me for the trust in life which I have lost. …With her I can be happy: that is why I want to marry her rather than a Socratic Oxford bluestocking who would be exactly like me in outlook…F has got the mental guns for me – I have no fear on that score…I do want to marry her soon…I am so desperately afraid that if we wait one of us will be killed, or (if not that) after the war we shall be different people…Anything may happen, and I want to have the right to protect her, I want to snatch something of love and companionship before the hurricane comes upon us and sweeps us away – to put things at their worst. Look after her.’

Felicity writes from Norah’s with the answer. ‘I forget everything about bloody wars and things here because it is all so lovely and the cuckoo shouts all day…and the woods are misty with bluebells… Darling I know with a great and Godly know that it would not be a Good Thing to marry you now or very soon. But 18 months is hundreds of years. Couldn’t it be Nine?’ Harry writes to Eric asking for a wait of 9 months instead of 18. Eric writes on 6 June ‘I agree to your dates, though your arithmetic appears to be as bad as mine, and your nine months appear to be seven. [They are planning to marry in January 1941.] However, I agree.’ Felicity is now being sent to Eve’s at Wiveliscombe; she writes to Harry just before 7 June (when she went): ‘Darling, my dearest, This is a v. short note because I have had too much wine to drink because I have been celebrating O darling darling – just darling – I love you and I wish you could see me in my Spanish shawl which Norah gave me to wear for you. c/o Mrs Henry Kitchin, Old Withycombe, Wiveliscombe, Somerset… I am going to marry you and I needn’t be cautious any more nor restraining But lovely – And don’t worry darling about anything any time, Goodby, Yr loving yr loving Felicity.’

1. **The summer at Eve’s**

Eve was married to (though separated from) Felicity’s cousin Harry Kitchin. The pithy description of her in the memoir reads: *Eve was in the midst of writing a book about John Donne and I had to listen to a great deal of talk about it, and to accept the fact that she was having an affair with a man, a psychiatrist who had been ‘treating’ her, called Dilston Radcliffe (silly name, I thought).* It is hard to tear out passages to quote from Felicity’s ecstatic but practical letters to Harry from Eve’s, and hard to concentrate on ones that move on the ‘story’ of their love, instead of the others: the train journey down to Taunton and all the people and what they said to her, and how she did not mention that she had got engaged the night before; her sunbathing in the linhay (an old sheep shelter) with nothing on but her silver cross, and finding ‘I never knew I had so many arms and legs’; her descriptions of Eve and Eve’s house; her two nights out dancing with some Army people when she came home at 5 in the morning, and ‘I could not get in so I slept in the barn on the hay and walked in for breakfast in my party dress’, her many drawings, and much else. She herself put their love in perspective: ‘…And also I meant to say that I loved your last letter and do not feel half worthy of it. God knows, I feel v. small and insignificant in the presence of All that is happening in the World at this Moment’. In the same letter she wishes she had known how she ‘wasted herself and the lavishness of her spirit on Bill’ the summer before, and is sorry that she hurt Harry then. ‘But that is no good – looking back. …That’s why I must see you soon or I shall burst. Have you ever read Thomas Traherne’s ‘Poems of Felicity’? If you ever see them do. It is ecstatic poetry but never didactic like friend Walt Whitman. This is tomorrow, if such a time exists…’ Her own letters are, in a way, ‘poems of Felicity’. It is quite a wrench to leave her letter and read the next one from Eric to Harry, saying that Felicity is ‘what is called “in love”’, and regarding all possessive affection as an ‘intrusion’.

‘June 1940. O frabjous day! Bulloo belay – I got a letter from my darling. Felicity Miles Kitchin Sutton jubilantly accepts Henry Arthur Piers Fisher’s invitation for a wedding January the twelfth 1940 [Piers a mistake for Pears – 1940 a mistake for 1941]. …I expect you will often be annoyed with me because I am very pert sometimes and intolerably conceited. But darling try and remember that everything I do I endeavour to do as well as I possibly can, for Doing is Living and I love living and I love to do all things well. I hope that I will be patient!’

‘I know I must be married in my church, for if I was married in your church it would be like not being married at all! – My dear Eric has just rung up and he is rather put out that you have not written to him yet. You know things like that irk him considerably…I cannot bear the crack of doom instead of Bow Bells.’

‘Darling I do so want to talk to you long and lovingly about you and men in particular. Mundane is a good word. But, my heart, table linen and furniture aren’t in the least sordid but extremely clean and interesting. … I am so frightened, love, about buying a ring… But, you know, I don’t like diamonds nor things that wink too much at all… My tastes in jewels are very Bohemian, I wish it could be an elephants’ hair ring.’

‘(And what is he like? O he is just like me, but he plays the piano instead of drawing pictures.)’

Eric to Harry: ‘It is not possible for Felicity to travel from Taunton to Leicester and back, under present conditions. …Until January next, I am responsible for Felicity’s safety and well-being, and I will not allow it. …I would be happier if I thought you were thinking for Felicity, as well as of her.’ She would have to change at Bristol, which is being bombed. ‘Hence my refusal, which is absolute.’

‘Dear sweet amore are you a Captain yet? Do I address you correctly? Can you never come and see me?’

*Harry came for some leave to Eve’s. He slept in the linhay during those hot hot July nights. We had some marvellous walks and bicycle rides and cooled our feet in dark streams. He was loving and kind and amused Eve very much. He played her piano much better than she did. …France ‘Fell’.*

Eric to Felicity: ‘Harry came to see me [4 August] and we had a v. friendly talk. As your guardian, I was bound to ask him what income you propose to marry on…This is, for the two of you, just enough…On the horrors and degradations of indebtedness I will not dwell…but IF you have children, it is most certainly not enough…I am therefore asking you both to consider whether you should not postpone your marriage until later than January. …I am of course not going to withdraw my consent… But I do ask you both to reconsider. Your temporal destinies are at stake, and the destinies of those unborn.’

In August she goes to Minehead and the Fishers for the second time. ‘My very dear Accuaintance…This dear little pink house quite shook with the bombs that fell in South Wales last night. I hope they are all right at Minehead.’

‘On the contrary I think you would have made an excellent scholar and rather chide myself at breaking through your cold barrier of why and wherefore and logical thinking and reasoning. You know, I am not in the slightest bit a logical person, love, but only very sensible. O Darling, this war is bloody is it not? But there is still ‘the wind on the heath, brother’. Which reminds me that I believe you left ‘The Wrecker’ on the table in the corner at Battins [a house in Minehead] and if you don’t recover it somehow…and return it to Eric it will be a Dreadful Thing: for Stevenson is one of his gods and he has got all his works and once sent me 10/- as a jubilatory present because he had acquired a m.s. signature of R.L.S. Bear this in mind.’

Eric to Harry, 25 August: ‘I write just this hurried line to say that what you tell me [that he has been made a Captain] removes my material anxieties regarding your marriage to Felicity so early and I think it only remains for me to wish you long life and happiness with my beloved daughter.’

The windows of the flat at Beaufort Mansions are blown out when the Convent opposite is bombed; also Eric and Jenny are behind with the rent. Eric moves first to a lodging house, ‘Mostyn’s’, but is bombed out of there with the loss of some of his clothes. He decides to lodge with Phyllis Gomme (Lindsay Emerson’s sister) at Long Crendon and commute. Jenny writes to him there on 20 September 1940: ‘The enclosed letter came from Eve. Could you send her a little money to keep her quiet? Keep the peace with her as I’m sure it is the best place for Felicity with Micky, as everyone isn’t so keen about having dogs… Eve is tactless but very goodhearted and I expect she is short of ready cash.’

1. **The escape**

But Felicity is no longer at Eve’s. On 17 September she sends Harry a telegram, ‘Coming if possible wire money please darling Felicity’. On 20 September she sends him another telegram from Repton, ‘Arrived yesterday’. A polite letter from Eric to Harry on 25 September accepts the arrangement. ‘My dear Harry, many thanks for your letter. I am very glad F. has been with you: it was kind of you to write, but please take it for the future that I am perfectly satisfied with any arrangements you may make on her behalf. I think it would be an excellent idea for her to stay at Repton, and help at the Sanatorium.’

The Memoirs also make the move seem sensible. *That autumn, after the dramatic feats over and on the Channel by the air force and the small craft who helped to rescue the sad B.E. forces, I went to stay at Repton, with poor Mick, to live with Miss Todd at the San. Mick lived with the gardener, Mr Deacon. He fed and housed him, for a fee, and I took him for walks every day. I worked for Miss Todd – quite a battleaxe with a nasty, grey, longhaired cat which hated everyone, including me.*

A letter from Eric to Felicity on 31 October makes it clear that in fact Eric was furious. ‘You left Eve’s without consulting us simply in order to confront us with a ‘fait accompli’, and to make your return impossible.’ In an undated letter, probably late September, Felicity writes to Harry, repeating almost word for word an excoriating letter from Eric. ‘I am v. upset and depressed by letters I have myself received from Eric. Shortly you will receive the sum of £14 and eleven pence which I have accepted from you in cash and kind. I will also send the pyjamas to the laundry, where they will starch them and will send them as soon as I know your address. I, apparently, have no social decency whatever, and to have accepted such gifts from you was in the worst possible taste and I am not a fit person to marry anyone. It is extremely humiliating for me to do this, but it must be done in order to restore my dignity and independence where you are concerned. You, apparently, want to possess me and kick everything that prevents you doing so out of the way, regardless of consequences. (Must go and take the doge for a walk, God bless you.) You have been, so Eric tells me, offensive to him on several occasions…and it is folly to speak to Eric of your feelings as a ‘biological urge’ … do you know he regards the ‘emotion of – God forgive us all – Love, as so expressed, with utter contempt’. … Dearest - what have I done? He says that my mother would as soon have thrown the money in his face as accept it from him had he offered it to her – that Jenny said she would rather have slept in the bath than accept the pyjamas. I do not very well see how I could have managed to get to and from seeing you, to pay for Mick or toothpaste or other necessaries without you helping me with mon., and you know I am really making all the clothes for my trousseau, tho’ you would have me wear the cherry coloured camel.’ So Harry persuaded her to come to Repton without asking Eric, lent her money, lent her pyjamas (for a night at a hotel?), and even, it seems, looked after Micky (or paid to have him looked after), at least at first.

At Repton she was in his orbit, with his family – his Aunt Pen, Rosamund’s sister, married to ‘Strick’, maths master at the school; Humphrey, one of Harry’s younger brothers, good-looking and in love with her, was living with Aunt Pen. *Everyone in Repton was enchanting to me, having known or loved the Fisher family for 18 years or so when Geoffrey was Headmaster.*  And even if Harry himself was away in the Army, they contrived to see each other as often as possible. The memoirs make it clear that *the ‘relationship’, as it would be termed today, in 2001, was not easy.* Biddy, her art school friend, who had been driving ambulances in the Blitz, came to visit one weekend. *At other weekends I would find my way by bus to Nottingham, where Harry was stationed with the 17th Leicestershire Regiment and had been promoted Adjutant to the lovely Colonel Underhill, who I met and who told me that Harry was the most untidy man he had ever come across. …Those nightmarish bus rides. Changing ‘buses at Derby, not knowing anything of the country or the towns; the panic which set in as I waited for Harry, the absolute hysteria, almost, when he did appear. Then the ‘Evening Out’ with dinner at the Blackboy Hotel, and a sort of brief happiness. He thought many things about my ways of thinking absurd, and said so. I hadn’t the education to ‘put my case’, and felt rebuked and saddened. …I was often in tears, and could not figure out why.*

Eric thought Harry broke off the relationship because Felicity agreed to another delay to the marriage. But there were other problems leading up to this. I have Harry’s summary, from ‘Nov. 1940’, in a letter to his friend Pat, never sent: ‘I probably shan’t get hitched – as you vulgarly put it – not yet anyhow. I am in the middle of a most shattering row with Flic and with her father (who is a charming man, but unfortunately a very acute one who sees through all my pretentions and uncovers my extreme ordinariness). I hate it. And the trouble is that it acts as a sort of catalyst (if that is right) and disturbs all the comfortable confidence and sureness I have been basking in since April’. The flight of Felicity to Repton might seem enough reason for a row; but Eric had at first politely accepted it, at least in his letter to Harry. The ‘shattering row’ started to build up with a row about Micky, the dog.

Felicity’s letter of ?late September, quoted above – the one which quotes the ‘excoriating letter from Eric’ – sheds some light on the Micky problem. ‘Eric is coming here to stay the weekend at the Bull on Nov 2nd. Could you come over for the Sunday possibly, even if only for a few hours: this bitter feeling can in no wise be cleared up without seeing Eric. And I certainly shall not write him for you (I won’t put in this ‘to’ even for you) I was astonished that you should even ask me to do such a thing, you must stand alone in that, and not be too egotistical or blindly stupid (yes stupid, we knew it was a stupid letter when we came to earth the next day). …Be gentle with him, love, and tell him as you would tell me, how badly you, and I, behaved in that letter. The subject of that letter is, of course, very well and bobbish.’ They seem to have written Eric a letter together, which I do not have, suggesting Micky should be put down. I deduce that Micky was a great nuisance when they had an ecstatic night together at the George Hotel, Nottingham. It seems that Harry wanted Felicity to write to Eric and apologise for the first letter; but as seen above, she refuses. The next letter I quote is his ham-handed attempt to smooth things over.

A letter from Harry to Eric, dated 4 October 1940, headed ‘Colwick Park’ (an army training centre) but on George Hotel, Nottingham notepaper, starts: ‘My dear Mr Sutton. I was very distressed to read your letter to Felicity about Micky which she has just shown me: it has upset her a great deal, and it seems to me to be a gross misrepresentation of the position. …Felicity’s chief worry in the whole matter is that you and Jenny think hardly of her for contemplating having Micky destroyed. And I am sorry, because you seem to think that I have turned her against him and have urged her to make this suggestion…I cannot endure to have Felicity worried and tied by the care of a tiresome animal – and Micky is now no more than that….If she was herself attached to the dog, I should not say a word. But she is no longer so.’ These last two sentences are scratched out wildly in blue pencil by Felicity.

Another letter sent at the same time in the same envelope says: ‘F has quite rightly scratched out a stupid thing I said in my letter. She is still fond of him but realizes that he is going to be a sticking point that we shall never get over if nothing is done. …I come into it too of course – for I am selfish and human. And I cannot see that Micky could be anything less than a nuisance on a honeymoon.’ Two days after this letter, dated 6 October, a letter from Felicity to Harry shows that Felicity, far from wanting Micky destroyed, has arranged lodgings for him. ‘Ruth’s gardener Meakin [Deacon in the Memoir] will have Micky for 5/- a week if I take him for walks and give him his food – so do bring the poor darling when you come on Sunday, love, and if it is not too much trouble, his basket: I have got J.B.’s rug [J.B.Trend], but I don’t really want to use it for him but I will if you can’t be bothered about the basket…if you are writing to Eric tell him Mick is all right and is coming down here on Sun.’ Micky was safely lodged; but a much great problem soon arose: Eric’s – and Felicity’s - attitude to birth control.

In the ‘excoriating letter’ letter, which I have dated to late September, Felicity explains: ‘As Eric very rightly points out to me,…if I decide to marry you and to make absolutely sure we do not have a child till we can afford it by methods of contraception, I am disregarding one of the most vehement doctrines of my church; by doing this I am in a sense disregarding the whole teaching and kindliness of the Catholic religion, which, though you may not think it, means half or more of the essence of my being.’ Eric went to Farm Street and got a leaflet about the Catholic doctrine on birth control, which he sent to Felicity. She writes again to Harry about this, probably in early October, sending it to him: ‘I simply must, as you realize by the enclosed, talk to you about this! I can’t possibly write about it or talk by telephone. I cannot say just how thankful I am that Eric went to Farm Street for me: I have wondered for about 3 months why I found it so hard to pray. Don’t be angry with me, for that is unkind, but your sensibility will show you what a difficult position I am in. You would not have me live in a sin which destroys peace in the soul, and mind, if you love me deeply and truly.’

From another letter of Eric’s to Felicity, dated 31 October, I deduce that Harry has mentioned ‘contraception’ to Eric and said that they are using it or will use it – perhaps to calm his fears about Felicity being left a war widow with a baby. ‘In regard to religion – you will have had the document I sent you. Your position is perfectly clear, and there is no way round it. I should perhaps have spoken more frankly when H. Fisher wrote me his elegant communication about ‘contraception’, but I am diffident about speaking to you about such matters. …I felt I could merely note your decision (with grief and great surprise).’ A month later, a letter from Felicity to Jenny (dated 24 November) develops her thoughts on birth control and its sinfulness. ‘With regard to the question of Children, Jen, I am prepared to take the risk when we are married. In the summer I did think I could with a clear mind take steps to prevent myself from having children, but was Horrified to find out that even to have this determination in one’s mind is to be in a state of mortal sin. O Jen.’ I think she must mean she has taken those steps – in the summer at Eve’s, perhaps, when France ‘fell’, or the night at the hotel when she borrowed the pyjamas; Eric’s mention of her ‘decision’ suggests the same.

In the letter of 31 October Eric says he thinks the marriage should be delayed again. ‘In regard to this business: you may, fairly, I fear, accuse me of inconsistency: this is partly due to the fact that I not merely asked, but took, advice against my own better judgement. I originally thought you would be acting unwisely, and improvidently, to marry before you were 20 [i.e. before January 1942]: and before I had been in Harry Fisher’s company for 5 minutes, I had a perfectly correct view of him – it was about Dec 28th 1939 – and I knew that he was unfit to marry – yet. But I gave way: partly, too, owing to Jenny’s kindness; and partly, in these hard times, to increase the sum of human happiness. But that is taking a very short view of happiness. I was right, in the first instance.’ He ends the letter: ‘I am sorry but it is quite impossible for me to meet Harry Fisher. You cannot ask your father to meet a man who has been consistently aggressive, sometimes offensive, - and, in his letter about the dog, merely insulting. I bear him no ill will, but it is clear – to put the matter mildly – that ‘no useful purpose will be served by an interview’, as we used to say in Whitehall. I have done my best to get on reasonable terms with him, for your sake; he has deliberately made it impossible. …My dear F., Harry Fisher does not really ‘love’ you, in the sense of thinking for you, and desiring your real happiness, and good life. All he wants is to own you, as I said.’

Eric did not visit on 2 November, but on 8-11 November. He wrote to Jenny on 11 November. The journey was not too bad, but ‘it was a dismal day, and today is a dismal day, and Repton is a dismal place. Yesterday evening F. and I had a long and most friendly talk, and I am very thankful that I came here. She is now inclined to postpone her marriage, at any rate for a short time, - on the religious ground. I saw Micky last night, and we took him for a walk this morning. He is clearly well, and quite recovered [from the mange], and full of life and cheerfulness, though a little more subdued than he used to be.’ He is planning that Felicity should come and live with him in Long Crendon, possibly in Mrs Cobden-Sanderson’s tiny cottage near the Gommes: ‘I shall be much relieved if we can set up some existence together.’ Felicity describes this visit to Harry in a letter of 13 November: ‘Biddy came and went like a burning drink of Cointreau – Eric like a whisky and soda. …All the bitterness and bad feeling has now vanished between us and because of my resolution and determination to show him that you are not such a bad fellow really I think he feels a little more kindly towards you. He did say that the letter about Mickses [Micky] could now be considered as forgotten. Whether or not he feels sufficiently reconciled to you to answer letters of yours remains to be seen. He of course asked me to wait until I was 20 – I said I did not think I possibly could, wouldn’t until after Easter do, and he complied – so he has saved me for himself for at least another six months.’ She has extracted from Eric a shorter delay than he wants, as once before.

But this was too much for Harry. In a letter to Jenny Felicity says: ‘As for my Plans – such as they are – I have decided not to get married until after Easter (when it is warm)… His row, if one can call it such, with Eric has cleared his mind a great deal, I think, and he too thinks it would be best to wait a bit longer. …Tho’ I don’t properly know what is in his mind about it at all, till I see him – I have not heard from him for some time.’ I do not have the ‘bad, dreadful, unpardonable’ letter which Harry wrote Felicity breaking the engagement, according to Eric: but I do have a letter from Felicity responding to it. ‘This is a very mis and bewildered F. who writes to you tonight – mis because of what you crossed out in your letter referring to our companionship ‘that is – if there ever was one’.’ She tries to explain the Catholic prohibition on birth control. ‘I think it is because man uses the machinations of Science to control the creation of life by his own will – Life which is God-given – that Catholics consider birth control a deadly mortal soul-destroying sin. It is man trying to go one better than God, which does not do.’ The placing of this explanation in the letter suggests that, as Eric said, the ‘religious ground’ was the main reason for the postponement, and Harry found this impossible to accept. So he was objecting not just to the postponement in itself, but to the ‘religious ground’ – and possibly to her new understanding of the Catholic position on birth control.

She continues with her own definition of sin, which is linked to her feelings of one-ness with Nature. She feels he might not have quite completely broken it off (eventually she was to be proved right); and as so often she quotes Shakespeare, and then produces her own lovely image, now a nostalgic one. ‘A sin, to me, is that which by thought or word or action, is contrary to ideals of truth, holiness and beauty; as God, to me, personifies these things, all sins are, directly or indirectly, sins against God. You cannot do without God, you know, however hard you try, and I have come so near him in my discoveries of the beauties of this earth that I can never escape from him now. You see I have a soul and my soul remembers everything. Sometimes I wonder whether I shall ever be the F. again who stood under the lime trees in the spring at school or above the hill at Wiveliscombe and was stricken with a happiness so acute it was a pain, to see the leaves growing and to hear the earth living below and the sky breathing above. Which is all very fine language and so on (or is it) but we come no further to saying that if you want to shuffle off this mortal coil that I am around you I will disappear like a wounded animal or a dead frog so that you would not know that I had ever been. But somehow I feel, although you might not, that I am such a very dear acquaintance of yours that I could never leave you now – or would you watch my going as unmovedly as watching the Butcher’s boy go off with the orders?’

Harry did not reply. On 5 December, Eric writes to Jenny: ‘Felicity and Micky are coming Saturday via London … she is rather distressed because Harry Fisher is apparently ignoring her. He is truly a very tedious youth, and obviously – in the old-fashioned phrase – needs a kick in the pants.’ On 9 December he writes to Jenny: ‘Felicity arrived safely on Sunday. I met her at Paddington and we went down [to Long Crendon] together. She has a cold, and looks pale, but seems v. well, otherwise. She is a good deal fatter, and not so good-looking! I think she will settle down happily.’ Felicity writes to Harry from Long Crendon, ‘My very dear H. Shall I ever hear from you? Are you alright? Have you lost the use of your right hand (dear H. - Are you alright?) … Next term I am going to work under Randolph Schwabe at the Slade in Oxford 4 days a week: Hooray and he knew my mother. …Eric is very well… He says he is in no way hostile towards you and did go so far as to say he thought he had been unreasonable and rude to send your letters back ignored – but he was not at all well at the time. …Shall I ever see you again, or hear from you?’ At Christmas she sends him a book. ‘When shall I see you again? Ever?’ And adds down the side ‘Please, I am not the slightest bit tragic.’ Eric sent some of Harry’s letters back, either ignored or unopened: this may be why I possess Harry’s two letters to Eric about Micky, quoted above.

The year ends with a letter from Eric to Jenny of 30 Dec. ‘I had a long walk and talk with Felicity yesterday, and went over all my doings in that regard, which had been distressing me. I don’t think she is hurt much truly, except as having been so ‘taken in’ – a phrase she used more than once. She said she never regarded me as having interfered at all. In writing to Mrs Fisher, or any member of the family, she is never going to refer to the young man’s name again; but merely to write in a friendly, general way – I said this was the only dignified thing to do. She is looking forward to going to the Slade.’

Once she was at Leamington (and the affair with Harry was on again) there was a correspondence between Eric and Harry in the summer of 1941 which looks back to the ‘shattering row’ described in this chapter. Eric apologises for saying hard things, and not replying to letters: and adds ‘I do not know whether your affection for Felicity has remained: if not that is not discredit to you, and you have but to say so. But if it remains, I would say that I very much believe, from a thing or two she said to me latterly when I was with her, that she still keeps her regard for you.’ He says he has changed his mind about birth control. ‘My meditation as a result of illness and much solitude has changed my views. The strict Catholic doctrine cannot be put into practice. …You were very provoking, you know – but then, so, I suppose, was I! We can afford to forgive each other.’

Harry wrote back, and Eric replied: ‘Dear Harry, there is just one point I would like to add. You spoke of divided allegiance. I assure you there is no question of this, as far as I am concerned. Felicity’s allegiance will be to the man she marries, and no one else. I am not in the least possessive about her – in spite of, I suppose, appearances – and never was. …If she is happy, I am. …It struck at my heart, as George Fox the Quaker used to say, that I had been guilty of unwarrantable interference last year, as I told you. This, I can say with truth, you need never have to bother about again. I do trust that everything may go as you both wish. Yours, E.S.’[[134]](#footnote-134)

***Felicity in her Chelsea studio in 1946, in the ‘little, poplar-fringed court’. Peggy’s oil portrait of Eric is on the shelf above.***



**Chapter 9**

**Postlude: Eric and Jenny in wartime**

‘Letters were unbelievably important during the War, and one longed for the arrival of mail.’ (Christian Lamb, *I Only Joined for the Hat: Redoubtable Wrens at War, their Trials, Tribulations and Triumphs*, Bene Factum, London, 2007, p. 48)

‘In the yawning gap between our grandparents and ourselves, the battle for our imagined individuality is waged, and the separation in time permits us to cherish the illusion that a greater truth lies concealed there than in what we know of our own parents.’ (Stefan Hertmans, *War and Turpentine*, Harvill Secker, London, 2013, p. 16)

1. **A wartime correspondence**

As well as hundreds of letters from Eric to Jenny and vice versa in WW2, I now have a last-minute discovery of a new cache of letters from Eric, to Louise and Otto Theis, held at the Beinecke library at Yale University . These are revealing – Eric seems to have been in love with Louise Theis in 1923 after Peggy’s death , and possibly she with him; and they show him mixing with a literary circle round the Theises, as he continued to do in wartime.

The main witness to this period is my large collection of Eric and Jenny’s letters to each other.[[135]](#footnote-135) The letters were kept by them in their envelopes, so the torn tops are almost a fingerprint of a faithful letter-writing relationship through most of the war, and probably contain their DNA. On the outside, the postmark is usually readable and enables them to be re-read in sequence. Neither usually dates the actual letter. I have 388 letters from Eric to Jenny from 1940 to 1946, and 366 letters from Jenny to Eric.. They are preserved with a note from Jenny, ‘Eric’s letters to me and my letters to him, 1956’. These letters, which in their little brown leather suitcase first led me to discover Eric, will not contain an answer to my central unanswered question of whether he was a child abuser. But they may contain answers to other questions, about the role of letters in wartime, about Eric and Jenny’s relationship, and about Eric himself.

In the first of his letters to Jenny that I have from this period, from 15 September 1940, Eric seems almost to be writing for me, by raising the subjects of their relationship – and even of letters in wartime. ‘Bitterly, as you must know, I do miss you. In spite of all our tumbles and difficulties, and my shortcomings, I do sincerely love you, and you are not very often absent from my thoughts, and never far from them.’ (Shortcomings – the rages? Drink? Solitariness?) And in the next letter (22 September 1940): ‘My dearest. It was such a joy to see you yesterday…You know how bitterly I feel this parting; I do so wish you had not joined the Wrens, but having done so, there is no way round. Do try and get posted within reach, so that we can meet regularly. This would help us much. In the meantime, we must write to each other often and all the details of our daily lives, please. I shan’t bother about writing you a ‘good’ letter, but just write.’

His letters to her, even if beautifully shaped as letters, are splendidly mundane in subject matter, often mentioning furniture, cleaning, shirts, socks, pants, flannels, hot water bottles and razors. They share a combination of bathos and pathos. Typical of him in style, and usually with a little literary reference and a joke about the need for or the battle with Drink, his letters are so well put together that they are very hard to excerpt.

How did Jenny see their relationship? The family legend is that she was flighty, and joined the Wrens as soon as she could (in 1939) to get away from Eric. But in her reply to the first letter above, she writes ‘My poor sweet, I’m afraid you had a nasty experience, and very shaking, but I am so thankful it was no worse. I wish I had been with you when it happened.’ (Eric was temporarily staying at Mostyn’s, a lodging house, since the windows at the flat in Beaufort St had been blown out; Mostyn’s had been bombed.) ‘Darling I miss you terribly and long for this bloody war to be over, but nothing’s any good till we’ve beaten those b. Germans. But I look forward to our life together when it’s all over.’

Jenny appears in her letters, at least in the early part of the War, as warm, loving and practical, in love with Eric and planning a future with him. They met as often as they could for little holidays in hotels or even at her digs. She sent him small amounts of money when needed. There are hints in Eric’s letters later in the War that she is now with her new partner and fellow-Wren, Fé Potter, and her physical relationship with Eric is over: ‘Glad you have Potter with you…I always read, with particular pleasure, your reference at the end of your letter to a kiss and a big hug. It’s a fine imaginative flight: for, when you do get into my company, you do not favour me with either’( 24 Dec 1944). Jenny and Eric did live together after the War: Jenny and Fé opened an antique shop together, and Felicity painted the sign. After Eric died in 1949, Jenny and Fé lived together for another 45 years.

He does not want to bother about writing a ‘good’ letter - but he still writes one. I treasure this passage from later in the same letter: ‘Did I tell you that I had determined to take up the study of the Arthurian legend, in the intervals of my labours at our Inn, when good times do come again. So I am going to begin by learning Welsh – indispensable for the purpose, and shall do so in the train, learning enough now so that by the time the black-out comes, I can repeat the verbs to myself in the darkness. I feel some satisfaction in the thought that the language is quite useless for all other purposes. Except for talking to Welsh people, which I see no particular need to do.’

Eric and Jenny seem to have been planning to run a pub together in peacetime – a nice fantasy, though Eric was always trying to cut back on his drinking, partly for financial reasons, and running a pub seems the wrong job for him. But his plan to repeat Welsh verbs to himself in the blackout (when it comes), in preparation for reading Arthurian legends, is typical and moving. So is his pleasure in the thought that he won’t actually use the language for talking to anybody.

1. **Circumstances**

What were Eric and Jenny doing, and where were they living? They had rented a flat at 46 Beaufort Mansions in June 1937. In late 1939 Eric got a job in the Ministry of Economic Warfare, always referred to by Felicity as the ‘Blockade Department’. This was set up on 3 September 1939. Under ‘Ministry of Economic Warfare’ in the National Archive come the files of the Special Operations Executive. There are personnel files, but they are lists of agents who were infiltrated into France. A lowly civil servant such as Eric was does not appear to be listed anywhere.

The letters give some clues. Eric often wrote his letters to Jenny and Felicity on Ministry of Economic Warfare notepaper, giving its address as Berkeley Square House, Berkeley Square, W1 – when he does not use United University Club notepaper. On 23 Jan 1941 he comments to Jenny: ‘I am fortunate in having this sugary sort of job.’ A letter of 13 Feb 1941 explains this: ‘I am, inevitably, sugaring a bit – a technical rowing term which designates one who drops his oar in just an instant later than the rest, and thus presents a neat appearance, without really contributing much to the momentum of the boat.’ On 26 March 1942 he wrote to Jenny ‘My job here ends in a month’s time – my work on the French colonies – amassing information thereon – was transferred to a much cheaper worker, a lady, in the main building, near to the man who does the actual execution work on the subject.’ He often complains about not having enough work to do.

His attempts to get another job included one which might suggest a gleam of intelligence work. He wrote to Jenny on 26 March 1942 ‘The Ashton-Gwatkin job is in Mr de Grey’s show! He, it seems, expressed particular interest in me.’ Mr de Grey’s show could be the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park, of which Nigel de Grey was Deputy Director in WW2. Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, a diplomat seconded in 1939 to the Ministry of Economic Warfare where Eric was working, could have recommended him. But it seems to have come to nothing. His letter two days later is waiting for news – a funny example of a letter that would make no sense at all without the previous one:

‘8 April 1942. Dearest, I haven’t any news of moment yet, except that:

1. The strapping you suggested for my tobacco pouch proved a great success.
2. The smell has been quite removed from my face flannel.
3. I dreamt last night that I was going to be hanged!...Generally believed to be an extremely lucky dream.’

The same month he got a new job. From the letters, I knew the title of his job was a Temporary Principal in the Board of Trade, Industries and Manufactures department, since I have a letter of February 1946 accepting his resignation from it; but I did not know what he actually did. One letter on a piece of office paper (his stinginess is sometimes useful to the researcher) was headed ‘Cinematographic Films Council’, so I went to the National Archive to see if I could find out more. A big file called ‘Master Copies of C.F.C. Minutes 1-90, BT 258/2459’ had the answer. He was Secretary of the Cinematographic Films Council from 10 June 1942 (its 42nd meeting) to 19 Dec 1945 (its 59th meeting). On p. 10 of the minutes of the 54th meeting, there is a correction in his handwriting. So there is no doubt about this being him. He was also Secretary of its Defaults Committee. He had an assistant, female – presumably he took the minutes in longhand, and she typed his notes from his atrocious handwriting.

As well as Secretary, Mr E. Sutton, the Committee consisted of about 5 ‘independent persons’, plus representatives (usually two) of ‘film producers’, ‘film renters’ and ‘film exhibitors’, plus one representative of ‘persons employed by makers of British films’. Members included Sir Walter Citrine, Sir Alexander Korda, and Mr J. Arthur Rank. Chair for the time he was Secretary was usually Lord Drogheda. The business of the Committee is rather arcane, not much about actual films, and to do with quotas (I think these are quotas of British films compelled to be shown, as opposed to American films) and whether there is a danger of a monopoly. But there were a few perks: ‘Henry V was, in its way, a magnificent show…We went to a film party afterwards – they were mostly film nobs, not social nobs, and I could not recognise many of them in the flesh. But the winsome smiles of the film stars, flashing on and off, were very fetching and decorative’ (6 December 1944).[[136]](#footnote-136)

The Beaufort Mansions flat where they lived before the War had all its windows blown out, and he moved to Long Crendon to lodge with Phyllis (sister of Lindsay Emmerson) and Arnold Gomme in 1940; atone point he decided to catch an earlier train back in the evening and do his allotted work in a shorter time – possible because it was a ‘sugary’ job. After Crendon, he tried various unsatisfactory lodging houses, one called Nell Gwynne House in Sloane Street, and on 23 October 1942 moved to a rented flat at 5 Cheyne Place. He hoped eventually to live with Jenny: ‘There is indeed, as Odysseus says to Nausicaa, in that wonderfully touching scene in the Odyssey between the battered old sea-farer, and the king’s daughter, nothing stronger or better, than when a man and a woman who think the same sort of thoughts, have a home together’ (Eric to Jenny, 15 October 1942). He was looking for a better flat where Felicity might be able to join him. On 26 November 1943 he writes ‘We have got the flat’ (Flat 3, 15 Cheyne Place); many of the letters are about doing it up, stair carpets, furniture, the sooty stove Felicity has chosen; he is not ‘installed’ until June 1944. On 17 July 1944 he writes that Felicity has got a job at the Air Ministry – she can now come and live with him. Cheyne Place is a redbrick row of houses in Royal Hospital Road, still existing, opposite the Chelsea Physic Garden.

Until Felicity came, he seems to have found it hard to sleep at the flat, and often slept at his office, the Board of Trade in Millbank. ‘I could not face the flat, empty, in that empty house, alone: and must make some temporary arrangement while the present visitation [bombing] lasts’ (4 July 1944). He did not always sleep well at the office: ‘I got some sleep, tho’ disturbed by a tremendous celebration of mice, which lasted from 2.00 to 3.45, when it stopped bang, with the precision that cock-crow banishes the goblins in a fairy tale. It seems odd they should have invaded the 6th floor of so splendiferous a building, and the very chamber adjoining the President’s throne room. None of my shouting and crashing deterred them: they carried out their revels, and departed.’

1. **Eric the translator**

While doing his civil service jobs Eric continued translating. On 27 October 1944 Eric writes to Jenny: ‘The weather is still inspissated: occupat urbem spissatus imber – an admirable piece of Tacitean Latin which you can look up in your dictionary. At the moment it fogs, but it does not rain. Everyone is in a bad temper, except Felicity.’ She has come back to live with him in the rented flat at 15, Cheyne Place, having transferred via some string-pulling from her job in Camouflage at Leamington to a job in the Air Ministry. She ‘has a chance of a studio, at £1 a week, in a little poplar-fringed court, in the bit of Upper Cheyne Row leading from Cheyne Row to Lawrence St. …and now I must go home [from his club], have a bath, heat my stew and eat it, and settle down to read Zweig’s inordinate ms. It looks good, but is very long: tho’ not – at first sight – very difficult. But I must buy a dictionary: I don’t really know much German.’

This was his last Arnold Zweig translation, *The Axe of Wandsbek*, published in 1948 by Hutchinson. An analysis by Zweig’s colleague, Robert Neumann, reveals Eric’s flaws. ‘According to Neumann Sutton knew German like an Oxford graduate in foreign languages (first class honours) who had then gone on an extended tour of Germany and had moved in university circles in Heidelberg. His descriptive passages were normally excellent, his dialogue between intellectuals was frequently first-class, but he was ignorant of the language spoken by ordinary people, and utterly helpless when it came to army slang of Prussian officers. The number of mistakes was enormous, but for the uncomparing reader they were not noticeable as they fitted the context. He had translated all of Zweig’s earlier books in the same way and nobody had noticed because they read so well. As a consequence Neumann advised the publisher to employ someone to give Sutton some competent idiomatic help.’

This exposé appears in *Verdun and the Somme* by Harro Grabolle.[[137]](#footnote-137) He provides a nice summary of Eric’s translating career: ‘A translator first of French literature, then of German, Sutton made a name for himself with Zweig’s *Grischa,* his first German text, to be followed by all the other pre-war novels of the cycle; translations of works by Heinrich Mann, Hans Fallada, Max Brod, Vicki Baum and Eric Kastner helped increase that reputation. So among German writers Sutton’s name appeared to have been excellent. Zweig himself admired his translation of *Grischa* as ‘excellent, even admirable’… The impression was not of a translation but of an original text. The trouble began when one compared original and translation.’

Grabolle goes on to quote mistakes and omissions in Eric’s translation of Zweig’s earlier book, *Education before Verdun.* For example, in a passage about ‘the corpulent Colonel Stein, his great belly overhanging his breeched legs’, ‘obviously the translator was unfamiliar with the slang expression “Scherben” – monocle, so he cleverly left it out’. ‘Chapter VI, 1, heading: ‘Was der Jude sich einbildet’. “The mind of a Jew”. [[138]](#footnote-138) Too neutral; the whole chapter abounds in anti-Semitic slander and vocabulary which is sometimes not even translated. …To conclude: a very readable translation with some flaws, some of which are only noticeable in comparison with the original. On the whole, Neumann’s verdict on *The Axe of Wandsbek* is also true for this earlier translation.’

I think of Eric starting to translate Zweig’s ‘inordinate ms’ without a dictionary, on a foggy night in Chelsea near the end of the war, cheered by some reheated stew, probably made by Felicity; and of her, in a good temper when everyone else is not, finding a possible studio in a ‘little, poplar-fringed court’ nearby, continuing her own artistic life while he practises his, such as it was. I salute the bravery of both. As for his softening the anti-Semitic character of one chapter of the earlier book, Zweig was a Jew and an active Zionist, who wrote a book about anti-Semitism, and became an exile from Hitler’s regime, so his use of anti-Semitic ‘slander and vocabulary’ is ironic or illustrative. One of his themes is the experience of a Jew in the German army. Part of the chapter inhabits the mind of the anti-Semitic Prussian officer, Major Jansch. By softening anti-Semitic phrases Eric may be undermining Zweig’s point, but in 1935, when he worked on *Education before Verdun*, this must have seemed the right thing to do.

Élisabeth Gille’s ‘mirador’ or prison watchtower is looking over my shoulder as I write. How should I interpret this action of Eric’s? I remember my mother saying ‘He’s a Jew, of course’ in a certain way; not necessarily condemning, but implying something unspoken. Both she and Eric had a somewhat anti-Semitic cast of mind. Eric’s appears in his complaining, in letters and even in letters to the press, about Jews taking English names; hers in certain derogatory remarks in her memoir, for instance about the girl who shared an earlier studio with her and two other girls. Yet the most glorious period of my father’s life was his spell of ten years as President of Wolfson College, Oxford (1975-85), when he and my mother had many friends who were Jews. I am glad to find an instance in Eric of a more sympathetic attitude towards Jews than I thought he had, even though it may have spoilt a chapter of his translation.

Grabolle introduces his discussion of Eric’s translation of *The Axe of Wandsbek* with the words: ‘Translations of the novel into major European languages followed in quick succession, a sign…that Zweig’s intention to do his share in the fight against Hitler had been internationally understood and appreciated.’ Slaving over Zweig’s long book in dark, dangerous London, while acting as Secretary to the Film Council during the day, was Eric’s way of ‘doing his share’ in the fight against Hitler. He had translated the novels of Zweig since *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* in 1928, so his accepting the job was not necessarily motivated only by this; perhaps he was glad of the income and glad that the publisher still recognised him as a skilful translator of Zweig. But the feeling must have helped him get through the task.

After resigning from his Cinematographic Film Council job in 1946 I have no more evidence of civil service jobs. I think he devoted himself full-time to translation. On 1 October 1946 he writes to Felicity about translating the second volume of Sartre – ‘The Reprieve’: ‘I am getting on fast with Sartre. Vol. II is very clever – cleverer, I think, but not so good, as Vol. I. But I fear he will have a most deplorable effect on the psychologies of Europe. Just as Dostoevsky transformed the Russians from a pack of hearty bucolics into a rabble of neurotics, under the influence of Sartre we shall be metamorphosed into – not schizophrens – but something far longer and far worse – katakermatizophrens – which, in case you haven’t a Greek dictionary handy, means – minds scattered into small change. I am beginning to detect Sartrean splitteries in myself!’

As we saw in Chapter 7, this translation (with its missing sections restored but some of Eric’s ‘foreignising’ Frenchisms removed) is still in print. So his Sartre translation has lasted longer than his Zweig translations. His French was always better than his German.

1. **‘The Theises gave me a Malory’: Louise and Otto Theis**

‘The Theis’s gave me a Malory, which I am reading with something of the pleasure which a small boy called E.S. took in it, reading it in bed, by the light of one candle, at the top of a house in Pimlico, somewhere about the year 1900’ (Eric to Jenny, 11 July 1944)

The Theises not only gave Eric a Malory, but also sheets, pillows, and a comfy chair for the flat at 15 Cheyne Place. Otto Theis and Louise Morgan had been friends of his and Jenny’s since the 1920s. In an undated letter from 6 Carlyle Studios, possibly soon after Peggy’s death in September 1923, Eric says: ‘My dear Louise, I suppose you are right and that it is no use: and anyhow that I oughtn’t to ask anyone to marry me. But I want you to understand how deeply attached to you I am, in spite of everything, and also that I am not ungrateful. Eric.’ Louise married Otto Theis in 1923 so I assume this letter is dated before that event. She seems to have turned Eric down kindly.

Other letters suggest how this closeness arose. In a letter dated Sept 30 1924, from the Savile Club, Eric says: ‘I can’t tell you how touched and grateful I was for your letter. As I expect you know, when I came down into the country, I had fallen into that frozen and paralysed condition that follows a great sorrow and the kindness and friendship which you and others have shown me has I know done more than anything to set me going again. You have done me more service than you know. This seems so poor an acknowledgement – and the difficulty of saying what I felt rather stayed my hand. Indeed, Vyvyan Holland assures me that I am getting not merely fat but pedantic. But you have passed the guard of this English heart and I take both your hands and thank you.’[[139]](#footnote-139)

Both Louise and Otto were Americans who moved to London and edited literary magazines in the 1920s – Otto was assistant editor on ‘The Outlook’, and Louise on ‘Everyman’. Otto was also later a literary agent and translator from German. Louise had a career as a journalist and writer on health and social welfare. Their papers are in the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Otto helped Eric get work such as reading foreign books for publishers, as well as translating. They continued to be very good friends of Eric and Jenny’s, and several of Eric’s letters invite them to stay at ‘Clayton Castle’, the cottage near Hassocks where Eric, Jenny and Felicity lived from 1929 to1932. Both Otto and Louise became British citizens just before WW2.

Louise may have been somewhat in love with Eric too. The archive of their papers includes a rained-on piece of paper (or is it wept-on?) recording, in her handwriting, a visit to Eric’s grave at Storrington in 1952, three years after he died, noting the inscription and the fact that there are three ‘Louises’ buried nearby, as if she wanted also to be buried near him. It is filed with an unattributed, unpublished poem titled ‘Despair’ which may have been written by Louise when she was grieving for Eric. It includes the lines ‘My tortured thoughts turn in/ Towards the bitter strife;/ To where my soul lies burning/ Consumed by its own life.’

A last-minute research trip to see copies of ‘Outlook’ in the Cambridge University Library turned up 17 book reviews by Eric in the years 1924 to 1927. So via this unusual name in the letters, I’ve found the minor literary career which Eric pursued before leaving his first Civil Service job to become a translator. The reviews are listed in my Bibliography. One quotation may illuminate his decision not to go on with this career: ‘An artist who does not live by his art will very rarely live in it …The literary Civil Servant is usually a poor creature suspected and disliked in both worlds in neither of which does he get very far’ (review of Maurice Baring’s *Collected Poetry*, ‘The Outlook’, 9 May 1925, p. 316).[[140]](#footnote-140)

Looking at Eric’s translating career, it seems driven more by what publishers wanted to offer him rather than by what he wanted to translate. This is very different from a translator such as Charles Scott Moncrieff who was able to champion new authors he believed in, including Proust. One exception I now know about, thanks to this discovery, is Eric’s sympathy with the 18th-century French novels he translated, discussed in Chapter 5. In 1926 he reviewed *Four Novelists of the Old Regime* by J.G.Palache for ‘Outlook’, one of whom was Crebillon, one of the authors he translated, and had this to say: ‘There has been, of late, a perceptible reaction, in literature as in life, to the formulae, or what are commonly understood to be such, of the eighteenth century. This is, no doubt, one of the many intellectual legacies left us by the Great War. Our feelings are exhausted and little but the pleasures of the intellect remain: and, as our emotions grow less keen, our minds grow more active. …We, too, find it hard to believe in love, but at least we can write elegantly and frankly about what seems to have taken its place. Though our cry must needs be stinking fish, we can at least learn to write and to appreciate good manners. These are absolute achievements in a shadowy world: and our thoughts naturally turn to another and not dissimilar age.’[[141]](#footnote-141)To cry stinking fish is to make little of your own achievements.

One thinks of Felicity’s September 1940 letter to Harry, quoted in Chapter 8 above: ‘Do you know [Eric] regards the ‘emotion of – God forgive us all – Love, as so expressed, with utter contempt’. Eric seems to have continued to ‘find it hard to believe in love’. On the other hand he often speaks of love in his letters to Jenny, in phrases such as ‘I do sincerely love you’. And he described her to Vyvyan at the start of their affair as ‘a nice lady who loves me and whom I love’. He valued love and felt it, but was suspicious of the way the word ‘love’ was used. In his letter to Felicity of 31 October 1940 he said ‘My dear F., Harry Fisher does not really ‘love’ you, in the sense of thinking for you, and desiring your real happiness, and good life. All he wants is to own you, as I said.’

1. **Eric and Felicity**

Felicity’s ‘battle for her imagined individuality’ continued. In early 1941 she was staying in lodgings in Oxford and studying at the Slade (removed for wartime to the Ashmolean) under Randolph Schwabe. Schwabe’s diaries were published in 2016. I looked up Felicity Sutton in the Index and found a telling anecdote:

‘Tuesday 11 [March 1941].

A moonlit night, and an air-raid warning. Went over to the Ashmolean. The students’ fire-fighting party turned up and stayed till about 11 o’c. I believe it was tonight that Miss Felicity Sutton decorated the statue over the centre of the Ashmolean pediment with bits of drapery. She must have gone to some risk to do so, as Gardner had some difficulty in reaching the drapery to pull it down…’[[142]](#footnote-142)

Being at the Slade did not last. After a term, she was taken on by the Directorate of Camouflage at Leamington Spa as a Junior Technical Assistant at £2.12s a week, starting in May 1941. She worked at Leamington for three years, living in lodgings with her friend the artist Victorine Foot. But it became rather lonely, especially after she broke off her renewed affair with Harry in 1942, and in 1944 she moved back to London to live with Eric in Flat 3, 15 Cheyne Place, and work in the Air Ministry. She then moved to a new job at the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, ‘run’ by Robin Darwin and Richard Guyatt.

At first living with Eric went well. ‘Felicity is a great help with getting the flat ready.’ She later dyes the carpet in what is to be Jenny’s room with a bucket of dye and a mop. ‘She is such a brick, and so intelligent and entertaining, affectionate and sensible. She has finished all the painting’ (April 1944). It is ‘the best home we’ve ever had, in my opinion’ (29 May 1944). When Felicity did move in, things weren’t perfect: ‘I wish F. wouldn’t laugh, or sleep half-way out of the window’ (24 October 1944). Felicity gets a picture into the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, called ‘Jenny on Sunday morning’ (lying on a bed reading a newspaper). In 1945 Eric gets her a commission, via a member of his club, from the Morcom family, to paint their children: their father was the uncle of Christopher Morcom, the great school friend and first love of Alan Turing, who died aged 18.

We have her clear-eyed view of the problems of living with Eric:

*At this time of my life I had two very great misfortunes. One was to be slowly upset by the appearances, on various parts of my body, of dreadful Abscesses – for the treatment of which I was encouraged by Eric to see the Doctor. This man shocked me a great deal, first, by attempting to drain the abscess with a scalpel when it was patently not time for this, and second, for pinching my breasts – especially the one that was not infected.*

*…Second, was the difficulty I found in bearing Eric’s rages. Every day I shopped on my way home, carrying heavy bags, and arrived so exhausted that I had to rest on my bed for at least half an hour, before feeling fit enough to face making a Supper for two.*

*…I had at last decided, with my evening class tutor’s encouragement, to get a living space elsewhere, and come twice a week only to cook Eric’s suppers, and also avoid the paralysing (for me) rages. I told Eric this. That he was a very difficult person to live with because of these terrible rages, and that I was moving to Oakley Street in a fortnight.*

*I loved him none the less – it was a question of spiritual survival. He was deeply shocked; he promised to control his temper and to dine at his club three evenings a week. … A divine two years followed, when I became great friends with my father and he was a charming, loving, interested, delightful companion, reading Walter Scott to me in the evenings whilst I did my sewing. I couldn’t bear Walter Scott, so wordy, so tiresome in his ‘olde’ approach to his writing of novels of Past Time, but I loved Eric too much ever to say so.*

1. **Final goodbye**

I know very little about Eric’s final three years, since when Jenny came home the letters stopped. From the Jamie Hamilton/Knopf correspondence discussed in Chapter 7, I know that he had a heart attack in February 1946. A new story from my sister (November 2016) – something my mother told her – is that after the War, Jenny was going to live with Fé, but as Eric became ill she came back to live with him and look after him until he died in 1949. Cited as Acting Chief Officer Félicité Potter, Fé had received an MBE in 1944 for her service in the WRNS.[[143]](#footnote-143) The London Gazette of 28 November 1944 states that she was among those honoured for ‘her distinguished services in connection with the planning of operations which led to the invasion of Normandy’.

My mother went back to the Slade and finished her course. She travelled to Italy in 1946 to teach English to the children of an academic, starting a lifelong connection with a family with whom I am still in touch. She describes in her memoir how almost every man she met at this time proposed marriage to her – at one point she was going to marry Robin Darwin, later head of the Royal Academy, although he already had a wife and a pregnant girlfriend, but saw the unwisdom of this move and broke it off. In 1948 she married my father.

This thesis began with my mother’s letter to Nick Jacobs, where she recalls her last conversation with Eric being about Henry IV Part 2. I will end this chapter with another reference by him to the same play. In one of his letters to Jenny, from 18 May 1944, when he is staying in Liphook for a break, he says: ‘The names of Falstaff’s recruits were: Ralph Mouldy, Simon Shadow, Thomas Wart, Francis Feeble, and Peter Bullcalf: and I am quite sure they were one and all let out of Limbo for the afternoon to join in the Home Guard parade at Liphook last Sunday.’ In an undated letter to Jenny, probably from 1942, Eric is staying at Maycoes, Branscombe (a house belonging to the Tansley/Chick cousins) and goes to church. He wonders ‘how much I really stood by in the matter of faith. Not, I suppose, a great deal, - that is, doctrinally and definitely. …We inhabit, for so short a time, a world of mystery and make-believe, a world largely of our own invention and creation, illuminated by our consciences, and the works of William Shakespeare.’

Shakespeare was one of the inheritances Eric gave my mother, as we saw in Chapter 8 where she suggests in a letter to Harry that she herself may be the ‘mortal coil’ entwining Harry which she thinks he may want to ‘shuffle off’. I must now go back to the question of the nature of her relationship with Eric and whether the thesis has changed my opinion about this or enabled me to draw any conclusions.

**Conclusion**

Eric and Vyvyan got round the 1920s censors with their pseudo-scholarly project of translating the sexy French novels; Hamish Hamilton caused Eric to censor Sartre’s masterpiece, *The Reprieve*; my mother censored most of her relationship with Bill from her memoir. These censorships wrap round the central censorship – the possibility that Eric abused my mother – neglected by me so far, either as too painful to discuss, or as unsolvable due to lack of evidence. All I have to go on is my sister’s evidence, the unreliable memoir, and the evidence – indirect – of my mother’s and Eric’s lives together as shown in this thesis. Aspects not shown – such as his loving weekly letters to her at the Convent, and her grown-up personality – are evidence too.

If Eric did sexually abuse my mother as a child, her statement to Nick Jacobs that she looked all her life for a man like Eric, and never found one, would have to be read as the pathological love of an abused child for her abuser. Eric’s frank letters to Vyvyan about sex and drink would have to be taken to mean that he was a sexual predator. Her words ‘The prospect of leaving Eric…was more than I could contemplate’ (when Harry first asks her to marry him in 1939) would have to be seen as too like that of a lover, and an additional shred of evidence that their relationship was too close. The drama of Chapter 8, when Eric seems to be trying to prevent Felicity marrying Harry by asking for more and more delays, would have to be read as a desire to keep her in this too-close relationship rather than a loving concern for her wellbeing.

Such a reading would go against my initial impetus for writing this thesis – sympathy with Eric. In Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier,* Dowell, the narrator, is describing Ashburnham’s feelings of taboo-violation on falling in love with his ward, Nancy, who may (critics have suggested) ‘actually’ be his daughter. ‘He certainly loved her, but with a very deep, very tender and very tranquil love. He had missed her when she went away to her convent school; he had been glad when she returned. But of more than that he had been totally unconscious. Had he been conscious of it, he assured me, he would have fled from it as from a thing accursed’ (quoted in Max Saunders, *A Dual Life,* p. 423). This would be how I wanted Eric to feel about the suggestion that he abused my mother.

About Eric’s guilt, in the end I can only go by my mother’s words about Eric – and what sort of person she was. ‘I was glad I had a dog to keep Eric out of my bedroom’ suggests a fear that went on for some time. She had Mickey for a long time, years. This long-term fear may have been caused by an incident, perhaps the one she describes in her other sentence, ‘He mistook me for my mother’. Even then, she calls it a mistake – thus not blaming him. Her words in her memoir ‘This tragedy [Peggy’s death] broke my father, and he never mended’, possibly assign a reason, again without blaming him. She asked for her ashes to be scattered partly on his grave. She did not blame Eric but saw him as ‘broken’, not a whole human being.

Mickey was a Sealyham. Many of my mother’s early letters to Harry end with a reference to Mickey – his mange, his need to be taken for a walk. The Sacred Heart ‘Chronicle’, vols. 6-7, p. 73, contains an extract from her school essay about him among other ‘Extracts from essays on Old Friends’. ‘Such a friend is he! While you read a book, with one arm over the side of the chair, his ears are between your fingers; half the mind is on the book, the other with the panting object lying there beside the chair, hot in the blazing fire-light, yet not daring to move, lest the dear hand be taken away from his head and the dear company withdrawn.’ This could be read as an echo of her relationship with Eric, full of love, and wanting to be near him, but aware of a blaze that is too hot and dangerous if you get too close. At least three times in her life she escaped that blaze, by getting the job in Leamington in 1941, by moving out of Eric’s flat in 1945, and by marrying Harry in 1948.

By ‘What kind of person she was’ I mean that everyone loved her. Rather than appearing to be a damaged person, she helped damage in other people. Harry’s letter to his mother about why he must marry her NOW (in 1939) speaks of her natural capacity for happiness. She was naïve and wise at the same time, wanted to know, listened to people, and would make some comment which was not only sympathetic but went straight to the point, acknowledged reality and expected more of you. When Harry was President of Wolfson she knew all the students, many of them foreign and at sea, knew their wives and children, and had parties to help them feel at home. She was a brilliant, dedicated artist. I have to thank Eric for his part in making her the person she was. I miss her very much.

***Eric’s gravestone in the Catholic cemetery in Storrington, West Sussex***

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***Eric, Jenny, Harry, Felicity, Harry’s brother Humphrey, and Rosamond Fisher on 18 December 1948 outside the church of the Holy Redeemer, Chelsea. I still have my mother’s wedding dress which she made herself from a length of Indian fabric acquired second-hand. She made her petticoat out of parachute silk.***



***Felicity with Emma and Lucy in about 1952***



***Jenny and Fé at Ronnie Dallas’s wedding (Jenny’s son with Douglas) in 1951 – from Nicolette Dallas’s scrap book.*** ***Fé was very glamorous: at the beginning of the war she had been photographed by Cecil Beaton for the cover of* Vogue *as a representative Wren.***

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FFA 1.4 Letters from Eric Sutton to Harry Fisher, 1939-1942

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*The chapters covering Edward Thompson, Arthur Bell – poet, resident of Storrington and friend of Eric and Peggy – and Eric’s translation of the novel by B. Traven were cut from the final version of this thesis.*

***Primary source material II: Translations by Eric Sutton***

***Translations are in date order, to give a picture of his translating career. A star beside one of the translations means I possess a copy. In some cases, other versions of the same book are listed beside his translation.***

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NOTE TO MY EXAMINERS TO ACCOMPANY REVISED PHD

Emma Tristram

Re PhD thesis titled ‘Eric Translated: An Experimental Family Memoir’, 2016

Main changes in the revised PhD thesis: one new chapter added and two removed

The main change is that as requested by the Examiners a new chapter has been added (Chapter 9) based on the WW2 letters between Eric Sutton and his wife Jenny. To make room for this two chapters have been removed, following suggestions in the Examiners’ Report – the chapter ‘The Storrington Mystery’, and the chapter on Eric’s translation of B. Traven’s The Death Ship. The Report suggested removing the Storrington chapter, and also felt too much emphasis was given to his translations, although I only discussed 3 of the 69 at length. The Traven chapter was the obvious candidate to go as Eric’s translation of it was an ‘interesting failure’, being overtaken by Traven’s own in less good, but more appropriate English.

It was necessary to remove two chapters (both quite short) to make room for the new chapter, as researching the new chapter turned up some previously unknown letters from Eric in the OttoTheis and Louise Morgan archive at Yale, and these led me to find 17 previously unknown book reviews by Eric in a little magazine of the 1920s. I also found further discussion of Eric’s skills as a translator, relevant to this period, in a Hungarian book about the battle of Verdun.

I hope by adding this new chapter I have rectified the main ‘puzzling omission’ mentioned by the examiners, even if there has not been room for much discussion of the wartime letters themselves.

**Other changes**

The examiners also asked for more information about Eric’s role in his post as Private Secretary to Lord Sumner on the Reparations Commission in 1919-21. I have researched this further, but Eric’s role remains obscure. I have added some more information in a footnote on p. 63.

More information was asked for about Jenny, Eric’s second wife. There has not been room for much more, except more pictures, but more has been added about Fé Potter, Jenny’s later partner and fellow-Wren. As requested a reference to Jean Findlay’s biography of Charles Scott Moncrieff has been added. Layout problems have been improved, TLS italicised, and TLS reviews attributed. Some additions have been made to the Bibliography. Sections of the Preface, and the Conclusion, have been rewritten. I made the decision to name my mother’s potential abuser, Eric’s friend Vyvyan Holland, partly because of discussions by email with his son, and partly because my conclusions are now more tentative than they were about who was the abuser.

About Eric’s childhood and schooling I know no more than I have already put in, so could not expand that section; but I have researched his family further and discovered more details about his maternal grandmother, Asenath Garrad, and his aunts and uncles – see the updated ‘Cast of Characters’.

**Further criticisms**

The criticism that the ‘final sections’ seem ‘staccato and compressed’ may result from the fact that the present Chapter 8, ‘The events of 1940’, which was originally the last chapter, was written in its first form at twice the present length. Cutting it to highlight Eric’s role, rather than the love affair of my parents, was hard, and I resorted to a mini-anthology of quotations from my mother’s letters at one point. Rather than change this, I hope that by adding the new final chapter I have improved this perceived variation of tone.

Some of the criticisms made by the examiners have not been curable – the suggestion that the thesis is ‘a collection of fragments’ for instance. This is part of its ‘experimental’ nature and is justified in Chapter 1 with reference to the quotation from Kathryn Hughes on p. 36. The examiners also wished for a less ‘flat’, more Shandyesque tone on my part and for more of a ‘rueful admission of failure’ at some points. I have to admit (ruefully) that I have failed to remedy this.

1. FFA 3.2, Felicity Fisher to Nick Jacobs, 1 September 1996. Nick Jacobs is a translator, publisher and critic who contacted my mother for information about Eric. I found his letter in the archive, got in touch with him, and he kindly gave me her letters to him. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. My mother, on the rare occasions when she spoke of him, always referred to him as Eric (possibly taking a cue from her stepmother Jenny). So ‘Eric’ he is throughout, reflecting the greater importance of family memoir as a theme in my thesis, compared with translation. In this I am following a recurrent fashion in biography – for instance, Robert Crawford’s *Young Eliot: From St Louis to The Waste Land,* Jonathan Cape, London, 2015, which calls Eliot ‘Tom’ throughout. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. FFA 2.1, Jenny Sutton to Eric Sutton, 15 November 1940: ‘Knowing how much you hated translating I don’t think you should do much of THAT again as it only depresses you.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. FFA 1.2, Eric Sutton to Jenny Sutton, 7 January 1941: ‘I don’t see why I shouldn’t try to recover a little of the standing and influence I so foolishly threw away during my years of self-eclipse. How stupid I was.’ Eric is hoping to renew his acquaintance with Ronald Knox, whom he knew at Oxford, to find good Catholic lodgings for Felicity at Oxford while she attends the Slade, which has moved there from London because of the war. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Felicity Fisher, ‘From Then to Then’, private printout, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. FFA 3.2, Felicity Fisher to Nick Jacobs, 1 Sept 1996. My mother met Jack Beazley, an Oxford don, several times and reports in the same letter that ‘he and Eric used to spend long vacations in Germany together, walking in the Black Forest and searching out Greek vases or bits of Greek vases’. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In May 1941, aged 19, my mother went to Leamington Spa to work for the camouflage department; the relationship with Harry was soon on again, with both parties a little more grown-up, and Eric’s influence no longer strong. Marriage was no longer the main plan, though my mother continued to make her trousseau. It was a question of meeting and being happy together when they could. But in 1942 my mother broke it off again, this time, it felt then, painfully and finally. They did not come back together until 1948, when they married soon after meeting again. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Much of my Gladys Peto material has been donated to Chichester University so that it becomes available for researchers studying art, journalism, media, the history of WW1, and other subjects to which it is connected. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The archive also contained much material connected to Geoffrey Fisher, my paternal grandfather, and my grandmother, Rosamond Fisher. This has been given either to Lambeth Palace library (if it belonged to his time as Bishop of Chester, Bishop of London or Archbishop of Canterbury) or to Repton School (if it related to his time as headmaster there). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. I interpret this as meaning ‘just another slice of autobiography covering a certain period, and of no particular importance’. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *The Autobiography of G.K.Chesterton*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2006, p. 21. The autobiography was first published in 1936. Eric mentions in a letter that he is reading it, and I am sure it would have interested both him and my mother, from a literary and a Catholic point of view. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. FFA 3.1, Felicity Sutton to Harry Fisher, ?13 November 1940. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In another example of negative influence, I have overturned this trend; I married a man who never flies into rages. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Nancy Miller, *But Enough About Me: why we read other people’s lives*, Columbia UP, New York, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2012, p.19. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. I left out ‘autem’ by mistake – my mistake now carved in stone, rather like Ed Miliband’s pre-election Labour ‘ten commandments’. The correct quotation from the Vulgate is ‘Tunc *autem* facie ad faciem’. ‘*But* then face to face.’ ‘But’ represents the ‘de’ of the Greek construction ‘men…de…’ used in two contrasting clauses. Too late to change it now. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature,* OUP, Oxford, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. An advertisement for ‘non-fiction courses’ run by the University of East Anglia (*London Review of Books*, 22 November 2012, p. 2) includes one course titled ‘How to write the new biography’, adding ‘A course for those writing memoir, autobiography, a journal, a biography, a fictional biography or an experimental family history’. Even though the advertisement is contradictory in including ‘a fictional biography’ among ‘non-fiction courses’, I am glad to see my own genre included – experimental family history could describe my project. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. A conference at Goldsmith’s College, London, on 5 June 2015 had the title ‘Biography and/as Experimental Fiction’. After the first panel, a biographer asked the question: ‘What about the facts?’ [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Dasa Drndic, *Trieste*, Maclehose Press, London, 2012, p. 356. Laurent Binet, *HhHH*, Harvill Secker, London 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *The Mirador: Dreamed Memories of Irène Némirovsky by her Daughter*, New York Review of Books, NY, 2011. Another possibility would be the fictional diary, a form analysed by Sam Ferguson in a thesis submitted to the University of Oxford in 2013, titled ‘Diaries real and fictional in Twentieth-Century French Writing.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Nancy K. Miller, ‘The entangled self: genre bondage in the age of memoir’, PMLA, vol. 122(2), pp. 537-548, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Thomas Larson, *The Memoir and the Memoirist: reading and writing personal narrative*, Swallow Press/Ohio UP, Ohio, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Examples are *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir* by Lisa Appignanesi (‘the story of how the nucleus of the family survived outside the camps…and eventually made it to the new world’), Vintage, London, 2000; and *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*, by Kao Kalia Yang, about the Hmong people of Vietnam, and her family’s emigration to America after years in a refugee camp, Coffee House Press, Minneapolis, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. HarperCollins, London, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. ‘The Holocaust as family history’, by M.L.Vaul-Grimwood, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2003; and ‘Voices from an Island: four Sri Lankan novelists in English’, by D. Saikia, Bristol, 2003. Their main thematic backgrounds are similar to those of Appignanesi’s and Kalia Yang’s ‘family memoirs’ referred to above. The Holocaust and the post-colonial experience are felt to be subjects on which testimony is important. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. PHD, Royal Holloway, London, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. His 1998 essay is reprinted in Michael Holroyd, *Works on Paper: the craft of biography and autobiography*, Counterpoint, Washington, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Norton, London, 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Michael Holroyd, *Mosaic: Portraits in Fragments*, Abacus, London, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Kirk Polking, *Writing Family Histories and Memoirs*, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. [www.ehow.com\_2103529](http://www.ehow.com_2103529), accessed on 12.04.2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Chatto and Windus, London, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Macmillan, London, 1977. Counterpoint, Washington, 2000. A ‘niece’ (of Ronald’s) is mentioned, along with nephews, as being ‘highly-strung’. Her uncle Dillwyn summons ‘his niece’ to come and see him, to discuss the possibility of a job at the code-breaking centre at Bletchley (2000 edition, pp. 242 and 249). I assume this is her in both cases, though she does not give the niece’s name. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Barbara Wadsworth, *Edward Wadsworth: A Painter’s Life*, Michael Russell, London, 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. She does make one other, more startling appearance in the main body of the text: ‘Barbara’s arguments with her father on the matter [of becoming an R.A.] were perhaps too vigorous. She remembers – but not with much regret – calling him a Quisling, a traitor who had sold himself to the enemy’ (Wadsworth, 1989, p. 303). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Union Books, London, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. These are coming into their own as literary genres; a symptom of this is the acceptance of authors’ computer hard discs as part of the archive by the British Library when an author’s papers are donated. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Blake Morrison, *And When Did You Last See Your Father?*, Granta Publications, London, 1993; *Things My Mother Never Told Me*, Chatto and Windus, London, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Kathryn Hughes, ‘The lives of others’, *Guardian Saturday Review*, 16.02.13, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Style magazine *Stylist*, 20 Feb 2013, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Sister April O’Leary, personal communication, in an interview of 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. FFA 4.2, letter from ‘Duggan’, Margaret Tomlinson, to Eric, 3 November 1940. For several years I did not know who ‘Duggan’ was, though from other hints in the letter I guessed her to be Margaret Tomlinson (1905-1997), daughter of Eric’s first cousin Arthur Tansley and his wife Edith Chick. I sent this letter from her to the *Devon Family History Journal* asking for help finding out who she was; they published it in 2007, and in 2010 her nephew, Eddie Thompson, having read it, got in touch with me to confirm my guess. She was involved in writing the county history of Devon and in 1983 she published *Three Generations in the Honiton Lace Trade*, about her mother’s ancestors, the Chicks of south-east Devon. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. FFA 4.3, letter from Doit Garratt to Felicity on 20 May 1949 about Eric’s death: ‘I think back over all the years since Geoffrey and I first met your parents at Storrington, about 1921 – all the witty and understanding things he had to say in his very nice voice, and the amusing and astringent ones.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Eric’s writing is very hard to read. This is letter 1 in Merlyn Holland’s numbering. Merlin Holland, Vyvyan’s son, a writer and biographer of his grandfather Oscar Wilde, owns about 200 letters from Eric to Vyvyan. He allowed me to read them all in 2008 and helped me copy about half of them. Since my set of photocopies in two volumes of Eric’s letters to Vyvyan, FFA 1.3, is frequently referred to in this thesis, I do not quote its archive number every time but simply Merlin Holland’s reference number for the letter, either in a footnote or in the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. The index to *The Nation and the Athenaeum* is by Stuart N. Clarke. It was announced in November 2012 on the Virginia Woolf ‘Listserv’: <https://lists.service.ohio-state.edu/mailman/listinfo/vwoolf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. At the post-Viva stage of this thesis I did find 17 book reviews by Eric in the 1920s magazine ‘The Outlook’ – see Bibliography and Chapter 9, ‘The Theises gave me a Malory’. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. They had three children, Pamela in 1913 who died as a baby, Diana in 1915 who died in 1926, and my mother, Felicity, in 1922. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. My printout of ‘From Then to Then’, p. 5. To clarify my mother’s contribution I have put longer quotations from her memoir in italics. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. T.J. Cobden Sanderson, 1840-1922, was a bookbinder associated with the Arts and Crafts movement; his son Richard (1912-1964) was a printer and publisher (who published T.S.Eliot’s journal *Criterion*), from whose wife Gwladys Eric tried to rent a cottage for himself and Felicity in Long Crendon in 1939-40, when lodging nearby with the Gommes. As usual, Eric was near but not in the cultural centre of things. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Personal communication from Clare Asquith. The diaries are quoted in Evelyn Waugh’s biography of Knox. The archive Waugh collected for that book was in the care of her father-in-law, the Marquis of Oxford and Asquith, when Penelope Fitzgerald was researching her book *The Knox Brothers* in the 1970s – she thanks him for letting her consult it. But two other present-day biographers of Knox have been unable to find the diaries. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. FFA 1.2. Nicolette, who died in March 2015 aged 93, was Jenny’s daughter from her first marriage to Douglas Dallas. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. FFA 1.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. The University Archivist told me that as the magazine was a private undertaking the correspondence would be kept by the Editor. I looked for current or recent editors, and contacted Sir Anthony Kenny, who had been ‘Acting Editor’ for a year; he had no archive. A friendly email from Colin Harris of the Bodleian library said: ‘Yes, I fully appreciate the feeling that there may be an Oxford Magazine archive out there, but such are the vagaries of time, coupled with events in history, as well as in one's personal life, that all too often 'archives' disappear. The most obvious reason is when one moves house and clears out the attic, etc; or when one downsizes. During the Second World War there was a great plea for paper salvage and this must have accounted for a lot of 'unwanted' paper and, of course, it was very patriotic to contribute to this. Even the Bodleian provided what it considered unwanted library (administrative) records to the greater cause.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. *Mind*, n.s., 1895, pp. 278-280. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. From Rimbaud, *Sensations*, quoted in Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, University of Chicago Press, 2003, p.100. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Peter Ayres, *Shaping Ecology: The Life of Arthur Tansley*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. The Tansleys were ‘ball and rout furnishers’ – organisers of the marquees and dance floors and other equipment for grand social occasions: Ayres, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. I have donated these to the Library of Kent University. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. FFA 1.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ayres, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. I have very little information about Eric’s father, William; but on William’s marriage certificate of 1876, his father, another William, is described as a woollen draper. Eric, too, may have been the first of his family to go to university. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. ‘From Then to Then’, private printout, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. ‘From Then to Then’, p. 2. The 1911 census shows Peggy living at St Bee’s with her widowed father, sister and brother in a 10-roomed house (excluding usual offices). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Marcus Ferrar, in his memoir *A Foot in Both Camps*, LBA digital 2012, tells how his grandfather Friedrich Roewer, Director of the Alfred Nobel Dynamit AG in Hamburg, expanded production to meet the needs of war: employment at the factory ‘soared from 600 to 2700 during WW1’ (p. 10). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. ‘From Then to Then’, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. First published 1941; quotations are from the Virago edition, Collins, London, 1984. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Scolar Press, 1994, p. 235. Walkley says there were 4 units, but Eric and Peggy lived at no. 6. More must have been added to the original 4. The London Street Directory for 1921 lists 7 flats at Carlyle Studios: 1, 1A, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 – all but one occupied by artists. Did Eric or Peggy at no. 6 forget to fill in their form? Or had Peggy joined Eric in Paris, 1921 being the last year of his diplomatic job, perhaps subletting the flat? [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. *The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome*, Century, London, 1985, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. It would be convenient if Arthur Ransome had also lived at no. 6, making his description also a description of Eric and Peggy’s flat. But what number he lived at has eluded me so far. Ransome’s letters to Gordon Bottomley of 1905 and 6 are just headed ‘Carlyle Studios’ (BL Add. MS. 88957/1/74). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Barbara Wadsworth, *Edward Wadsworth: A Painter’s Life*, Michael Russell, Wilton, 1989, p. 64. Both my mother and Barbara state that the flat was upstairs; Stella Bowen recalls someone climbing in through the bathroom window after missing her last bus home. Perhaps the bathroom was shared, and on the ground floor. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. ‘From Then to Then’, p. 2. FF’s handwritten addition. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Another light on ‘studios’ comes from Vyvyan Holland’s autobiography, *Time Remembered,* Gollancz, London, 1966. After WW1 Vyvyan planned to set up house with a painter friend, Stanley Mercer. Their house at 59, Oakley St, was not ready: ‘Mercer…had gone back to his studio in Cheyne Walk; I joined him there, and to begin with I lived in the bedroom, while he slept on the model’s throne in the studio…There was a gas ring in the bedroom where we cooked and upset boiling fat on the carpet and on ourselves, and we called it the bed-kitchen-room’ (p. 110). Vyvyan first calls the whole thing a ‘studio’ then it becomes clear it is two rooms. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. ‘From Then to Then’, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. FFA 3.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. MI5 and MI6 were separated officially in 1910, according to Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: the authorised history of MI5*, London, 2009, pp. 25-7. An email from intelligence expert Phil Tomaselli, 3 December 2012, tells me that Eric’s name does not appear in lists of known agents. He added that some names that should be on such lists do not appear on them. He also says that MO5, the department that recruited Eric, ‘split up, in 1916, to become M18 (cable censorship), M19 (mail censorship) and MI5 (the security service), all part of the much larger Directorate of Special Intelligence’. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Vintage, 2000, p. 172. Originally published 1928. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Lord Sumner’s papers in the National Archive contain a few mentions of Eric. He is present at a meeting of the Reparations Commission held at President Wilson’s house in the Place des États Unis, Paris, on 4 June 1919, among five ‘Experts of Reparation’ listed for the UK, one of them Lord Sumner, and at two meetings in May (FO 608/306). Wilson represents the US, David Lloyd George represents the UK, M. Clemenceau France, and M. Orlando Italy. But Eric is never minuted as saying or doing anything. He is not a secretary in the minute-taking sense, as others do that. He then vanishes from the papers of the Commission. Perhaps he was a plant by the Intelligence services. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. *Laughing Torso: Reminiscences of Nina Hamnett*, Constable, London, p. 1932. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. As so often, my mother gets this wrong: Peggy’s 1923 etching is of Mary Cecil, Duchess of Devonshire. It remains in the Devonshire Collection, although it is no longer on view to visitors (information from Charles Noble, curator at Chatsworth, 2.9.2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900-1939*, Penguin, London, 2003, p. 53. First published by Viking, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Ian Ferguson, a local historian of Storrington, recently (2016) found the entry about designing Peggy’s tombstone in Eric Gill’s workbook listing his commissions. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Letter 8, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Introductory dots in the original; letter 5, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Letter 16, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Eric’s letters to Vyvyan are usually from the Savile Club or the office – on their notepaper – hence do not reveal where he is living. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Letter 48A, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Letter 54, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Letter 17, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Jennifer Birkett, *Margaret Storm Jameson: A Life*, OUP, 2009, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. This is what Douglas is stating is true ‘to the best of my knowledge, information and belief’ (Divorce petition, Divorce Court file J 77/2406/5150, p. 2): ‘That the Respondent [Jenny] has frequently committed adultery with Eric Sutton of Flat 4, 26 Campden Hill Gardens, W. in the county of London. That from the month of July to the month of December 1925 at times and places unknown to the petitioner [Douglas] the Respondent frequently committed adultery with the said Eric Sutton. That throughout the months of December 1925, January and February 1926, the Respondent frequently committed adultery with the said Eric Sutton at Tryon Buildings, Mallord street, Chelsea. That from the month of February 1926 to the date of this Petition [April 1927] the Respondent has lived and cohabited and habitually committed adultery with the said Eric Sutton, at Flat 4, 26 Campden Hill Gardens, W.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Letter 22, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Letter 28, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. FFA 1.2, Eric to Jenny, 17 December 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Letter 30, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland, ?April 1926. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Letter 7, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland, dated by Merlin Holland to ‘?early 1924’. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. I copied the article by hand in about 1990 (already interested in Eric and his style) from the cutting supposedly from ‘The Times’, which my mother then had. This is a retyping of that. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. *Never Again! (Point de Lendemain) and other stories, translated from the French of Claude-Joseph Dorat by Eric Sutton, with an introduction by Vyvyan Holland*, 12th in the series ‘XVIII Century French Romances’, edited by Vyvyan Holland, London, Chapman and Hall, 1928. Full details of Eric’s seven translations for the series are in the Bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Vyvyan Holland, *Time Remembered: After Père Lachaise*, London, Gollancz, 1966, p. 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Vivant Denon, *No Tomorrow*, translated by Lydia Davis, New York Review of Books, New York, 2009, p. vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. ‘The Censored Language of War: Richard Aldington's Death of a Hero and Three Other War Novels of 1929’, J.H.Willis Jr., *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 45, No. 4  (Winter 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. The *TLS* reviewer of the translation, 6.9.1928, Richard Aldington, implies that the editor of the series should have known it was by Denon. The 1777 edition is signed ‘M.D.G.O.D.R.’, ‘M. Denon, gentilhomme ordinaire du Roy’. ‘Dorat never held that post.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Useful here is the edition *Point de Lendemain*, Editions du Boucher, Paris, 2002, which gives the 1777 text, the 1812 text, and a ‘comparative’ text showing how 1812 has changed 1777. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. ‘La Comtesse de…me prit sans m’aimer, continua Damon: elle me trompa. Je me fachai, elle me quitta: cela était dans l’ordre. Je l’aimais alors, et, pour me venger mieux, j’eus le caprice de la *ravoir*, quand, à mon tour, je ne l’aimai plus. J’y réussis, et lui tournai la tete: c’est ce que je demandais.’ *Point de Lendemain*, 1777 text, Editions du Boucher, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Catherine Cosset, *No Tomorrow: The Ethics of Pleasure in the French Enlightenment*, University of Virginia Press, 1999, p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. The 7 November 1927 letter is FFA 1.3, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland, no. 56 in Merlin Holland’s numbering. The letter from early 1928 is no. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. FFA 1.3, Eric Sutton to Vyvyan Holland, letter 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Review in *TLS*, 27 September 2013, by Kevin Mulligan of *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics* by A.W.Moore, Cambridge University Press, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Letter 47/1927 in Merlin Holland’s numbering: but as it is about *The Masked Lady* by Durey de Sauroy, which appeared in 1926, it should go before letter 37 of 11 September 1926. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. FFA 1.3, letter 30, ?April 1926. ‘What of soul was left, I wonder/When the kissing had to stop?’ from ‘A Toccata of Galuppi’. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Jaques Cazotte, *A Thousand and One Follies and His Most Unlooked-For Lordship*, 1927. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. *The Times*, 30 May 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. *New Statesman*, 26 November 1960, pp. 837-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of language and translation,* Oxford, 2nd ed, 1992, p. 67. Originally published 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A history of translation,* Routledge, 2nd ed., 2008, p. 11. Originally published 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. ‘Je veux être Lord: je veux être Pair: où est ma Pairie?’ in the French text of ‘Le Lord impromptu’, which can be seen on the website [www.archive.org/details/lelordimpromptu00chargoog](http://www.archive.org/details/lelordimpromptu00chargoog); p. 47 of the book. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com). Consulted in January 2013. There is also a currency converter on [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk); it only gives 5-yearly intervals and only goes up to 2005, but suggests £150 was worth £4,495 in 1925, £5,013 in 1930. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Evelyn Juers, *House of Exile: The Life and Times of Heinrich Mann and Nelly Kroger-Mann*, University of Western Sydney, Sydney, Australia, 2008, p. 187. Juers does not give references but lists the diaries of both brothers among her sources. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Heinrich Mann, *Henri Quatre: Last Days of Henri Quatre*, 2 vols, Secker and Warburg, London, 1938-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. My mother told my sister Lucy that when the time came to pay the rent on one cottage, Eric and Jenny would ‘flit’ to another without paying. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Quoted in Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A dual life*, Oxford University Press, 1996, vol. 1, p. 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. ‘The Chronicle’ (magazine of Sacred Heart convents), volumes 8-9-10, p. 77, in the archive at Barat House, Roehampton University. Copied 25.10.2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. *The [Roehampton] Chronicle*, Vols. 8-9-10, p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. My 1972 Penguin edition states on the copyright page: ‘Eric Sutton’s translation first published by Hamish Hamilton in 1947. Revised translation published in Penguin Books 1964. Reprinted 1964, 1966, 1968, 1970 (twice), 1972.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Last Chance: Roads of Freedom IV*, translated by Craig Vaisey, Continuum, London, 2009. Vaisey prefers ‘Roads of Freedom’ as the translation of whole tetralogy. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Eric Griffiths, *Dante in English*, Penguin Classics, 2005, Introduction, p. xx. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. The comment was included in a short essay, ‘Please insert’ I, which formed part of the first, French edition but was not included in Sutton’s translation of 1947 or the Penguin revision of Sutton’s translation in 1963. It is now available in English in Sartre, *The Last Chance: Roads of Freedom IV*, Continuum, London, 2009, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. The University of Texas at Austin (Harry Ransom Center), Alfred A. Knopf Inc. Records Archive, Boxes 25.2 and 4.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. His death certificate shows that he died three years later on 14 May 1949 of ‘cardiac failure’. Another reason given is ‘old pericarditis and coronary infarction’, possibly this earlier episode of heart-related illness. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. *The Reprieve*, first American edition, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1947. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Bristol University Library, Special Collections, file DM 1107/00 1823. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Reference to the letters quoted in this chapter are so many that I have referred to them in the text simply by date, rather than footnoting each one. The archive sections in which particular letters belong are described at the beginning of the Bibliography. This one, for instance, is in FFA 3.1, letters from Felicity Sutton to Harry Fisher. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. ‘If she is happy, I am’: a version of the Latin phrase ‘Si vales, valeo’, common in letters in classical times, referred to by Eric (in one of his own letters) as being used by Cicero. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Eric’s letters to Jenny in my archive are FFA 1.2, hers to him FFA 2.1. Because of the number of quotations I do not quote this reference every time but refer to letters by date. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Laurence Olivier’s ‘Henry V’, which he starred in and also directed. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Akademiai Kiado, Budapest, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. A new translation of the book, *Outside Verdun*, by Fiona Rintoul (Freight Books, Glasgow, 2014), translates this chapter title as ‘The imaginings of a Jew’. This may refer to Private Bertin, the main Jewish character, and his plan to take the six days of leave he is owed, which is refused, not point-blank but in a humiliating staged scene. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Folder 378, Letter 2, Otto Theis and Louise Morgan manuscript collection at the Beinecke Library. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Louise Morgan, on the other hand, had a distinguished literary career. A review by her in ‘The Outlook’ of T.S.Eliot’s *Poems, 1909-1925* (20 February, 1926, p. 135) shows her as a learned, graceful writer who understood the feelings, techniques and newness of Eliot’s poetry long before many other critics. Eric must have found her intelligence very attractive as well as her sympathy. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. See the list of Eric’s reviews in the Bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. *The Diaries of Randolph Schwabe: British Art 1930-48*, edited by Gill Clarke, Bristol, 2016, p. 346. I told my siblings about this story and my sister Lucy replied: ‘She was quite a daredevil! Did she ever tell you how she crossed the Thames on the outside of a closed bridge, wearing an evening dress? With some bloke.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. D. Collett Wadge, *Women in Uniform*, Imperial War Museum, London, 2003, p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)