

## 9. The Private Life Meltdown 1936-1937

On 10 August 1935 the 24-year-old Michael Patmore was married to 23-year-old Netta McCulloch in St John the Baptist Church in Pinner, Middlesex. His mother and her partner were unable to attend as they were in Connecticut. His brother was also in the United States, preparing his autumn exhibition at Altman's department store in New York.

Aldington and Patmore must have met with Michael and his new bride on their return to London in mid-October. Another young couple of whom they saw a great deal were Eric and Violet Warman. Aldington also made one new acquaintance and picked up another from the past. The new friendship was with C.P. Snow, whom he visited in Cambridge on several occasions. In his memoir, *Stranger and Brother*, Philip Snow recalls Aldington's first visit: 'He was outstandingly handsome, the most impressive-looking writer I was ever to know. . . . During the weekend he stayed with Charles his stock grew with us. He was gentlemanly; this need not have followed from his rough war experiences starkly described in *Death of a Hero*.'<sup>1</sup> The problematic relationship between art and science, which Snow would publicly debate 23 years later, was already a concern to Aldington, and the two men had much to discuss.<sup>2</sup> Aldington would contribute an article, 'Science and Conscience', to the journal *Discovery*, of which Snow became editor in 1937;<sup>3</sup> and it was Snow to whom Frere would turn in 1938 for *Richard Aldington: An Appreciation*, the pamphlet issued by Heinemann to accompany new editions of Aldington's novels.

Alec Waugh was the friend with whom an acquaintance was renewed. He and Aldington had met sporadically over the years since their first encounter at the Poetry Bookshop in 1919, but their more recent friendship had been occasioned by a scoffing remark about *The Eaten Heart* by Beachcomber of the *Daily Express* in 1934.<sup>4</sup> Coming across this, Waugh had obtained a copy of the poem, then one of *A Dream in the*

C.P. Snow,  
1934



*Luxembourg*, both of which confirmed the opinion he had expressed in 1919 that Aldington was a fine love poet.<sup>5</sup> He wrote to him and over the next three years they met whenever Aldington was in London.

By April 1936, when he and Patmore set off for Portugal, Spain, France and Austria in the company of the Glovers, Aldington had completed 60,000 words of what would become *Very Heaven* and had had the approval of both Prentice and Raymond. The title is drawn from the lines in *The Prelude* in which Wordsworth celebrates the early days of the French Revolution: 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive/ But to be young was very heaven!'<sup>6</sup> With reference to the life of Chris Heylin, Aldington's protagonist, these lines are tinged with irony. Aldington worked on the novel throughout his travels and completed it during his two-and-a-half-month stay in Austria.

*Very Heaven* is the story of a young man in the postwar world who is forced, as a result of his father's financial losses, to give up his undergraduate life and make his way in the world without qualifications for any kind of employment. In the final pages of the novel, overcome with a sense of guilt and unworthiness and in despair at the state of the world around him, Chris determines to throw himself off a Portuguese cliff-top. However, the sight of a butterfly caught in the wind on the rocks below him but wafted up to safety triggers his reflections on the place of the individual in the chain of life, a passage that recalls the final section of *Life Quest* (and Lawrence's *Apocalypse*):

On the edge of barren land and barren sea under the same sun, life was born. For millions of centuries life has struggled and perished under these three great powers. Yet it has always been passed on. The salt of the sea is in my blood, the radiance of the sun and the chemicals of earth in my cells. In all that unimaginable stretch of time what an infinity of chances against my ever existing! One broken link in that tremendous chain of life, and I could never have been. And I exist.

The novel ends with Chris walking away from the clifftop towards the little town, trusting in the human capacity for progress. 'And if the whole adventure does fail,' he concludes, 'at least we shall have had the exultation of the attempt.'<sup>7</sup>

The novel is flawed by the weight of the ideas it has to carry. The protagonist is treated sympathetically and with some humorous critique of his youthful naivety and earnestness, but he also has to act as a mouthpiece for the author. In consequence, he engages in lengthy discourses, either with himself or delivered to other characters, and these are supported by further passages of exposition in the authorial voice. The targets are the usual ones: the older generation, materialism and greed, bourgeois codes of ethics (particularly sexual ethics), Christianity, militarism and the state of international politics; but no opportunity is missed to deliver the messages. This is particularly noticeable in the representation of the characters, many of whom are little more than caricatures. Even those with 'walk-on' parts are used in this way, for example a young university acquaintance of Chris who is 'an intelligent Catholic aesthete with a tendency to fascism' or a police sergeant who is 'one of those bluff hearty fellows who stand no nonsense from agitators – of the Left'.<sup>8</sup> The young female characters, like those in *Death of a Hero* and *All Men Are Enemies*, are either enchanting, insipid or controlling.

As in *Death of a Hero*, the portraits of the protagonist's parents are damning. Chris's father's incompetence has led to the family's financial downfall, for which he evades responsibility, retiring to his bed and leaving his son to sort out the mess. However, there is a moving scene towards the end of the novel where Chris has to identify his father's body, a duty Aldington himself had been forced into undertaking. At the time he had written to Frank Flint: 'For me the dead are yellow faces, pools of blood, muddy khaki, hurried burials under shell-fire. . . . I became addicted to wholesale death; so retail death, although it touches me closely, cannot move me greatly'; but the account in *Very Heaven* prompts us to think otherwise.<sup>9</sup>

Nell Heylin, Chris's mother, is an ignorant and grasping materialist, pushing her daughter into a loveless marriage to improve the family's financial prospects, preoccupied with her and her family's social standing and possessed of a love of drama and a sentimentality which includes her conviction that she 'can read [her] own son like a book': 'Nobody can understand a boy as his mother does.'<sup>10</sup> She is drawn with a savagery even greater than that employed in the portrait of Isabel Winterbourne, suggesting that the intervening seven years had done nothing to diminish Aldington's contempt for his mother.

During his travels he told several correspondents that he intended to be on the Continent until September and then to visit Japan, but this plan seems to have been abandoned by late August when he informed Bacon that, after all, he would be spending the winter in 'smoky London' in order, he said, to write another novel.<sup>11</sup> An undated entry in one of Patmore's personal notebooks gives us a clue as to the real reason for the change of plan. The entry tells us that she and Aldington had opened and read the mail that was awaiting them at a French village which they had given as a poste restante and that she had recognised her daughter-in-law's handwriting on one of the envelopes addressed to Aldington. It was their habit to exchange their letters after they had read them, but she did not find the one from her daughter-in-law amongst those he gave her. When she enquired about it, he silently passed it to her; reading it, she experienced 'a curious gasping pain' around her heart.<sup>12</sup>

It is hard to know exactly what happened after the return to London and the Cavendish Hotel on 1 October, but the events were dramatic – and agonising for those affected. First, Aldington seems to have had a major dispute with Chatto, such that he instructed Pinker to terminate his contract and arrange the transfer of all publishing rights to Heinemann – just as *Very Heaven* was going through the editing stage. The letters exchanged between Pinker, Raymond and Frere show the cordial relations between these three parties – and their utter puzzlement, embarrassment and consternation. Pinker informed the other two that Aldington was so enraged with Chatto that he could not bear to correspond with the company and wanted Pinker to conduct all the negotiations.<sup>13</sup> Frere wrote to Raymond: 'I had talks with Richard, who was emotionally upset and deranged, but was also both determined and adamant. . . . I want to thank you personally for being so damned decent about the whole thing.'<sup>14</sup>

Chatto were compliant, agreeing to release Aldington from his contracts if the company could come to 'a reasonable arrangement' with Heinemann regarding his already-published work.<sup>15</sup> '[W]e have worked hard over Richard's work for more than seven years and it goes without

saying that he is a very considerable asset to our list,' Raymond wrote to Pinker, estimating a figure of £3,100, which included £1,000 for Chatto's loss of profits on the existing publications, particularly the eight titles in the Phoenix Library. He concluded: 'This is a very laconic letter, I fear. You know how we must be feeling about all this. But I don't think there is anything to be gained by protestation. One can only accept the situation.'<sup>16</sup>

Of course, Prentice's retirement from Chatto had been a disappointment to Aldington, but his relationship with Raymond had always been a good one, and Raymond and his wife Vera had visited Aldington and Patmore in France on at least one occasion, as well as socialising with them in London. Aldington's correspondence with Parsons, the other Chatto director, with whom he had dealings whenever Raymond was on holiday, had always been cordial.

There had been two slightly awkward exchanges between Raymond and Aldington when the latter returned from America in the autumn of 1935, fired up – as he had had no ideas for a new novel since *Women Must Work* in 1934 – with Doubleday's suggestion of a book on the Borgias and still keen to have *Life of a Lady* published. Raymond had 'declined' to publish the play: 'We don't feel it is worthy of you. . . . I can't seem to find a whiff of R.A. in it.'<sup>17</sup> About the Borgia book, he had been discouraging. 'The slump, combined with the general pursuit of the bestseller, has dealt a heavy blow to any serious work of non-fiction,' he had told Aldington, adding that the outline the latter had provided might make the book 'a trifle episodic', 'a fact which we think accounts more than anything else for the disappointing sales and reviews of *Artifex*'.<sup>18</sup>

By January 1936, however, the Borgias abandoned, Aldington was communicating excitedly with Raymond about the early stages of *Very Heaven*. He thanked Raymond for Chatto's forbearance during what he called his 'ghastly interregnum', which he blamed on his accident and the subsequent operations. He had, he said, only felt fully recovered in the last month, but was delighted to be able to inform Raymond that he had already written 5,000 words of a new novel and even had an idea for another. 'Only Charles and Brigit know that I've got off the mark again,' he wrote, 'but I feel you ought to know because of the subsidy, and because you are you!'<sup>19</sup>

Writing to his friend Alister Kershaw twelve years later, Aldington described Raymond as 'a chump' but called Parsons 'an excrementum of purest ray serene, and my reason for leaving [Chatto]'.<sup>20</sup> Quite what had caused his objection to Parsons we do not know – but the fall-out was massive. Whatever the cause of the rupture, Aldington became

a Heinemann author. It was an acquisition about which Frere would have cause to be ambivalent over the next two decades. Reconciling the conflicting demands of his professional and his personal relationships with Aldington would prove wearing. That this had never been the case where Prentice was concerned may be due to the fact that the latter had been Aldington's publisher before he was his friend. On the other hand, it may tell us more about the personalities involved: Prentice was a tolerant and gentle man; both Aldington and Frere were made of more explosive material.

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Frere was called on to play a part in the even more dramatic and agonising events that were taking place in Aldington's personal life. Aldington had begun an affair with Netta Patmore, Michael's new wife. He told H.D. in January 1937 that the affair had been going on for over a year.<sup>21</sup> This means that it must have started not long after his return from America in the autumn of 1935 – and only a few months after Netta's marriage. H.D. encountered the pair on one occasion in a London teashop ('The Nell Gwynne' she noted ironically). She subsequently told Jessie Capper that Netta had seemed very young: 'a slight little thing with no hat, no vamp, little if any make-up, a nicely tailored little dark costume, rather on the tiny, petite side'.<sup>22</sup>

There seems to have come a moment when Aldington decided that this would not be yet another affair and that he must marry Netta. She, meanwhile, had to choose between the two men – or retain Aldington as an extramarital lover. He proposed that they run off to America. On 5 December 1936 he wrote a long letter to Pat and Frere, arranging for them to meet Netta and himself for lunch. He acknowledged difficulties: the 20-year age gap; his sense that she admired him as a writer rather than as a man; and her affection for Michael. Brigit's feelings are not mentioned. What he does say is that he feels 'utterly married' to Netta and that this is a feeling he has never experienced before. (We might recall his telling Brigit in 1930 that he felt 'married' to her.)<sup>23</sup> He concludes, melodramatically: 'I died in 1916, and came alive again in 1936. And it's damned painful, for I don't know whether I am coming or going.'<sup>24</sup> This statement implies that it had taken him 20 years to recover from his wartime experiences and that the relationships of the intervening years were somehow aberrant.

Netta, it appears, did not want to hurt either Brigit or Michael. Aldington had always believed that Michael, like Derek, was gay. He told Frere: 'If she's really in love with the pansy, it's a god-awful tragedy.'<sup>25</sup> He subsequently

told H.D. that 'the marriage with Michael was not a real one – you know what I mean'.<sup>26</sup> It is possible that the physical aspect of the marriage had proved unfulfilling; Netta does not seem to have contradicted Aldington's views on this matter. We need to note here, however, that Michael Patmore would remarry in 1940 and have two children.

Aldington decided that, with or without Netta, he would go to America. There were what he referred to in a letter to H.D. as 'terrible scenes with Brigit and Michael'.<sup>27</sup> On 16 December Netta told him that she would not leave Michael and, in an undated, hand-delivered letter explaining her decision, wrote: 'I don't want to leave Micky more than I want to lose you. . . . If it weren't for the "tangled web" and loving Micky, your passion would be pure glory.'<sup>28</sup> From the SS *Normandie*, bound for New York, Aldington wrote Pat and Frere another long letter. He told them:

I loved and, alas, still love that girl more than anyone in my life; for a time I was nearer to her than to any human being; and until Wednesday I trusted her utterly. But how can one go on trusting a woman who allows a dagger to be put into her hands, with careful instructions, and who uses it ruthlessly? She accused me of pride when I refused the position of spare-time lover and sugar-daddy. What the hell else has she left me? . . . I thought I had found, indeed I had found, someone with whom I was in complete harmony, with whom there was no necessity for defences. That made me so damnably and ridiculously vulnerable.<sup>29</sup>

The reference to 'instructions' and the implication of betrayal suggest that Michael and Brigit had had a hand in Netta's decision. Much of the letter is concerned with professional matters: he was correcting the proofs of *Very Heaven*; but he concludes: 'My first business is to learn to stand quite alone in life, and for that these five days of solitude at sea are useful.'

Arriving in New York, he was met by Malcolm Johnson and driven to the Doubledays' mansion in South Carolina. They were welcoming and hospitable, but Ellen Doubleday wrote to Patmore, expressing their regret that she was 'slipping out' of their lives. As Aldington's American publisher, Doubleday had little choice. 'Oh, Brigit, my dear, my heart does ache for you and Michael and my mind is nearly bewildered,' Ellen wrote. 'I can only send my love and tell you if some sorrow comes to me I pray to meet it as you do.'<sup>30</sup>

Writing to Slonimsky from the Doubleday home on 2 January, Aldington was less than frank. Arranging to meet his friend in New York, he told him that the Doubledays had issued a 'general invitation' and that

he had 'suddenly decided' to come over for Christmas. 'Brigit is staying in London with the boys,' he ended.<sup>31</sup> The proposed meeting would not take place. A cable arrived at the Doubleday residence three days later: Netta had changed her mind. On 7 January Aldington set off from South Carolina to board SS *Lafayette*, bound for Plymouth, telling Slonimsky that he had been suddenly called back to England on 'urgent affairs'.<sup>32</sup>

On board the *Lafayette*, he was bombarded by telegrams from Netta, telling him how 'crazy with impatience and love' she was and that she would meet him in Plymouth.<sup>33</sup> To judge from a letter Patmore wrote to the Warmans, the Freres had had a hand in the matter. Telling the Warmans that Aldington had left her '& not just with "another woman"' but with her son's wife, Patmore continued:

Michael has been terribly run-down with overwork & trying to steer her through all sorts of emotional strains. She said up to the last moment – i.e. Thursday [7 January] – that Michael was the one she loved & that she was taking him away to a cottage in Dorset where they'd both been so happy. Then on that morning, Frere-Reeves of Heinemann's rang her up & arranged for her to go somewhere the next day & R. was going to meet her – straight back from USA. Until Frere-Reeves came into the affair things might have settled into some order, but he's just pushed them into it – violently.<sup>34</sup>

Whether or not the Freres had taken the initiative, they had certainly picked Netta up from her home in Dorset Square once she had decided to leave Michael, and she was their guest until her departure for Plymouth. Aldington felt indebted. 'I can't ever thank you for what you've done and are doing. You have literally made this possible & thereby really saved my life. I'll never forget this,' he wrote to them as, reunited with Netta, he set off for France. 'I must have those divorces,' he added, 'It's a damn crime if we don't have a child.'<sup>35</sup>

This desire is echoed in a letter to H.D. (the first communication between them for five years), written five days earlier from on board the *Lafayette*: 'We want to marry and have a child. . . . If you will set me free to marry her, I shall bless you indeed.' He painted a picture of rescuing Netta from an 'angel in the house' existence: 'With me she can live the adventurer's life for which she was born.' He told H.D. that he was giving Brigit part of his income and added: 'It is horrible to have to hurt other people.' Echoing Anthony Clarendon in *All Men Are Enemies*, he wrote: 'Dooley, I trust you. I felt you ought to know about this.

Forgive me if anything in this letter gives you pain. Lovers are selfish. They have to be. The world is against them. Don't be against us. Let us have our life together.<sup>36</sup>

Characteristically, H.D. was excited by the drama, writing immediately to tell Plank what had happened:

I had a thunder-bolt by way of letter from RA. . . . I am perfectly willing to do this + am consulting experts to see if divorce is feasible, but psychically I fear a catch + think the state of Denmark pretty rotten. . . . [Brigit] is apparently on the war path + frankly, to me, the whole thing looks tricky + shady to a degree, not to mention incest. . . . My mind is cold like ice but my heart thumps when I even think of it – can't sleep . . . what 'doings'.<sup>37</sup>

Bryher, of course, was delighted: 'I do hope you manage to go through with it. Far better once and for all to be rid of dear Cuthbert.'<sup>38</sup>

'Cuthbert' meanwhile was in Brantôme with Netta, from where he wrote to Orioli, telling him that he hoped to bring Netta to meet him – and Douglas – in February. The letter ends: 'Dear Pino, I'm so happy, I hope you'll be happy with us.'<sup>39</sup> Like the letter to H.D., it is an appeal for support. Brigit and Michael were also travelling and she, too, was calling on the understanding of friends. In the letter to the Warmans she explained that she and Michael had felt they must get away. Surprisingly perhaps, given what must have been painful memories of the Riviera, they were at the Hotel Beau Rivage in Nice. She told the Warmans:

It would be easier to bear if it had been anyone else & Michael too feels that but for his wife I'd still be happy – and you can understand all that. But in a way, it's good for me to be HERE to show him that there's a life even better than one had always ahead.

The rest of the letter concerns the divorce proceedings that might ensue and it is clear that there has already been an argument between themselves and Aldington in which the latter had indicated that Netta would sue on the grounds of non-consummation, while Michael would only proceed on the grounds of Netta's adultery. 'How can I possibly ask [Michael] to take the blame?' Patmore asked the Warmans. 'He's too young to spoil his life in that way. . . . It's strange to have to protect my son's name in connection with the fair name of someone I thought was my husband – I mean that in its deepest and most enduring sense.' 'I fear

we've spoiled a sort of ideal for you,' she told the couple, continuing: 'I wonder what I did that was so very wrong. In a way, Mickie's burden is more than mine because he can't believe that R. would do this to him – he's got two deceptions.'

This sense of responsibility for the events surfaces again in the personal notebook mentioned previously:

My own finding is that while not exactly regretting having loved, my remorse is for having loved without wisdom. It seems now to me that my failure was in greatness and strength. I loved in a fervour of worship and a fear of loss which took away all possibility of wise behaviour, for I was cold and hid my real feelings when they ought to have flared out, & then not become emotional & verbose when a smiling silence would have arranged things very nicely.<sup>40</sup>

One of the few photographs of the couple during their 'Riviera years' endorses this perspective on the relationship: Aldington faces the camera cheerfully and confidently, his arm around Patmore; she looks up at him with a gaze full of anxiety. She told H.G. Wells, one of the friends to whom she turned:

Apart from the natural desire for youth & change & the rather pitiful desire for a child there are in Richard the almost universal ache to make others suffer what one has endured in one's own life & a complicated hidden anger with me for not being as beastly to my sons as his mother was to him.<sup>41</sup>

It is a harsh judgement but its location of the source of Aldington's behaviour in his childhood is perceptive.

The astounding feature of the events is not so much the end of Aldington's relationship with Patmore – although there are very few hints in the correspondence (despite the evidence of his other affairs) that all was not well between them – but Aldington's determination, first to conduct an affair with, and then to marry, her daughter-in-law.

Derek Patmore remarks in his introduction to his mother's memoirs that *All Men Are Enemies* (published in 1933) symbolised 'the apex' of Aldington's love for Patmore. 'Although it took several years before this love affair broke up, it foreshadowed the tragedy to come,' he wrote.<sup>42</sup> What led to the deterioration of the relationship can only be speculation, but the restlessness of their existence in its later years and



Richard Aldington and Brigit Patmore in the south of France in the mid-1930s

the consequent loosening of ties with their closest friends, leading to comparative isolation, may well have been a contributory factor. Not that they were without a social life on those travels: Derek Patmore recalls

how charming and hospitable their neighbours in Connecticut had been and how, on his weekend visits from New York, they had enjoyed ‘picnics with neighbours and small evening reunions’.<sup>43</sup> These, however, were no substitute for the close – and shared – friendships with Prentice and MacGreevy, and even – for a couple of years – with Douglas and Orioli. Only the friendship with the Warmans had seemed to offer a possible replacement. The Glovers, of course, had been their closest companions in the later years but towards the end, particularly in the period they spent together in Austria over the summer of 1936, that friendship had made heavy demands on them.

Alec Waugh’s memoirs contain some penetrating observations about how this state of affairs had come about. He describes finding, when he met up with Aldington in 1934, that the latter was living with ‘a widow rather older than himself’.<sup>44</sup> His description of Patmore is complimentary: ‘She was red-haired and extremely handsome; it was obvious that she had been a very great beauty in her youth. She was still most attractive. . . . Hers and Aldington’s had clearly been a high romance.’ Then Waugh adds: ‘One said to oneself, “The disparity of age. How long will it last?”’

He realised, in retrospect, he says, that, during the three years of their friendship in London (1934-1936), he had never seen Aldington ‘against the background of his personal life’: ‘He was either my guest, or the guest of someone else, of Douglas Goldring, at least once.’ ‘It is my belief,’ he continues, ‘that he was one of those men who cannot be bothered to organise a social life, who socially live from hand to mouth, making the most of what happens to be around.’ While this does not match our knowledge of the life the couple led in the south of France in the summers of 1930, 1931 and 1933, it does apply to the periods they spent in Italy and in London and, in particular, to the later years. They had no settled home – eventually living in a London hotel.

Waugh goes on to argue that it was because Aldington ‘left things to chance’ in this way, that he ‘found confusion in his private life’. The following passage is worth quoting in full:

I think the nature of that collapse [of the relationship with Patmore] was determined by Aldington’s indifference to the organisation of a personal life. Most men, *l’homme moyen sensuel*, manage to conduct their *passades* so that they do not impair irretrievably the fabric of their domesticity. They do not make love to their wife’s best friend. They maintain appearances. I do not say that this is an admirable characteristic, but it is a social lubricant. Aldington, like Shelley, within the narrow limits of his domestic circle, stumbled,



Alec Waugh, October 1937

unknowingly, unwittingly into confusion. He fell in love with his consort's daughter-in-law. Could anything be more humiliating for a woman than to have a lover younger than herself desert her for her son's wife: and to become the father of that woman's daughter? Yet, let anyone who feels censorious read Aldington's *The Crystal*

*World*. It is a fine and noble poem. It is not an apologia. It says quite simply, 'When this happens, when this ultimate mystery is revealed, there is no alternative but to accept it.'<sup>45</sup>

Of course, Aldington himself would see 'maintaining appearances' as Victorian hypocrisy. Nevertheless, it was how he had managed his relationship with Patmore alongside his affairs with Black and Rathbone. *The Crystal World*, the poem he wrote for Netta over the next few months (just as he had written *Reverie* for H.D., *Images of Desire* for Yorke, *A Dream in the Luxembourg* for Dobrée and *The Eaten Heart* for Patmore) was not, as Waugh points out, 'an apologia'. He wrote:

You see for them it is not enough  
 To have a biological affair –  
 Which would be quite easy –  
 Or to meet as intimate friends,  
 Which would be even easier.  
 You have here two passionate natures  
 Unable to compromise  
 Under the smug winking of the hypocrite world.  
 They must have everything,  
 Must share each day and night,  
 Must grow together closer, closer  
 And build their crystal world.<sup>46</sup>

The poem provides a further clue to his conduct. The narrative follows his courtship of Netta and at the point where the poet thinks that he and his lover have parted for good, a section of the poem is addressed to the child they will never have. At the end of this section, he turns to the dead of the Great War:

O comrades lying in the fields of France,  
 Strange is our fate; childless like me you died;  
 For us the coloured flame of love fades out,  
 The million generations have an end,  
 The ship of life sinks in a dusty sea.

The letters he wrote to Frere and to H.D. that are quoted above both indicate that having a child was an important element of his vision of a life with Netta; this passage from the poem shows that fatherhood was something he now craved. Patmore could not give him a child, as Derek

explains in his introduction to her memoirs.<sup>47</sup> This would not have been a concern for her; she already had two much-loved sons. However, two of Aldington's closest friends were now fathers or would-be fathers: the Warmans' daughter, Jean, was now four years old; and Pat and Frere were about to become parents.<sup>48</sup>

Setting aside the desire for a child, we have seen a similar pattern of behaviour on several occasions in Aldington's past: in his determination to persist in the affair with Yorke; in his angry parting from H.D.; in his pursuit of Dobrée; and in his abandonment of Yorke. His childhood years and early relationships were complicated and troubled ones. In a settled relationship with H.D. in his twenties he might have been able to resolve the resultant emotional tensions. Two events made that impossible: one was the stillbirth of their child, for which he had never allowed himself to grieve and which destroyed the sexual side of their marriage; the other was the war. Both events served to complicate the tensions already within him. The remark he made to Frere in 1935 ('I have been surprised to find how bitterly I still resent things I thought I had long ago dealt with and forgotten') demonstrated his awareness of the problem. In several of his relationships – with Eliot, Read and the *Criterion* set for example – we see behaviour suggestive of low self-esteem and an inability to accept criticism, the inheritance of that troubled childhood. The writing of *Death of a Hero* and *Roads to Glory* had helped him to come to terms with the war bitterness and trauma – although they would never be entirely resolved – but even the savage representation of his parents and his family life in the former of these – and more recently in *Very Heaven* – had hardly begun to relieve him of this burden.

The travelling years were not so much a cause of the breakdown of his relationship with Patmore, although they may well have been a factor, as a symptom of his inability to resolve his inner chaos. Only excitement and constant change could distract him from that painful process; and by these means it was postponed. Travel acted as work had done in the 1920s, as a means of avoidance. However, once the genie had come out of the bottle in Tobago, it could not be put back. Writing *Very Heaven* only succeeded in making him reflect further and even more painfully and bitterly on the confusions and humiliations of his childhood and youth. The affair with Netta bolstered his self-esteem at this difficult time, given both her admiration for him and his own sense that he was a more worthy partner for her than Michael Patmore. It also displayed all the characteristics of his previous sexual behaviour during the war and its aftermath and at the end of the twenties when he was struggling to contain the chaos within: the infatuations, the obsessiveness, the ruthlessness. Between

those two major eruptions, and in the more recent period of his life with Patmore, minor affairs – Capper, Black and Rathbone – had served to keep the demons at bay. This time, however, as in 1919 and 1929, only the complete destruction of his current life would serve.

Whatever the cause, he was now embarked on his fourth long-term relationship. As for Patmore, even in June 1938 she was writing to Morgan: 'I'm so glad you think I look all right. Half of me wants to die and the other half knows it's got to live decently – and therefore beautifully.'<sup>49</sup> In a letter to Gluckman 25 years later, Aldington would call Patmore 'a very sweet and good woman whom I still love in retrospect', but the intervening years were to see a bitter and relentless battle between them over the financial settlement made at their separation.<sup>50</sup>

SAMPLE