

## Revising Marcus Fleming: The Composition and Publication of Edward Sackville-West's *The Ruin* (1926)

Edward Sackville-West's tumultuous friendship, conceivably a love affair, with New College, Oxford undergraduate John Willey McDougall (1903–1976) first inspired then delayed the publication of his first-written novel, *The Ruin*. Michael De-la-Noy's full-length biography of Sackville-West (1901–1965), and an article published in *New College Notes* a couple of years ago, have each considered the relationship between Eddy and Jack, and their fictional counterparts in *The Ruin*, Denzil Torrent and Marcus Fleming.<sup>1</sup> A new acquisition to our collections now occasions this supplementary article, which reconsiders the publication of the novel, delayed as it was by two years, and—possibly for the first time—examines revisions made for that 1926 published book from and within the complete manuscript draft of *The Ruin* now held by the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas. How Eddy portrays the sinister, unscrupulous Marcus Fleming, a disruptive guest to the Torrents' grand country house in Kent, and by extension how he personally perceived Jack, his real-life love interest, evidently drove many of the revisions. Other notebooks of Eddy's and one of his diaries held by The British Library also reveal that 1924 was a year when other men Eddy had fallen for, and his plans to write other novels, were vying for his attention beyond both his bittersweet feelings for Jack, and his preoccupations with *The Ruin*.

On 19 January 2026, we opened a parcel in the library containing a new acquisition I had purchased from a Kentish antiquarian bookdealer for our collections, a copy of Eddy's *The Ruin*. At that point in time, New College Library already held a fine copy, complete with near impeccable dustjacket, of *The Ruin* in its first imprint, William Heinemann's of London, a prestigious publisher of British fiction in the 1920s. This copy we found ourselves unwrapping in January of this year was in the same imprint, lacked a dustjacket, and was a little worn. The intense relationship exercising Eddy during the composition of the novel, which in part motivated him to write the novel, is one directly associated with New College. But what led to our buying an additional, somewhat shabby, copy of this book?

At the end of the autograph copy of Eddy's manuscript draft, now held in Texas, the novelist has dated its composition as 'Bicknoller. Sept. 1922. / Long Barn, Weald. Sept. 1923'.<sup>2</sup> As well as giving dates of composition, this also tells us where Eddy penned it. He had started writing this draft of his novel at Ford House in the Somerset village of Bicknoller, completing it in the medieval house of Long Barn in Weald near Sevenoaks then owned by diplomat Harold Nicolson and his wife, novelist Vita Sackville-West, Eddy's cousin. Vita had been born and raised at Knole, the great house near Sevenoaks that is the model for the 'Torrents' house, Vair, in *The Ruin*. She profoundly lamented rules of aristocratic male entail which meant that she, as the only child of the third baron Sackville, owner of Knole, would not inherit the magnificent house. Instead, it eventually passed to her cousin Eddy, when he became the fifth baron Sackville. The dating of the manuscript draft corresponds to the first dates also given at the end of the novel in its 1926 Heinemann imprint: '1922–1923, 1925'.<sup>3</sup>

We know for sure when Eddy wrote it. And we know the reason why the novel, effectively completed in September 1923, was not published in 1924 as it was envisaged it would be, with Eddy feeling compelled to delay publication by Heinemann's.<sup>4</sup> That pressure came down to the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael De-la-Noy, *Eddy: The Life of Edward Sackville-West* (London: Bodley Head, 1988); Christopher Skelton-Foord, 'Edward Sackville-West's Marcus Fleming: New College Anti-Hero?', *New College Notes* 21 (2024), no. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Sackville-West, signed handwritten manuscript of *The Ruin*, p. 296, held in container 2.5 of MS 3675, Hon. Edward Sackville-West Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. For access to this manuscript, I am most grateful to Jack Menzies, Reference Services Graduate Research Assistant at the Center in Austin.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Sackville West, *The Ruin: A Gothic Novel* (London: William Heinemann, 1926), p. 363. The copy I acquired on 19 January 2026 is now held at New College Library, Oxford, RS5430.

<sup>4</sup> Sackville-West Diaries: three diaries kept by Edward Charles Sackville-West (1919, 1920, 1924), The British Library, Add MS 71871 C (i.e. 1924's), f. 18v. Here, for the 16 January 1924 entry, Eddy has written: 'Had to agree to suspend the Ruin. . . . I feel that part of its merit consists in its being worth while suspending. I must feel this to bear up'.

potential identifiableness of the real people upon whom the characters were based. These were chiefly Jack McDougall (portrayed so negatively as Marcus), as well as Eddy Sackville-West himself (as Denzil). And the relationship depicted between Marcus and Denzil has undercurrents (after all, this was the 1920s) of latent homoeroticism, and more than a soupçon of sadomasochism to boot. I have previously referred to correspondence from Jack to Eddy held by The British Library; it constitutes the surviving side of what must have been a flurry of written exchanges of 1923 suggestive of a highly charged, close relationship between these two Oxford undergraduates, and it also alludes to how Eddy lent Jack the manuscript draft of *The Ruin* (presumably the one now in Texas) to read through.<sup>5</sup> Jack is by turns reprimanding and apologetic. The correspondence, however, does not suggest that Jack always commanded the upper hand in their relationship, in the way that Marcus does over Denzil in the novel. In one letter, most likely of October 1923, Jack writes from his home in Surrey:

I hope your postscript was rather the result of the grim atmosphere of Mousehole than anything else: the uncompromising dilemma which you made of my last sentence had all the false logic which one might attribute to the rigid chapel [of] yours who are now your neighbours. I refuse to believe that it needs apology—but apologies, if you will, I shall give. . . . But though I object to ‘having things out’ with people, I still more object to seeing a lot of someone whom I cannot think of without a reminiscent bias of hostility.<sup>6</sup>

Jack has also written to Eddy, on a New College, Oxford postcard of 1923, giving what must be one of the earliest ‘reviews’ of the novel, or, rather, of the manuscript draft he has just read:

[H]ow well you treated the subject, Eddy. And on every page, apart from the conscientiousness [*likely this word but misspelled*] & unity of the whole book, there was a phrase which made things & relations and intercourse more vivid; I mean things that happen to oneself, & relations one sees, as well as those of your characters. That looks like a solemn review, & you will probably giggle.<sup>7</sup>

Virginia Woolf sent a typewritten letter to Eddy on 22 September 1926 which refers to the fact that his novel has now just been published. Interestingly, she, a supreme master of the novel, does not congratulate him on it, which suggests that either she had not read *The Ruin*, or, if she had, she was not entirely sure what comment she should or could proffer. He, of course, was a much less talented writer of fiction:

Are you pleased with your novel? I think the weeks when it is first out are humiliating. People will talk about it, or they wont [sic] talk about it. Which does one want? All that is miserable; and yet a necessity—one goes snuffing round after it.<sup>8</sup>

By 1926, she and Vita Sackville-West, who first met in 1922, were already lovers, and Virginia was now acquainted with Eddy chiefly through his cousin Vita. Another friend and novelist, David ‘Bunny’ Garnett, whose *Lady into Fox* (1922) won both the Hawthornden and James Tait Black Memorial prizes, also wrote to Eddy about *The Ruin*:

<sup>5</sup> Skelton-Foord, ‘[Edward Sackville-West’s Marcus Fleming](#)’. This piece also includes an account of Jack’s personal and professional life.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Jack to ‘Eddie’ [sic] (probably October 1923), Edward Sackville-West Papers, Vol. II, The British Library, Additional MS 68905, ff. 18v–17v [sic], 17v–18r. (Some of these letters have been foliated in a counterintuitive way.)

<sup>7</sup> Postcard from Jack to Eddy (1923), in *ibid.*, f. 28r.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Virginia Woolf to Edward Sackville West (22 September 1926), in *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume III: 1923–1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), pp. 294–5.

I was rude to you. I was in a rage with you when I had finished the *Ruin* because it seemed to me the makings of a very fine book—a magnificent story spoilt wantonly. So then I wrote an article full of insult & in the worst of taste I'm sure, but it was honest. It will wound you when you get the press-cutting and you will hate me, not understanding that there was love & admiration under my rage, causing it.

'Bunny' has written to 'Dearest Eddy' on Nonesuch Press headed stationery (he co-founded the press), but the letter, held in The British Library, is undated.<sup>9</sup>

September 1926, however, does appear to be the month that *The Ruin* was officially published, in crown octavo format, priced 7s 6d. Hubert Griffith's review in *The Daily Express* of 16 September 1926 picks up on one theme 'in this dark book—the mastery of one man's soul by another man', also acknowledging it 'difficult to follow all the fearful and sinister meanings in Mr. Sackville West's new book'. Eddy's friend and fellow novelist, L. P. Hartley, reviewed it (largely positively, and certainly most perceptively) for *The Saturday Review* of 18 September, noting that 'it contains passages that are almost unique: passages in which the mind and soul are stretched and amplified to their extreme capacity, passages in which beauty, love and terror have found a new and livelier expression, and in which splendour of conception is matched by nobility of language'. A review of it also appeared the same day in *The Spectator*, somewhat more critical: 'The vocabulary of Mr. Sackville-West is large, his diction unaffected, his powers of description remarkable. It is not even any fault in his characterizations which makes this new novel more arresting than satisfactory'. A *TLS* review followed a few days later that month, which was mixed in its assessment (justly so), still highlighting its strengths: "'The Ruin" is a *tour de force*, carried through with a fascinating completeness, but yet a work of art which at the end belongs to literary *bibeloterie*'.<sup>10</sup> But the following month saw two much harsher reviews, which postulated how the intensity and potency of the novel had been achieved at the expense of any normality of character and verisimilitude of action. The poet Edwin Muir writes in *The Nation and Athenaeum* of 9 October 1926: 'The minds of the characters are so perverted and paradoxical that it is difficult to find any significance in them; and their possessors are not merely abnormal, they are wildly and melodramatically unreal'. The review of 13 October 1926 in the journal *Truth* drives home a similar point, and does so with entirely underserved dismissiveness:

A weirdly fantastic drama of psychological emotions, not without a certain power in its elusive way. Might be quite interesting if any of the solemnly, not to say priggishly, introspective young people involved in this soul-tragedy were sufficiently worth while to make you care what happens to them. Had the whole bevy of them been tarred and feathered in the first chapter, much unnecessary emotional ado would have been avoided.<sup>11</sup>

Viscount Castlerosse, in his influential column for *The Sunday Express*, on 24 October 1926, is 'frankly horrified' by Eddy's 'morbid slime': 'It is the most unhealthy and perverted book that I have ever seen publicly published', he writes.<sup>12</sup> (Two years later the viscount married the courtesan Doris Delevingne, and he was likely an inspiration behind the character 'Mr Chatterbox', gossip columnist for the fictitious *Daily Excess* newspaper, in *Vile Bodies* (1930), the second novel by

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Bunny [i.e. David Garnett] to Eddy (undated, likely 1926), Edward Sackville-West Papers, Vol. II, The British Library, Additional MS 68905, f. 42r.

<sup>10</sup> H. G. [i.e. Hubert Griffith], [Review of *The Ruin*], *The Daily Express* (16 September 1926), 2; L. P. Hartley, 'New Fiction', *The Saturday Review* (18 September 1926), 317–8, at p. 318; 'Fiction', *The Spectator* (18 September 1926), 443; 'New Novels', *The Times Literary Supplement* (23 September 1926), 630.

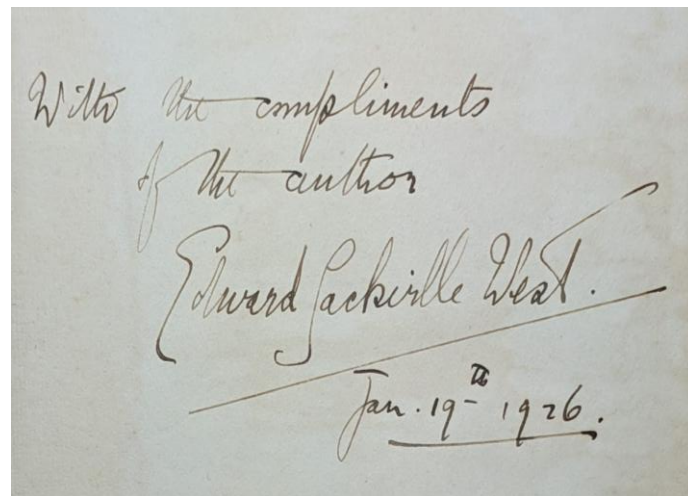
<sup>11</sup> Edwin Muir, 'Fiction', *The Nation and Athenaeum* (9 October 1926), 28–30, at p. 30; [Review of *The Ruin*], *Truth* vol. 100, no. 2608 (13 October 1926), 657.

<sup>12</sup> [Valentine Browne] Viscount Castlerosse, 'The Londoner's Log', *The Sunday Express* (24 October 1926), 2.

Eddy's friend and fellow Catholic convert, Evelyn Waugh.) One might reasonably debate whether the viscount's implying such lurid and salacious content in *The Ruin* would be likely, indeed, to deter or to encourage sales of the novel. The following month, John Sydenham in *The Empire Review* delivers an assessment without any such peevishness or hysteria, and one that succeeds in considering the world of Eddy's novel on its own extraordinary and unsettling terms:

Reading this novel is like being in a hall of distorting mirrors. We need not ask if these are men and women whose sensitiveness, suspiciousness, melancholy, and self-distrust are so grotesquely elongated, for we are not here to see people as they are in the streets and restaurants outside. The mirrors are a world of their own in which we see two pairs of brothers and sisters with their dying mother and their lunatic father in a vast fifteenth-century country house. Their lives are clouded with horror, which comes to a climax by the visit to them of two comparative strangers, a man and a girl, who complicate to an intense degree the relations between each of the pairs. It is a highly imaginative study of queer emotions.<sup>13</sup>

The generally authoritative *English Catalogue of Books* listed a publication date of September 1926 (which is the date the publishers would have supplied), and the *Daily Express* listed *The Ruin* among its 'Books of To-Day' within its 9 September issue.<sup>14</sup> So, we can confidently conclude, these sources and other published book reviews, and Virginia Woolf's letter, do indicate that the novel was obtainable for purchase from September 1926 onwards, and possibly from the early part of that month too.



New College Library, Oxford, RS5430, front flyleaf [detail]  
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This additional copy of the 1926 Heinemann imprint we have just purchased, however, attests to when the novel first came off the press. For, it is a signed and dated presentation copy of the book that I have tracked down, whose front flyleaf bears in ink the signature of the novelist, dated 19 January 1926. That is to say, a date exactly 100 years to the day prior to our unpacking this copy as a newly acquired acquisition for New College Library was the date by which we now know for definite that completed copies of the book had been printed and bound. This is some eight months earlier than the novel was released generally for distribution and sale, which is an

<sup>13</sup> John Sydenham, [Review of *The Ruin*], *The Empire Review* no. 310 (November 1926), 472.

<sup>14</sup> *The English Catalogue of Books (Including the Original 'London' and 'British' Catalogues): Vol. XII: January 1926 to December 1930*, ed. James D. Stewart (London: The Publishers' Circular, 1931), p. 1652; 'Books of To-Day', *The Daily Express* (9 September 1926), 11.

unusually lengthy period of time. Was Eddy having second thoughts about his book appearing? Were his publishers still entertaining concerns about possible legal wrangles?

Eddy first conceived ‘A Romance’ as the subtitle of his novel, later amending that to ‘A Novel’, as the manuscript attests.<sup>15</sup> The published novel has instead ‘A Gothic Novel’. Perhaps there was a realisation that the writing did indeed tend to melodrama, and that the tenebrous and outlandish atmosphere of the book ought to be owned and acknowledged. Certainly, we know from one of Eddy’s working notebooks of 1923, held by The British Library, that while he was composing this novel he was thinking more widely about all things Gothic. Among his scribbles, he has jotted down ‘Gothic novel story: two castles, abyss, ~~between~~ all Radcliffian apparatus, two families, pretend fight’, and also: ‘Dungeon & Turret. Being a History of the Studies in Neo-Gothic Novel Art’. Another note (a type of aide-mémoire) Eddy has written on another leaf of this notebook—‘The Ruin. Revise. p. 9, 23, 29’—attests to his ideas about Gothic writing being contemporaneous more or less with the composition and revision of this, his first-written novel.<sup>16</sup>

The manuscript of *The Ruin* now in the Harry Ransom Center carries no dedication to Jack, or to anyone else. But when the novel appeared in print it carried a dedication to Adrian Stokes (1902–1972), a friend and contemporary of Eddy’s at Oxford, who would become a prominent art critic. Adrian was at Magdalen College, Eddy at Christ Church, and both were working on their first books at the same time, and at precociously early ages. Adrian Stokes’s philosophical work *The Thread of Ariadne* appeared in 1925; Ariadne is the name of one of *The Ruin*’s principal characters. They would be lifelong friends. Adrian was one of the first guests to Eddy’s Gatehouse Tower rooms at Knole, after Eddy had set up home there in 1926, signing the visitors book to record his 17–19 June 1926 stay there, and shortly after one of 27 August too.<sup>17</sup> Eddy’s biographer believes the two friends ‘probably’ had a love affair at Oxford.<sup>18</sup> Adrian, certainly, was considered most handsome. His entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* puts it: ‘As a young man Stokes was remarkably beautiful, with a crest of fair to reddish hair, an aquiline nose, and dark blue eyes, and his looks won him admirers of both sexes, to the intensification of his natural shyness’.<sup>19</sup> Adrian would go on to marry twice (two sisters, in fact, of a Scottish Presbyterian minister), but that Adrian was goodlooking would unquestionably have played into Eddy’s own romantic inclinations. Adrian Stokes is also one of 11 male friends Eddy lists on 29 February 1928 in what Eddy has entitled his ‘A Commonplace Book & Diary’, that runs from 12 October 1927 till 3 March 1928. He lists Adrian along with others including Anthony Eden (future prime minister, and a fellow Christ Church man, listed third), Jack MacDougall, Bunny (i.e. David) Garnett, and Eardley Knollys. The names are bracketed together alongside an enigmatic comment: ‘The Colossus of Rhodes is built as far as this’.<sup>20</sup> What this phrase encrypts for Eddy may not be precisely explicit; but, as Michael De-la-Noy has speculated not unreasonably, it is likely a list of men with whom Eddy had been in love or had had a love affair. It is possible, too, that names are given in some kind of ‘little black book’ ranking order, in this, Eddy’s private diary.<sup>21</sup> Jack is listed

<sup>15</sup> Harry Ransom Center (HRC), Austin, Texas, MS 3675, MS of *The Ruin*, unnumbered title page. ‘Romance’ has been crossed through, and Eddy has inserted ‘Novel’ above it instead.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Sackville-West, [Working notebook-cum-diary] (1923), Edward Sackville-West Papers, Vol. V, The British Library, Add MS 68908, ff. 16v, 19r, 33v.

<sup>17</sup> Eddy’s ‘The Gatehouse, Knole. Visitors Book’ (1926–1940), owned by the Sackville Trustee Co. Ltd., is still kept in the Gatehouse Tower at Knole in Sevenoaks, Kent. A booklet of plain paper, enclosed within handprinted leaf-design paper covered card, it contains signatures and dates of stay of Eddy’s visitors from 16 May 1926 till 27 May 1940. Adrian was also back there on 14 January 1931, 20–22 February 1932, 1 June 1932, and 21–23 July 1934. Jack was a visitor of Eddy’s there too, on 11 July 1927 and on 17 January 1930. I consulted the visitors book on my visit to Knole on 28 June 2026, and I am also grateful to Beth Lucas, collections assistant at Knole, for further assistance.

<sup>18</sup> De-la-Noy, *Eddy*, p. 130.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Wollheim, ‘Stokes, Adrian Durham (1902–1972)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (7 January 2016) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/31722>> (Accessed: 2 March 2026).

<sup>20</sup> Edward Sackville West, ‘A Commonplace Book & Diary’ (12 October 1927–3 March 1928), Edward Sackville-West Papers, Vol. III, The British Library, Add MS 68906, f. 28v.

<sup>21</sup> De-la-Noy, *Eddy*, pp. 129–30.

fourth, and Adrian fifth. Eddy and Eardley were undergraduates together at Christ Church, later living communally at Long Crichel House in Dorset, two of the so-called ‘Crichel Boys’, homosexual intellectuals who established something akin to a joint literary salon and home from 1945 onwards. (Eardley comes 11th in the list.)

The manuscript draft at Texas reveals that Marcus Fleming was originally to have been called Richard Fleming, and was to have been ‘very dark’, ‘sallow’, but ‘not tall’.<sup>22</sup> Instead in the published novel he has a name with connotations of bellicosity (Marcus is etymologically linked to Mars, the Roman god of war), and in appearance he is ‘fair’ and ‘tall’.<sup>23</sup> Eddy originally dwells more on Marcus’s appearance, here in a draft passage crossed through in the manuscript (and omitted from the novel) that perhaps conveys a sense of Marcus’s mutability and contrivance:

His head went up into a high peak at the back & the light brown <sup>hair</sup> that seemed to change ~~from~~ colour from lock to lock fell straight down from the crown in a thick mess over ~~one side of~~ his forehead. The lower portion of his face was curiously protruded & the full lips that were always slightly pouted gave to ~~his~~ his whole face a factitious childishness.<sup>24</sup>

And then further on there is more about Marcus’s hair and his attractiveness, again scored through in the manuscript and not included in the published version: ‘falling so low as to form completely hide his forehead, forming a straight curlin straight fringe above the beautifully pencilled drawn eyebrows [sic]’.<sup>25</sup>

Very handsome and superficially charming, yet animalistic, subjugating, and despicable in character, the Marcus in parts of the manuscript draft that do not find their way into the published novel is a yet more extreme version of the Marcus that Heinemann actually publishes. It appears that Eddy has toned down, though only slightly, the hideous side of this protagonist who is based on the real man, his close friend Jack, with whom Eddy was so besotted. A passage crossed through in the manuscript, and absent from the book, describes Marcus during his first conversation at Vair with Lady Torrent, and it calls attention to all of Marcus’s easy charm, an allure which perhaps Eddy believed bore comparison with the charm Jack himself had honed at New College, Oxford:

~~Speaking was no effort to him. He conversed as he would~~ Conversation came as naturally to him as walking. He knew how to rely on his telling charm of manner & appearance, an accomplishment that Oxford is expert in conferring, together with that of appearing intensely interested in the personality & views of whomsoever you are talking to, even if you are in reality extremely bored with both.<sup>26</sup>

A paragraph appearing later on in the manuscript, this time not crossed through—but again not making its way into the book—spells out Marcus’s blend of vibrancy and ruthlessness, referencing his magnificent head of hair, which is a recurring descriptive motif in the novel:

Again that look of animal cruelty illumined Marcus’ face. A subtle suggestion of mastery emanated from his splendid youth, as if one hair of his head would have ~~been suffice~~ sufficed to ruin a race of supermen by its own inherent power. He was possessed by the higher unscrupulousness, the will-less elementalism of ~~the~~ an animal god.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> HRC, MS 3675, pp. 15, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Sackville West, *The Ruin*, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> HRC, MS 3675, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> HRC, MS 3675, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> HRC, MS 3675, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> HRC, MS 3675, p. 48; Sackville West, *The Ruin*, p. 58, is the corresponding part of the published book from which this passage is absent.

(Another surviving letter also of 1923, also at The British Library, contains a convoluted apology-cum-attack from Jack to Eddy about Jack's having made an entirely legitimate assumption that Marcus was a fictional version of himself, and this derives in part from the reference to his hair:

I had no right to the supposition, even, of identity. Because you had accurately observed my hair, with advantages, my large plebeian ~~figure~~ body, and (with a flash of real truth) my 'good-looking fish-like' face, there was no possible justification for a further comparison. . . . You are right when you say that I began to come to see you; but if I willingly reopened an intercourse, feeling no diffidence where apparently I might have felt it & done well, why should I voluntarily close it again by a postcard which you must, I suppose, have thought hysterical? I know that you did not come to see me often last term; but I thought ~~you~~ it was the added length of Beaumont St, and a preference for the passive part, which made your visits rare. If it was not those things, you should be delighted that you can now fitly so arrange matters, that I shall 'have seen the last of you.' If it was, you still have the advantage of me; for you can choose your way.<sup>28</sup>)

Might Eddy have felt subsequently that his Nietzschean references ('supermen', 'higher unscrupulousness', 'animal god', etc) were so unsubtle here in his manuscript draft as to warrant his suppressing this passage from the published book? Certainly, he seems to have been laying it on a bit thick. But Nietzsche (as well as Jack and his superb hair) was clearly very much in Eddy's mind while he was writing *The Ruin*. The manuscript carries four epigraphs prefacing the novel—by Tennyson, Nietzsche, Webster, and Sophocles—but only the Nietzsche quotation actually makes its way into the book, where it is printed opposite the title page. Here is how the Nietzsche quotation appears on the manuscript, (after which I give an English translation):

Bist du ein Sklave? so kannst du nicht Freunde sein. Bist du ein Tyrann? so kannst du nicht Freunde haben.

Nietzsche. [sic] Zarathustra.<sup>29</sup>

[*Are you a slave? Then you cannot be a friend. Are you a tyrant? Then you cannot have friends.*]

This seems to get to the heart of the relationship between Denzil (slave) and Marcus (tyrant), and how the nature of that relationship might best be defined, given Denzil is servile almost to the point of subjugation, and Marcus callously dominant. In book one chapter five of the novel, Marcus confronts Denzil's sister Helen with a declaration of the control he demands to exercise over Denzil:

I cannot live without a slave! I want and *must* have a complete ascendancy over another being, no matter who it is. This time it is Denzil, and he will have to succumb.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Jack to Eddy (1923), Edward Sackville-West Papers, Vol. II, The British Library, Additional MS 68905, ff. 22v–25v (i.e. 22v, 23r, 24r, 25v).

<sup>29</sup> HRC, MS 3675, unnumbered page following the title page and preceding p. 1. The epigraph appears in the published book on the page facing the title page. In the book, it is printed above a four-bar musical quotation in  $3_4$  time from Richard Strauss's opera *Elektra*, namely the 'dreaming motif' (which starts at rehearsal number 178 in the musical score). Thus, while a literary quotation from Sophocles's play *Elektra* does not appear in the book, a musical quotation from Strauss's opera based on the Greek tragedy does instead.

Friedrich Nietzsche and his *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883–5) were a preoccupation of Eddy's. The typescript of Eddy's unpublished novel 'Sinfonia Eroica. A Legend' also bears an epigraph from this work by Nietzsche: see Edward Sackville West, 'Sinfonia Eroica. A Legend' (undated), Edward Sackville-West Papers, Vol. VIII, The British Library, Additional MS 68911, f. 2r.

But the manuscript version is even stronger, with Marcus spelling out the nature, both bodily and psychological, of the control he must exert over his friend:

I cannot live without a slave. I want & must have ~~an~~ a complete physical & mental ascendancy over another being, no matter who it is. This time it is Denzil & he will have to succumb.<sup>30</sup>

Physical and mental dominance—what exactly was Eddy originally implying with that phrase?

An extended passage in book two chapter two delves into Denzil's psychology as the Eddy character (Denzil) finds himself discreetly observing, indeed staring at, the Jack character (Marcus). Amendments from manuscript to print are again telling. 'The ~~more~~ longer he watched him the more he felt himself the slave of this other' becomes a less emphatic 'The longer he watched Marcus the more he felt himself in subjection to him'. 'More often, however, it was his nature that was dominated by the heavier will of the opposing one' is amended to a less belligerent '... the heavier will of the other'. And 'a satisfaction hardly less vivid than if he had been protected ~~ed~~ from the ~~real~~ very real assault of a burglar' feels somewhat diluted in the published version's '... than if he had been screened from the very real assault of a footpad', with its slightly jarring anachronism.<sup>31</sup>

The climax in the relationship between Marcus and Denzil, however, comes in book three chapter four, the scene within the oast-house at night, where the psychological crisis between the two men will ultimately play out. This is one of the 'ruins' to which the narrative inexorably runs: things come to a head, the gloves are finally off in terms of their inner lives. The manuscript makes more explicit than the book the deliberateness of Marcus's ruthlessness: 'He was within reach of his goal', Eddy has written in the manuscript, as Marcus first confronts Denzil, a sentence not included within the published novel.<sup>32</sup> Marcus throws out a rhetorical question to Denzil, asking him if he wished they had never met. The book has, from Denzil, 'In his heart was "Yes! Yes! Yes!"', but the manuscript something yet stronger: 'In his heart was "Yes! Yes! A thousand times yes!"', and Marcus refers to their friendship as 'violent', which the book omits.<sup>33</sup> In the book, Marcus's words seem 'vile and callous' to Denzil, and Denzil's soul 'twisted into momentary insensibility', but in the manuscript, Marcus's words 'wreaked of vileness & moral turpitude', and Marcus has 'enslaved him, mind, body & will'.<sup>34</sup> Marcus's very devilishness is more pronounced in the manuscript too: 'It was like some elaborate circle of hell', Eddy includes in the draft but not the published version.<sup>35</sup> In the book the three chimneys of the oast-house are 'sad white widows', but 'sinister white widows' in the manuscript draft with 'ghostly' white heads; in the book Marcus's eyes are 'wide and tense', but the manuscript includes yet more combativeness, and his eyes are 'wide and tense with the final battle'; and the manuscript describes how 'The hour of triumph had come for Marcus', which the book also omits.<sup>36</sup>

Three to four months after Eddy had, for the time being at least, completed his manuscript draft of *The Ruin*, he began keeping a diary for the year 1924. Now held by The British Library, his is a red morocco leather, page-a-day Asprey's Diary with clasp, manufactured by luxury brand Asprey & Co. of New Bond Street, London, and he keeps it up until 1 April. The first three months of 1924 were to prove pivotal in his life, and they took in the remarriage in January of his widowed father. They also included Eddy's trip later that month to Freiburg to receive psychoanalysis and aversion therapy from Dr Karl Martin, essentially a type of conversion therapy to counter his same-sex attraction (causing Eddy considerable physical discomfort), as well as ongoing romantic

<sup>30</sup> Sackville West, *The Ruin*, p. 78; HRC, MS 3675, p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> These three examples are drawn from HRC, MS 3675, p. 99, and correspondingly, Sackville West, *The Ruin*, p. 124.

<sup>32</sup> HRC, MS 3675, p. 200.

<sup>33</sup> Sackville West, *The Ruin*, p. 250; HRC, MS 3675, p. 201.

<sup>34</sup> Sackville West, *The Ruin*, p. 251; HRC, MS 3675, p. 201.

<sup>35</sup> HRC, MS 3675, pp. 201–2.

<sup>36</sup> Sackville West, *The Ruin*, p. 251; HRC, MS 3675, pp. 201, 202; Sackville West, *The Ruin*, p. 255; HRC, MS 3675, p. 205; HRC, MS 3675, p. 206.

and sexual attachments to male friends (primarily Jack), all the while he was pondering or planning his various fiction writing projects (including *The Ruin*).

It seems thoughts could always easily turn to Jack. On 3 January, he writes of his younger sister, Diana: 'Din used a phrase of Jack's together day: "all sorts of odd things." Bother it is this gave me a turn!'<sup>37</sup> The following month, on 19 February, he records seeing a Swedish silent film of 1921: 'Saw Jenny Hasselquist in *The Refugees*. She looked ~~and~~ & was marvellous. Thought her strangely like Mummy, but in a different way from Jack'. Jack's mother had died just over three years ago—his doleful diary entry of 25 February records, 'I have not felt Mummy's death until now that Daddy has married again'—and it is telling how he conflates these two critical relationships of his early years, the filial and the romantic.<sup>38</sup> Then, 29 February brings a new dramatic development in his tortured longing for his friend from New College, Oxford:

Letter from Jack. Could not open it for a few minutes. Very nice but a little patronising, as ever. Dares to ask what I am being psycho'ed about & talks of 'casting off scandalous & sentimental sloughs.' Be damned to him! I hope I never see him again. I shall grow that beard!<sup>39</sup>

The irony is, of course, that his infatuation with Jack is at the heart of why Eddy finds himself in Germany for this crude experimental treatment, so physically and emotionally painful, i.e. 'being psycho'ed'. Perhaps Jack, depending on how Marcus-like he really was, could even have known this, or at least have worked it out? But Jack had not been commanding Eddy's romantic longings exclusively. There had also been Eric Siepmann (1903–1970), a few months older than Jack. Like Jack, Eric had been a scholar at Winchester College, thereafter a classical scholar at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, which he left without taking his degree, before becoming a journalist. 'I find Eric restful, now I am no longer in love with him', Eddy confided in his diary, on 14 January: 'I should dislike to lose the adventure of friendship with such a preposterous creature!'.<sup>40</sup>



Photograph of Winchester College Scholars in fancy dress, summer 1920 [detail]—  
showing E. O. Siepmann (back, left) as William of Wykeham, and J. W. McDougall (back, right)  
Winchester College Archives, Winchester G/255/3  
This and the following image © Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of Winchester College

<sup>37</sup> Diary kept by Eddy (1924), The British Library, Add MS 71871 C, f. 12r.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, ff. 35v, 38v.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, f. 40v.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, f. 17v. In his autobiography, Eric recalls of the year he spent at Oxford an 'Eddy Sackville-West, in baggy flannel trousers, [who] drew from the piano sounds like a howling cat': Eric Otto Siepmann, *Confessions of a Nihilist* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1955), pp. 45–6.



Photograph of Winchester College Prefects, 1921 [detail]—  
showing J. W. McDougall (front, left) and E. O. Siepmann (back, right)  
Winchester College Archives, Winchester, G5/8/5<sup>41</sup>

And then there was Eddy's foppish 'bright young thing' friend the Hon. Eddie Gathorne-Hardy (1901–1978), his contemporary at both Eton and Christ Church. Eddie would be the model for the camp and frivolous character Martin Gaythorne-Brodie (who, for obvious reasons, was renamed Miles Malpractice in subsequent printings) in *Decline and Fall* (1928), Evelyn Waugh's debut novel. Eddie was also living in Germany when Eddy was out there, as Eddy relates on 17 March 1924:

Eddy [i.e. Eddie Gathorne-Hardy] left for Venice. The worst Welters I've known since Mousehole. I suppose it's because Eddy's gone. I miss him quite dreadfully. What a fool I am about people! And if I could only believe what Otto Weini[n]ger says about my masculinity!

(Weininger's controversial 1903 book *Geschlecht und Charakter* ('Sex and Character') posited a theory, among others, concerning the universal inherence of bisexuality.)

And in his diary entry for the following day, Eddy continues to lament: 'How I miss Eddy!'<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> For access to photographs in Winchester College Archives, I am grateful to the college archivist, Suzanne Foster.

<sup>42</sup> The British Library, Add MS 71871 C, ff. 49r, 49v. Eddie also visited Eddy at Knole; his visits of 30 November–2 December 1929, 28–30 March 1931, and 30 April–2 May 1932 are recorded in Eddy's 'Visitors Book' at Knole.

Eddy is still thinking about the novel he has set aside, which has evidently been circulating in manuscript form. On 16 March he writes with evident satisfaction:

Back in Freiburg. Aunt Eva [*his paternal uncle's wife*] seems the better for the Feldberg. She likes The Ruin & was not in the least shocked! She is fast becoming a 'possible' relation.

Meanwhile elements of other novel-writing designs were also concurrently taking shape. Probably as early as 1923, he was thinking about and likely collecting ideas and setting aside textual passages potentially for *Piano Quintet*, his first published novel, which Heinemann brought out in 1925 a year before *The Ruin*, as well as for 'Sinfonia Eroica', a novel that remains unpublished in typescript draft (at The British Library). One page from Eddy's working notebook-cum-diary of 1923 he has headed '~~The People Who went to Bewdley.~~ Piano Quintet', and another page refers to 'Sinfonia Eroica'.<sup>43</sup> In his Asprey's Diary of the following year, Eddy records on 19 March the start of his so-called treatment at the hands of Dr Martin, and his 'First injection of novoprotein'. He hopes to turn the pain of his real life into art:

God! What agony it was I thought: The pain glowed in & out like a lamp in the wind, swaying to & fro in gusts of agony. [To be used in Piano Quintet.]<sup>44</sup>

In similar vein, he sought to save up recollections of wonderful experiences, too, for his fiction. On 8 February 1924, he recalls a

Divine day. Walked miles in the upper slopes of the Günterstal with Eddy [*Eddie Gathorne-Hardy*], taking photographs. Woodcutters, snow, sun, Bächlein, smell of pine trees. All very useful for The Sun in Capricorn. Sense of satisfaction in life.

Later that month, he decides, on 22 February, that 'The Sun in Capricorn is not going to be my next novel. I shall write one about Koenigsberg, vaguely on the Phaedra theme, called (I think) Erna Göpel'. And *The Sun in Capricorn*, indeed, is not published until 1934, the last of his novels to appear. Denzil Torrent will reappear in that book, a partially autobiographical coming-of-age story, which follows Eddy's characters from Eton College then to Oxford and beyond out into the world. His diary entry for 31 March shows he has no lack of confidence in his ability to write novelistically:

Some time I must write an Eton novel, as seen from the Inferiority Complex point of view. About Denzil Torrent. It will certainly be the best school story ever written, as it must be, not through being representative (which it won't be) but from being at least true for my type. So far no school story has been true for any type.

Writing was intrinsic both to Eddy's sense of identity and also to generating the feelings of satisfying accomplishment he craved, as he makes clear on 25 March: 'I am certain my happiness depends on having written something every day. I have not felt so relieved for days as I do at this moment, having achieved six pages'.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Edward Sackville-West, [Working notebook-cum-diary] (1923), The British Library, Add MS 68908, ff. 44v, 17r. Institutional copies of Eddy's first published novel are rare in the UK. New College Library holds a copy complete with very good dustjacket: Edward Sackville West, *Piano Quintet* (London: Heinemann, 1925), RS5434.

<sup>44</sup> The British Library, Add MS 71871 C, f. 50r. New College Library holds a copy of Edward Sackville West, *The Sun in Capricorn: A Recital* (London: William Heinemann, 1934) in its pristine dustjacket, at RS5376. The novel of Eddy's with the finest dustjacket is his third published one, with the striking and attractive pictorial design of Ralph Keene. The library also has a copy of this novel, in its pristine rare jacket: Edward Sackville West, *Mandrake over the Water-Carrier: A Recital* (London: William Heinemann, 1928), RS5435.

<sup>45</sup> The British Library, Add MS 71871 C, ff. 30r, 37r, 56r, 53r.

But today, *The Ruin: A Gothic Novel* is little remembered, and Eddy not readily recalled as a fiction writer. Of his novels, only *Simpson: A Life* (1931), which also came out in a revised version 20 years later, can be said to have garnered anything in the way of critical acclaim.<sup>46</sup> It is mainly as a music critic—and relatedly, close associate of Benjamin Britten (with whom he was for a while in love), dedicatee of that composer's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*, collaborator with Britten on the radio drama and musical score *The Rescue*—that he is now remembered.<sup>47</sup> A lasting popular image of Eddy Sackville-West is of an overrefined aristocrat entertaining from his Gatehouse Tower rooms at Knole, as a cousin, certainly, of the Bloomsbury Group's Vita Sackville-West, and (possibly still to literary scholars) as a distinguished biographer of Thomas De Quincey.<sup>48</sup> And—just very fleetingly, perhaps—might he be recollected, still, as an intimate friend of our intriguing New College man, Jack.



Christopher Skelton-Foord  
Librarian  
New College, Oxford

Eddy photographed by Lady Ottoline Morrell the year *The Ruin* was published  
The Green Room, Garsington Manor, Oxfordshire  
National Portrait Gallery Photographs Collection, NPG Ax142414  
Detail from vintage snapshot print © National Portrait Gallery, London

<sup>46</sup> The library has a copy of the new and revised edition of Edward Sackville West, *Simpson: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1951), at RS5436, as well as the American first edition of the novel, which was published in June 1931, four months after the UK edition had appeared: Edward Sackville-West, *Simpson: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), RS5437. Our copy of the American edition is signed and dated 'March 1931' by Eddy, inscribed to his friend, the openly gay American fiction writer and poet, Glenway Wescott (1901–1987), and it also bears Eddy's modernist *ex libris* bookplate, designed by John Banting, who also oversaw the decoration of Eddy's Gatehouse Tower rooms at Knole. Eddy had a love affair with John, whose name comes eighth in Eddy's 'Colossus of Rhodes' list in Eddy's 'A commonplace Book & Diary', The British Library, Add MS 68906, f. 28v. Eddy's Gatehouse Tower 'Visitors Book' at Knole records nine separate stays of John's at Knole during 1927, two during 1929, and then two more in 1938.

<sup>47</sup> New College Library holds a presentation copy, signed by Eddy, of Edward Sackville-West, *The Rescue: A Melodrama for Broadcasting based on Homer's Odyssey*, with six illustrations by Henry Moore (London: Secker and Warburg, 1945), RS5433.

<sup>48</sup> Eddy's most critically acclaimed book, *A Flame in Sunlight: The Life and Work of Thomas De Quincey* (London: Cassell, 1936), won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Biography for 1936.