

= Nancy Mitford =

Nancy Freeman @-@ Mitford CBE (28 November 1904 ? 30 June 1973) , known as Nancy Mitford , was an English novelist , biographer and journalist . One of the renowned Mitford sisters and one of the " Bright Young People " on the London social scene in the inter @-@ war years , she is best remembered for her novels about upper @-@ class life in England and France and for her sharp and often provocative wit . She also established a reputation for herself as a writer of popular historical biographies .

Mitford enjoyed a privileged childhood as the eldest daughter of the Hon. David Freeman @-@ Mitford , later 2nd Baron Redesdale . Educated privately , she had no training as a writer before publishing her first novel in 1931 . This early effort and the three that followed it created little stir ; it was her two semi @-@ autobiographical postwar novels , *The Pursuit of Love* (1945) and *Love in a Cold Climate* (1949) , that established her reputation . Mitford 's marriage to Peter Rodd in 1933 proved unsatisfactory to both (they divorced in 1957 after a lengthy separation) , and during the Second World War she formed a liaison with a Free French officer , Gaston Palewski . He became the love of her life , although the pair were never a formal couple . After the war Mitford settled in France and lived there until her death , maintaining social contact with her many English friends through letters and regular visits .

During the 1950s Mitford was identified with the concept of " U " (upper) and " non @-@ U " language , whereby social origins and standing were identified by words used in everyday speech . She had intended this as a joke , but many took it seriously , and Mitford was considered an authority on manners and breeding ? possibly her most recognised legacy . Her later years were bitter @-@ sweet , the success of her biographical studies of Madame de Pompadour , Voltaire and King Louis XIV contrasting with the ultimate failure of her relationship with Palewski . From the late 1960s her health deteriorated , and she endured several years of painful illness before her death in 1973 .

= = Life = =

= = = Family background and connections = = =

The Mitford family dates from the Norman era , when Sir John de Mitford held the Castle of Mitford in Northumberland . A later Sir John held several important public offices during the late 14th and early 15th centuries , and the family maintained a tradition of public service for many generations . In the 18th century William Mitford was a leading classical historian , responsible for the definitive history of ancient Greece . His great @-@ grandson Algernon Bertram Mitford , born in 1837 and known as " Bertie " , was a diplomat and traveller who held minor office in Disraeli 's second ministry , from 1874 to 1880 . In 1874 he married Clementina , the second daughter of David Ogilvy , 10th Earl of Airlie , a union that linked the Mitfords to some of Britain 's most prominent aristocratic families . Blanche Ogilvy , Clementina 's elder sister , became the wife of Sir Henry Montague Hozier , a soldier turned businessman . Their four children included daughters Clementine (" Clemmie ") , who in 1908 married the future British prime minister Winston Churchill , and Nellie who married Bertram Romilly . Both Hozier and Blanche were promiscuous , and it is generally accepted by historians and family members that Hozier was not Clemmie 's father , although he was registered as such . Blanche told her friend Lady Londonderry , shortly before Clemmie 's birth , that the father of the expected child was her own brother @-@ in @-@ law , Bertie Mitford ; most historians believe that other candidates for the paternity are more likely .

Bertie Mitford 's marriage produced five sons and four daughters . His career in government service ended in 1886 , when after the death of a cousin he inherited a considerable fortune . A condition of the inheritance was that he adopt the surname " Freeman @-@ Mitford " . He rebuilt Batsford House , the family 's country seat , served briefly as a Unionist MP in the 1890s , and otherwise devoted himself to books , writings and travel . In 1902 he was raised to the peerage as 1st Baron

Redesdale , a re @-@ creation of a title that had previously been held in the family but had lapsed in 1886 .

= = = Ancestry = = =

= = = Selective Mitford family tree = = =

= = = Childhood = = =

= = = Parentage = = =

Nancy Mitford 's father , David Bertram Ogilvy Freeman @-@ Mitford , was Bertie Mitford 's second son , born on 13 March 1878 . After several years as a tea planter in Ceylon he fought in the Boer War of 1899 ? 1902 and was severely wounded . In 1903 he became engaged to Sydney Bowles , the elder daughter of Thomas Gibson Bowles , known as " Tap " , a journalist , editor and magazine proprietor whose publications included Vanity Fair and The Lady . The couple were married on 16 February 1904 , after which they rented a house in Graham Street in West London . Bowles provided his son @-@ in @-@ law with a job , as business manager of The Lady magazine . David had little interest in reading and knew nothing of business ; thus , according to Nancy Mitford 's biographer Selena Hastings , " a less congenial post ... could hardly have been imagined " . He remained in this position for ten years . The couple 's first child , a daughter , was born on 28 November 1904 ; they had intended to call her Ruby , but after she was born they changed their minds and named her Nancy .

= = = First years = = =

Responsibility for Nancy 's day @-@ to @-@ day upbringing was delegated to her nanny and nursemaid , within the framework of Sydney 's short @-@ lived belief that children should never be corrected or be spoken to in anger . Before this experiment was discontinued , Nancy had become self @-@ centred and uncontrollable ; Hastings writes that her first years were " characterised by roaring , red @-@ faced rages " . Just before her third birthday , a sister , Pamela , was born ; the nanny 's apparent change of loyalty in favour of the new arrival was a further source of outrage to Nancy , and throughout their childhood and into young adulthood she continued to vent her displeasure on her sister .

In January 1909 a brother , Tom was born , and in June 1910 another sister , Diana , followed . That summer , to relieve the pressure on what was becoming an overcrowded nursery , Nancy attended the nearby Francis Holland School . The few months she spent there represented almost the whole of her formal schooling ; in the autumn the family moved to a larger house in Victoria Road , Kensington , after which Nancy was educated at home by successive governesses . Summers were spent at the family 's cottage near High Wycombe , in Buckinghamshire , or with the children 's Redesdale grandparents at Batsford Park . In the winter of 1913 ? 14 David and Sydney visited Canada , prospecting for gold on a claim that David had purchased in Swastika , Ontario . It was here that their fifth child was conceived , a daughter born in London on 8 August 1914 and christened Unity .

= = = War , Batsford Park and Asthall Manor = = =

On the outbreak of the First World War on 4 August 1914 , David rejoined his regiment and was soon in France . In May 1915 , Clement , David 's older brother , was killed while serving with the 10th Royal Hussars , which made David heir to the Redesdale title and lands . On 17 August 1916

Bertie Mitford died ; David , still serving at the front , became the 2nd Baron Redesdale . Sydney quickly took possession of Batsford House , much of which had been shut up for many years , and occupied the portion of it that she could afford to heat . The children had the run of the house and grounds , and were taught together in the schoolroom . This was a source of frustration for Nancy , whose lively intelligence required greater stimulus . She spent many hours reading in the Batsford House library where , according to Hastings , the foundations of her intellectual life were laid .

The Redesdale estates were extensive , but uneconomical . At the end of the war Redesdale decided to sell Batsford Park and move his increasing family (a fifth daughter , Jessica , had been born in September 1917) to less extravagant accommodation . The house was sold early in 1919 , together with many of its contents ? including , to Nancy 's great dismay , much of its library . The new family home was Asthall Manor , a Jacobean mansion near Swinbrook in Oxfordshire . This was intended as a short @-@ term measure while a new house was built on land nearby . The family stayed in Asthall Manor for seven years , and it became the basis of many of the family scenes which Nancy was later to portray in her semi @-@ autobiographical novels .

Growing up proved a difficult process for Nancy . Unable to form a relationship with Pamela , the sister nearest to her in age , she was bored and irritated by her younger siblings , and vented her feelings by teasing and tormenting them . Although there was undoubtedly cruelty in her taunting ? the other children , led by Tom , formed a " Leag (sic) against Nancy " ? her teasing was also , according to the later reflections of her nephew Alexander Mosley : " a highly @-@ honed weapon to keep a lot of highly competitive , bright , energetic sisters in order . She used it ... as a form of self protection " . Not all her interactions with her siblings were hostile ; for their amusement she edited and produced a magazine , The Boiler , to which she contributed entertainingly gruesome murder stories .

In 1921 , after years of pleading for proper schooling , Nancy was allowed a year 's boarding at Hatherop Castle , an informal private establishment for young ladies of good family . Laura Thompson , in her biography of Nancy , describes Hatherop as not so much a school , " more a chaste foretaste of debutante life " . Here Nancy learned French and other subjects , played organised games and joined a Girl Guide troop . It was her first extended experience of life away from home , and she enjoyed it . The following year she was allowed to accompany four other girls on a cultural trip to Paris , Florence and Venice ; her letters home are full of expressions of wonder at the sights and treasures : " I had no idea I was so fond of pictures ... if only I had a room of my own I would make it a regular picture gallery " .

= = = Debutante and socialite = = =

Nancy 's eighteenth birthday in November 1922 was the occasion for a grand " coming @-@ out " ball , marking the beginning of her entry into Society . This was followed in June 1923 by her presentation at Court ? a formal introduction to King George V at Buckingham Palace ? after which she was officially " out " and could attend the balls and parties that constituted the London Season . She spent much of the next few years in a round of social events , making new friends and mixing with the " Bright Young People " of 1920s London . Nancy declared that " we hardly saw the light of day , except at dawn " . In 1926 Asthall Manor was finally sold . While the new house at Swinbrook was made ready , the female members of the family were sent for three months to Paris , a period which , says Hastings , began Nancy 's " lifelong love affair " with France .

Among Nancy 's new London friends was Evelyn Gardner who , Nancy informed her brother Tom , was engaged " to a man called Evelyn Waugh who writes , I believe , very well " . She and Waugh later developed a lasting friendship . Although she was now of age , her father maintained an aggressive hostility towards most of her male friends , particularly since , as Hastings remarks , these tended towards the frivolous , the aesthetic and the effeminate . Among them was Hamish St Clair Erskine , the second son of the 5th Earl of Rosslyn , an Oxford undergraduate four years Nancy 's junior . He was , according to Hastings , the least suitable partner of all , " the most shimmering and narcissistic of all the beautiful butterflies " ? and the one most likely to offend Lord Redesdale . The pair met in 1928 and became unofficially engaged , despite his homosexuality (of

which Nancy may not have been aware) . Against a backdrop of negativity from family and friends ? Waugh advised her to " dress better and catch a better man " ? the affair endured sporadically for several years .

= = = Incipient writer = = =

As a means of augmenting the meagre allowance provided by her father , Mitford began writing , encouraged by Waugh . Her first efforts , anonymous contributions to gossip columns in society magazines , led to occasional signed articles , and in 1930 The Lady engaged her to write a regular column . That winter , she embarked on a full @-@ length novel , Highland Fling , in which various characters ? mostly identifiable among her friends , acquaintances and family ? attend a Scottish house @-@ party which develops chaotically . The book made little impact when it was published in March 1931 , and she immediately began work on another , Christmas Pudding . Like the earlier novel , the plot centres on a clash between the " Bright Young People " and the older generation . Hamish Erskine is clearly identifiable in the character of " Bobby Bobbin " , and John Betjeman is the basis for the supporting role of Bobby 's tutor . The thinly disguised caricatures pervading the book shocked Lady Redesdale , who thought it could not possibly be published under Mitford 's own name .

The affair between Erskine and Mitford continued intermittently . While she often despaired of the relationship , she refused other offers of marriage , saying that she would " never marry anyone except Hamish . " In 1932 her plight was overshadowed by a family scandal involving her younger sister Diana , who had married Bryan Guinness in 1928 and was the mother of two young sons . In 1932 Diana deserted her husband to become the mistress of Sir Oswald Mosley , the leader of the British Union of Fascists , himself married with three children . Almost alone of her family , Mitford offered her sister support , regularly visiting her and keeping her up to date with family news and social gossip . Her own love affair with Erskine came to an abrupt end when , in June 1933 , he informed her that he intended to marry the daughter of a London banker . In a final letter after their parting , Mitford wrote to him : " I thought in your soul you loved me & that in the end we should have children & look back on life together when we are old " .

= = = Marriage , writing , politics = = =

Within a month of Erskine 's departure , Mitford announced her engagement to Peter Rodd , the second son of Sir Rennell Rodd , a diplomat and politician who was ennobled that year as Baron Rennell . According to Mitford 's friend Harold Acton , Rodd was " a young man of boundless promise ... he had abundant qualifications for success in any profession he deigned to choose " . Other biographers describe him as irresponsible , unfaithful , a bore and unable to hold down a regular job , and as the model for Waugh 's unscrupulous , amoral character Basil Seal from Black Mischief . They were married on 4 December 1933 , after which they settled into a cottage at Strand @-@ on @-@ the @-@ Green on the western edges of London . Mitford 's initial delight in the marriage was soon tempered by money worries , Rodd 's fecklessness and her dislike of his family .

In 1934 Mitford began her third novel , Wigs on the Green , a satire on Mosley 's fascist " Blackshirt " movement . Mitford herself had briefly flirted with this cause , although her enthusiasm was short @-@ lived and she soon became a vociferous opponent of fascism . When the novel was published in 1935 it made little critical impact , while seriously offending members of her own family , particularly her sisters Diana and Unity , both of whom were supporters of Mosley 's movement and devotees of the German dictator Adolf Hitler . Diana eventually forgave her , but the rift with Unity , who was outraged by her depiction in the book as the ridiculous " Eugenia Malmains " , was never fully healed .

By 1936 Mitford 's marriage was largely a sham . Rodd was engaged in an affair with the wife of a friend , a situation that continued into the new year , when the Mitford family was further shaken by the 19 @-@ year @-@ old Jessica 's elopement with her cousin Esmond Romilly . A rebellious ex @-@ Wellington schoolboy and avowed Communist , Romilly had been invalided home after

fighting on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War . The young couple were traced to Bilbao ; Mitford was despatched to bring them home , but failed to persuade them , and they were married in May .

Through the winter of 1937 ? 38 Mitford 's main literary task was editing the letters of her cousins the Stanleys of Alderley , with whom she was connected through her great @-@ grandmother Blanche Airlie . Her preoccupation with this project ? nine or ten hours a day , she informed her friend Robert Byron ? further damaged her relationship with Rodd , who resented the time thus spent . Nevertheless , in the summer of 1938 she discovered she was pregnant . She hoped for a girl : " 2 Peter Rodds in 1 house is unthinkable " , but in September she miscarried . Early in 1939 Rodd left for the South of France , to work with the relief organisations assisting the thousands of Spanish refugees who had fled from General Franco 's armies in the final stages of the civil war . In May Mitford joined him , and spent several weeks there as a relief worker . She was much affected by what she saw : " I have never cried so much in all my life " . The experience hardened her anti @-@ fascism to the extent that she wrote : " I would join hands with the devil himself to stop any further extension of the disease " .

Having rejected the political extremes within her family , Mitford affected a stance of moderate socialism , though as Hastings points out , without much depth or conviction . Many of her writings ? for example , her introductions to the Stanley letter collections , and her " U ? non @-@ U " essay of 1955 ? are staunch defences of aristocratic traditions and values .

= = = Second World War = = =

The outbreak of war in September 1939 divided the Mitford family . Nancy and Rodd supported the war ; the Romillys had by this time departed for America , while the others either hoped for an Anglo @-@ German détente or , as with Unity , were openly pro @-@ Nazi . Unity was in Munich when war was declared ; in despair she attempted suicide by shooting herself in the head . She survived , and was sent home through neutral Switzerland . Mosley and Diana , who had married secretly in 1936 , were detained under Defence Regulation 18B . Nancy , in full anti @-@ fascist mode , had described her sister to the British Intelligence agency MI5 as " a ruthless and shrewd egotist , a devoted fascist and admirer of Hitler [who] sincerely desires the downfall of England and democracy in general . " During the " phoney war " of 1939 ? 40 , Nancy was briefly an Air Raid Precautions (ARP) driver , and later worked shifts at a first @-@ aid post in Paddington . She drew on these experiences in her fourth novel , Pigeon Pie , a comedy about spying . It was published by Hamish Hamilton in May 1940 , at a time when there was little public appetite for lighthearted war satire , and the book was a commercial failure .

In April 1940 Mitford suffered her second miscarriage . Shortly afterwards Rodd , who had been commissioned into the Welsh Guards , departed overseas . Alone in London , Mitford moved to the family 's Rutland Gate house where she remained during the London blitz . The main house had been requisitioned to provide a refuge for Jewish families evacuated from the bombed areas of the East End . Mitford spent much of her time looking after these families , " so hard @-@ working , clean and grateful " . A brief affair with a Free French officer , André Roy , resulted in a third pregnancy . Mitford again miscarried , with complications that led , in November 1941 , to a hysterectomy . After convalescence , at a loose end , she began working as an assistant at the Heywood Hill bookshop in Curzon Street . The shop became the centre of Mitford 's daily activities , and was a favoured meeting place for London 's literati . In September 1942 she met Gaston Palewski , a French colonel attached to General Charles de Gaulle 's London staff . She found him fascinating , and he became the love of her life ? though her feelings were never fully reciprocated ? and an inspiration for much of her future writing . For the sake of Mitford 's reputation the affair was pursued with discretion , before Palewski left for Algeria in May 1943 . Thereafter the relationship was conducted mainly by letters and occasional phone calls , since Palewski was only intermittently in England before the end of the war .

Pigeon Pie 's failure had cooled Mitford 's desire to write , but in 1944 , with Waugh 's encouragement , she began planning a new novel . In March 1945 she was given three months '

leave from the shop to write it . The Pursuit of Love is a heavily autobiographical romantic comedy in which many of her family and acquaintances appear in thin disguises . Despite the distraction of learning that her brother Tom had died fighting in Burma , she finished the book and , in September , went to Paris . Ostensibly this was to establish a French branch of Heywood Hill but in reality she wished to be close to Palewski , who was now a member of de Gaulle 's postwar provisional government . She was back in London in December 1945 for the publication of The Pursuit of Love which was , Hastings records , " an instant and phenomenal success ... the perfect antidote to the long war years of hardship and austerity , providing the undernourished public with its favourite ingredients : love , childhood and the English upper classes " . The book sold 200 @, @ 000 copies within a year of publication , and firmly established Mitford as a best @-@ selling author .

= = = Move to Paris = = =

At the end of the war Rodd returned home , but the marriage was essentially over ; although remaining on friendly terms , the couple led separate lives . Mitford 's visit to France in late 1945 had revived her longing to be there , and in April 1946 , having given up working in the shop the previous month , she left London to make her permanent home in Paris ; she never lived in England again . She was a prolific letter writer , and kept contact with her large cohort of friends by a voluminous correspondence . According to Hastings , she developed many of her friendships far further on paper than she could have done through normal social intercourse .

= = = Rue Monsieur = = =

During her first 18 months in Paris Mitford lived in several short @-@ term lodgings while enjoying a hectic social life , the hub of which was the British Embassy under the regime of the ambassador , Duff Cooper , and his socialite wife Lady Diana Cooper . Eventually Mitford found a comfortable apartment , with a maid , at No. 7 rue Monsieur on the Left Bank , close to Palewski 's residence . Settled there in comfort , she established a pattern to her life that she mostly followed for the next 20 years , her precise timetable determined by Palewski 's varying availability . Her socialising , entertaining and working were interspersed with regular short visits to family and friends in England and summers generally spent in Venice .

In 1948 Mitford completed a new novel , a sequel to The Pursuit of Love she called Love in a Cold Climate , with the same country house ambience as the earlier book and many of the same characters . The novel 's reception was even warmer than that of its predecessor ; Waugh was one of the few critics to qualify his praise ? he thought the descriptions were good but the conversations poor . In 1950 she translated and adapted André Roussin 's play La petite hutte (" The Little Hut ") , in preparation for its successful West End début in August , The Times 's critic noted the " habit of speech at once colloquial and unexpected which instantly declares itself the creation of Miss Mitford . " The play ran for 1 @, @ 261 performances , and provided Mitford with a steady £ 300 per month in royalties . The same year The Sunday Times asked her to contribute a regular column , which she did for four years . This busy period in her writing life continued in 1951 with her third postwar novel , The Blessing , another semi @-@ autobiographical romance this time set in Paris , in which an aristocratic young Englishwoman is married to a libidinous French marquis . Harold Acton deems it her most accomplished novel , " permeated with her joyous love of France " . This time Waugh (to whom the book was dedicated) had no criticism ; he found the book " admirable , deliciously funny , consistent and complete , by far the best of your writings " .

Mitford then began her first serious non @-@ fiction work , a biography of Madame de Pompadour . The general view of the critics , when the book was published in March 1954 , was that it was " marvellous entertainment , if hardly to be taken as history " . The historian A.J.P. Taylor likened Mitford 's evocation of 18th @-@ century Versailles to " Alconleigh " , the fictitious country house that formed the background to her recent best @-@ selling novels , a comparison that she found offensive .

= = = = Noblesse Oblige = = = =

In 1954 Alan Ross , a University of Birmingham professor of linguistics , devised the terms " U " and " Non @-@ U " to differentiate the speech patterns of the social classes in England . " U " indicated upper @-@ class usage , and " Non @-@ U " the conventions of the lower strata of society . His article , in a learned Finnish journal and with an illustrative glossary , used *The Pursuit of Love* to exemplify upper @-@ class speech patterns . In a spirit of mischief , Mitford incorporated the U and Non @-@ U thesis into an article she was writing for *Encounter* on the English aristocracy . Although this aspect formed only a small section of Mitford 's article , when it was published in September 1955 it caused a major stir . Few recognised the tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek aspect ; Mitford received hundreds of letters from worried readers desperate to know if they were snobs or merely " common " . The level of anxious or amused interest was sustained to such an extent that in 1956 Hamish Hamilton reproduced the article in a short book , entitled *Noblesse Oblige* . The book also included an abbreviated version of Ross 's original article , and contributions from Waugh , Betjeman , Peter Fleming and Christopher Sykes , It was a tremendous success ; as Lovell records , " ' U and Non @-@ U ' was the buzz phrase of the day ... Nancy 's comments made her the arbiter of good manners for several generations " . Thompson notes the irony that the U and Non @-@ U labels , perhaps Mitford 's best @-@ known legacy , were not her own but were borrowed for the purpose of a " tease " .

= = = = Later career = = = =

In October 1957 Palewski was appointed as France 's ambassador to Italy . Mitford 's meetings with him , which had become increasingly rare because of his many political and social commitments , were now reduced to a single visit a year , supplemented with occasional letters . Mitford mainly concealed her true feelings on this separation , although one acquaintance noted her increasingly " savage " teasing of friends , which was perhaps a safety valve : " If she would only tell one she is unhappy one would do what one could to comfort her " . In March 1958 Mitford 's father , Lord Redesdale , died . After the cremation , she informed her sister Jessica , " the ashes were done up in the sort of parcel he used to bring back from London , rich thick brown paper & incredibly neat knots " .

Meanwhile Mitford had completed her latest book , *Voltaire in Love* , an account of the love affair between Voltaire and the Marquise du Châtelet . She considered it her first truly grown @-@ up work , and her best . Published in 1957 , it sold well , was taken seriously by the critics and was warmly praised by Mitford 's friends . Its writing had been hampered by painful headaches arising from her apparently failing eyesight and worries that she might be going blind . The problem was resolved after a visit to the ophthalmic surgeon Patrick Trevor @-@ Roper , who gave her new spectacles : " It is heavenly to be able to read for a long time on end & now I see how handicapped I was when doing *Voltaire* " . She then returned to writing fiction , with *Don 't Tell Alfred* , in which she revived Fanny Wincham , the narrator of *The Pursuit of Love* and *Love in a Cold Climate* , and placed her in a Paris setting as wife of the British ambassador . Several characters familiar from the earlier novels appear in minor roles . The book , published in October 1960 , was popular with the public , but received indifferent reviews . Some of Mitford 's friends disliked it , and she decided she would write no more fiction .

In August 1962 Palewski was appointed a minister in Georges Pompidou 's government , and returned to Paris . This did not mean more regular or frequent meetings , and the affair with Mitford continued at arm 's length . In April 1963 Mitford was in England for the wedding of her cousin Angus Ogilvy to Princess Alexandra . A month later she was back for the funeral of her mother , Lady Redesdale , who died on 25 May . Mitford 's friends were dying , too , " in middle age " , she informed her long @-@ time friend Violet Hammersley . The premature deaths included that of Evelyn Waugh , who died on 10 April 1966 . Mitford saw the kindness and humour concealed behind his hostile public image , and said after his death : " What nobody ever remembers about Evelyn is everything with him was jokes . Everything " . Thompson calls their relationship " one of

the great literary friendships of the twentieth century " .

Amidst these personal upheavals Mitford continued writing . In 1964 she began work on *The Sun King* , a biography of King Louis XIV . Her publishers decided to issue it as a lavishly illustrated " coffee table " book . When it was published in August 1966 , among the many tributes to the book was that of President de Gaulle , who recommended it to every member of his cabinet . By this time , Mitford 's relationship with Palewski had become dormant , and she recognised that the best days would never return . Under pressure from her landlords to leave her rue Monsieur apartment ? they had raised her rent " exorbitantly " ? she decided to leave Paris and buy herself a house in Versailles .

= = = Final years = = =

Mitford moved to No. 4 rue d 'Artois , Versailles , in January 1967 . The modest house had a half @-@ acre (0 @.@ 2 hectare) garden , which soon became one of her chief delights . In 1968 she began work on her final book , a biography of Frederick the Great . While confined at home in March 1969 after a series of illnesses she learned from a newspaper announcement that Palewski had married the Duchesse de Sagan , a rich divorcée . Mitford had long accepted that Palewski would never marry her . Nevertheless , she was deeply hurt by the news , although she affected a typical nonchalance . Shortly after , she entered hospital for the removal of a tumour . After the operation she continued to suffer pain , although she was able to continue working on her book . In October 1969 she undertook a tour of East Germany , to visit former royal palaces and battlefields . She finished the book , but in April 1970 was back in hospital for further tests , which did not lead to either a diagnosis or effective treatment .

Frederick the Great was published later in 1970 to a muted reception . Mitford 's remaining years were dominated by her illness , although for a time she enjoyed visits from her sisters and friends , and working in her garden . In April 1972 the French government made her a Chevalier of the Légion d 'Honneur , and later that year the British government appointed her a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) . She was delighted by the former honour , and amused by the latter ? which she remembered Waugh had called an " insult " and turned down . At the end of 1972 she entered the Nuffield Clinic in London , where she was diagnosed with Hodgkin 's lymphoma , a cancer of the blood . She lived for another six months , unable to look after herself and in almost constant pain , struggling to keep her spirits up . She wrote to her friend James Lees @-@ Milne : " It 's very curious , dying , and would have many a drôle amusing & charming side were it not for the pain " . She died on 30 June 1973 at her home in the rue d 'Artois and was cremated in Versailles , after which her ashes were taken to Swinbrook for burial alongside her sister Unity .

= = Writings = =

= = = Fiction = = =

Mitford had no training as a writer or journalist ; her style , particularly in the pre @-@ war novels , is chatty and informal , much as in her letters . She may have inherited some of her natural wit and sharpness of expression from her maternal grandfather Thomas Bowles , who in his youth during the Franco @-@ Prussian War had provided dispatches which Acton describes as " extremely graphic and amusing " . Mitford 's fiction , based on upper @-@ class family life and mores , belongs to the genre of the comedy of manners . Her protagonists ? typically , intelligent women surrounded by eccentric characters determined to find life amusing ? are broadly autobiographical . It is unsurprising , says Thompson , that Mitford should first attempt to write a novel in the early 1930s , since many of her friends were doing the same thing . What is surprising , Thompson adds , is the ease with which she found a publisher for this first book . Perhaps , says Thompson , her publishers Thornton Butterworth " liked the idea of this pretty , well @-@ connected girl who wrote in the style du jour " . Mitford was later embarrassed by her prewar novels ; Rachel Cooke , writing on

their reissue in 2011 , believes she had no reason to be : " There is a special kind of energy here , and its engine is the admirable and irresistible commitment of a writer who would rather die than be boring " .

Critics generally place the postwar novels in a different league from the earlier efforts ; Cooke describes *The Pursuit of Love* as " an immaculate novel that soars many miles above what came before " . In Acton 's view it and its companion volume *Love in a Cold Climate* present an entirely authentic picture of country house life in England between the wars , and will long be consulted by historians of the period . In these later novels Zoë Heller of the *Daily Telegraph* hears in the prose , behind a new level of care and artfulness . " the unmistakable Mitford trill , in whose light , bright cadences an entire hard @-@ to @-@ shock and easy @-@ to @-@ bore view of life is made manifest " . At times a more serious undertone , contrasting with the " bright , brittle , essentially ephemeral " nature of her early works , becomes evident ; Olivia Laing in the *Guardian* , discerns " a faint and beguiling pessimism about love 's pursuit and its consequences " beneath the light superficiality .

The Blessing has provoked a more divided response . Waugh 's judgement was that those who criticised the book were " lazy brutes ... [who] ... can 't bear to see a writer grow up " . More recently , Philip Hensher and others have argued that although the novel is immensely enjoyable and that Mitford 's " marvellous voice " is undiminished , she is on less sure ground with her " Frenchness " than with the English country house ambience , and her picture of France as the embodiment of everything civilised is less than convincing . Similar mixed comments greeted Mitford 's final novel , *Don 't Tell Alfred* , Waugh again hailing it as her best , " clamouring for a sequel " . In this judgement he was largely alone ; other critics perceived in the anecdotal framework of the book an uncertainty as to what it was about . An American reviewer wondered what parts were to be taken seriously : " What exactly goes on ? ... Can you always tell an Etonian , even when he goes beat ? Is all modern architecture a fraud ? Do U @-@ people really talk this way ? " Similar questions were raised in the *Times Literary Supplement* 's review , in relation to Mitford 's fictional output as a whole : " Would she have been a better novelist if she had ' tried harder ' , gone in further , dropped the pose of amateurishness , cut the charm , looked beyond the worlds that she knew and , more importantly , loved ? " .

= = = Biographical works = = =

The gift for vivid characterisation , which Mitford developed in her fiction , was used to full effect in her four biographical works . In the first of these , *Madame de Pompadour* , she followed Waugh 's advice not to write for experts but to fashion " a popular life like Strachey 's *Queen Victoria* " , with " plenty of period prettiness " . This remained her yardstick in her subsequent biographical writings . Her own description of Voltaire in *Love is* " a Kinsey report of his romps with Mme de Châtelet and her romps with Saint @-@ Lambert and his romps with Mme de Boufflers ... I could go on for pages " . Acton thought *The Sun King* the most entertaining introduction to the subject in the English language . Mitford 's informal style was remarked on by the literary critic Cyril Connolly , who wrote that her facility for transforming unpromising source material into readable form was a skill that any professional historian might envy . The historian Antonia Fraser considered Mitford an important contributor to the " remorseless process by which historical and biographical sales have soared since 1950 " .

= = = Journalism , letters and other works = = =

Mitford did not regard herself as a journalist : nevertheless , her articles were popular , particularly those she contributed on Paris life to *The Sunday Times* . Thomson describes this series as " a more sophisticated version of *A Year in Provence* , bringing France to the English in just the way that they most like it " . Thompson adds that although Mitford was always a competent writer , it is in her letters , with their freedom of expression and flights of fancy , that her true character emerges . Many have been published within collections ; they are , according to *The Independent* 's reviewer :

" a delight , full of the sparks of an abrasive and entertaining wit , refreshingly free from politeness " .

= = List of works = =

(Publisher details are for first publication only)

= = = Novels = = =

Highland Fling . London : Thornton Butterworth . 1931 . OCLC 12145781 .
Christmas Pudding . London : Thornton Butterworth . 1932 . OCLC 639867174 .
Wigs on the Green . London : Thornton Butterworth . 1935 . OCLC 5728619 .
Pigeon Pie . London : Hamish Hamilton . 1940 . OCLC 709966771 .
The Pursuit of Love . London : Hamish Hamilton . 1945 . OCLC 857990796 .
Love in a Cold Climate . London : Hamish Hamilton . 1949 . OCLC 563596524 .
The Blessing . London : Hamish Hamilton . 1951 . OCLC 752807050 .
Don 't Tell Alfred . London : Hamish Hamilton . 1960 . OCLC 757838847 .

= = = Biographical = = =

Madame de Pompadour . London : Hamish Hamilton . 1954 . OCLC 432649137 .
Voltaire in Love . London : Hamish Hamilton . 1957 . OCLC 459588409 .
The Sun King . London : Hamish Hamilton . 1966 . OCLC 229419330 .
Frederick the Great . London : Hamish Hamilton . 1970 . ISBN 0 @-@ 241 @-@ 01922 @-@ 2 .

= = = Drama = = =

The Little Hut . London : Hamish Hamilton . 1951 . OCLC 317377443 . (Play , translated and adapted from André Roussin 's La petite hutte)

= = = As editor = = =

The Ladies of Alderley : Letters 1841 ? 1850 . London : Chapman & Hall . 1938 . OCLC 408486 .
The Stanleys of Alderley : Letters 1851 ? 1865 . London : Chapman & Hall . 1939 . OCLC 796961504 .
Noblesse oblige : An inquiry into the identifiable characteristics of the English aristocracy . London : Hamish Hamilton . 1956 . OCLC 219758991 . The book includes Mitford 's essay " The English Aristocracy " , first published in Encounter , September 1955

= = = Collections of letters = = =

Mosley , Charlotte (ed .) (1993) . Love from Nancy : The Letters of Nancy Mitford . London : Hodder & Stoughton . ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 340 @-@ 53784 @-@ 8 .
Mosley , Charlotte (ed .) (1996) . The Letters of Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh . London : Hodder & Stoughton . ISBN 0 @-@ 340 @-@ 63804 @-@ 4 .
Smith , John Saumarez (ed .) (2004) . The Bookshop at 10 Curzon Street : Letters between Nancy Mitford and Heywood Hill 1952 ? 73 . London : Frances Lincoln . ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 7112 @-@ 2452 @-@ 0 .
Mosley , Charlotte (ed .) (2007) . The Mitfords : Letters Between Six Sisters . London : Fourth Estate . ISBN 978 @-@ 1 @-@ 84115 @-@ 790 @-@ 0 .

= = = Other works = = =

Mitford was a prolific writer of articles , reviews , essays and prefaces , some of which were published in two collections : *The Water Beetle* (Hamish Hamilton , 1962) and *A Talent to Annoy* (Hamish Hamilton , 1986) . Her translation of Madame Lafayette 's romantic novel *La Princesse de Clèves* was published in America in 1950 , but was heavily criticised .