

Bloomsbury Heritage

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Julian Bell,
the Violent Pacifist



Julian Bell: The Violent Pacifist

Becoming Political

Virginia Woolf described Julian Bell, her nephew, as 'a wild ruffian' as he rambled across the grounds of Charleston, the spoiled and favorite child of Vanessa Bell. As he grew into a man, he was variously labeled a poet, military strategist, conscientious objector, teacher, libertine, journalist, activist, but, most decidedly, a young man who needed, as Charles Mauron would say, 'physically no less than spiritually...elbow room. 'He became ' a man of action' during his years of teaching and political involvement in China (1935-1937), and, as an ambulance driver in the Spanish Civil War (June 6-July 18, 1937). He died at the age of twenty-nine when his ambulance was bombed in Fuencarral, Spain – the kind of end he wanted.

Yet there was another 'side to Julian: he was a poet and a pacifist. When in China, Julian sent home what he called 'travelogue snapshots' to Leonard Woolf and his mother.¹ These rarely seen eighty photographs that Julian snapped in China reveal his unarmed eye – his visual gifts, his curiosity about how others saw the world, and his sympathetic personality. Julian wrote regularly describing the landscapes of China but it was Vanessa's prodding – 'describe it for me,' 'send pictures' – that stimulated his descriptions as well as the photos. These photographs will flicker throughout this narrative revealing that he had an eye for framing forms and shapes and creating a feeling of distance. As Julian develops into an activist, they remind us of his poetic and lyrical self.

The events in China and Spain, however, will mean little, unless we know – as Virginia Woolf reminds us – 'the person to whom things happened.'² And Julian – though some might say that his short life was insignificant – was on the margins of one of the most influential intellectual, literary and artistic circles in twentieth-century England where things happened. But who was he? His identity, difficult in formation, was often overshadowed by the talented and, sometimes, authoritarian circle of Bloomsbury. Yet he, part of a younger more militant generation, called into question the pacifism of some of its members in the mid-thirties, challenging the value of 'states of mind' over 'action' in the world, and liberal 'thinking' over the soldier's 'force.'

In the *Memorial Volume* published after Julian's death in 1938, family and friends mourning the death of a bright young man claimed him as part of the 'governing class' of England. In their tributes, they shored up their pacifist views – solidified around resistance to England's involvement in World War I

– against Julian and his generation’s unruly interest in war. However, Julian’s opposition to the intellectual’s ‘passive’ stance toward battling the Japanese in China and the fascists in Europe in the mid-30s signals not only his own evolution but the changing historical consciousness in England. Though many in Bloomsbury assumed a pacifist stance in World War I, some, including Virginia and Leonard Woolf³ felt that they could no longer sustain this view given the growth of the fascist forces of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco in the 30s. Julian represents then a new sparkle in the Bloomsbury constellation as he criticized the ‘liberal inability to think in terms of force’ in 1937. He observed that only certain political changes could save the world and that the Bloomsbury stance of fighting with words was ineffectual in the new world order. Julian, during his short life was an attentive listener and observer of nature and people. He entered into other cultures and the way that others saw the world – perhaps more so than others in Bloomsbury. Had he lived, he would have become a politician, perhaps, in the Labour Party; an activist, surely; and, maybe, a journalist. He would have become part of the public voice of a more socially and politically-engaged Bloomsbury.

Family and friends viewed Julian’s death in the Spanish Civil War as ‘senseless’. Perhaps Charles Mauron’s Preface to the Memorial volume is the exception in his acknowledgement of Julian’s desire to play a part in the conflict of political forces in the twentieth century, and then the ‘logical necessity’ to become, as Julian would say ‘a barbarian.’ Three decades later, Peter Stansky and Harold Abraham’s rich account of Julian Bell in *Journey to the Frontier* (1966) would explain his break with his parents, their circle, and with the generation of Apostles: ‘For a young man of the 1930s, the simultaneous authoritarianism and quietism of Bloomsbury philosophy were suspect and unsatisfactory’⁴. Stansky and Abrahams go on to extol Julian Bell as well as John Cornford’s position as adventurous socialists determined to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War. Though a minor figure in this intellectual and artistic circle, this short biography focuses on his adventures in China and Spain and presents some of his rarely seen photographs of China. It explores what makes a life ‘significant’ in the living as well as in the writing of family, friends, critics, and novelists of different generations. For though biography looks to memory and the past, ‘a life’ continually expands into the future as new interpretations are imposed upon it. ‘The life’ flies out of the card catalog or computer database or photo album into the changing social and literary preoccupations of the day.

Julian Bell’s short life is no exception. Recently, a fictionalized life of Julian in amorous relationship with the writer, Ling Shuhua, during the years that he taught in China, Hong Ying’s *K: The Art of Love*⁵ has caused a sensation in China and England, reflecting international interest in celebrity sex between so called, elites, and a Western man and an Asian woman. Where is Julian Bell amidst this swirling constellation of interpretations and reception in various

decades? Letters, diaries and fiction do not necessarily reflect the inner man, and various versions of a life may be in conflict. Julian has been described by some people as a gentle, sympathetic, warm, spontaneous pacifist and a political romantic; at other times, he has been described as violent, wild, cruel, misogynist, indiscreet, bitter, stubborn and controlled. The following presentation of different aspects of Julian – taken from letters and diaries at different points in his life – reveals then a complex view of his personality and of the field of biography.

‘Action is for me what painting is to you,’ wrote Julian to his mother. What some in Bloomsbury thought was inevitable – Julian’s venture to teach and join in revolutionary activity in China, 1935-37, and, later in the fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War in 1937, others – particularly his mother – denied. He was a self-declared pacifist when he edited *We Did Not Fight, 1914-18, Experiences of War Resisters* (1935), part of a younger generation of war resisters in the early thirties who ironically believed that they would ‘succeed in putting down war – by force if necessary.’ Quentin Bell’s description of Julian as ‘a violent pacifist’ captures his waning 1930s pacifism in the face of emerging fascist forces in Europe as well as his stated violence *against* war in Bloomsbury’s ironic gaze.

Julian was a physical child, not as intellectual or inward or pacifist as the Bloomsbury he emerged from. He struggled to be himself in this circle of strong and talented personalities. Molded by Bloomsbury while rebelling against it, the way he lived his life may be read as a dialogue with this community, and particularly his mother, and aunt, Virginia Woolf. He was a new, politically defined member of the community and presented a challenge. In time, he would become the political unconscious of a Bloomsbury that fought to repress him.

In correspondence with G.L. Dickinson, his mentor at King’s College, he discussed ‘pacifism’; with Leonard Woolf, his uncle, who viewed Julian as his favorite Bell nephew, he discussed ‘revolution’; with Quentin, his brother, who shared his political passions, the Labour Party; with Eddy Playfair, his best friend at King’s, politics and life; and with Maynard Keynes, a family friend, a shared interest in economics and politics. His artistic temperament, love of nature and landscape is revealed in letters to his mother; Virginia Woolf; and Roger Fry, his aesthetic mentor and friend. His amorous nature is revealed in his tender letters to his first love, Helen Soutar (Morrison), at Cambridge, and Ling Shuhua, a Chinese painter and poet with whom he had a mercurial and, finally, scandalous affair in China in 1935-1937, as well as traces of his relationships with Lettice Ramsay, Antoinette Piri, Anthony Blunt, and Innes Jackson Herden.

It is not irrelevant then, as Maynard Keynes would say in a testimonial for Julian Bell after his early death, that he grew up in a circle of British life that gave him the opportunity to know intimately those who did much ‘to mold the

direction of taste and accomplishments in both literature and art.' And, said Keynes, this 'would...prove of some real importance in his ability to convey to Chinese pupils the current thought and feelings of the English'⁶. But Julian would not only convey Bloomsbury tastes in art and literature to the Chinese, but also the political commitments and partisanship of a new generation in England: his introduction to *Why We Did Not Fight*, was an exposition of the views of his generation toward war.

When he wrote to his mother of his decision to go to China, we hear a familiar refrain: 'I hope this letter won't be upsetting to you.' Julian had an unusually open, honest and as his sister, Angelica Garnett, claimed, a 'cloying' relationship with his mother. Her favorite, he handled Vanessa's maternal affection better than Angelica and Quentin. After making his decision to go to China, he wrote, 'I don't want to spend my life away from you... I'm appalled at the thought of leaving you all for three years - it seems a terrific slice out of life. I shall be thirty then - 1938.... It's the most drastic step I've ever taken...'⁷. Vanessa would respond, 'Oh Julian - I can barely express what happiness you've given me in my life - I often wonder how such luck has fallen my way.' Innes Jackson Herden, a friend in China, confirmed their very close relationship, noting that when Julian left China, he was homesick for Charleston - the land of lost content. His mother Vanessa, he told me, was the most important person in his life'⁸. In one of his letters written in China, to be given to his mother in the event of his death by his friend, Eddy Playfair, Julian wrote: 'You know, I'm about the only person I know who has an adult relationship with their mother. It's about the most satisfying human relationship, I have, perhaps because it's the only one where I've deep emotions uncomplicated by power-sadist feelings'⁹. The repetition of the words 'adult' and 'grown-up' belie Julian's impulsiveness and vulnerability hovering on the surface of his letters as he wrote weekly to his mother from China and she, to him, a remarkable correspondence¹⁰.

Vanessa revealed her intimate relationship after Julian's death in her *Diary*. She remembered 'when I first held him in my arms ...his dark brown curly hair. All pain now became worthwhile.' Then 'sitting at a long window looking onto the square with him on my lap. Clive beside me. Intense peace < joy. Painting him in his cradle every morning as he lay < kicked. Drawing as he began to stagger about (I have those still)'¹¹. At Charleston, on Vanessa's desk one can still see a small watercolor of Julian's infant face. Always creating her own values independent of the mainstream, Vanessa decided early that she would never punish Julian. Relating this to the hospital nurse, the nurse became angry and told her she was 'foolish & ignorant'; later, Vanessa would label various nurses, 'intolerable,' 'tyrants.' What Dr Spock would label a 'permissive' mother, Vanessa surprised even Roger Fry who one day witnessed Julian, aged 3, put a handful of gravel and dirt all over her head and neck without a bit of scolding from her. Vanessa writes movingly of what every mother knows, how

'my life changed, invaded by this creature suddenly alive.' And the joys and the pain, of the 'strange intimacy giving him my breast, not my nipple to suck when he was hungry & too weak to keep him waiting & being so bitten by those hard strong gums - I had to hide the mark from the nurse for shame of my weakness'. And the interruptions of her work, she, painting at this time in 1907: 'my mornings half given to him, my evenings too - & Sunday mornings & one afternoon and evening a week.' But Vanessa's 'strange intense absorption' ends with Quentin's arrival in 1910 and his illness as a baby when Julian is two and she can 'think of nothing else.' Later, the closeness with Julian resumes, and it is surprising what he related of his life and loves and sexual escapades to his mother in his China letters.

Maynard Keynes noted that Julian 'developed to maturity slowly'¹². But Julian's admission of 'power-sadist' feelings provides in a flash his insight into his defense against this immaturity and vulnerability. War and hunting had been his hobbies since the time he was a boy attending Owens, a public day school; hawks, his favorite birds. His family crest was, he noted, a falcon holding a spear in its claw. He attended Owens School in Islington, while living at Regent Square and then Gordon Square. Quaker school though it was, he was bullied from the first day of 'utter horror'; Vanessa described picking him up after his first day 'seeing him standing white-defiant in a crowd of boys'¹³. 'Very soon I found I had learned to wrestle so as to be more than a match for my contemporaries,' Julian remembered, 'I was heavier and taller... Consequently, I was able to beat off individual bullies, and even, on occasion, intimidate mobs.' 'My natural seriousness,' he observed, increased no doubt by isolation and unpopularity was 'consequently counteracted by rage and excitement'¹⁴.

It is curious that despite Bloomsbury's much-vaunted public image of pacifism, Julian was sent a double message about war at home. During the war, he wrote of his social isolation at school, and his 'expectation' of hostility because of his family's pacifism. But just before he entered Owens, about the age of seven or eight, he and Quentin developed a passion for war and war games in the grounds of Charleston encouraged by Duncan Grant and Bunny Garnett, who were conscientious objectors. The earliest games he noted were 'Little American boys' and 'Curtains,' played during the years he was at Owens: 'The prototypes were, I fancy two war games of the grown-ups, Bunny and I and someone else, [Morgan?] or Maynard - against Quentin, Duncan and I think Nessa on Wisset back pond: a muddy clay but high-banked affair.' He describes toy clockwork steamers, wooden boats, feather-sailed rafts, and ships. And the 'big war' was fought with a storming of the attic, naval battles on the pond and 'spitting guns with red-headed matches, and, I think, cigarettes.'¹⁵

These war games, left out of the *Memorial Volume* but present in the *China Diary* ms. at King's College, were an initiation into the war and informed by Julian's historical reading. For what a family is silent about is revelatory. Just

as Clive had taught Julian and Quentin to hunt and romance, Duncan and Bunny, conscientious objectors, ironically, would teach him to play soldier. An interesting aside is that Duncan Grant's father was a colonel and that Duncan's family had also wanted him to have a career in the army! Such were Charleston's 'manly' initiations.

At Owens Julian read of war exploits and military histories like *Famous Land Fights*, finding by the time he graduated, that he had 'a considerable stock of military ideas.' It was also at this time, he wrote in his *China Diary*, that he dropped his efforts as a painter, 'encouraged,' he noted, by his family. Julian occasionally suggested their neglect and the wounds that resulted from their vaunted 'honesty.'

Images of Julian roaming freely in the grounds of Charleston or Wissett as a child appear in Virginia Woolf's *Diary*, his untamed side implicit in her descriptions, 'peppery,' 'undisciplined,' 'uncouth rather, yet honest,' and 'old ruffian.' Brought up permissively, he apparently ran wild and was often up to tricks and mischief. Vanessa noted in her 1937 *Diary* that 'when he was 6 (1914), Asheham – the war...soldiers marching past along the road at the bottom – London-air raids – I believe he was cross at not being taken out to see them'¹⁶. These childhood experiences of being drawn to but held back from the excitement of the war, a serious temperament, 'natural nervousness,' and brutal boarding school experiences, formed a susceptible child. Thinking of death at school, he wrote: 'I was going to die, I became panic-stricken at the idea of judgment being possibly true and began to make a list of the animals...I had killed.' And he had killed them. David Garnett, who lived at Charleston when Julian was growing up, remarked that in those days he had 'often to be exhorted to reason' and to listen to explanations about 'the consequences of his violent experiments,' for example, flinging newly-hatched ducklings into the pond again and again until some were drowned. Vanessa also mentioned Julian and Quentin's 'shooting of cats'¹⁷. Garnett described the look on his face at these times as 'the lovely sulky look of a half-tame creature'¹⁸. These experiences, becoming a hunter with his father, Clive Bell, and seeing the throats of stags cut when a young man, as well as shooting boar in the wilds of Tibet when in China presents us with another face of Julian. Virginia Woolf would refer to this as 'a strong element of the Bell in him.' This streak of the violent – the roughness, the impulsiveness, the physical courage – was an aspect of his character that led him to war and helped him to ward off squeamishness on the bloody battlefields of Spain.

The death of Roger Fry in 1934 was a blow to Julian. Living in a household in which he was 'fathered' by Clive Bell, Roger Fry and Duncan Grant, it was Fry – the loveable eccentric – who was the most generous in sharing his views of art and life. Julian related in a letter to Vanessa how deeply Fry affected his perspectives on life and art: 'After you, Nessa dearest, I think I owe more to him than anyone, even of my contemporaries. Perhaps this is hero-

worshipping, but I know that my whole way of looking at life, and particularly at the arts and sciences and philosophy is very largely a result of his conversation and example'¹⁹.

He would go on to write a Hogarth Letter on Roger Fry for the Woolfs. Julian wrote to Vanessa from China that he should be very glad to get the Letter off his hands, 'though I hear it's a frightfully bad length for publishing. Still, now I'm in China and a romantic asset, perhaps. Virginia will become more amenable to the length and the Hogarth might do it as a letter or pamphlet'²⁰. Vanessa responded early, 'I think it very likely that you got more from him than from anyone, my dear, though Roger is much older it was almost uncanny how little that mattered. I've never known anyone who bridged the generations so much'²¹. Julian related Fry's importance as an art critic who combined science and aesthetic sensibility but his Hogarth Letter was painfully rejected for publication by the Woolfs who did not think it well-written or clearly focused.

Fry, though graduating in 1888 from King's College, Cambridge, with a first class degree in Natural Science, had decided, against family wishes, to become a painter and art critic, not a scientist. Nevertheless, he 'kept up with the main lines of modern physics' according to Julian, and stimulated his interest in the wonders of science when a boy. Fry was known for 'honesty' of observation, termed 'ruthless' by Leonard Woolf, and was always 'anxious to define as exactly as possible the shade of feeling he had experienced' in the presence of art²². Julian brilliantly captures Fry's sensibility: 'his voice or style would caress the development of an idea as if it were the gelb of a Chinese vase or the construction of a Poussin'²³. For want of a better word, what remains constant and has value to us today is this expression of 'sensibility.' Vanessa Bell portrayed the intimacy and engagement between Julian and Roger as they play chess in a painting that remains above a back staircase in King's College, Cambridge University.

When an adult, Julian characterized Leighton Park, a progressive Quaker school and the only boarding school he attended (1922-1927) as 'pretty much my idea of Fascism. Probably it was no worse than most schools, tho' I have always regretted not having had brains and education enough to have gone to college at Eton as Eddy [Playfair] and others of my friends did. But the idea never entered anyone's head: for one thing it would probably have been too expensive.'²⁴ This passage omitted from the published *Memorial Volume* is one of the few where there was not only an exposé of the school but implied criticism of his family's seeming indifference to or inability to pay for his schooling. He entered the school after the autumn term, having spent it in St Tropez with Vanessa and family, with a case of influenza. Unable to take baths, he developed early a reputation at the school, he says, for 'dirt and weakness.' Nurtured in the cultural crucible of Bloomsbury, he was more intellectual and eccentric than most of the boys, as well as carelessly dressed, rather like a ruffian. He suffered from a sense of physical inferiority at games; being 'too

fat,' out of training, and 'reckless.' Though Leighton's advertised advantages were its Quaker education and the absence of fagging and beating, he observed, nevertheless, that his chief memory of the school, was a regretfully poor education and the ever-present bullying: 'I suppose there were periods of peace but never much happiness tho' when Quentin came we could in summer, escape on bicycles butterfly collecting. But up to the very last I was always nervous, and always subject to attack'²⁵. Charles Mauron praised his 'genuine and successful simplicity' never detecting 'any sign of inhibition, self-consciousness'²⁶. One also wonders, given Vanessa's 'damned maternal instinct,' as she phrased it, why there was this neglect of Julian. She and others in the Bloomsbury circle though aware were not responsive to the brutality of Leighton Park School – perhaps considered a rite of passage – or Julian's unhappiness. She noted his 'horror of all schools' but adds diffidently, 'but what could one do'²⁷. Finding better schools did not seem to be an option. In Julian's perception, these school experiences took their toll on his personality. He attributed to them much of his social difficulty and 'fits of nervous inhibition' which continued to attack him and made it impossible for him 'to go shopping or get my hair cut: that sometimes bar or pubs, restaurants, the bar at the Club and make me socially nervous...all these are probably due partly to our co [conscientious objector] childhood but largely to LPS [Leighton Park School]'²⁸.

The pacifist stance adopted at home in Charleston during World War I was isolating for Julian, having developed 'a taste for fighting,' at school. Going to war was now something to which he aspired and which Bloomsbury tried later to quash. Growing up in a family of conscientious objectors who were isolated from mainstream political sentiments in England, the message sent to Julian from the time he was a child was that war, indeed certain kinds of 'action,' were rejected. During World War I, Duncan Grant and Bunny Garnett had taken up fruit farming as conscientious objectors at a farm near Charleston in 1916, the same classification as Clive Bell and Adrian Stephen; and Leonard Woolf was also exempted from the war because of his trembling hands and Virginia's precarious mental health. Yet Julian's temperament and the times led him to select from his environment that which would psychologically bolster him and his generation: a self-proclaimed life of action.

Leaving the Circle

After a year in Paris, 1926, Julian went up to Cambridge. Here he began one of his essays, *The Art of War*, with Virgil's well-known incantation, 'Arma virumque cano' (Of arms and the man, I sing). He did sing of war from the time he was a boy. And in this essay, he wrote of his extensive reading of Fortescue's *Military History* and his *History of the British Army*, as well as his knowledge of strategy (four methods of attack), and admiration for the tactical genius of an Alexander the Great, and British generals like Wellington, Cromwell and

Marlborough. At this point in his development, however, he did not romanticize, but strategized war. He observed two common fallacies: 1) that war consists of 'fighting'; 2) that 'it is something wonderful and romantic.'²⁹ Though noting the evil effects on the population's general intelligence reflected in phrases like 'the war mind' or 'the war mentality,' it is clear that as a young man of twenty, Julian was fascinated, like the war poets Auden, Isherwood and Spender. He noted that in war, 'one can see the dreams and thoughts of men taking concrete form, and one may see the conflict of ideas fought out not alone with pen and tongue, but with sharp shot and cold steel, with famine and disease, with aeroplane and poison gas.'³⁰ None of the Bloomsbury circle – painters, writers, philosophers, economists, or critics – was a person of military action, and there is clear current of rejection of Bloomsbury's 'pen and tongue' in this essay.

Among his collection of essays on war strategy and tactics during the Cambridge period is also 'A Sketch of a Revolutionary Strategy based on the campaigns of Michael Collins', the then popular Irish revolutionary hero. Later essays would include 'Open Letter to Kingsley Martin on Spain: Peiping, Sept. 5,' written during the China period, 1935-1937; 'Military Considerations of the Socialist Policy,' 'The Labour Party and War,' and essays on the French Revolution. At this age, he separated himself from communism in his 'Prose Reflections: To My Bourgeois Friends in the Communist Party,' 'Specific Positive Recommendations in the British Situation.' Later, however, it is suggested in some of the documents and relationships he developed at National Wuhan University, particularly with the 'leftist,' Ye Junjian, that this anti-communist stance may have changed in relation to politics in China.

When Julian arrived at Cambridge, David Garnett noted that he was 'far bigger, noisier, and more raggedly dressed than any of his companions'³¹. Feeling that he lacked the 'social graces' that his father, Clive, had hoped would develop during his year in Paris, Julian was drawn to the Etonian and fellow Apostle, Eddy Playfair, during his years at Cambridge. He was his closest male friend, and they met every day during their three years together. Though at first Julian reacted against Playfair's Etonian manners in the end, he felt he owed him a great deal for his efforts 'to civilize me and give me whatever social graces I possess'³². And when Julian went to China, Playfair faithfully wrote long letters (some, ten pages long) practically every week, waiting for replies six to eight weeks.

Though Cambridge was a time of intellectual growth, Julian was not a good student but was chosen, nevertheless, to be an elect Apostle. He engaged in experiments with poetry, and wrote about aesthetics, Pope and eighteenth-century literature. But he felt vague about his future not having distinguished himself in any way. Who was he in a Bloomsbury family of artists and intellectuals whose fame grew in the 1920s? Undefined. He wrote in a letter to Virginia Woolf that he wasted most of his time at Cambridge, talking to his

friends and 'doing nothing at all.' He said that he got into trouble 'for knowing too many celebrities and referring to them by their christian names. In fact, I have got a reputation as a product of 'Bloomsbury' which I do my best to live down.' Benefiting from the privileges of being a member of the Apostles and a scion of Bloomsbury, he was awarded studentships at King's in 1930 and 1931. After repeated attempts to finish a qualifying dissertation, he was turned down for a fellowship at King's in 1931 and 1934 because he did not reveal the appropriate academic qualifications in his writing. He turned to contemporary politics, and, finally, an appointment to teach in China. He taught Composition, Shakespeare and the Moderns – mostly Bloomsbury authors – and noted in a letter that they all wrote too much. Observing the lack of what he considered real criticism or discussion of aesthetics in China, an area that interested him, he wrote to Leonard Woolf that he needed a dozen copies of Charles Mauron's book on aesthetics for his students. Personable, Julian formed close relationships with his students, particularly Yeh Junjian, who joined the Communist ranks, and later became a translator for W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood and Agnes Smedley on their visits to China. Yeh then became a journalist and writer of short stories.

In his letters to Playfair from China, Julian's craving for political news is evident. Playfair wrote to him of the intense interest in Italy and Abyssinia, the '40% possibility of war,' the failure of the League of Nations, the threatened coal strike, Labor issues, the need for a new Defense Minister, Winston Churchill's 'impossible' candidacy; the death of King Albert, the activities of Archie Rose and Leith Ross in China, the Canton [Guang Dong] government's movement of troops north to defend against the encroaching Japanese, and the civil war in Spain. And along with this, gossip about friends like John Lehmann, Ann Sackville-West, and Mary Cook.

Not particularly encouraged in his painting by his mother, or his writing by the Woolfs, he toyed with the idea of writing articles for *The Times* like Peter Fleming while in China. He wrote to Leonard Woolf soon after his arrival about Chiang Kai-shek and his movement of troops to control the northern generals just as he got control of Szechuan in the West. He despaired of the attitude of the intellectuals at his university whom he observed exhibited 'a resigned and ineffectual bellicosity.' They seem, he said, to want a war and yet think they would lose it. So from the very beginning, Julian planned to get involved in Chinese politics, confessing to Leonard that he had to be 'tiresomely careful' because 'if I get involved even as a spectator the Japanese will start the story that the British and Americans are fomenting trouble'³³. At the same time he mentioned that if Leonard saw Voigt or Eves, British journalists, and in case of a real crisis in China, he would like to 'have a shot at reporting it' for them during the summer. Leonard was not able successfully to make any contacts, and in June, Julian wrote, 'It seemed rather flying in the face of providence not to try and see a war in one's back garden, so to speak, during the vacation. But

not having had an answer yet, I assumed there's nothing doing'³⁴. Leonard did not respond because he was fearful like Vanessa about Julian's getting into trouble or being in political danger in China. So, instead, he set out for a trip to Szechuan, the Yangtze River Gorges and Tibet with 'a curious geologist,' Derek Bryan.

A few months later he sent proofs of his poetry collection, *Work for the Winter*, to Leonard Woolf who was publishing it reluctantly through the Hogarth Press, probably as a favor to Vanessa. In the same letter, Julian focused on the anti-Japanese demonstrations of the Wuhan students and mocked the conservative and frightened faculty as 'out of touch.' He gives a sense of the times. The thing he most dreads, since he thinks war with Japan is inevitable, is the 'resigned and ineffectual bellicosity' of the intellectuals, who offer, he says, no resistance. He commented cynically that 'there's not much doubt anywhere I think that the Nanking government is perfectly capable of doing a deal with Japan – the real point being whether we should try to bribe them the other way'³⁵. He characterized Dean Chen Yuan, Shuhua's husband, along with Professor Kwantung as 'reactionary toughs of the old school'³⁶. He characterized the general reaction as 'misery,' not 'dread,' and noted that Shuhua had put some of her precious paintings in the bank since there's 'the chance of looting if things go wrong.' The Japanese, he reported have got all the north and the 'whole country full of troops and armed police.' Again, his thoughts turned to the Spanish Civil War, 'does anyone know how the war is going?' Leonard responded in November 1936, 'by the time you get this some new horror will have started up in Poland of Czechoslovakia or Iceland or even Paris or London, and the ruins and corpses of Madrid will no longer be even of 'interest.'³⁷. However, Julian returned to the issue requesting that Leonard get some information for him. In February 1937, Leonard wrote to Julian in England that he had consulted the Spanish Ambassador in a confidential manner about Julian's desire to go and fight with them. He relayed that they did not want 'untrained' men, and required drivers of lorries to speak Spanish which disqualified Julian. Nevertheless, four months later Julian was on his way to Spain, learning Spanish and using his fluent French on the fields of battle.

Playfair urged him about the same time 'to stand for Parliament,' suggesting Quentin as a good model. Quentin was then a volunteer for the Labour Party with Leonard Woolf as a mentor. Julian should start, Playfair recommended, by being a Labour Party MP. All these plans somehow evaporated, however, and his sense that he would not be of much use for anything but 'fighting' developed. He also assessed his life in the letter written about a year and a half earlier, October 1935, to be given to Vanessa in case of his death: 'I don't think that anything I've done yet is first rate, either my poetry or philosophy. Still they're fairly good, and I hope Quentin and Leonard and you will strive to publish what you can'³⁸. After his death, Quentin edited his work, and Leonard

Woolf's Hogarth Press published the *Memorial Volume* containing the tributes of family and friends as well as his significant writings. Vanessa, inconsolable for many years, became Picasso's 'Femme en Pleurs.'

Julian never ceased to try to explain his growing difference from his family. In the letter he wrote to his mother in 1935 to be given to her in case of his death, he reflected: 'I have a feeling that I might be a very good man of action, and I want to try this out. I do feel as if action and excitement were in some way necessary to me, as if I should never be perfectly at peace and happy unless I experienced them. I feel it in the same sort of way, with the same sort of strength that I imagine you feel about painting'³⁹. Is it any wonder that in Julian's first debate at Cambridge – after spending a year in Paris with the Pinnaults who were communists – that he called for a 'bloody revolution' embarrassing his uncle, Leonard Woolf: 'Julian. The French Revolution !!!!!!!!!!!!!' Nevertheless, according to Quentin, Julian was Leonard's favorite Bell nephew, and Julian was drawn to Leonard's politics rather than to Clive who was openly anti-Semitic, pro-Mussolini and anti-democratic after the advent of Hitler. In 1937, Julian would make the same call for 'revolution' in his public letter to E.M. Forster on 'War and Peace.' Here he asserted that obscure political forces had 'taken definite political form' in Fascism. He championed a 'revolution' that would consist of a 'call for a very few of the military virtues, only for some shouting and rioting in the street, a few heroic stormings of Bastilles and Winter Palaces by angry and idealistic crowds'⁴⁰. Leonard Woolf overtly shared his anti-fascist stance. Julian noted in a letter to him after meeting his sister, Bella Sidney Woolf, in China that she was trying to sell Woolf's anti-fascist polemic *Quack, Quack!* there. Julian thought 'it would do a deal of good.'

Despite his vivid interest in war as a boy, he had ironically written an anti-war poem in his first book of published poems, *Winter Movement* (1930), and wanted to dedicate it to G.L. Dickinson. Dickinson had responded that he was 'rejoiced to think that there is at least one young man who hates war,' but observed that if he accepted the dedication, he would be supposed to endorse Julian's methods. He warned, 'I feel it in my bones that if you publish it you may regret it later'⁴¹. Julian did not publish the poem in that collection. Indeed, given his later zeal for war, he *would* have regretted it, had he lived.

Five years later in 1935, Julian was still trying to find an occupation, still publicly anti-war; and finding that the lyric voice no longer served in an uneasy political climate. At this time, he was working on his Mallarmé translation, the Roger Fry Hogarth Letter that was eventually rejected by the Woolfs, and his Cambridge thesis on Pope that was on its way to the printer. He was unable to write poetry yet still engaged in the writing life. Supported by Bunny Garnett, he got the job of editing and writing an introduction to *We Did Not Fight: 1914-1918 Experiences of War Resisters*. There is a curious anomaly in the timing of this volume, noted in Joe Newberry's introduction, that the subject, the reflections of conscientious objectors in World War I, and Julian's editing and publication of the

volume in 1935, was 'a time of uneasy peace.' Yet he defends the integrity of the conscientious objectors, making distinctions that are often forgotten – that their opposition was 'against the warmakers at home rather than the troops at the Front.'

Julian acquired the job of editing the book through the Bloomsbury network. We can observe, ironically, the family 'construction' of Julian, urging him to edit a 'pacifist' book in 1935 (almost as an anti-dread strategy), as he and his generation were growing increasingly bellicose. And we can share in Charles Mauron's sense of irony that Julian, 'brought up among the conscientious objectors, should one day have rediscovered himself in every way a soldier.' But Julian rationalized what he calls the 'conshie book': 'Pacifists and CO's were not cowards I think' but 'war-makers at home.' Defending their integrity, he noted that 'the position of the CO was one of simple resistance; a conviction that it was impossible for anyone of intellectual and moral integrity to surrender to the discretion of fools and scoundrels engaged in the enterprise of destroying civilization.' He is articulate about the need for the more 'negative virtues' of intellectuals during such a period: 'the ability to remain clear-headed and undeceived, and a refusal to take part in the government's dirty work'⁴². Yet it is still a time of optimism and he observed that the 16,000 conscientious objectors of 1918 had become the 12 million voters in the Peace Ballot of 1935. He concluded his introduction to this book with the statement: 'Those of my own generation who care about the human race and what happens to it have come to believe that only effective action counts...The attitude of the younger generation of war resisters has learned too much from its enemy, it has grown – even in peace-time – into a war mind: sometimes even into a war hysteria. Yet, with all its defects, I believe that the war resistance movements of my generation will in the end succeed in putting down war – by force if necessary'⁴³. Tangled in the contradictions of the political (and editorial) moment, Julian urged 'all honest and thoughtful men' to resist war even if accused of being 'unpatriotic,' striking themes of our own generation at war in Iraq.

His early pacifism was overtaken by the rise of European fascism, something about which he was almost visionary. Playfair would note in a letter to Julian, about a year after the 'conshie book' was published, 1936, that there was 'little of the pacifist, or anti-violence man left' in him. Julian, second generation of Bloomsbury, was then not unique in his desire 'to fight' as fascism began to spread across Europe. A whole generation of young men was finding themselves being 'dragged into' politics and was unable, like, Playfair and Julian Bell, 'to think of anything else'⁴⁴. Julian though acknowledging the waste and stupidity of war, nevertheless, urged that it was the duty of 'all honest and thoughtful men.'

Julian on War: His Dialogue with Bloomsbury

In letters Julian wrote after his graduation from King's College, Cambridge, 1932, politics outweighs literary conversation. He was, Quentin recounts,

'ruthlessly serious, and a member of the Labour Party, an Apostle, unworldly, interested in poetry and an intellectual puritan'⁴⁵. Though his interest in politics was considered 'eccentric,' there were others in Bloomsbury who shared his interest: Maynard Keynes, G.L. Dickinson, Leonard Woolf, as well as his friends, Eddy Playfair, John Lehmann, Harry Lintott, Anthony Blunt (who was discovered to be a KGB spy in the 1970s), Guy Burgess, Harold Barger, and Quentin. But Julian kept his distance from the Communists in Cambridge, according to Quentin in his memoir, *Bloomsbury Recalled*.

The writings that appear in the *Memorial Volume*, Julian's public letters to E.M. Foster and C. Day Lewis might be read as his dialogue with his intellectual family, Bloomsbury, as well as the world. He would write in his public letter to E.M. Forster, 'War and Peace' (1937), on his way home from China to explain his generation's waning pacifism and its choices: 'Where the liberal lives in a romantic poem, we see ourselves in the catastrophe of a Greek tragedy'⁴⁶. As the Fascist forces took political form in Spain, Julian found in the defenders of Madrid an active stance that he personally sought. In doing so he moved further away from the Bloomsbury circle and its vaunted reflective values and cultivation of 'states of mind.'

His public letter to E.M. Forster begins with the statement that he had 'contemplated an apology' for his tastes and opinions on war, but he proceeded 'to explain why it is that I, and many more men of military age, have ceased to be pacifists.' He urged Forster to practice 'the military virtues' and here we see the turnabout from pacifism that G.L. Dickinson, Forster's close friend, had predicted in 1930. Announcing that he was a social Democrat of the left, Julian stated that he was not interested in the 'glamour' of war and had never doubted its 'natural evil and imbecility.' He asserted, nevertheless, the value of 'military virtues' and the necessity of having 'force' at hand, even if not used, 'to make the political changes that alone can save us'⁴⁷. He criticized the League of Nations that G.L. Dickinson had helped to found, as a futile example of liberal thought and practice because of 'the liberal inability to think in terms of force.' President George W Bush would make the same charges against the successor of the League, the United Nations, on the eve of the American invasion of Iraq. Julian asserted that the aggressive creed of Fascism has as its first stage the destruction of all culture and liberty as well as its enemies. This public letter was, in Forster's estimation, 'as a reasoned exposition, ... all over the shop', as are many of Julian's essays. Nevertheless, Forster ruefully acknowledged Julian's refusal of sentimentality or physical squeamishness in battle. Julian asserted in his *Letter to Forster* that he was 'grateful for being made, as a child, to look at a stage having its throat cut,' having 'reached a stage of contemplating a corpse in the road without a Baudelairean extravaganza of horror.' Forster replied, 'Julian's tips may come in useful over corpses'⁴⁸.

About two months after Julian's death, perhaps in preparation for the *Memorial Volume*, Virginia Woolf also mused on Julian's letter to Forster: 'How

strange – to hear his voice so clear from the other side of the grave – Julian on War. I hear his sharp quizzical laugh now and then; something like Clive: shrewd and biting. But as usual, the whirl of things, of things half grasped and sweeping on, like a staircase that forever passes the platform – bewilders me. Why could he never force himself to think to the bottom of his idea?⁴⁹ Critical still, these reservations that Woolf had about Julian's thinking and writing, among others in the circle, led to the Press's rejection of his Hogarth Letter 'On Roger Fry.' Even Clive Bell writing to Julian at Cambridge stated that he had a quarrel to pick with Julian about the quality of writing in an essay, asking him why he did not 'take more trouble about the expression'⁵⁰. David Garnett would also observe that although argument was one of Julian's greatest pleasures and that he loved a good 'political row... he was in some ways never good at it'⁵¹. Though an attentive listener, Garnett would add, he sometimes lost his own ideas in other's opinions. Others observed his carelessness in thinking, debating and writing – being 'all over the shop,' as Forster put it or 'not thinking to the bottom of an idea,' as Virginia Woolf would charge.

Forster would say of Julian in his eulogy that Julian was a gentleman who was typical of the ruling class, that he went to war as 'aristocrat' defending 'privileges,' another Bloomsbury construction. Though he would acknowledge his background in his poem, 'Autobiography' (1936), published in *Work for the Winter*, Julian had a broad kind of personal and socialist sympathy that increasingly defined him and separated him from his family on both sides. He self-consciously writes about the splits of self among the capitalist Bells 'harried labourers underpaid,' to the 'Clapham sects' of Quakers and 'high Victorian intellectuals' of the Stephens:

I stay myself – the product made
By several hundred English years,
Of harried labourers underpaid,
Of Venns who plied the parson's trade,
Of regicides, of Clapham sects,
Of high Victorian intellectuals....

When he was eighteen, he remembered his grandmother Bell's 'authoritarian' reaction to the General Strike of the miners in 1926. But his socialist friends were pro-strike and this brought him back from his 'governing class reaction'⁵². His personal warmth and social sympathy were qualities to which his friends referred. Eileen Bernal in a 1935 letter mentioned that 'his projection into other people's troubles is highly developed'⁵³. Playfair noted that Julian's desire to fight fascism in Spain when he left China was 'the penalty of being a social animal'⁵⁴.

Obituaries noted that he was 'a great scholar' but Julian himself and others denied this. As already noted, he regretted that his grades had not been good

enough to get into Eton as a scholar. Peter Stansky and William Abrahams have written about Julian's repeated attempts to get a fellowship at King's first with his Pope dissertation and then later with a warmed-up essay, 'The Good and All That.' He was, they said, misled by 'the Apostolic practice' of applying for positions and honors without much qualification and without doing too much work. Keynes wrote to him after he was turned down for a King's fellowship in 1934, stating that his dissertation on Pope had good qualities but 'there's a good deal which calls for some time to tidy it up'⁵⁵. Julian was not a systematic scholar or careful thinker and writer. He flaunted this in the Preface to his essay: 'I have made use of no authorities beyond those mentioned in the text: I have stolen ideas wherever I came across them, usually in conversation, and used them without acknowledgment....' He admitted his lack of qualification to write a philosophical dissertation to the King's Electors. 'I am not,' he asserted, 'a professional philosopher...My claim to be interested in the theory of ethics is that, in a small way, I am a practicing poet and politician'⁵⁶. Though Julian was confident because of his Apostle and Bloomsbury connections – indeed Roger Fry read and approved of his dissertation with some qualifications – he was turned down for the fellowship and the temporary shelter of an academic post at King's.

Others at Julian Bell's Memorial observed that he gave his life for a 'cause,' the fight against Fascism. Some of these observations were 'official' constructions at odds with the 'facts,' a natural tendency to idealize a youth cut down early. Understandably, they were written by an intellectual circle that sadly mourned the untimely death of an energetic young man of charming 'simplicity' of character. Many words were spoken to comfort his mother who, as Virginia Woolf observed, was never the same again after Julian's death. Charles Mauron, however, who came to know Julian during his year in Paris, 1927-28, understood Julian otherwise. He laughingly noted that in Julian the 'English gentlemen...collapses and gives way to the barbarian'⁵⁷. Julian left the circle of Bloomsbury that considered his involvement in 'politics,' eccentric: 'for none of these,' Mauron observed, 'is a man of action, they are painters, writers, and philosophers of liberal outlook. ... They think, amuse themselves and suffer in the peaceful qualitative land of tastes and colors'⁵⁸. In fact, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant had briefly involved their art with the subject of World War I, incorporating the external, political world. In 1914, for example, Vanessa created, 'Triple Alliance,' a painting-collage that presents the alliance of England, France and Russia against Germany. But this was an unusual foray.

Virginia Woolf had written to Julian in May 1936 as Europe was on the eve of World War II of the general detachment of Vanessa and Duncan from politics: 'all they can do when Europe blazes is screw their eyes up and complain of a temporary glare in the foreground'⁵⁹. Julian, however, instinctively turned toward the blaze of politics with his generation and away

from his mother's detachment and what he termed, Bloomsbury's 'mysticism, fantasies, escapes into the inner life'⁶⁰. Nevertheless, Julian does write to Leonard Woolf about the same time that he did 'get startled...when even Nessa's letters were full of politics'⁶¹. During this period before World War II, even the first generation of Bloomsbury moved from the politics of detachment perceived in Vanessa, Duncan, Bunny, and Fry – to a politics of engagement. Playfair wrote to Julian in December 1936 'it is extraordinary how your family are blossoming into politics'⁶²; at another time, he noted that even Vanessa and Duncan are 'being dragged' in⁶³.

Interestingly, Julian chose both China and Spain as his terrain of action, each holding contrasting historical views of the soldier. In Chinese history, the soldier is looked down upon; in Spanish history, the soldier reigns supreme in literature. Cervantes' Don Quixote declares, 'The lance has never blunted the pen, nor the pen the lance.' Charles Mauron noted that Julian discovered himself to be a 'Viking' or 'barbarian of the twentieth century' when he came into contact with Chinese civilization. The value of the 'life of contemplation' that China represented to G.L. Dickinson is thrust aside in the turmoil of the China that Julian experiences. When he arrived, he deserted its 'romance' under the pressure of practical and political realities. Ironically, as Julian left in 1937, Wuhan became the center of politics. Beijing and Shanghai writers and intellectuals had fled their cities, re-settled, and established a university in exile in Wuhan, escaping the advancing Japanese. But Julian mused in a letter to Playfair that 'one day, when I'm old and have finished my war memoirs and history of the English revolution, in exile – I hope in a nice climate – I shall write 'A year among the Chinese'⁶⁴.

'She is Really in our World': Ling Shuhua

The untamed side of Julian Bell's character was expressed in his amorous life as a young man as well as his political ventures. Possessing, as he claimed in his *China Diary*, a 'Latin sensual view of amour,' Julian always felt that he could stir physical passion in others. David Garnett described Julian's manner as 'hesitant and soft,' appealing to women. Upon arrival in China, he wrote home descriptions of 'ravishingly pretty girls': 'they dress charmingly in trouser and a high collared jacket, or a side-split skirt, make-up admirable. I see I should lose my head fifty times with half a chance'⁶⁵. He found the general high level of morality uncongenial, given his own libertine views. Early on he wondered 'Shall I ever find a Chinese mistress? Lots of them are attractive but I doubt there's much doing'⁶⁶. As always, he did.

Three months after his arrival, he wrote to Marie Mauron in France: 'Really, I am falling a bit in love with China – also, platonically (yes, I assure you, for particular reasons, social, and so on) with a Chinese woman.' Shuhua was not only charming but the wife of the dean of the Faculty of Letters, whom Julian described as a 'highly intelligent and amiable man, one of Goldie's students,'

Chen Yuan having studied at LSE in the 20s. Julian went on to say that Shuhua was the daughter of a mandarin, a painter and short-story writer, 'one of the most famous in China. She's sensitive and delicate, intelligent, cultivated, a little malicious, loving those gossipy stories, etc., that are true about everyone, very gay – in short, one of the nicest and most remarkable women I know.' Julian described the relationship as close but up to that point 'a friendship of the Chinese sort – in Waley's poems.' Her sensibility and style reminded Julian of his artist mother and Bloomsbury. He wrote to his mother that Ling Shuhua 'tells me about the Chinese Bloomsbury in Peiping [Beijing], that's very like the London one indeed, so far as I can make out.'

His dramatic affair with Ling Shuhua in China stands out as the cameo love of his short life. Because of discretion – she, being married to Dean Chen Yuan, the dean who hired Julian at Wuhan University and with whom Ling Shuhua still lived – he announced early in his *China Diary* that 'My life with Shuhua should go unmentioned.' The story of the affair, however, is generously described in his letters to his mother and his Cambridge friend, Eddy Playfair. Critical and biographical works by Peter Stansky and Harold Abrahams and Frances Spalding discreetly left Ling Shuhua unnamed. And during my own research, Chinese critics would stoutly deny that there was an intimate relationship. Stansky and Abrahams referred to Shuhua as 'K' in their account of Julian Bell in the Spanish Civil War, *Journey to the Frontier*, and Francis Spalding discreetly referred to Julian's affair with the Chinese wife of one of his colleagues. The letter, 'K,' representing Julian's eleventh conquest (going through an amorous alphabet as Mr. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* had marched through an academic one, getting to 'Q') has also come to haunt and continue his story in Hong Ying's *K: The Art of Love*, mentioned earlier.

Before Julian met Shuhua, he had tempestuous relationships with Helen Soutar Morris (even obtaining a marriage license), 1930-1931, and Lettice Ramsay and Toni (Antoinette) Piri, during his student research years at King's, 1931-34. He also had a brief relationship with Anthony Blunt, the art historian and KGB spy, his bi-sexuality perhaps another link to Bloomsbury. Vanessa described this relationship as 'not a very real one,' and that Quentin denied it in his memoir. However, Topsy Lucas – a student at Cambridge and sister of Julian's friend, Peter Lucas – alluded to Julian's relationship with Blunt, real enough at the time. She wrote in a letter to Julian around 1929: 'you sound unhappy. Don't force Anthony's hand. If necessary fly to the wilderness without a scene.' Later, she adds, 'It would not be pushing me to tell me about your feeling about Anthony B; and if you ever want to I hope you will. Nor can I see your 'position is really hopeless and ridiculous' – but perhaps he is in love with someone else? Unless it's that it's never hopeless, and not even then. I wish you would tell me more.' Still later she writes, 'I was terribly pleased to learn of your success, am anxious to know the result. You looked quite different, and you need not make a fuss about your appearance – being thinner

however is very becoming to you, and, of course, being happy always is. Don't think because I was wretched that I didn't rejoice in your having got Anthony because I did'⁶⁷.

Each of Julian's relationships with women would follow the same pattern of intensity and withdrawal, and each of the women would, from Julian's point of view, become too emotionally mercurial and demanding. Though he was sometimes carried away by romance, another quality that characterized Julian's relationships was his calculation, his amorous strategies (somewhat like the military strategies that he loved to plan at Cambridge) as he carefully juggled two women. For example, when leaving Wuhan for London in 1937, Ling Shuhua met him at the boat, and was surprised to discover that Innes Jackson Herden who had spent time at Wuhan, and with whom he had begun a flirtation, was returning to England on the same boat. He never, as he said, 'forswears polygamy.'

Julian taught English literature at Wuhan University, 400 miles up the Yangtze River from Nanjing, for sixteen months – from October 1935 to January 1937. He left after the scandal of his love affair with Ling Shuhua was discovered. Nevertheless, he was delighted with China. He dreaded the teaching, but enjoyed translating Ling Shuhua's stories with her, learning Chinese (a modest amount), practicing calligraphy, shooting, sailing and being guided through the culture, politics, food and art of China by Ling Shuhua. Always in dialogue with his mother – actually or imaginatively – writing home every week from China, he asserted that Shuhua was 'the most charming creature I've ever met, and the only woman I know who would be a possible daughter in law to you (she isn't, being married with a charming child and ten years too old...she is really in our world'⁶⁸. Julian loved exploring the cities of Beijing and Shanghai with Shuhua, going to markets, buying pottery, art and wares and shipping some of it home to his family. She was temperamentally and aesthetically a Chinese Bloomsburian, an anomaly in China of the time.

He often wrote indiscreet letters home concerning his affair, careless and insensitive about Dean Chen Yuan's 'losing face,' were the relationship to be discovered. Though Playfair feared sermonizing, he advised Julian to stop gossiping: 'The dean's wife is rapidly becoming, in the public eye, one of the better myths of the Julian cycle'⁶⁹. Julian described Shuhua to Playfair: 'She's very shy physically and verbally...it's my oddest affair to date. She's as intense and passionate as your old enemy Helen [Soutar], is also a self torturer and pessimist asking reassurance.' He added that she was 'both jealous and not wanting to lose face. On the other hand, intelligent, charming, sensitive, passionate and a malicious storyteller. And a perfect adviser on social situations....'⁷⁰.

Ye Junjian, one of Julian's favorite students in China, said years later in an interview that Shuhua 'was not beautiful but cultured.' Nonetheless, she was referred to as one of the three beauties and talents of Luojia (a landmark hill

near Wuhan University). She, along with Su Xuelin, the writer, and Yuan Changying, the playwright, were all considered major contributors to the May 4th literary movement. This movement that persisted from 1919 through the early 1930s was a period of cultural openness in China. Intellectuals and artists who identified with the movement expressed an interest in humanist values, liberalism, Western literature, and advocated the use of the vernacular instead of classical Chinese as the language of literature. Ling Shuhua, Xu Xuelin and Yuan Changying were drawn to European liberalism and British literature in addition to being part also of the 'new woman' movement in China.

When Chen Yuan, Ling Shuhua's husband discovered Julian and Shuhua's relationship she hurriedly wrote to Julian: a 'letter quarrel' between Julian and Ling ensued. Forced to resign from Wuhan University, Julian decided to go off to the Spanish Civil War. He wrote that he disliked the thought of dying and feared fighting in cold, wet weather or being wounded in the stomach but said 'indeed, I'd rather die in a battle than any other way I can think of. And I've had a very good life; I shant have many missed experiences to regret. But I wish, in a way that I had a child – not a wife, but I should like a son. How Chinese'⁷¹. In contrast, she wrote a despairing note. Living in the midst of the Sino-Japanese War, she described a landscape of mind as well as place. 'It's still winter here and my mind is winter too.' She included a sketch of plum blossoms, the tree that blossoms in China in winter and symbolizes triumph over adversity, signed 'Love from Sue,' westernizing her name as Julian had. Later, she wrote to him when journeying to visit a sick aunt in Beijing where she is making inquiries about claiming some part of her father's estate, money that she needed to go to England now that Julian would be returning: 'The winter scenery is lovely. I am pleased to see again the wide plain scattering with white snow and filled with yellow grass. The shed [shades] of the distant mountains are lovely. I like its shape, standing out so clearly and "well cut." In the foot of the mountain there are always some ferrets, with bare branches which match the rocky mountains. The river is frozen. I love to see the soft light of the ice again. Oh how I love North China! What a world!' She includes a sketch of the landscape⁷². The postscript, however, includes the strategy for a rendezvous in Beijing. They corresponded after Julian sailed away from China in March 1937 and she tells him that she is back in Wuhan two days, and 'the most important thing is when you see this letter you will feel relieved to know that I am still living,' hinting at earlier suicide attempts.

Julian hoped that they could meet in Beijing or Nanjing before his departure for London, and fantasized about how nice it would be 'if we beat the Fascists and you beat the Japanese and next autumn you come to Charleston and we will walk down the garden paths and admire Nessa's flowers and the goldfish in the pond and the trees and fruit, and be reminded of Pekin and the parks and you shall write Chinese poems and paint Chinese pictures about English scenery,

and we shall never have to worry about respectability and conventions and gossip and live happily ever after'⁷³.

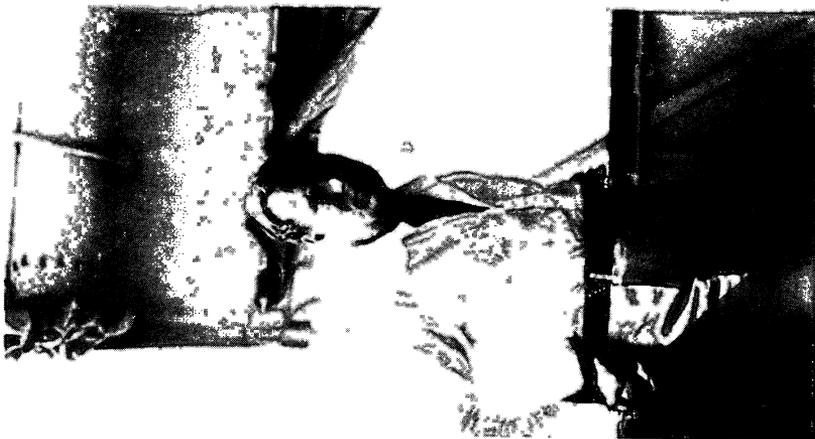
Julian, nevertheless, wrote to Playfair that he would resign; Shuhua decided to return to her husband. Julian conceded that Chen Yuan's 'behaviour has been reasonable and fair under great provocation – apart from the purely ludicrous scenes of the actual discovery.' Subsequently, Julian described exhausting scenes with Shuhua and, one, particularly with her husband: 'I've never produced a reaction of that kind – seeing a man almost literally crumple up under a piece of information. There was undoubtedly a certain exultation about it – very like shooting – followed by regrets rather like those one has about a wounded bird.' However, Julian was also frightened by Chen Yuan's threats of violence and legal measures. It was a grand climax to his life of 'scenes' in China, and observed ruefully, 'I wonder when I shall have some quiet. Probably when I get really absorbed in a civil war'⁷⁴.

Julian's irony and insensitivity, describing his 'exultation like those one has about a wounded bird,' in this case, Chen Yuan, reveals his character. The macho thrill of the sportsman emerging in his descriptions of his state of mind – his sexual conquest – and the irony of his finding peace away from the battles of love in the prospective Spanish Civil War is chilling. After the melodrama and the scenes, Julian came out numb, bitter and ambivalent about his future: war or home to Charleston? He muses, 'If I really have a gift as well as a taste for war I must use it. The other half of me cries out for Charleston and peace, guns and boats and nice uncomplicated girls with amiable bodies and good brains and no feelings'⁷⁵.

It is sobering to observe that Julian who emerged from a family of some of the most talented, free and progressive women in the early twentieth century revealed his sexism again and again during this troubled period of his life. Values absorbed at boarding schools, in male societies in college and from his father, Clive Bell, trumped the liberated views, lives and careers of the women in his family. At one point, Julian classified women into two groups, the serious and the frivolous: The 'frivolous...turn into wives or prostitutes – actresses, dancers, cinema stars etc. their essential business in life is to become parasites on the bread-winning type of male – the corresponding male class... If they have children, and are not well off, they may be kept busy. But what with labor saving devices, small families, and more democratic manners, they seem to have a lot of spare time on their hands'⁷⁶.

Vanessa was an emotional anchor for Julian during the period of turmoil with Ling Shuhua, as always, but he claimed to come out of this experience 'older and clearer.' He wrote to Playfair: 'Helen cleared me of romanticism, Lettice of timidity and scrupulousness, Sue has made me feel that love affairs are really better subordinated to friendship...Let me prophecy rashly – but I will never again, if I can help it, get myself involved with anyone who demands more than pleasure and conversation'⁷⁷. A surprising admission for a scion of

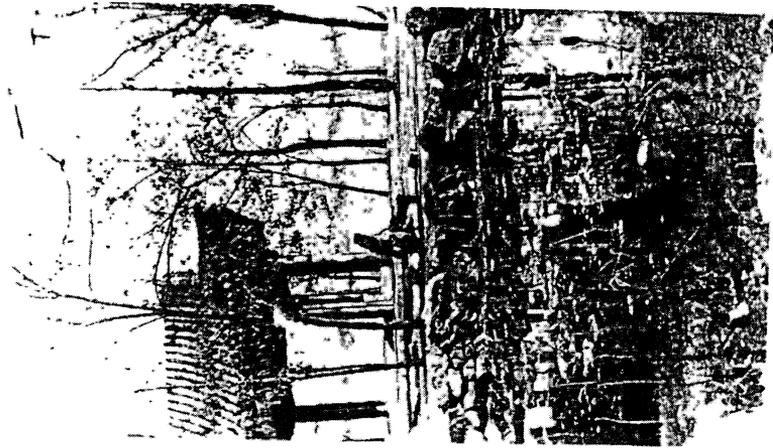
The following pages of illustrations contain photographs taken from 'An Album presented to Wuhan University in memory of Julian Bell, who taught at Wuhan and died fighting fascism, Madrid, July 18, 1937'.— Quentin Bell (1984). Photos and captions by Julian Bell.



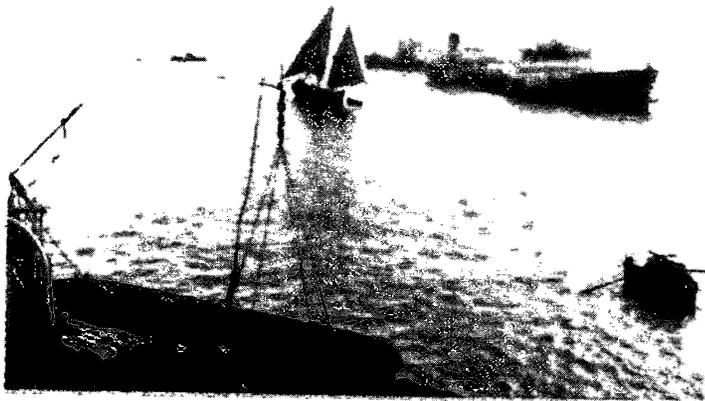
1. 'Myself scowling at Juan Cambou who is obviously going to jerk the camera if he can. Pretty grim—probably suffering fro belly-ache.' [Julian on his way to China, a three-month journey.]



2. 'Self, Tumbo [Chen Yuan, Ling Shuhua's husband], Shu Hwa: the only one I got of her that does anything like justice.'



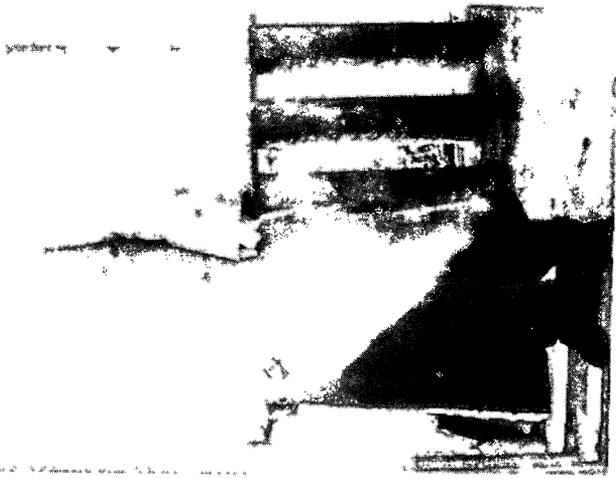
3. 'at the Hot Springs baths: a wildly romantic and very lovely place, with all the water clean and unfrozen.'



4. 'Sailing boat in the Suez Canal; it should remind Angelica of our rubber-boat voyages: the square sail was made of [?] and the crew of fishermen obviously lived abroad in a rare mess. The canal was very like the Ouse . . . and not much bigger.'



5. 'Our beauty spot [Julian and Shuhua]. It really was lovely in its autumn colours.'



6. 'Julian in Chinese gown. This and the other one of my Chinese gown (blue silk) were taken by Sue at the same time I took her.'



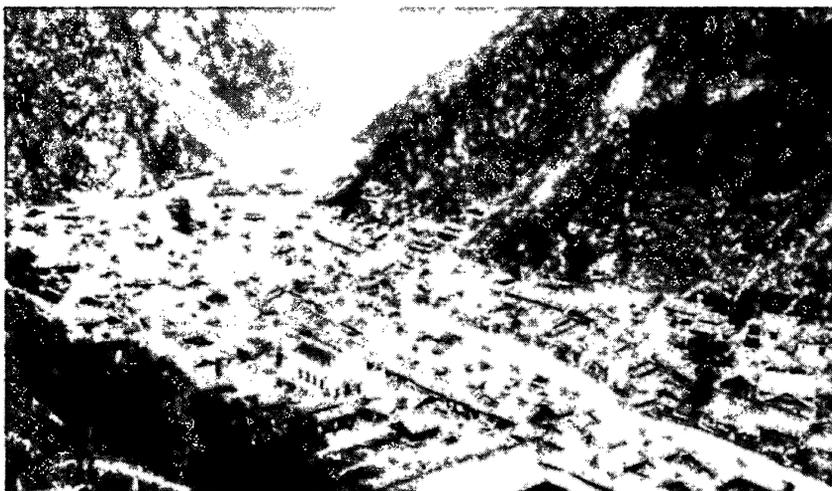
7. 'Chen-chan Yeh [ye Junjian] with a Tibetan in Tatsanlu, 1936.'



8. 'Lama of the new Buddha trying on my glasses (binoculars).'



9. '3 academic ladies who called on me on a summer morning: Mrs Wang (the president's wife), Mrs Yang (teaches French and drama: a writer) and Mrs Liu, wife of an economist.'



10. 'Tat'sientn from above.'



11. 'Sue and Buddhas.'



12. 'Myself in the Gate of Peace and Good Luck at top.'



13. 'Roofs and a censer: very typical of the temples.'



14. 'Palace. Also skating in Chinese robes, a very dignified accomplishment.'



15. 'Bell and Porter. Note camouflaged sun hat.'

Bloomsbury, nurtured by his talented mother and aunt, as well as a gallery of strong-minded Bloomsbury women. By the end of December, Julian wrote that he has got his 'Caroline Lamb off to Beijing after a week of scenes and indiscretions which left me puzzled at the feminine taste for honour and complete lack of it'⁷⁸.

Those surrounding Shuhua and Julian probably realized their relation, but Julian suspected 'that race pride will make them loathe to admit anyone as remarkable as Sue could prefer a foreign devil to her distinguished – but practically impotent-husband'⁷⁹. In his last weeks, he plotted and succeeded in seeing Shuhua for a last time in Hong Kong though forbidden by Chen Yuan.

At the end of this period, Julian was left in a severe state of nervousness and wrote home that he was 'jumping disgracefully, shooting like a chinese bandit...and scared myself stiff in the boat tonight with a quite moderate gale...But I realised that I was pretty bad when I found that being frightened wasn't at all a pleasure – as it usually is.' He observed that if he went to Spain now he would either 'get shot for cowardice or decorated for some imbecile feat – I feel as if I could do anything that didn't need thought or care'⁸⁰. There's a desperation and rashness in these last days in China, in sport and sex.

Shuhua despite her unhappiness with her husband did not divorce. Though they were separated from one another for long periods in their life once they left China – he being the Chinese representative to UNESCO in Paris and she, living in London – they remained married in name. Julian would not forswear polygamy, and divorce would have totally ruined Chen Yuan's career as Dean of Humanities at Wuhan. Just before Julian left for England, he wrote to Chen Yuan asking permission to see him before his departure. Chen Yuan responded to Julian's request with dignity. His letter of 29 January 1937 was remarkable for its consideration of Shuhua's temperament under the circumstances, and for honoring the notion that Julian might die in Spain. Chen wrote:

I still stand by my original decision. You could send any news about yourself to me or to both of us. It will not be suppressed. But if anything happened to you [the word 'during' is erased], I think it is much better to let silence be the token, or if it must be made known to us, let it be known in time. To communicate such news quickly does not do you any good and yet it will cause some one an eternal regret – which she would blame herself for what happened to you. I really don't think you do know very much about me, for you had only the version of me made up by someone to justify herself and I don't think you really know her. Of course you won't admit it. But it explains why your advice will not be acceptable to me. Yes I will concede you the half hour you ask for.⁸¹

A Chinese gentleman. Shuhua told Julian that she was going to write a history of the affair that Julian found fascinating: 'and so I shall have a *raison d'être* in literature after all.' The projected history of the affair has not been found, and

it is evident that Julian overrated Ling Shuhua's ability to immortalize him, a brash young man on an erotic and political adventure in China.

The superficial effects of his China ventures on his family are remarked upon in the letters: Angelica wore Shuhua's dress at a dinner party given by Clive and Julian reported an admirable joke – that he might become one of the directors of a Bell family business that imported feathers from China. Julian sent home gifts from China, a jade fish for Virginia Woolf that is still at Monk's House, and pottery and dyed materials at Charleston. Julian also contemplated taking a political job when he got back to England urging his mother 'to work the Wolves hard for me.'

The Unarmed Eye: Poetry

Despite his turn to the political, there were traces of the poet in Julian. David Garnett observed at Julian's memorial: 'Julian was first of all a poet; hard thinking never made him a thinker,' When Julian left for China, he still viewed himself as a poet and political visionary rather than the activist he would become in China and the Spanish Civil War. The underside of Julian, the man of action, was his lyric voice. In France, he had discovered the Parnassians, Symbolists and the Moderns, and read Rimbaud, Mallarmé (attempting a translation), Proust and Gide under the direction of Pinnault. Though he had an early 'rationalist' bent and an interest in science, nurtured, to some degree by Roger Fry, he also discovered that he could write poetry. His first volume of nature lyrics, *Winter Movement and other Poems*, was, in fact, published in France. At King's College, he continued to aspire to be a poet, and in a tender letter to Helen Soutar (Morris) in 1930, he wrote 'I try to write about – beauty or about myself, now about you and love. But it's more an exercise in metaphysical verse than my real feeling which cant be got down anyhow. Still the ideas about something I feel *now* – the unbreakable net of our memories and something we felt *then*'⁸². If Charleston was 'childhood' to him, Paris and Cambridge, were 'poetry' and 'amour'; and the King's Research Studentship, his attempt at scholarship. When he arrived in China they welcomed him as a poet and he wrote to his mother that he had become 'a far more literary character, under the pressure of circumstances. At least, I've become less political.' But before long, he was engaged in the discussions of the war with the Japanese and the civil war.

He published a pamphlet and two volumes of poetry: 'Chaffinches' in *The Songs for Sixpence series* (1929), at Cambridge; *Winter Movement and other Poems* (1930), in France; *Work for the Winter* (1936), published in England when abroad in China. Romanticism as well as the 'modernist' aesthetic was anathema to him as he rejected Georgian 'emotionalism,' 'confused thinking' and 'obscurity.' He wrote against Romanticism in his essays at Cambridge, noting 'the 'Victorian-Romantic mistake' in creating a conventional 'prettiness,' and preferring instead intellectual vitality and backbone in poetry.

He was drawn to the discipline of classical poetry (as he was to the discipline in military strategizing) – its generalizing and intellectualizing – that led to his literary specialization in 18th century poetry, and a thesis on Alexander Pope at King's. In a fragment, he wrote that Lytton Strachey's description of Pope always seemed far and away the best, 'an opposition of formality on top of the most violent emotions (the two are intimately connected).' And one senses that this is the kind of poetry – and perhaps, life – to which he aspired.

Nature description and the pastoral, however, came naturally to him. In his first publication, 'Chaffinches,' in the *Songs for Sixpence* series, Cambridge, 1929, his early promise is marked in his descriptions of birds, Hopkinesque style:

Startled, flock after springing flock they rise
With rustle of beating wings and as each flies
The sudden coverts flicker white,
In drooping, jerked finch flight
Of rise and fall:
Stray chinking call. ('Chaffinches' stanza 5)

Similarly, his first volume, *Winter Movement* – dedicated to Vanessa, Angelica and Helen Soutar – contains lovely Hopkinesque lyrics about the English or French countryside, and the sport of hunting that Julian loved. These lyrics written when he was staying with the Pinaults in France were inspired, he said, by Paris, his 'first experience of a large town' that made him 'fiercely naturalist...sending ...[him] to watch all the gulls and sparrows of Paris.' It also sent him, he notes, to 'the writing of my first poems, pure nature description.' Hopkins's influence is everywhere in the dyads of 'flint-studded garden wall' and 'thin-leaved hedges' as Julian deftly sketches word paintings of landscapes – the birds, colors and movements of nature (as he does in his letters) – that rise above the imitative. But violence underlies the formal and careful observation of nature, the vivid metaphor of birds shattered by shot in the opening poem, 'Vendemiare.'

Cold morning upon stubble, swede.
Whirring, up sudden springs
Covey of brown
Birds. Blue barrel and black dot,
Thud and thin smoke of double shot.
Feathers drift down
Slowly, from breast and wing.
The chestnut horseshoe bodies bleed
At beak and shattered joint, opaque
Drops, shot unsmoothed

Plumage; as they are gathered in
Without mistake
By questing spaniels, gentle mouthed,
with white-toothed grin. (WM, 13)

Human relations are occasionally alluded to in *Winter Movement*: mythical feminine imagery in 'Fern Ladies,' shadowy images of a woman in 'Still Life,' and, perhaps, some hint of torment in 'Pyrhha.' But Julian felt that he was not very good at knowing what went on inside of people, and so what motivates most of these early poems is sport and nature. He wrote in an essay, 'Poetry as Pure Art,' probably written during his period in China, that he did not believe that poetry could be explained psychoanalytically as the representation or resolution of sub-conscious conflicts. Nor did he believe that poetry conveyed an ethical, personal or emotional message or personality. His views remind one of Clive Bell's notions of significant form: 'like a picture or a piece of music is an object so made as to produce an effect on the mind independent of and unlike any of the emotions of life... "imaginative" because this is the handiest label... I believe that the explanation of the effect of poetry is to be found in the power of words to, in Coleridge's phrase, "flash images"'"⁸³.

Julian was on the battlefield of Romanticism and Classicism. It is evident that his enthusiasm for poetry and literary criticism grew alongside his theoretical military essays at Cambridge. In addition to his essays on the art of war, he wrote on 'Poetry as a Pure Art,' 'Modern Verse Satire,' 'A Brief View of Poetic Obscurity,' 'The Progress of Poetry,' 'A Short View of the Aesthetics of Poetry.' Though not remarkable in their literary thinking, these essays were representative of the general drift of British criticism first toward 'naturalism,' then the 'psychological' and the 'scientific' which became the 'rationalist' basis for the study of literature. In criticism, Julian admired Empson and Richards because they were well educated in the sciences and the art of observation. But in 'The Progress of Poetry,' he criticized other contemporaries, and particularly T.S. Eliot, as an 'inverted Romantic' for using images, for example in *The Wasteland*, that conjure overtones and association. Yet he praised him for helping to destroy 'the cant of Georgian emotionalism.' In 'Politics and the Good Life,' he attacked Eliot's élitism and authoritarianism and took a democratic, Benthamite stance toward art appreciation. He found 'no reason whatever why an impartial judge should prefer Mr. Eliot's kind of good life to Mr. Brockway's, the value of a Vendeian peasant's state of mind listening to M. le Curie's sermon to a garage hand's at the cinema.'

In *Work for the Winter*, Playfair observed that Julian had 'come on enormously.' Harold Barger wrote that he particularly liked 'Autobiography' and the series labeled, 'London.' After publication, Julian, in China, was stung by the lack of attention to his poetry and complained about the *New Statesman* ignoring him. He asked Leonard Woolf to write to the *Times Literary*

Supplement and other minor magazines to review his work. Leonard later wrote Julian that the poems had not done very well given the terrifying politics of the day.

It is not surprising then that Julian's commitment to poetry did not last. He wrote to Vanessa from China: 'I suppose really its more the trouble of finding some serious occupation. I don't seem able to write poetry – that's obviously not going to be a reliable thing for me; I seem to have been able to at moments only, not all through my life'⁸⁴. In China, he left his lyric voice behind but found anew, love, political commitment, polemical writing, and, in helping to translate Shuhua's stories, still, a literary life. He related to Innes Jackson Herden that 'poetry wasn't enough' in the current political situation of Europe and China. By the fall of 1937, Julian had turned strongly to politics. As Charles Mauron would say, 'The Viking had come into contact with Chinese civilization to discover that he was a Viking: we already knew it'⁸⁵.

Upon arrival in China, September 1935, Julian had already heard that the Japanese were advancing toward Hankou. The British were set to champion the Chinese. Archie Rose, a British diplomat in China, observed that they had infinite powers of passive resistance, and the Japanese, limited absorptive powers. Julian was aware that perhaps the first battles against Fascism began with the Chinese resistance to imperial Japan in Manchuria, and he found himself in a unique position to see the movement of Fascism sweep toward Spain. After observing the European, Spanish and Chinese scene, Julian wondered in October 1936 whether war could be avoided and how decency, democracy and toleration could survive. He announced that he had become a 'social fascist' in the strict meaning of the term, no longer believing 'in reason, persuasion and compromise – nor in justice – which I think good things but hopelessly out of date. And I do believe in force and treachery, which I don't really like, but which are the conditions of survival'⁸⁶. He was looking for action, like Auden and Isherwood who later wrote *Journey to a War* after spending time embedded with Chinese troops at the front.

But Julian was in the thick of it: in the middle of both the Sino-Japanese and a brewing Civil War between the Communists and the Nationalists. He wrote in June 1936 that the Chinese feared civil war at the same time that the Japanese were encroaching in the north. The Nationalist Chiang Kai-shek was taking advantage of incidents with the Japanese in the North to move his own troops north to seize control of the generals just as he had got direct control in Szechuan and the south center in his movement against the Communists. Later, Chiang would be forced into an alliance with the Communists to oppose the Japanese.

Though the situation was 'impenetrable,' at times, Julian, witnessing and hearing about these conflicts, had wished for a war correspondent's job in China. When Julian returned home to England, he related his bitterness at not having a profession to Virginia Woolf. She notes in her *Diary* that Julian was bitter at dinner about the Bloomsbury habit of education. He had been taught,

he said 'no job; only a vague literary smattering. But I wanted you to go to the Bar, I said. Yes, but you didn't insist upon it to my mother, he remarked, rather forcibly. He now finds himself at 29 without any special training. But then he objected, as I thought, to all professions'⁸⁷.

But Julian was imperceptibly becoming a politician. Though some in Bloomsbury dammed politics, his keen observations of 'war mind' and the Chinese scene appeared in his letters home marking his shift. He juxtaposed, for example, poverty and hunger with the pastoral in a letter to Playfair, sketching a Chinese street in Hopkinsque style: 'Maggots in a corpse – a hot weather blown soft belly burst corpse: bacteria: they're not human: they proliferate: disease, above all scabs, sores: one sees men stark naked, women scratching what nearly always [?] with skin disease. Coolies and chair boys retinous...bones condy virus, or pendulorey open mouths. The women of la condition humaine sometimes come running home to one. Out of it all are landscapes of steep pastoral.' This is one of the rare passages where Julian records the poverty and sickness in China. He fractures Waley's poetic imagery, the China uppermost in the mind of Bloomsbury. He looks at the people, and notes the presence of opium, still: 'Sometimes a woman handsome and alive, or rarely a young man; very occasionally a sage sometimes staring with opium: I fancy my six foot belongs to his visionary world. In one riverside town open shops selling it. Foreigners, doughty missionaries, hard bit businessmen, amiable seamen'⁸⁸. Here Julian shored up his 'fragments against the ruins' of Chinese culture.

The Spanish Civil War: 'A Violent Finish in Hot Blood'

Julian evolved to reject the pacifism of his Quaker schooling as well as his family's pacifism that he keenly experienced when a boy of six. He never forgot the taunts of friends aggressive toward the conscientious objector stance of David Garnett and Duncan Grant, both of whom worked on a farm near Charleston. His parents, Vanessa and Clive Bell along with Duncan Grant remained pacifists through World War II, focused instead on the realm of art. Stansky and Abrahams observe that Clive Bell, a year after Julian's death in 1938, published a pamphlet, *War Mongers*, in which he announced his opposition to those who 'hate Fascism and Nazism more than they love peace.' He asserted that 'A Nazi Europe would be...heaven on earth compared with Europe at war'⁸⁹.

Even in China, Julian rejected what he perceived as the 'softness' and 'sentimentalism' in certain factions of Chinese society – including the faculty at Wuhan University – that were overwhelmed by the aggression of the Japanese in 1937. As he left China, there was confusion about China's stance toward the Japanese occupation, and he was convinced that the Nanking government would not resist. What he most dreaded, he wrote to Leonard Woolf, was seeing a war without any attempt at resistance. Departing China full

of revolutionary fervor, he announced again his commitment to fighting the forces of fascism in Europe.

Though a phalanx of Bloomsbury friends and relatives would surround Julian in March 1937 to deter him from going to fight, his commitment to a life of action was firm. Playfair, perhaps one of the most passionate, wrote: 'do think again about going to Spain. I think it is a bad idea...You'll be a hundred times more use here than there. Here your intelligence would be really needed: there it wont serve as much but as cannon fodder...Do give a last thought to this despairing plan. You've got to think of it on the basis that there's a large chance you'll be killed, and that would be a "stupid" waste'⁹⁰. And the familiar refrain about it being hard on Vanessa occurred again and again in various letters. Even Duncan Grant, typically passive in relation to Julian and domestic things, wrote to him early in 1937, informing him how upset Vanessa was by his decision to go. The conversations between Vanessa and Julian are unrecorded, but all, including Julian, knew how desperate she was to prevent him from participating. Duncan added Bloomsbury's disengaged advice, 'you might be in fact more use to the world as a free agent than as part of a machine', a metaphor used frequently by war resisters.

Friends and family were against it and doubted, as did Playfair, 'whether a million Julians will save the [Spanish] Government from defeat'. But Julian was changed. Virginia Woolf noted in her diary upon a dinner at Charleston upon Julian's return from China that Julian was now a grown man, and also 'vigorous, controlled, and I guess embittered.' There was, she said, something 'tragic in the sadness now, his mouth and face much tenser; as if he had been thinking in solitude'⁹¹. He needed an occupation. As Stansky and Abrahams observe, Julian's writings during this period became increasingly polemical and though he tried doing local political work for the Labour Party, canvassing in Birmingham in April 1937, he did not find it satisfying. He even revisited Cambridge to meet old friends and to speak again before the Apostles, this time, about 'the soldier as his new found ideal.' Both Leonard and Virginia Woolf noted that he was now self-centered and stubborn, perhaps his strategy against the Bloomsbury encirclement.

Julian wrote to Shuhua in June, 1937, as he was about to embark, 'I'm so committed to Spain I can't change my mind without being called a coward.' While in China, he wrote a poem, 'The Defence of Madrid, 1927' using the 'far-travelled Ulysses' as his persona who longs for home. Though not a particularly good poem, it is an interesting revelation of his preoccupation with being a soldier-hero as well as his desire to leave Shuhua behind. In his Beijing letters to her just before he left China, he wrote that he was tired of the intrigues of his romance, worried about her 'illness,' and ready for a new phase of his life. He wrote, 'it's time I went back to London and a serious life doing real things. This place is too much make believe - at any rate for a foreigner...I like to be about real things - politics, power - not those silly little gossiping intrigues.' For Ulysses,

liberty, face once seen on the wall of a city, Helen
Empty symbol and fate, and lost past relevant grieving
Now not a hope nor cause, but fate and mastering impulse.

His persona Ulysses reveals courage and power:

Human courage and craft, the soldier's skill in the battle
Fire to seize on the ships, and the terrible voice of Hector
Before at the Scaean gate there blares the end of an epic.

One senses then a new Julian just before he died. As Virginia Woolf wrote after his death, 'how Julian wanted a profession – his innate desire for self assertion, to be a figure'⁹².

It was part of his nature to want to run risks, and just before he left China, he reported that he gave a rousing 'revolutionary' speech to his Chinese students at Wuhan. He announced a feeling of political responsibility that few in his circle – except for Leonard Woolf and Quentin – understood. Virginia Woolf would also write with insight about the commitment of his generation to do something for the world at large in 'The Leaning Tower.' Julian's interest in Spain was not new and had been signaled two years earlier in a 1935 letter to his mother: 'the fascists are going to win in Spain which means that all the things I care about and people are going to be in really serious danger in a year or two.' He had a 'feeling of responsibility about the idiotic and impersonal muddle of the world.'

Julian always thoughtful about Vanessa gave Playfair two letters, written in 1935 and 1937, to relay to her under certain circumstances. Letter A was to be given to her if he contracted a fatal disease or met with an accident; letter B was to be sent if Julian wrote a letter to Playfair, about 'Rachel' or this letter was to be sent if there was rumor that he was involved in revolutionary activities, which Julian started to engage in before his departure from China.

Julian joined the Spanish Civil War just as Picasso finished painting the horrors of war in *Guernica* in 1937, a town remembered because it was the first destruction of an undefended civilian target by aerial bombardment. Rejecting the detachment that sustained his mother and Duncan Grant, Julian expressed his sense of moral outrage about the Republican government in Spain. He left for Spain, June 6, 1937, as the conflict internationalized.

Julian joined a British Medical Unit in Spain as a lorry driver, not as a combatant, honoring his family's wishes. In this moment when he chose political involvement in the Spanish Civil War against his mother's wishes after his sixteenth-month stay in China, he was, perhaps for the first time, dramatically separating from her. He had written to Shuhua what he would not dare tell his mother: 'I'd rather die in a battle than any other way I can think of.' 35,000 Julians would die before the end of the war.

Reflecting on his life in his *China Diary* before he left for Spain, Julian viewed it as happy and successful: 'I have had what I really wanted – except war, which I hope to see before long.' Feeling perhaps that his life might be in imminent danger, because of what he – with exaggeration – termed his 'revolutionary activities' in China, he is impelled, he says, by 'natural sentiment and vanity' to 'leave a monument.' When he wrote, it was a defining moment of his generation that lived under the threat of war. Virginia Woolf observed, 'everywhere change, everywhere revolution. In Germany, in Russia, in Italy, in Spain, all the old hedges were being rooted up, all the old towers were being thrown down.' Julian felt this 'revolution' within. He wrote to his mother from Spain about a month before he died: 'a goodish bullfight today, bathing, the human race – all very entertaining. So far war has meant nothing worse than hard driving – It's the sort of life that suits me. I think one of the reasons one enjoys war and travel is getting back into male society. I've never used and heard such foul language for one thing'⁹³. Reeling from the intrigues of his affair with Shuhua as well as the Bloomsbury emotionalism at his departure, he confesses his love of a Hemingway-type macho society. About a week later he wrote that he was partnered with Richard Rees – an Etonian Socialist, one of Orwell's closest friends, former editor of the *Adelphi* – 'nice and competent.' In the same letter, he wrote that he's had a 'very hard 2 days driving, about 500 miles between Rees and myself.' Yet he finds Madrid 'utterly fantastic in the way it keeps the war on one edge and a family and civil life going on – you can take the metro to the front.' He loves the excitement and events and observes 'it's a better life than most I've had.' Vanessa responded, 'I cant pretend my dear that I didn't feel upset and worried that you should be in Madrid.... You seem more remote than in China. The only consolation is that you are with people you like and leading a life you like'⁹⁴.

At the point that Julian entered the 35th Division Medical Service, Bilbao had just fallen to Franco's forces. These forces with German and Italian backup had overcome the Government resistance in the North. As Richard Rees observed, the future of the war and Europe now depended on the Government forces meeting and resisting the main front near Madrid. Julian then took part in one of the largest offensives of the war – the Battle of Brunete, just west of Madrid. As Stansky and Abrahams observe it was also one of the costliest. One half of the British Medical Unit was killed by the end of the three-week campaign.

In the village of Brunete, on 6 July 1937, Republican forces initially gained the advantage. The tide of battle changed, however; a day later in one of the bloodiest encounters of the war, the Republican forces were pounded by Franco's air and artillery attacks. Richard Rees wrote of these events and of El Galoso Hospital to which he and Julian were attached in 'Close-Up of a Battle.' He assessed Franco's superiority in airplanes, 3 to 1. He described 'a world where the very air had turned into a whistling menace that might suddenly give

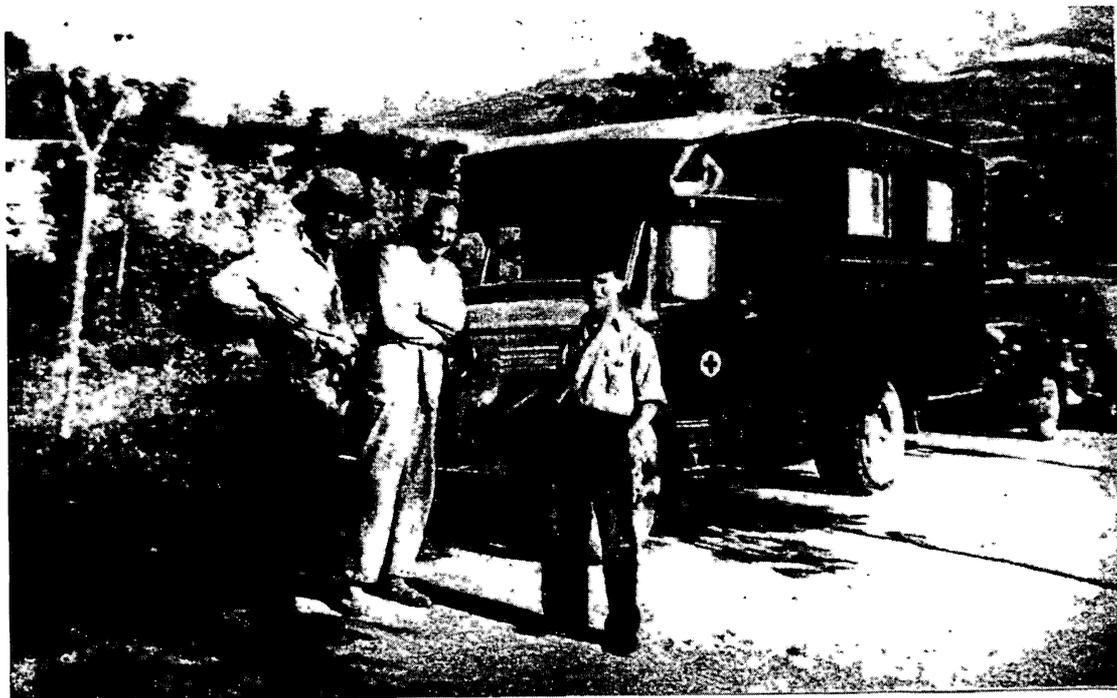
birth to a blinding maiming explosion.' Despite the horror of the scene, he described Julian as 'excited'; 'indefatigable,' talented at organizing; and 'fuming with impatience at being kept so far from the front.' Practical to the end – possessing the family ability to improvise and patch – in a lull in the battle, Julian went out to repair the shell-holes in the roads. His ambulance was hit by artillery from a plane on a road outside Villanueva del la Canada, 18 July 1937. Brunete was destroyed.

When Rees discovered that Julian had received a deadly lung wound, he wrote a moving letter to Vanessa. Though he knew Julian only a short time, he regretfully noted that he would miss his 'terrific vitality and his jokes, his enthusiasm and his brains.' He told her that at odd moments in the war he and Julian would talk about painting or Cambridge or literature. And, surprisingly, having a copy of the *New Statesman* with Virginia Woolf's essay on 'Gibbon at Sheffield Place,' they had time to discuss it. 'Looked at from his [Julian's] point of view,' Rees asserted, 'he was luckier than most of us.' He was struck down suddenly 'without time for morbid regrets or disillusionment, when he was at the very height and perfect fulfillment of his most unusual combination of gifts.' Playfair added that if Julian had lived longer,

He would scarcely have found any more situations in which his various gifts could all have been so perfectly expressed together; his humane and altruistic and profound and sensitive intellectualism, and his high spirited and adventurous side, and his unusual practical abilities.⁹⁵

How refined Julian was in his analysis of the situation in Spain is unclear. Stansky and Abrahams observe that he was not engaged in political subtleties and analysis. In his letters, he stated simply that he wanted to see battle first-hand and to defend 'democracy.' Rees observed that he seemed to have a mature and sane view 'far more so than most of his contemporary intellectuals.' Stanley Payne's recent book, *The Spanish Civil War, The Soviet Union and Communism* drawing on new primary sources suggests that many on the Left, like Julian, were seized with revolutionary zeal based on a miscalculation about the outcome of their actions. Challenging the claim that the struggle was one of 'democracy vs. fascism,' Payne asserts that the only probable outcome would be either a Stalinist dictatorship or the cruel Franco regime. Many Left-wing leaders had welcomed the prospect of civil war, Payne states, never responsibly assessing the appalling suffering that would follow on the streets of Spain or, he asserts, being fully aware of the Stalinist agenda.

Julian's death occurred during Virginia Woolf's writing of *Three Guineas*, her polemic about the 'waste' of war that has Julian as its subtext. One of her themes is the connection between the private brother and the public warmonger – 'a monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist' – perhaps a reflection of Julian's transformation and hardening into an activist and soldier. Woolf wrote



16. Julian Bell and Richard Rees in Spain, July 1937, a few days before Julian died. Photograph by Graham Brooks

in her *Diary* in 1937 that she often argued with him on her walks, and in 'The Leaning Tower' (1940), she continued her dialogue as the war came 'like a chasm in a smooth road.' The displacement and deaths of the young would invade her consciousness. In her 1937 *Diary*, she writes not only of Julian but also of seeing thousands of Basque children who had been evacuated to Southampton, flying from Bilbao that had fallen to Franco's forces on 18 June – 'a long trail of fugitives – like a caravan in a desert.' These were children evacuated by England from the same area where Julian drove his ambulance.

Working through her understanding of Julian's generation, Woolf acknowledged that if you were young and imaginative, 'the poet in the thirties was forced to be a politician.' Julian too, a visionary about the spread of Fascism in Europe, was forced to become an activist, quarrelling with his lyric voice. Eventually, he abandoned the lyric imagination of poetry for political activism and the communal vision of war.

Virginia Woolf would articulate the same tensions writing only notes during the war, capturing fragmentary voices of diverse people along with the communal voices of the loudspeaker, radio and the newspapers in her posthumously published novel, *Between the Acts* (1941). Both Leonard Woolf in *Quack, Quack!* (1935) and Virginia in *Three Guineas* (1938) and *Between the Acts* (1941) would pose questions about the 'decivilizing' forces that had been unleashed in Europe under the auspices of Franco, Hitler and Mussolini. Julian then was not alone in his desire to 'fight' Fascism, but Bloomsbury had different means – they were individuals who fought with words and abhorred the war 'machine' – while Julian was ready to take up arms, become part of an international fighting force, and 'have a violent finish in hot blood.' Though Julian Bell had initially urged young men of his generation to resist war even if accused of being 'unpatriotic' in *Why We Did Not Fight* (1935), he and his generation found that the 'peace mind' had grown into a 'war mind' in 1937 under the political force of Fascism. He became a 'violent pacifist.'

Notes

1. Photos in Wuhan University Archives, Wuhan, China.
2. Sketch of the Past, 'Moments of Being, p.65.
3. See 'The Facts and Fugue of War: From *Three Guineas* to *Between the Acts*.'
4. Stansky & Abrahams, p.3.
5. Hong Ying, K: *The Art of Love*,
6. MK to JB, 5 April 1926.
7. JB to VB, 16 July 1935.
8. IJH to PL, 15 November 2004.
9. Stansky & Abrahams, p. 252.
10. VB to JB China Letters, Tate Gallery Archives.
11. All quotes on p.5 from VB *Diary* July 1937, pp.1-6.
12. *Memorial Volume*, p.vi. Note distinction in between references to the *China Diary* in the *Memorial Volume*, edited by Quentin Bell after Julian Bell's death, and the ms. version of the *China Diary* by Julian Bell in Modern Archives, King's College.
13. VB *Diary*, p. 14.
14. *China Diary* ms.
15. *China Diary* ms.
16. VB *Diary*, p.8.
17. VB *Diary*, p.14.
18. *Memorial Volume*, p.3.
19. JB to VB, 24 September 1935.
20. JB to VB, 22 December 1935.
21. VB to JB, 1 November 1935.
22. Essay 'On Roger Fry,' *Memorial Volume*, pp. 27, 30.
23. Essay "On Roger Fry," *Memorial Volume*, p.45.
24. *China Diary* ms.
25. *China Diary* ms.
26. *Memorial Volume*, p.234.
27. VB *Diary*, p.15.
28. *China Diary* ms.
29. 'Art of War,' p.3.
30. 'Art of War, p.13.
31. *Memorial Volume*, p.5.
32. *China Diary* ms.
33. JB to LW, 14 December 1935.
34. JB to LW, 15 June 1936.
35. JB to LW, 14 December 1935.
36. JB to LW, 15 June 1936.
37. LW to JB, 15 November 1936.
38. JB to EP, 26 September 1935.
39. JB to VB, 6 September 1935.
40. *Memorial Volume*, p. 375.
41. GLD to JB, 17 July 1930.
42. *We Did Not Fight*, p xv.
43. *We Did Not Fight*, p. xix.
44. EP to JB, 23 February 1937.
45. Quentin Bell, p. 121.
46. *Memorial Volume*, p.342.
47. *Memorial Volume*, p. 336.
48. *Memorial Volume*, pp. 339, 391, 392.
49. *Diary*, V, 2 September 1937.
50. CB to JB 8 June 1929.
51. *Memorial Volume*, p.7.
52. *China Diary* ms.
53. EB to JB, 1 September 1935.
54. EP to JB, 23 February 1937.
55. MK to JB, 11 February 1934.
56. Stansky & Abrahams, p. 92.
57. *Memorial Volume*, p. 237.
58. *Memorial Volume*, p. 248.
59. VW to JB, 31 May 1936.
60. *Memorial Volume*, p. 259.
61. JB to LW, 20 April 1936
62. EP to JB, 5 December 1936.
63. EP to JB, 15 November 1936.
64. JB to EP, 5 December 1936.
65. JB to VB, 20 September 1935.
66. JB to VB, 16 October 1935.
67. TL to JB, 10 November 1929; 13 November 1929.
68. JB to VB, 22 November 1935.
69. EP to JB, 15 March 1936.
70. JB to EP 27, December 1935.
71. JB to LSH, 18 December 1936.
72. LSH to JB 4 January 1937.
73. JB to LSH, 18 December 1936.
74. JB to EP, 1 November 1936.
75. JB to HS (Morris), ND
76. JB to EP, 1 November 1936.
77. JB to EP, 21 January 1936.
78. JP to EP, 4 September 1936.

79. JB to EP, 21 November 1936.
 80. CY to JB, 29 January 1937.
 81. JB to HS (Morris), 29 March 1930.
 82. JHB/8 Kings.
 83. JB to VB, 14 May 1935.
 84. *Memorial Volume*, p. 237.
 85. JB to EP, 21 September 1936.
 86. *Diary V*, 5 May 1937.
 87. JB to EP, 4 July 1936.
 88. Stansky & Abrahams, p. 396.
 89. EP to JB, 15 January 1937.
90. *Diary V*, 14 March 1937.
 91. Two letters written by Julian Bell to Vanessa Bell, September 1935 and July 1937, delivered by Eddy Playfair to Vanessa Bell after his death, according to his wishes.
 92. JB to VB, 13 June 1937.
 93. VB to JB, 7 July 1937.
 94. RR to VB, 4 October 1937.
 95. *Diary V*, 3 February 1938.

Abbreviations in the Notes:

CB: Clive Bell
 CY: Chen Yuan
 EP: Eddy Playfair
 GLD: Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson
 HS: Helen Soutar
 JH: Innes Jackson Herden
 JB: Julian Bell
 LW: Leonard Woolf
 LSH: Ling Shuhua
 MK: Maynard Keynes
 PL: Patricia Laurence
 RR: Richard Rees
 TL: Topsy Lucas
 VB: Vanessa Bell

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