

rather dispassionate manner. Despite this coolness a week later he announced their engagement—and once the decision had been made Fred was smitten, and not at all concerned that he, the man, had played what is usually thought of as the feminine part. In May he wrote to his sister, ‘the queer part of this latest episode of mine is the very passive and small role I played. I never dreamed of anything of the sort happening but, now that it is all settled, it appears the most natural and fitting thing one could imagine for me.’⁶ Furthermore Fred felt no embarrassment about the fact that he was not master in his own home. ‘Who’s Boss?’, he wrote to his brother a year after marriage. ‘In our case there was no room for discussion on that point, it was clear from the very beginning who was “Boss”. Needless to say I am NOT the proud holder of that position.’⁷

Fred doted on Amy and revelled in domesticity. For him marriage was all-absorbing. Two years after meeting Amy he described himself as having ‘no aspirations, wishes, ambitions—hardly any dreams—beyond my daily work, my garden, and our quiet hearth’.⁸ While this mood lasted Fred’s letters were full of news about Amy and descriptions of the domestic activities which made up their lives. Amy was thirty-nine when Mary was born in 1889. Her pregnancy and labour were both difficult and the birth was ultimately induced. Fred described it all in minute detail—a much fuller account than I have come across in any of the diaries and letters kept by women during that period.

In 1904 Amy took Mary to Europe so that she would have the opportunity to learn to speak French and German fluently. By the end of January 1905 they were back in New Zealand, but domestic bliss had become a thing of the past. Fred identified this return to Christchurch as the time when he and Mary began to draw closer together and the drifting apart of himself and Amy began to show itself. Perhaps predictably, references to domestic life became increasingly rare in his reminiscences which became more and more taken up with his business activities. Later that year Fred was appointed manager of the Wellington Branch of New Zealand Loan and Mercantile, and moved north. Amy and Mary followed when the school year was over. In 1909 Fred and Mary moved to Timaru. Amy left for Europe. She never returned to New Zealand with the intention of staying.

The collection shows us two Amys. There is the very practical and unconventional woman Fred perceived when he was in love during the late 1880s and early 1890s. Then there is a gap of nearly ten years before we meet Amy again, this time through her own letters and the perceptions of her daughter. Amy of 1905 was discontented and difficult. She was also nearly sixty years old. She appears to have been a meddling old woman with a hyperactive