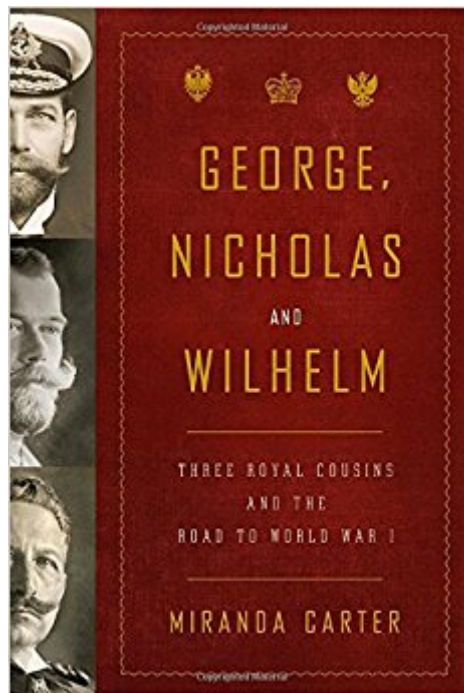




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# George, Nicholas And Wilhelm: Three Royal Cousins And The Road To World War I



## Synopsis

In the years before the First World War, the great European powers were ruled by three first cousins: King George V of Britain, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and Tsar Nicholas II of Russia. Together, they presided over the last years of dynastic Europe and the outbreak of the most destructive war the world had ever seen, a war that set twentieth-century Europe on course to be the most violent continent in the history of the world. Miranda Carter uses the cousins' correspondence and a host of historical sources to tell the tragicomic story of a tiny, glittering, solipsistic world that was often preposterously out of kilter with its times, struggling to stay in command of politics and world events as history overtook it. George, Nicholas and Wilhelm is a brilliant and sometimes darkly hilarious portrait of these men – damaged, egotistical Wilhelm; quiet, stubborn Nicholas; and anxious, dutiful George – and their lives, foibles and obsessions, from tantrums to uniforms to stamp collecting. It is also alive with fresh, subtle portraits of other familiar figures: Queen Victoria – grandmother to two of them, grandmother-in-law to the third – whose conservatism and bullying obsession with family left a dangerous legacy; and Edward VII, the playboy – “arch-vulgarian” – who turned out to have a remarkable gift for international relations and the theatrics of mass politics. At the same time, Carter weaves through their stories a riveting account of the events that led to World War I, showing how the personal and the political interacted, sometimes to devastating effect. For all three men the war would be a disaster that destroyed forever the illusion of their close family relationships, with any sense of peace and harmony shattered in a final coda of murder, betrayal and abdication.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** The slippery slope into horrific armed conflict is a tale often told about World War I, but this author's take on the antecedents of the European war of 1914-18 is distinct. Carter views the shifting alliance entanglements of the Great Powers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and especially the growing animosity and rivalry between Britain and Germany, with particular focus on the attitudes and actions of three royal first cousins: Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany, Emperor Nicholas II of Russia, and King George V of Great Britain (who also reigned as emperor of India, hence the book's title reference to three emperors). Rich in concrete detail, elegant in style, and wise, fresh, and knowledgeable in interpretation, the author's account observes a profound anachronism at play: that these three monarchs, in what they didn't realize were the waning days of the institution of monarchy, handled foreign diplomacy as if it were a family business. Despite the reality of growing fissures separating their countries, "each emperor continued to paper over the cracks with cousinly gestures, each increasingly irrelevant." Europe plunged over the precipice of war in August 1914, revealing in stark terms the inability of royal familial ties to control and contain national disagreements; as the author has it, the fact that Wilhelm, Nicholas, and George were out of touch with actual politics could not have been more apparent. An irresistible narrative for history buffs.

--Brad Hooper

Praise for Miranda Carter's *George, Nicholas, and Wilhelm*: "Miranda Carter has written an engrossing and important book. While keeping her focus on the three cousins and their extended families, she skillfully interweaves and summarizes all important elements of how the war came about." "Carter has given us an original book, highly recommended." ---The Dallas Morning News "Masterfully crafted. . . Carter has presented one of the most cohesive explorations of the dying days of European royalty and the coming of political modernity. . . Carter has delivered another gem." --Bookpage "Ms. Carter writes incisively about the overlapping events that led to the Great War and changed the world. . . George, Nicholas, and Wilhelm is an impressive book. Ms. Carter has clearly not bitten off more than she can chew for she -- as John Updike once wrote of Gunter Grass -- 'chews it enthusiastically' before our eyes." --The New York Times "An irresistibly entertaining and illuminating chronicle . . . Readers with fond memories of Robert Massie and Barbara Tuchman can expect similar pleasures in this witty, shrewd examination of the twilight

of the great European monarchies." *•Publishers Weekly*"A wonderfully fresh and beautifully choreographed work of history." *•Craig Brown, Mail on Sunday* "A hauntingly tempting proposition for a book . . . The parallel, interrelated lives of Kaiser Wilhelm II, George V, and Nicholas II are . . . a prism through which to tell the march to the first World War, the creation of the modern industrial world and the follies of hereditary courts and the eccentricities of their royal trans-European cousinhood . . . An entertaining and accessible study of power and personality." *•Simon Sebag Montefiore, Financial Times*"Carter draws masterful portraits of her subjects and tells the complicated story of Europe's failing international relations well . . . A highly readable and well-documented account." *•Margaret MacMillan, The Spectator*"I couldn't put this book down. The whole thing really lives and breathes and it's very funny. That these three absurd men could ever have held the fate of Europe in their hands is a fact as hilarious as it is terrifying." *•Zadie Smith*"[An] enterprising history of imperial vicissitudes and royal reversals." --The New York Times Book Review

I rather expected this heavy tome to be heavy going. I was pleasantly surprised to find it moved at a brisk pace, was skillfully written, and told a ripping good tale. The period covered - the events of the last decades of the 19th century and leading up to the first World War - has not been the focus of much literary attention in recent years. Miranda Carter, using a plethora of primary and secondary sources, brings this period to vivid life. The three royal personages of the title, George V, Tsar Nicholas, and Kaiser Wilhelm, prove remarkably interesting considering they were either ordinary or worse than ordinary. They ruled during the last years of European royalty, and only the English king managed to survive the Great War. I look forward to finding some of the historical sources listed in the comprehensive bibliography for further reading. This book is an excellent starting point on the origins of World War I and the characters of its royal protagonists.

Great revealing history about World War 1 and the reason why. The author made me feel like I know these last "ruling" monarchs and the English Royals. Very revealing regarding Queen Victoria. Through her letters you see how she attempted and did control all the royals in Europe and Russia. Excellent last Czar Nicholas and wife Alexandra coverage detailing their lives plus lots of pictures of the royals, their friends and the period. Appears to be well documented and was one of my favorite reads. Learned a lot and was entertained. You'll be a better human by reading this book.

The intertwining personalities of three royal cousins and how they devolved into tragedy before,

during, and after the Great War. A relatively powerless George who focused on correct protocol, shooting, and wearing the correct outfit. An brilliant but insecure and narcissistic Wilhelm who was ultimately ignored by even his own military staff. And the decent but doomed Nicky, who's actions might best be described a too little too late. Add to that mix - viewed through the lens of time - the hubris and foolishness of the various governments and politicians of the time, and you're presented with a distant mirror of our own eras dangerous and pointless global politicking. Worth adding to your library. and definitely a timely read.

There are a lot of biographies written about Wilhelm II, Edward VII, George V, and Tsar Nicholas II but I liked how this book told their stories focusing on the relationship between the royal family members. The book should've been called 4 monarchs because Edward VII was king for about 8 years and his relationship with Wilhelm was an important factor in the book. The way the book is marketed it makes it seem as if the relationship between George, Nicholas, and Wilhelm actually mattered. In actuality it mattered very little. George had absolutely no power. The Chancellor had most of the power in the German Empire except over the army. Nicholas was the only one who had any real power. Then all 3 rulers were pretty ineffective when they had the opportunity to do anything. During the war Wilhelm had control of the army yet he wanted nothing to do with it (except wear the uniform). The fact that their relationship meant little is evident on how Wilhelm's and Nicholas' reign ended. Had their relationship been that important Nicholas probably would've survived the revolution and made it to England. I thought this was a good read on the lead up to WW1. Following all the family ties can be confusing because everyone had married into every other royal family. And the names are all so similar it drove me mad. There were multiple Vickis and Victorias, a few Alexanders, Alix and Alexandras. And there were several George's and one Lloyd George. The family tree's at the beginning were a good touch, unfortunately they do not show up well on the kindle version. I'd recommend this book to anyone who enjoys royal biographies, or is interested in pre WW1 European history

I feel this work is a fine telling of the personal relationship among these royal cousins. Certainly they all had respect, but also family rivalry. The inclusion of George V, is merely for show, as he had little formal control over British foreign policy. Yet it is George who survives the war with crown intact. Wilhelm and Nicholas had much more control of their foreign policy, but there were muckrakers in both camps that probably caused more damage than any rivalry between kings or emperors or czars as the case may be. How much could the cousins have done to stop the road to

war? That question is still left unanswered by this book, which is why I decide to give less than five stars. I think the Austrians used the pretext of Archduke Ferdinand's assassination to take on Serbia. They were ham fisted, and Hotzendorf and his fellow Austrians thought they could face down the Russians. In the end it became a test of honor, and in that vain, certainly Nicholas has blame as well as the Kaiser. I think the relationship between royals also gives lie to the supposition that kings and their personal relationships could avert war. Indeed, not because but in spite of these relationships, war came and it was brutal. Personal diplomacy can only go so far in a modern world, and World War I shows its limitations.

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