

Margaret Moran

Bertrand Russell's First Short Story: *The Perplexities of John Forstice* as "Spiritual Autobiography"

Although Bertrand Russell usually took far greater interest in our knowledge of the external world than in the intricacies of his own psychic states, he wrote so much about himself as to make his life among the most carefully chronicled of our era. His well-known *Autobiography* in three volumes is complemented by *My Philosophical Development* and by essays in collections including *Portraits from Memory* and *Fact and Fiction*. Russell left unpublished the larger part of his personal correspondence, journals and other private papers, but he scrupulously kept a vast array of these materials for posterity. Losses of documents probably resulted more often from accident than cautious discrimination designed for self-protection. His reverence for truth and for the written word as an important source of that truth was finally stronger than the desire for any facade. Through his self-portraits and his archive, he provided the means for the realization of a wish expressed to his first wife: "When I am dead, please don't make a myth of me."¹ Ever the iconoclast, he commanded that respect directed to him be purged of idolatry. What can easily be overlooked amid the wealth of information available from his formal autobiographical statements and private papers is Russell's first short story.² Although Russell ensured at the last that the world could know his thoughts and opinions almost as thoroughly as curiosity and patience might ever be expected to reach, his story is an intriguing mix of disclosure and reserve.

The fiction offers an illustration and, to some extent, a documentation of a unique period in Russell's life and career. Undertaken in 1912, while his goals were in considerable flux, the story shows him assessing the past and seeking firm direction for the future. The contrast to the public image cultivated elsewhere gives the story special value; it complicates and even corrects Russell's later revelations. At the outset, *The Perplexities of John Forstice* surprises by the tentativeness of the

central character. Rather than a philosopher's firm advocacy for a particular view, the work attempts expiation and reformation through its malleable hero. In his *Autobiography*, Russell made a remark about the stories he composed in old age that also has applicability to his very different early one: "I could state in fiction ideas which I half believed in but had no solid grounds for believing."³ With different standards of truth-telling, fiction gave the freedom, in his autobiographical tale as much as in his late prophesies, to test speculations inappropriate to his usual expository style.

The Perplexities of John Forstice was published in 1972⁴ following a manuscript that in all likelihood was the one that Russell had so optimistically judged satisfactorily complete in early July sixty years before. Since the story is probably the least often read of all his published autobiographical reflections, a summary of its contents is in order. The fiction, as it has survived, is meticulously arranged in three sections so that the tensions between the competing claims of knowledge and love may be examined in Part I; while that between knowledge and service may dominate Part II. As in a mathematical or logical problem, an answer to the dilemma is found in the conclusion. John Forstice, surely one of the most passive and impressionable central characters ever invented, is led to engage in a search for life's meaning. The hero's confusions begin with the discovery that his studies in physics have absorbed him so completely as to have made him oblivious to the state of public affairs. Encounters at a garden party with an Empire Builder, a socialist, and a world-weary cynic create an unsettling sense of his own disengagement. Shaken by the awareness that epochal events have been unfolding without his notice, he faces the far more alarming realization that his private world has suffered irreparable damage through his neglect. His wife has reacted to his callous inattention by becoming seriously ill. She survives just long enough to teach him that personal love is the *sine qua non* of human existence. After some aimless wandering, he arrives fortuitously in Florence, ready for the second stage of his quest. There, members of the "Amanti del Pensiero" offer, in a series of five set speeches, various remedies for his difficulties. Although Forstice finds the theories of Nasispo and Pardicreti intellectually persuasive, he cannot fully accept either. And the ideas of Forano and Chenskoff hold little appeal. He becomes especially troubled about the challenge given by Alegno, the last speaker. Until the consolations of philosophy can be made available to the poorest and meanest people, they are considered by Alegno to be of limited importance. Summoned back to England, by the illness of Uncle Tristram, Forstice learns of the devotion his relative has cherished for Sister Catherine. After his uncle's death, Forstice reaches the

last phase of his exploration when his most important mentor, Sister Catherine, convinces him that love and service can be reconciled to his desire for knowledge. He returns to his scientific research certain that the insights acquired during the year-long interlude can somehow be applied in his classroom and laboratory.

The troublesome composition of the story makes a saga of its own because of the uncommon challenges it presented. As Russell cast about for an appropriate form, he considered using conversations from a cross-section of society, letters, and dialogues between a mature self and a younger one. When the story came to be written, each of these plans was adapted for various portions. Also incorporated were some passages originally written for a related venture, his "spiritual autobiography" (which is now lost). Textual evidence indicates that parts of the speeches of Pardicreti and Chenskoff were derived from this source⁵, and it is very likely that the story assimilated even more. Russell had taken time to realize that his fiction and his autobiography amounted to a single task. But constant throughout all his striving on both projects had been the wish to find a literary vehicle that would protect him enough to allow for the exploration of the uncertainties behind his public achievement. For the spiritual autobiography, the unlikely pseudonym of Simon Styles had been chosen precisely because "that's not at all the sort of person I am supposed to be."⁶ Initially, the fiction and the life story were undertaken as discrete works, in spite of the fact that the autobiography had clearly been thought about from its inception in literary terms. In January 1912, he had written about the autobiography:

It is desirable to be able to make a dramatic statement of views one doesn't agree with and moods one has outgrown. And one can make the final outcome more complex and many-sided than in direct exposition. I have many moods myself and can imagine many others; they are useful as background to one's gospel. Then there is more room for humour and irony and development; and one can be more tentative and undogmatic.⁷

And the fiction had been conceived of in a very personal way.

After telling his story by drawing together his two efforts, Russell experienced in early July a temporary but intense elation. He had apparently found "room" for a good deal of what he had ever "thought or felt."⁸ But the use of a persona who could be treated with a judicious mixture of sympathy and distance gave a safeguard against the extremes of introspection. The need for aesthetic distance had been a paramount concern all along because Russell always doubted the modern assumption that (whatever else may be mysterious and elusive) the depths of an individual psyche can and should be plumbed by

alertness and perseverance. Nor does he ever condone the opinion that the process of self-discovery has an intrinsic worth. Instead, he demonstrates a belief that the wisdom the world really needs may actually be impeded by brooding self-consultation. Although he may at times describe his inner state in letters to trusted intimates as tormented beyond what others could endure, he usually tried to harness that conflict to provide the energy for his professional work. Russell's story shows the ambiguity of his attitude to introspection. Wishing to know himself, but made impatient by the belief that the answer to the human predicament is through selflessness, he rushes through the presentation of his dilemmas to a transcendent conclusion. The fiction is the hastily resolved daydream of a person deeply suspicious of the value of self-analysis. Nevertheless, the story goes further in describing his inner life than anything else he intended for a mass audience. Though reticent in its own way, the fiction reveals more than he probably realized because the masks of the various characters are so transparent. By means of Forstice, the characters he encounters in Florence and Uncle Tristram, Russell engaged in the intensely private exercise of telling himself a story in order to try to understand who he was and who he might become. Forstice allows for the projection of the self into a weakened, suggestible state as if to test what might be done for the world by a martyr to truth. According to modern standards, Russell's exploration of his consciousness may be judged neither daring in its content nor admirable in its technique. But the exercise was so atypical as to suggest a response to unusually intense pressure. The disappointment he felt almost immediately about the story's artistic limitations probably did not interfere with the catharsis that followed from the articulation of his perplexities.

Shortly after the writing, Russell perceived all too clearly the artistic inadequacies of his attempt. He knew that he needed to add substance, greater scope and a less melodramatic tone. But although he had an overabundance of schemes for revision,⁹ no improvements could actually be effected. His own awareness of the imperfections was confirmed after he asked Evelyn Whitehead for her judgments. Yet he was encouraged to continue planning elaborate additions to the story by G. Lowes Dickinson's opinion that the writing had "the quality of the best seventeenth-century prose."¹⁰ In 1914, the disappointment became acute when Joseph Conrad, the writer he admired beyond all other novelists, responded to his request by giving gently but honestly his critical opinion.¹¹ Russell abandoned the project, deeply saddened by his failure as an imaginative writer. Years later, he offered in his *Autobiography* this assessment: "Though the first half of it I still think is not bad, the latter half seems very dull to me, and I have never made

any attempt to publish it."¹² Indeed, he actually discouraged its printing by agreeing only to a posthumous publication. He further required in 1968 that his critical note always accompany the story: "My views in the second [third] part were very sentimental, much too mild and much too favourable to religion. In all this I was unduly influenced by Lady Ottoline Morrell."¹³

Russell's retrospective comment may be distressingly ungallant, but there is accuracy in his emphasis on Lady Ottoline's responsibility for the inspiration for the story. At the time of composition, he intended his fiction to be an unqualified tribute. Both as creator and as imagined character, he struggled to fashion himself into the kind of person who would be an appropriate mate for her. "I feel you want finer gifts than those I have to give,"¹⁴ he told her. When they became lovers in 1911, Russell had completed his monumental achievement, *Principia Mathematica*, undertaken a decade earlier in collaboration with Alfred North Whitehead. To her went the credit for the revival of all the human interests that had been held largely in abeyance while he disciplined his attention to that intensely demanding labour. As a gesture of gratitude, he hoped then to turn his talents to the form of creativity she could best appreciate. What augmented his difficulties was that he tried to project into that work her highest values. His own reservations about the applicability of these standards to his own life could not be admitted within the confines of the story, however much they troubled his peace. In letters to her at the time, he offered a full range of responses: acquiescence, veiled discomfort and outright opposition. A far more intense drama unfolds in their correspondence than in Russell's story, since his perplexities gave greater resistance to resolution than did Forstice's. Yet, in the end and almost in spite of himself, the values he argued about so strenuously with Lady Ottoline turned out to be his own.

Though with far greater vitality, his letters to Lady Ottoline take as one of their concerns the central theme of the fiction: the relationship between professional commitments and personal life. At the beginning of their affair, Russell emphasized his relief at having been prevented by her love from turning into "a sort of logic machine warranted to destroy any ideal that is not very robust".¹⁵ Although the sincerity of statements like these should not be cast into question, they must be seen as only one facet of a very complex reaction. Russell had suffered no lasting diminution of confidence that his unique talents deserved expression even if the personal cost involved was high. In a cautionary note, he told her: "I have a perfectly cold intellect which insists upon its rights and respects nothing. It will sometimes hurt you, sometimes seem cynical, sometimes heartless".¹⁶ During his most optimistic

moments, Russell hoped that he could achieve a perfect balance between his rational acuity and the sensitivity he thought they shared. This aspiration finds expression in the wish-fulfillment at the end of the story when Forstice takes his insights back to the sterile laboratory. But, in sober fact, Russell often felt defeated by his attempts to harmonize the opposites. "Some part of me is left out now whatever I do, intellect one way and mystic vision the other. They ought *both* to come in."¹⁷

Consciously or not, Russell was mistaken in telling Lady Ottoline that her effect in 1911 constituted a permanent change. Actually, the beginning of their affair coincided with a period of renewal that was part of the recurring cycle in his creative experience. Typically, a remorseless commitment to a vast theoretical challenge eventually gave place to a compassionate interlude. By June 1913, Lady Ottoline was complaining that Russell's writing of *Theory of Knowledge* (the book he subsequently abandoned as a result of Wittgenstein's attack) had expelled her completely from his consciousness. Involvement in technical work was for him an experience too heady to be long resisted. As he admitted, "Work is delicious. I dread coming back into the human world with its intolerable pains".¹⁸ But at the outset of their relationship, Russell appears quite genuinely to have suspected that his contributions to technical philosophy as to mathematics had been completed. Unsettled by the impact Lady Ottoline had had upon his emotions, Russell misinterpreted the results for the future of his professional life. When, however, he began to experience a resurgence of interest in technical writing, he was relieved. "I believe it comes from having made Forstice go back to his Physics, which I felt was right."¹⁹

The comment emphasizes Russell's use of Forstice as his pathfinder. But although Forstice has many unenviable difficulties, he is benevolently allowed a less troubled existence than had been allocated to his creator. Forstice's tensions were limited in advance by his exceedingly tentative nature and by his involvement in controversies that arose without developing to their fullest potential. The people Forstice encountered were stick figures because Russell needed to forestall the obligation to wrest a conclusion from the complexity that always accompanies the richness of lived experience. The story is an experiment, permitting the introduction of only a selected number of variables so as to test whether an answer might be found in these restricted circumstances. With a central character prone to persuasion and amendment, some accord might be reached between intellectual ambitiousness and private or social obligations. The experiment was important because the Faustian view of the overreaching desire for knowl-

edge as inherently sinful was intolerable. And the facile answer of exchanging lofty aspiration for lazy complacency seemed absurd.

If Russell experienced guilt about the loss of the normal human perspective during his "work fits," it was not that he felt that the intellect must be mortified, but because he wanted to excel in a number of different spheres. The opening scene dealing with Forstice's blindness to events in the public arena permitted Russell to engage in a comic magnification of his own tendency to absorb himself in his books. Only a person who expected to attain pre-eminence in every aspect of experience could have suffered Russell's discomfiture about his limitations. Otherwise, his scholarly achievements would have long since vindicated his choice of the academic life over the political. Misgivings that remained about his youthful defiance of his relatives' attempts to mould him into a successor to his grandfather, Lord John Russell, might well have been muted by then into occasional qualms. He might have consoled himself with the thought that whenever an issue had seemed particularly compelling (as had happened in 1903-4 with the controversy over free trade and the battle over women's suffrage in 1906-10), he had given what time he could spare to active involvement in the cause.²⁰ And even when he restrained himself from direct personal effort, he never failed to follow current affairs with a vital interest. Notwithstanding his formidable accomplishments in mathematics and philosophy, and his contributions—as opportunity allowed—to political debates, Russell indicated in the garden-party scene his submerged regret that he had not yet tried in any sustained way to make the world a better place. During the First World War, Russell berated himself severely for the insularity of his past political outlook. And he felt chagrin for the luxurious assumptions about the continuity of civilization upon which his high intellectual endeavours had rested. Through Forstice, Russell suggests that his conscience was already nagging him enough about his past disavowal of politics to prepare for the intense struggles ahead. He was even then arguing himself into existence as a world reformer.

Forstice takes very solemnly his failure to observe that imperialism, millenarianism and decadence have been corroding modern life. Yet the people who bring him to this new understanding are presented so satirically that a comic atmosphere is created for the garden-party. Only in the opening scene, is the debt Russell acknowledged²¹ to W.H. Mallock's *The New Republic* (1877) evident. Mallock's book had drawn together caricatured versions of famous people (including T.H. Huxley, Tyndall, Arnold and Pater) for a weekend party. Russell may have been modest about attributing any influence to Thomas Love Peacock; he had certainly read several of his novels with enthusiasm for their genial wit. Following these examples, Russell made conversa-

tion dominate over plot and character as he exposed the hypocrisy and greed of the Edwardian scene.²² At the garden-party, Forstice encounters the Empire Builder, Mr. Lane (Rhodes), the socialist, Shifsky (Webb) and Breitstein (who is harder to identify with absolute precision because his only characteristic is fashionable ennui). Breitstein poses the problem that the rest of the story must attempt to answer: what is the meaning of life? This is the same concern with which *The New Republic* opens, but Russell's treatment is entirely his own. Whereas Mallock used the question as an occasion for light-hearted banter before proceeding to all the other topics presented for discussion, Russell gives the matter serious, extended consideration. Although Russell achieves a satiric tone in the garden-party scene, the mood changes when Forstice asks his wife if "all human hopes are dust and ashes."²³ Thereafter an earnest pilgrimage through possible philosophies is undertaken as the influence of Peacock and Mallock gives way to Plato and Spinoza.

The change of mood is accomplished with the shift of attention to the domestic scene as the illness and subsequent death of Forstice's wife is described. Sheltered behind his protagonist, Russell was able to examine the anguish associated with the deterioration of his marriage with Alys Pearsall Smith in a way he seldom managed in his *Autobiography*, his letters, or even his secret journal of 1902-5. Although Alys had not, like Forstice's wife, become mortally ill, she had deliberately courted death through a profound despair and a desire for illness.²⁴ Whenever Russell spoke about the destruction of their marriage, he tended to exonerate himself by blaming Alys for a variety of failings. Disguised as Forstice, he risked a different perspective by assuming all the responsibility because of the indifference to her needs that his professional labours had entailed. But whereas Forstice can begin to redeem himself by learning from his wife about love for the individual, Russell withdrew more than ever into his studies. More teachable than his creator, Forstice can proceed to the second part of his quest where he tries to understand the importance of love for the entire human race. Even so, Forstice's advancements beyond Russell should not be overstated. Both accept love best at the idealized level when the object of their affection is either dead or unattainable.

Personal love and altruism are values that are difficult to challenge, even intermittently. Russell's letters to Lady Ottoline praise romantic and spiritual love in the same intense manner Forstice adopts. But since theirs was a turbulent relationship, Russell also doubted the degree of her commitment and his own emotional capacity. His demand for perfection made him often ill suited to sublunary attachments.

Love, unfortunately, belongs with life, and therefore is not shining and clear and strong, but turbid, painful, transitory, not a thing one can *worship*. I make a mess of human things always because I try to think them like the eternal things; with the eternal things I am all right, my ways of feeling are what they call for. But I have not the strength to forego all human things, which is what I ought to do.²⁵

The story of Uncle Tristram and Sister Catherine told at the opening of Part III, creates a situation that permitted the expression of the painful aspects of Russell's relationship with Lady Ottoline. When their affair began, he had hoped that she might be persuaded to abandon her husband and daughter so that all her attention might be lavished on him alone. Her inability to comply with his wishes cast him often in the role of outsider, excluded from the warmth of her domestic circle. Like the fictional Uncle Tristram, Russell had to content himself with isolated moments of ecstatic union that, however precious, could not be integrated entirely into ordinary life. By describing the guilt Sister Catherine suffered over the loss of her child, Russell imagined the consequences that might have ensued had he succeeded in separating Lady Ottoline from her family. He struggled to reconcile himself to his unalterable circumstances by emphasizing the ennobling quality of self-denying love. Forstice, Uncle Tristram and Sister Catherine have in common the need to direct love either toward a transcendent ideal or toward a person who is safely ensconced in the immutable shrine of memory. Their dead or cloistered loved ones cannot inflict disappointment, pain or irritation. Love is thereby preserved from decay but it is also incapable of growth. Into the fiction is thereby transmitted Russell's futile effort to protect himself from the "contagion of the world's slow stain."

Love of mankind, being an abstract concept, suited Russell's requirements better than individual love. Yet, ironically, he held at the time much less exalted expectations about his ability for concern on the large scale. He told Lady Ottoline:

Some very deep and really trustworthy instinct in me tells me that love for mankind is not for me the highest or most important thing. I have to find a path across the desert, without bothering too much about people who follow.²⁶

Part II of the story questions whether or not knowledge can be reconciled to service, just as Part I asked about its compatibility to love. Each of the first four speakers tells in his own way what man can do to accommodate himself to his condition by taking thought. These orators hold positions that had been publicly advanced or privately embraced by Russell himself. Part II is therefore a primitive psycho-

machia in which one facet of the individual encounters other sides. In the fiction, his most confused and vulnerable aspect, represented by Forstice, seeks help from the various voices of certainty conjured from other stages of experience. With the remembrance of convictions past, comforts can be elicited until resistance comes from Alegno—the angelic man.

Forano (whose name is an amalgam of Frege and Peano) summarizes the position Russell had presented in "The Study of Mathematics" (1907). In Forano's view, life itself is so painful and muddled that the best solution is to retreat into mathematics, the only sphere in which absolute perfection is possible. Although Russell retained great attachment to the discipline, he had had occasion to feel grave and growing doubts about its ability to justify a life. Such anxieties were expressed to Lady Ottoline: "But mathematics is a cold and unresponsive love in the end; and it is hard to generate all one's force from within".²⁷ Yet in another mood he could write: "I like mathematics largely because it is *not* human and has nothing particular to do with this planet or the whole accidental universe—because, like Spinoza's God, it won't love us in return".²⁸ In *The Perplexities of John Forstice*, this association is apparent in the placement of Nasispo's (Spinoza's) speech²⁹ immediately following that of Forano. But whereas the defence of mathematics failed to inspire Forstice, Nasispo's argument was attractive. Forstice's attitude reflects Russell's life-long admiration for Spinoza as a model for the union of contemplation and action, reason and emotion. From the poet, Pardicreti (Lucretius and Leopardi), comes the essential argument of "The Free Man's Worship" (1903); namely, that man must adjust himself to his alien universe instead of projecting his own needs onto it. According to this view, man is exalted by taking the responsibility for generating his own spiritual force instead of expecting any help from outside the human realm. As Russell wrote epigrammatically to Lady Ottoline, "If there is a God so much the better, but we are more worthy of him if we can do without him."³⁰ The fourth speaker the Russian novelist, Chenskoff, believes that the consolation for the intense pain at the heart of man's experience in an unsympathetic cosmos may be derived from the beauty he creates in response to that agony. (Since Chenskoff's name was assigned before his function was altered from composer to novelist, it is likely that Russell had been thinking of Tchaikovsky.)

By attributing to these speakers some of his own favourite theories, Russell wished to give full credit to the attainments of reason. But he reluctantly acknowledged that unless intellectuals could be softened by pity for the masses who endured on the margin of existence, then thinkers would become so aloof and inactive as to have a very res-

tricted purpose. His suppressed benevolent impulses find their voice in Alegno, the selfless defender of the inarticulate and the deprived. What he allowed this character to say had long been regarded as a dangerous intrusion upon his supreme mental efforts. The severe commentary Alegno makes on all rarified theories by asking what help they could give to a washerwoman is an adaptation of a conversation Russell had had on the evening of 11 December 1902 with the scholar-politician, John William Mackail. On the following day, Russell wrote a protesting letter to his friend Gilbert Murray:

I had heard so much about his balance and judgment that I was surprised to find him a fanatic. But he is too democratic for me — he said his charwoman was more in contact with the real things than anybody else he knew. But what can a charwoman know of the spirits of great men or the records of fallen empires or the haunting vision of art and reason? All this and much more I wished to say; but the words stuck in my throat. Let us not delude ourselves that the best is within the reach of all, or that emotion unformed by thought can ever attain the highest level. All such optimisms seem to me dangerous to civilization and the outcome of a heart not yet sufficiently mortified.

Russell's reaction was vehement because he consistently believed that the romantic glorification of the untutored sensibility encouraged a false sense of complacency about the status quo. Social and political reforms were urgently needed to relieve the oppression of the poor and the uneducated. Of that fact he never knew any doubt. There was, however, uncertainty about whether he would feel obliged to participate in the formulation of these improvements. Through Alegno, Russell was ready to concede that wise men must design ways to give aid to impoverished lives, even though he retained the conviction that the highest insights could never be as accessible to the peasant as to the philosopher.

Russell organized Part II as a series of formal orations in a structure like that used by G. Lowes Dickinson for *A Modern Symposium* (1905). The format allowed one speaker to respond briefly to previous statements, but did not permit free interchanges among the participants. Without some method of compensation (such as Dickinson found), this arrangement puts early speakers at a disadvantage. Alegno's arguments seem to have a greater dramatic finality than they had in Russell's own mind. Russell's letters show his own deep resistance to some of Alegno's perceptions and they suggest his expectation that Nasispo would be interpreted as offering an implicit response. When Russell denied to Lady Ottoline that "all the spiritually best things must be open to uneducated people"³¹ he drew attention to Spinoza as an example of excellence far beyond that reach of the unenlightened.

I do not really hope to persuade you about this, because I am afraid it is a fundamental divergence. But I do feel quite convinced that Spinoza's spiritual life was richer and fuller and more in harmony with the universe than any ignorant person's could be. Forgive this outburst — it touches something which I feel very profoundly. It is true that at times of very deep emotion I feel the whole life of the intellect thin and valueless. But I always cease to feel this when emotion is less stirred; and looking back, I can see that what I have felt when it was most deeply stirred was profoundly coloured by learning, and in a way that seems to me important. But I know I am biased, because if I didn't feel this the whole motive force of my life would be gone.³²

Within the fiction, Russell emphasized this tension between the positions represented by Alegno and Nasispo with the common man's last thrust at the philosopher:

If you ask what purpose is served by human life in general, and whether it would be better it should cease, I can only say I do not know. But if any purpose is served it must be one that can enter into the daily lives of common men, not a rare and difficult good, realized only by the few to whom all the other millions are to be ministering slaves.³³

The final sentence in Spinoza's *Ethics*, "But all noble things are as difficult as they are rare," thus received a challenge which Nasispo was not allowed to answer.

In Russell's life, his intellectual and moral elitism did not prevent strenuous efforts on behalf of the common person. By turning to fiction, Russell may have hoped to continue in a new dimension the undertaking to popularize ideas which he had begun in 1910. At Gilbert Murray's invitation, he agreed then to write a book for the Home University Library. Published in 1912, *The Problems of Philosophy* admittedly contains much to confuse Russell's hypothetical washerwoman. But like *The Perplexities of John Forstice*, it was intended for a very general readership, a point Russell emphasized by referring to it in letters as the "shilling shocker." Although Russell had therefore already worked to elucidate complex thoughts for a non-professional audience, he did not become fully engaged until the war with issues of immediate and practical concern to the average person. With the appearance in 1916 of *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, his first popular success, he started his long career as social critic. Thereafter, by writing about topics including education, marriage, political organization and disarmament, and by active effort for reforms, he responded effectively to Alegno's challenge to make knowledge compatible to service.

Russell's resolution is foreshadowed in Part III, when Sister Catharine draws together the altruism of Alegno, the capacity for self-transcendence of the "Amanti del Pensiero" and the love epitomized

by Forstice's wife and uncle. In so doing, she makes herself the embodiment of Wisdom. Russell's ideal character was directly based on Lady Ottoline's description of Mother Julian, the nun who had inspired her youth. Indeed, Lady Ottoline actually wrote a portion of the section in which the nun appears. Even allowing for Lady Ottoline's influence, Russell's use of a religieuse as a model character is startling because of his well-known anti-clericalism. When Russell made his commentary in 1968, he directed attention to that incongruity by expressing discomfort about having been "much too favourable to religion". But at the time of composition, he trusted that readers would be able to separate, as Forstice tries to do, Sister Catherine's Wisdom from her dogmatic beliefs. Forstice asks how the nun's insight "could be disentangled from the God, the life of prayer, the belief in the power of Spirit with which in her it was entwined."³⁴ The question is identical to the one Russell set for himself in "The Essence of Religion" (1912). After dogmas have been rejected, religion can give man a sense of union within himself and with his world, Russell decided. He made explicit the moral, that *The Perplexities of John Forstice* had suggested, at the conclusion of that essay:

There are three kinds of union: Union in thought, union in feeling, union in will. Union in thought is knowledge, union in feeling is love, union in will is service...what promotes union is the combination of knowledge, love, and consequent service which is wisdom, the supreme good of man.³⁵

Although they are given in a revised order, these three elements of Wisdom form Russell's summary of his life-long goals at the opening of his *Autobiography*: "Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: The longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind."³⁶

When Russell took stock of himself in 1912, he could feel pride about his accomplishment in only one of the three areas: knowledge. And even there he had laboured tirelessly for further advancements. After Mother Julian died, he wrote a letter of condolence to Lady Ottoline that included this passage:

A few people in the world show how life can be lived—they are the people who give one courage and hope and the belief that it is worthwhile to struggle on, that in the end there is something attainable. Without them life would be very hard. I shall never be among those who have securely achieved—my life will always be a battle—but I don't feel that with you—and I see what you owe to her.³⁷

What is remarkable about the comment is not that he demurred about fulfilling the same function as the nun, but that he perceived any

association at all between her role and his own. However resistant he might have been to his fate, the world came eventually to see him as a secular saint, one who had acquired at high personal cost ideas deserving of notice about "how life can be lived." In his fiction, he could not outline with any precision how Forstice intends to apply Sister Catherine's wisdom to his everyday work. Although the story ended with a lofty message its answer was kept so vaguely generalized that it needed to be elaborated in all the essential details within Russell's own life. Russell failed to draw for *The Perplexities of John Forstice* any person convincing enough to compel our admiration and emulation, but he performed over time a rarer feat by turning himself into one.

NOTES

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1. To Alys (Pearsall Smith) Russell, 13 June 1902.
2. Ronald Jager suggests this direction in "Russell and Religion" by writing: "As fiction it is — to be honest — pretty awful; as moral philosophy it is insightful, though excessively humourless and solemn; but as testimony to the perplexities of Russell's own spiritual and philosophical outlook it is quite powerful and interesting." In *Russell in Review*, ed. J.E. Thomas and Kenneth Blackwell (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, Hakkert, 1976), p. 97.
3. *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell 1944-1967* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 35.
4. In *The Collected Stories of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Barry Feinberg (London: George Allen & Unwin).
5. *The Perplexities of John Forstice*, in *Contemplation and Action 1902-14*, edited by Andrew Brink, Margaret Moran and Richard A. Rempel, Volume 12, *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* (London: George Allen & Unwin), 139: 16-140: 28; 141: 19-143: 18 and 151: 32-151: 34.
6. To Lady Ottoline Morrell, 25 April 1912, #423. St. Simeon Stylites (c. 390-459) was an ascetic who lived for forty years on a pillar. In 1897, Russell had used the pseudonym "Orlando" for the brief "Self-Appreciation" he had written for publication by his brother-in-law, Logan Pearsall Smith. See *Cambridge Essays 1888-99*, edited by Kenneth Blackwell, Andrew Brink, Nicholas Griffin, Richard A. Rempel and John G. Slater (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), Paper 11.
7. To Lady Ottoline Morrell, 9 January 1912, #311.
8. To Lady Ottoline Morrell, 1 May 1912, #434.
9. His ideas ranged so far as to lead him to consider including, for example, a description of the celebration at the opening of the Panama Canal (3 September 1912 #563). Plans like these indicate the massive scale he had in mind for his fiction.
10. 21 July 1912.
11. Russell reported Conrad's opinion in this way to Lady Ottoline: "He seemed to think by a great deal of work I could make something of it, but not to be sure whether it was worth my while to give so much time to it. He seemed to think very well of the garden party at the beginning. And I am happy to say he liked the nun" (22 July 1914, #1055).
12. *Autobiography 1944-1967*, p. 34.
13. To Anton Felton, 6 April 1968.
14. 30 January 1912, #329.
15. 21 March 1911, #3.
16. 29 April 1911, #46.

17. To Lady Ottoline Morrell, 13 March 1912, #386.
18. To Lady Ottoline Morrell, 12 June 1913, #805.
19. To Lady Ottoline Morrell, 27 October 1912, #613.
20. Sometimes he was indeed able to console himself in this way. He wrote to Lady Ottoline: "it really is worth much sacrifice to bear one's part in great undertakings. I have always felt that with the little bits of political work at election-times—the whole is great, and makes one's own part inspiring, however little it may be in the main great work" (postmarked 21 December 1912, #655).
21. *Autobiography 1944-1967*, p. 34.
22. There is irony about the fact that Russell, who attempted to write fiction in the manner of Peacock, unwittingly contributed to a portrait in another satirical novel of discussion. See my "Bertrand Russell as Scogan in Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*", forthcoming in *Mosaic*.
23. *Contemplation and Action*, p. 133.
24. Barbara Strachey, *Remarkable Relations: The Story of the Pearsall Smith Family* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1980), p. 222.
25. To Lady Ottoline Morrell, 24 June 1912, #482.
26. Postmarked 27 April 1912, #425.
27. 4 April 1911, #17.
28. To Lady Ottoline Morrell, postmarked 9 March 1912, #374.
29. Kenneth Blackwell, in *The Spinozistic Ethic of Bertrand Russell* (London: George Allen & Unwin, forthcoming), includes a detailed discussion of Nasispo's rendering of Spinoza's ideas.
30. 21 January 1912, #319.
31. 14 March 1912, #382.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Contemplation and Action*, p. 145.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-2.
36. *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell 1872-1914*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), p. 13.
37. 22 September 1911, #188.