

LUDWIG IN FACT AND FICTION<sup>1</sup>

NICHOLAS GRIFFIN  
 Philosophy / McMaster University  
 Hamilton, Ont., Canada L8S 4K1

- Brian McGuinness. *Wittgenstein: a Life*. Vol. 1: *Young Ludwig (1889–1921)*. Paperback: London: Penguin, 1990 (1st ed., 1988). Pp. xiv, 322. £6.99.
- Ray Monk. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the Duty of Genius*. London: Cape; New York: Free P., 1990. Pp. xv, 654. £20.00; US\$29.95. Paperback: New York: Viking Penguin, 1991. US\$15.95.
- G. H. von Wright, ed. *A Portrait of Wittgenstein as a Young Man from the Diary of David Hume Pinsent 1912–1914*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990. Pp. xxii, 119. £25.00.
- Bruce Duffy. *The World as I Found It*. New York: Tichnor and Fields, 1987. Pp. x, 548. US\$19.95.
- Theodore Redpath. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: a Student's Memoir*. London: Duckworth, 1990. Pp. 109. £12.95.
- Terry Eagleton. *Saints and Scholars*. London: Verso, 1987. Pp. 145. £9.95.

Wittgenstein's life has always attracted a good deal of attention. From his first appearance in Cambridge, before his thought was at all noteworthy, he was taken to be a remarkable man. The Apostles were fascinated by him; Bloomsbury handled him cautiously but with interest. He became, well before his death—in fact, before he was even middle-aged—a legendary Cambridge eccentric. Elizabeth Anscombe, one of his executors, once declared she would like to have a button which would stop all the interest in Wittgenstein's personal life and leave only the interest in his philosophy: she might as well have been Canute wishing for a button to control the tides. Since Wittgenstein's death, in 1951, disciples, friends, and even bare acquaintances have produced a considerable biographical literature of very uneven

<sup>1</sup> Other frequently cited books are: Wittgenstein, *Letters to Russell, Keynes, and Moore*, ed. G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974); Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1979); G. H. von Wright, *Wittgenstein* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota P., 1982); Rush Rhees, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

The research for this paper was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

quality. Among the best of these pieces is the memoir by Fania Pascal, who taught Wittgenstein Russian in the 1930s.<sup>2</sup> Pascal was more an acquaintance than a friend, and this contributes to the success of her memoir. Fortunately she was not a disciple, for there is evidence, going back to the first century AD, that disciples don't make good biographers. Pascal's account is good precisely because she dared to criticize, though ever so respectfully—aware, no doubt, that she was facing a cultural mafia of considerable power. The full force of this mafia was brought to bear on W. W. Bartley's highly controversial *Wittgenstein*,<sup>3</sup> notable for its claimed revelations about Wittgenstein's sex life and his penchant for rough trade. Bartley's was the first biographical book on Wittgenstein by an outsider, but it was not a full biography. The closest we had to that was Norman Malcolm's *Memoir* prefaced by von Wright's "Biographical Sketch."<sup>4</sup> Von Wright's "Sketch" has served Wittgenstein scholars well (as have his bibliographic essays on Wittgenstein's writings),<sup>5</sup> but it is no substitute for a proper biography.

It is somewhat surprising that the first proper biography of a thinker as influential as Wittgenstein should appear nearly forty years after his death. His ghost, however, ought to feel that it was worth the wait, for he has been admirably served by the two main volumes under review. McGuinness's first volume, so far still the only one to be published, first appeared to wide acclaim in 1988. He must have been surprised and alarmed to find that, before his second volume was finished, another biography appeared. It is a remarkable tribute to Monk's biography that it can hold its own against one as good as McGuinness's; and it is a similar tribute to McGuinness that we still need his second volume even after reading Monk.

The two books are rather different. McGuinness is more meditative: he is apt to pause over problems of German translation, for example, and to take issue with previous commentators. Faced with a conflict of interpretations, McGuinness will present the evidence on both sides together with his judgment. Monk, by contrast, enters into discussion only on really important matters (as with the controversy over Bartley). His narrative is more compressed. While it takes McGuinness seventy-two pages to get Wittgenstein to his arrival in Cambridge in 1911, Monk gets to the same point in thirty-five.

<sup>2</sup> "Wittgenstein, a Personal Memoir", *Encounter* (1973); reprinted in Rhees, pp. 26–62.

<sup>3</sup> (London: Quartet, 1974); see also Bartley's unrepentant 2nd ed. (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1985). Bartley's book was savaged by (among others) Bernd Frohmann in *Russell*, n.s. 7 (1987): 91–6; David Ramsay Steele, Bartley's American publisher, replied (*ibid.*, pp. 173–4), and Frohmann responded (*ibid.*, pp. 174–6). Monk offers a judicious assessment of the issues in an appendix which, for the first time to my knowledge, seriously confronts the question of whether Bartley had any evidence for his claims about Wittgenstein's sex life.

<sup>4</sup> Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: a Memoir*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1984).

<sup>5</sup> All are reprinted (along with three philosophical papers) in von Wright, *Wittgenstein*.

As a result, his account loses some of the detail that McGuinness provides, but in return we get a portrait of Wittgenstein of extraordinary vividness. Monk selects his material tellingly and has a sharp eye for illuminating details and a remarkable capacity for clear, vivid exposition of complex issues. The result is a brisk and sharply focused picture of Wittgenstein and his ideas. McGuinness lets his picture build cumulatively, detail by detail; the reader comes away with the impression that every known fact has been considered.

Philosophical biography lags far behind scientific biography when it comes to dealing with the subject's work in terms comprehensible to the general public, probably because philosophy, unlike science, does not have a strong tradition of popular writing. Even philosophers like Russell, who took pains to popularize their own ideas, have not fared well in this respect with their biographers. (Clark, for example, gives Russell's philosophical work only the most superficial attention, and Cohen-Solal does little better with Sartre's.<sup>6</sup>) It is the more surprising, therefore, that Wittgenstein, who made no effort to make his ideas accessible to anyone, should be the subject of two biographies which both give serious attention to his work and do so in a way that is intelligible to those who have no philosophical training. Monk, in particular, is brilliantly successful in explaining Wittgenstein's central ideas and conveying a clear idea of how he came by them and why they were original. His skills in this respect are in a class of their own.

Both Monk and McGuinness have had unrestricted access to Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*, especially Wittgenstein's unpublished (and largely unseen) coded notebooks. The contents of these have been much speculated about, especially since Bartley's book. The code is a simple one and was intended merely to deter those who might open the book casually. The contents, accordingly, are not very scandalous—Monk assures us that he has quoted "virtually all the remarks that are in any way revealing of Wittgenstein's emotional, spiritual and sexual life" (p. 585), thus ending years of speculation—but they are revealing.

For one thing, they plainly show that what was published in 1961 as *Notebooks 1914–1916* was a very one-sided selection from Wittgenstein's war-time notebooks. It was not explained to the reader of the published version that a large number of entries (especially from the later years) had been omitted. The omission of some of these could be justified on the ground that they were of purely biographical interest. Yet their occurrence among the more obviously philosophical entries (especially those on value and the mystical) does change one's impression of some of the philosophical material. From about the middle of the War questions of values and the philosophy of life become increasingly important to Wittgenstein. In these areas, it is not so

<sup>6</sup> A. Cohen-Solal, *Sartre, a Life* (New York: Pantheon, 1987).

clear that Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks can be as thoroughly segregated from his private reflections as the editors of the *Notebooks* supposed. Whether or not they were right to exclude the personal remarks, they were certainly wrong not to tell the reader of their existence, and there is scope now for a complete edition of the war-time notebooks—although one suspects that, between them, Monk and McGuinness may have got all the good bits not previously published.

The material now published from the notebooks does change very substantially our view of Wittgenstein's thinking at this critical time of his life. The developmental picture that emerges helps explain Russell's surprise when, after the war, he discovered Wittgenstein had become a mystic. Certainly it is no longer possible to dismiss the final few pages of the *Tractatus*, as the Vienna Circle did, as of little importance in Wittgenstein's thought. By the end of the war the topics of these last pages—values, the mystical and the meaning of life—were central to Wittgenstein's concerns. In this respect, knowledge of Wittgenstein's biography is an essential aid in understanding his philosophy. But, while a good deal of new light is thrown on these topics, some puzzles remain. There is a good deal in both Monk and McGuinness about Wittgenstein's thoughts on suicide—a topic, apparently, never far from his mind. But nothing they say seems to me to explain one of the most startling doctrines of the *Notebooks*: "If suicide is allowed then everything is allowed" (p. 91).<sup>7</sup> This is usually said to follow from his solipsism, but I don't see it. Just as there are fates worse than death, so it is easy to conceive of value-systems in which worse fates can befall a world than annihilation.

Each book leaves a different impression of Wittgenstein the man. Though both are sympathetic to their subject, McGuinness is somewhat more respectful—at times, I felt, slightly too much so. Wittgenstein, though by anyone's standards an impressive man, lacked some of the traits that make a satisfactory human being. McGuinness emphasizes the impressiveness, and forgives the defects. McGuinness's Wittgenstein is a man who with a fair degree of success remade his own personality according to the dictates of his philosophy of life. True, he was egotistical in the extreme, intolerant of others, unable to treat them as equals, incapable of love—but then he seemed himself to need neither tolerance nor equals nor love—a cold, unlikeable, but impressive monolith. Monk's Wittgenstein seems rather more fragile: a man who set himself an impossible personal goal and who brought himself repeatedly to the brink of ruin, not only because the goal was impossible, but because he pursued it in quite the wrong way. Frequently, but especially as he got older, the sense that things had gone desperately wrong with his life

<sup>7</sup> Nor do they explain why Wittgenstein bothers to state the contrapositive in his next sentence.

looms in on Monk's Wittgenstein: a sense that his life was a failure, that no one understood his philosophy, that the effect of his teaching on those he taught was appalling, that there was some fundamental lack of "decency" in his life, that he had no one to love.

The one weakness of Wittgenstein which is revealed (it seems inadvertently) by McGuinness is his penchant for disciples. He seems generally to have avoided the company of those he couldn't dominate, in favour of those who would do as he told them, look after him, accept his leadership and not question his opinions.<sup>8</sup> Outside of the social pathology of religious cults, I can think of no one else whose associates are so naturally and literally referred to as disciples. They aped his mannerisms, they took his advice, they wrote down his thoughts, they sat in awed silence through his classes, and they occasionally plucked up enough courage to ask a question. Von Wright, the most sympathetic of observers, says: "I believe that most of those who loved him and had his friendship also feared him" (*Wittgenstein*, p. 31). And Redpath admits that he rarely felt comfortable in Wittgenstein's presence, especially indoors (*Ludwig Wittgenstein*, p. 38). From Monk's account of his years teaching at Cambridge he seems to sit like a disease upon the place. Students were cowed into taking dictation; Wittgenstein himself was eaten up with discontent at the University, his classes, and his own (internal and external) life, and persuaded (surely with good reason) that the effects of his teaching were not beneficial. It was a poisonous atmosphere. Gilbert Ryle, when he went to Cambridge to give a paper, was repelled: "veneration for Wittgenstein", he wrote, "was so incontinent that mentions ... of any other philosopher were greeted with jeers. This contempt for thoughts other than Wittgenstein's seemed to me pedagogically disastrous for the students and unhealthy for Wittgenstein himself" (Monk, p. 495). In these days a "discussion" with Wittgenstein about his work would consist of him reading it aloud, with accompanying explanations, sentence by sentence.<sup>9</sup>

Real discussions, with those who were his intellectual equals or at least were prepared to behave as such (with Russell, Moore, Keynes and Ramsey, to mention only the most eminent) were precipitately terminated by Wittgenstein. The only exceptions were Sraffa (who terminated the discussions himself) and Kreisel. Instead Wittgenstein preferred to meet with those who were prepared to exhibit a degree of subservience that is frequently embarrass-

<sup>8</sup> Monk's account modifies this impression a little, as regards Wittgenstein's slightly more mellow later years. Monk mentions at least two friendships, with the economist Piero Sraffa and the ruggedly independent logician Georg Kreisel, in which Wittgenstein not only tolerated but welcomed their independence.

<sup>9</sup> This must be balanced, however, by Redpath's account of his first classes with Wittgenstein which conveys some sense of the excitement Wittgenstein was able to generate (pp. 16–21), though even Redpath could find the classes a trial at times.

ing to read about. McGuinness's account of Wittgenstein's control of the little circle around Engelmann in Olmütz during World War I is particularly depressing (pp. 247–50). Engelmann, McGuinness tells us, “had many of the qualities Wittgenstein looked for in a disciple. He was gentle, not self-seeking, even ineffectual, but above all painfully critical of his own failings” (p. 247). It is sad to have to report that all these traits were fully exploited by Wittgenstein. Even sadder are the letters Monk quotes from Francis Skinner, who was pathetically in love with Wittgenstein. Dismal examples can be found in Monk (pp. 361–2, 377–9). Wittgenstein found these dog-like devotions “*stirringly lovely*” (*ibid.*, p. 375; Wittgenstein's emphasis).

Fania Pascal says that one of the things that Wittgenstein liked about England was that its middle classes produced sons with “the two features Wittgenstein ... required in a disciple: childlike innocence and first-class brains” (Rhees, p. 40). There is plenty of evidence of childlike innocence in Skinner's letters to Wittgenstein, but little of first-class brains. Skinner must have been intelligent—he was a Wrangler in the Mathematical Tripos of 1933, and his family spoke of his giving up a “brilliant career” as a mathematician to follow Wittgenstein's advice and become an apprentice in a factory (Rhees, p. 37)—but, from the evidence of his letters, “brilliant” must have a narrowly mathematical reference.

The same seems true of Wittgenstein's first love: David Pinsent, now mainly famous as the dedicatee of the *Tractatus*. Pinsent's diaries (together with Wittgenstein's correspondence and Russell's letters to Ottoline Morrell) have long been a main source of our knowledge of Wittgenstein's life in Cambridge before World War I. Pinsent, who met Wittgenstein at one of Russell's “Thursday evenings”, was at that time a mathematics student at Trinity; he also was a Wrangler in the Mathematical Tripos; and he was considered (but rejected) for membership of the Apostles. A contemporary, George Thompson, later wrote that he was “the most brilliant man of my year, among the most brilliant I have ever met” (*Pinsent*, p. xv). Pinsent's diaries seem to me to undermine this reputation. Von Wright has published all the entries which concern Wittgenstein, together with Pinsent's letters to Wittgenstein, some correspondence between Wittgenstein and Pinsent's mother after Pinsent had died, and a brief sketch of Pinsent's life and background by his sister, Anne Pinsent Keynes. They certainly show Pinsent's extraordinary good nature, his tolerance of Wittgenstein's moods and bullying. They also show a young man, plainly fascinated by Wittgenstein, but by no means so in awe of him as poor Skinner was. But his diary, unfortunately, is rather dull. He was neither witty nor observant, nor did he record much of the content of his many discussions with Wittgenstein. He seems altogether too much like an earnest, good-natured schoolboy. There are some signs of a new maturity after his trip to Iceland with Wittgenstein in September 1912, though whether this was general or affected only his relationship with Witt-

genstein is impossible to tell. The day by day account of this trip is perhaps the most interesting part of the book, though there are some other nice touches, for example, the description of Wittgenstein “ramming Russell's Theory of Classes into ... Moore's head” (p. 47).

Redpath, who attended Wittgenstein's classes from 1934 to 1936 and again from 1938 to 1940, knew him at a time when he was much more formidable as a person and suffered accordingly. Writing with all the advantages of old age, Redpath is able to give himself some distance from his subject and to explore, though not too deeply, the ambivalence of his feelings for Wittgenstein—a man who evidently touched him deeply without entirely derailing his life. The memoirs ramble pleasingly from memory to memory, without too much effort to put them into order. Nor is there any attempt to understand what sort of man Wittgenstein was beyond what was apparent to a student who was, as he admits, not one of Wittgenstein's closest friends. The result is a collection of snapshots, some interesting, some forgettable. There are a number of new details. We learn, for example, that Wittgenstein took sodium acid phosphate ( $\text{NaH}_2\text{PO}_4$ ) as an aid to concentration (p. 48). Redpath is best, I think, when he describes how Wittgenstein treated his students. His account of Wittgenstein's classes is the most vivid I have come across and the only one which conveys some of their excitement. In a less happy vein is the account of Wittgenstein's obnoxious behind-the-scenes manipulation of the Moral Sciences Club of which Redpath was the secretary in 1938–39. Attempting to cater to Wittgenstein's whims could put his students in intolerable situations (Monk records other such incidents, e.g. p. 346.) Redpath also gives some nice illustrations of the way in which Wittgenstein's sense of values affected his life in matters of etiquette.

There is not much philosophy in Redpath's volume. A section, however, is devoted to the composition of the *Philosophical Investigations* to which Redpath contributed by spending a taxing day attempting to translate a Preface (pp. 72–7). Better still is the account of Wittgenstein's talk to the Moral Sciences Club on 23 February 1939 when Redpath, as secretary, took the chair (pp. 82–6). Wittgenstein spoke on “Philosophy” and was, as Redpath says, in “especially good form” (p. 82). This is, however, the only extended account of philosophical issues in the book.

The publication of Pinsent's diary also gives us some new glimpses of Wittgenstein's philosophical work in progress. We have, for example, reports of Wittgenstein's “new solution” to a problem in mathematical logic which “Russell ... thinks ... is sound” and “should revolutionize lots of Symbolic Logic ... the most masterly and convincing solution too” (*Pinsent*, p. 37; 25 Oct. 1912). But, alas, we get no details. The next year we get the following account of the state of the art in symbolic logic:

Of course [Wittgenstein] has upset a lot of Russell's work—but Russell would be the

last to resent that, and really the greatness of his work suffers little thereby—as it is obvious that Wittgenstein is one of Russell's disciples and owes enormously to him. But Wittgenstein's work is really amazing—and I really believe that the mucky morass of Philosophy is at last crystallising about a rigid theory of Logic—the only portion of Philosophy about which there is any possibility of man knowing anything—Metaphysics *etc* are hampered by total lack of data.<sup>10</sup> It is like the transition from Alchemy to Chemistry. (Pinsent, p. 59; 25 Aug. 1913)

Unfortunately, it is not clear whether this view of philosophy is Pinsent's own or one he got from Wittgenstein. It fits rather well with the impression of Wittgenstein's philosophy that the members of the Vienna Circle got from the *Tractatus*—before they discussed it with Wittgenstein.<sup>11</sup> It may well have represented a stage in Wittgenstein's thinking before World War 1.

Both Pinsent and Skinner died young: Pinsent in an flying accident in 1918, and Skinner from polio in 1941. In both cases, Wittgenstein was devastated by the loss, but his grief for Skinner seems to have been almost uncontrollable. Skinner's sister described him as like a "frightened wild animal" at the funeral (Monk, p. 427). Here grief was complicated by guilt at the way he had treated Skinner. In 1937, after much pleading, Skinner had been allowed to join Wittgenstein in Norway. Wittgenstein recorded in his diary: "Lay with him two or three times. Always at first with the feeling that there was nothing wrong in it, *then* with shame. Have also been unjust, edgy and insincere towards him, also cruel" (p. 376). Notwithstanding this curmudgeonly treatment, Skinner found his time in Norway "wonderful" (six times in two letters; p. 377). After that, they lived together for something like a year in Cambridge when Wittgenstein took up his professorship there, but it does not seem to have been a happy time (p. 402).

Bartley's book left the impression that Wittgenstein's often expressed feelings of shame had to do with his homosexuality. But the shame that Wittgenstein recorded in Norway had nothing to do with his homosexuality—nor, for that matter, with his cruelty. (For good or bad, Wittgenstein's reactions were rarely the conventional ones.) The shame arose because he had allowed himself to give physical expression to his love.

This same attitude can be found in Wittgenstein's one serious relationship with a woman, Marguerite Respinger, an "artistic young lady from a wealthy [Swiss] background, with no interest in philosophy and little of the devout

<sup>10</sup> To this Pinsent added the footnote: "Really Logic is all Philosophy. All else that is loosely so termed is either Metaphysics—which is hopeless, there being no data—or Natural Science *e.g.* Psychology."

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rudolf Carnap, "Autobiography", in P. A. Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap* (LaSalle, Ill: Open Court, 1963), pp. 24–9.

seriousness that Wittgenstein usually made a prerequisite for friendship" (Monk, p. 238). That she was not interested in philosophy would not have been an obstacle to Wittgenstein's friendship. Numerous friends and acquaintances (including Fania Pascal and F. R. Leavis) thought that they got on better with Wittgenstein as a result of their ignorance of philosophy. The lack of seriousness, on the other hand, might have seemed an insuperable obstacle, but for the fact that Wittgenstein seems to have had considerably lower expectations of women than of men in this respect. (On this point, at any rate, his reactions appear conventional—at least by the standards of the Viennese *haute bourgeoisie* among whom he was brought up, though hardly by those of the Cambridge intellectuals with whom he later worked.) He did seriously contemplate marriage to Respinger, though he seems not to have thought to inform her of the fact for a couple of years, nor of the fact that he intended a Platonic marriage. Matters came to a head when Wittgenstein invited her to join him in Norway for a period of spiritual preparation for their marriage. Wittgenstein's idea of an appropriate preparation was that they should see little of each other, but spend their time meditating and reading the Bible (of which he thoughtfully left her a marked copy). Respinger stood two weeks of it and then left for Rome.

Wittgenstein's love, as Monk makes clear, had little to do with the feelings of the other person involved. This was most evident in Wittgenstein's infatuation with Keith Kirk, an apprentice in the factory where Skinner worked. The infatuation occurred largely within the pages of Wittgenstein's notebooks; Kirk never even knew of Wittgenstein's interest. As Monk puts it:

That neither Pinsent nor Marguerite—and certainly not Kirk—were in love with him seemed not to affect his love for them. Indeed, it perhaps made his love easier to give, for the relationship could be conducted safely, in the splendid isolation of his own feelings. (P. 428)

The other side of this unusual situation was that, even when the other person loved Wittgenstein (as Skinner evidently did), their feelings did not make much difference to him either.

It is only with his last important love, that for Ben Richards, that he seems to have developed some recognition of the other person's feelings. In August 1946, he wrote in his notebook: "It is the mark of a *true* love that one thinks of what the *other* person suffers. For he suffers too, is also a poor devil" (Monk, p. 492). Sad as it is to see this recorded as if it were a new discovery, it does seem as though Wittgenstein, now approaching sixty, was at last getting the hang of these things. Remarks like these are the thoughts of a philosopher who has taken his solipsism too seriously. So, too, is the shocking remark, from a discussion Wittgenstein had with one of his nephews who

had made “some remark of a pacifist tendency” about the First World War: “It saved my life;” he said, “I don’t know what I’d have done without it” (McGuinness, p. 204). This may well have been true as a piece of autobiography, but, true or not, only a solipsist could think of it as even part of a reply to pacifism, ignoring as it does all the other “poor devils”. When Leavis talks of Wittgenstein’s “immense superiority” to Russell “as a person—as a centre of life, sentience and human responsibility” (Rhees, p. 67), one wonders whether his values or his knowledge of Wittgenstein is at fault.

Leavis’s acquaintance with Wittgenstein was certainly slight enough. Monk estimates they met only four or five times (p. xvii). The “Memories of Wittgenstein” (Rhees, pp. 63–81) that Leavis spun out of these meetings seem to be largely moral in intent. Unlike Russell, we are told pointedly, Wittgenstein “was a complete human being, subtle, self-critical and un-self-exalting” (p. 69).<sup>12</sup> Leavis spends much time trying to clear Wittgenstein of the (surely undeniable) charge that he was arrogant. “When, in characterizing him,” Leavis says prissily, “one touches on traits that seem to entail adverse or limiting judgments, one is not intending to impute defects in his potential full humanity” (p. 69). With Leavis packing punches like this, we might end up thinking the man had faults! No wonder Leavis goes on to lament that he hasn’t “the opportunities that the scope and complexity of a novel would give for being just to Wittgenstein” (pp. 69–70).

I suspect that Duffy has attempted to write such a novel. One ought not to judge Duffy’s book as biography, but it is difficult to avoid doing so. He has evidently read a good deal of the published literature on his main characters (Wittgenstein, Russell, Moore, and Ottoline Morrell), though McGuinness and Monk’s books appeared too late for him. Many of the events in the novel have *some* basis in fact or in what passes for it in the biographical literature. Moreover, Duffy interweaves actual letters, quoted verbatim, with complete (and often improbable) fabrications. Very little occurs in the novel exactly as it occurred in reality, and, while some of the distortions are deliberate (Duffy draws attention to one or two in his Preface), many, one suspects, arise from a misapprehension on Duffy’s part about what took place or, more seriously, about what his main characters were like. It is this which makes it so difficult to avoid reading the book as biography. The narrative runs close to the facts but continually collides with them—like a car travelling at exactly the wrong speed over a washed out dirt road.

<sup>12</sup> There is the following nice exchange in Eagleton’s novel, p. 22: “WITTGENSTEIN: ‘I want to find some community of simple folk who know nothing of the machine, who are immune to the virus of ideas.’ RUSSELL: ‘It sounds rather like Cambridge.... You’ve been talking to that fellow Leavis again.’”

There is a problem faced by all authors who attempt fictionalized biographies of intellectuals: that of how to present their work. We have in *The World as I Found It* three major philosophers who, if we are to believe in them, have to talk and think like major philosophers. The skilled novelist solves the problem by keeping the characters from talking shop. No one writing a novel about a fictional poet of genius would dream of quoting any of his poetry. Why, then, does Duffy offer us not only reams of Wittgenstein’s philosophical conversation, but what purport to be extracts from his philosophical notebooks as well, in which sentences from the *Tractatus* are muddled up with reflections of the utmost banality (pp. 306–7)?

Duffy is even bold enough to tell us what criticisms Wittgenstein made of Russell’s logic, making a hopeless hash of the theory of types in the process (pp. 188–9). In fact, of their earliest discussions we know only what Russell passed on to Ottoline Morrell. From this source, however, we do know that Wittgenstein at one point defended the views that no empirical propositions are knowable and that the only things that exist are asserted propositions.<sup>13</sup> Few conclusions about Wittgenstein’s philosophy can be drawn from these remarks, except that the second of them is based on Russell’s account of asserted propositions in *The Principles of Mathematics* (pp. 35, 48–9). Duffy could have avoided disaster simply by sticking to what was given. Instead he conflates the two claims by putting into Wittgenstein’s mouth the neo-Derridean doctrine that “nothing was knowable but spoken propositions” (p. 75), unaware that “asserted propositions” in Russell’s sense are not spoken propositions—indeed that one couldn’t speak a proposition in Russell’s sense at all. Finally, when he comes to Wittgenstein’s famous doctoral *viva* conducted by Russell and Moore (which Duffy moves, with good effect, to Russell’s school at Beacon Hill), instead of discreetly leading the reader away from the keyhole and leaving the philosophers to get on with it once things get started, Duffy (astoundingly) attempts to report the entire examination. The result is just embarrassing—wrong, totally, in manner and content.

Why Duffy falls into so obvious a trap is hard to imagine since it seems unlikely that he intended his novel to give a just estimate of Wittgenstein’s philosophy so much as one of his character. He takes few pains to do justice to the people around Wittgenstein. Certainly Russell and Moore come out badly. Moore appears as a bumbling unworldly dunce, shepherded through life by his much younger wife. His famous “childlike innocence”, in which Wittgenstein could find no basis for moral praise (Malcolm, p. 116), appears childish rather than childlike. Duffy’s caricature of Russell is similarly one-

<sup>13</sup> See Russell’s letters to Morrell, 2 and 7 November 1911, nos. 241 and 247, respectively.

dimensional. Duffy's Russell has two interests: sex and publicity. The former, of course, is a conventional complaint, the second is Leavis's. It is true that Russell sought publicity on various occasions in his life: when he needed it to make money or to support a cause he thought important. Duffy seems to have no conception of the class from which Russell came, which could have publicity for the asking, but which rarely asked because to do so was vulgar.

Of all the minor characters only D. H. Lawrence gets sympathetic treatment—another Leavisite choice. Lawrence's ideas survive well in this novel—they being already so muddled that no novelist could muddle them further—except that, in an inexplicable lapse into lucidity on page 290, Lawrence provides Russell with both the title and one of the key ideas of *Principles of Social Reconstruction*.

Duffy's book would not suffer as a novel, if he had caricatured Russell and Moore in order to make them foils for the charismatic brilliance of Wittgenstein. But, unfortunately, Duffy's Wittgenstein, though rather more complex than his foils, still falls far short of the real thing. A closer reading of Leavis might even have helped him here. There is, in Duffy's Wittgenstein, little of that sense of personal moral responsibility that is "courageous enough to forget codes and to defy law and codified morality and justice", which Leavis extols in his essay on Conrad's story "The Secret Sharer".<sup>14</sup> Yet this might have proved a useful point of entry for Duffy's exploration of Wittgenstein's character. For Wittgenstein sought to live by an ethic of personal moral integrity—which (as Monk points out, p. 44) confused Russell, whose own moral sense could never ignore civic values. Leavis's reading of Conrad is not exactly the right starting point for a consideration of Wittgenstein's morals in 1911,<sup>15</sup> but it is closer than the benign liberalism Duffy imputes to him.

In the third and by far the most successful section of his novel, set around a visit by Moore and Wittgenstein to Russell's school at Beacon Hill, Duffy sanitizes Wittgenstein's personality by projecting many of his most offensive characteristics into the bizarre character of Max, a God-fearing, antisemitic, Ramboesque psychopath, formerly of the Austrian army, who ends the novel as an SS officer. This dramatic device, oddly enough, works quite well, but further distances Duffy's Wittgenstein from the real thing. Generally Duffy's milquetoast Wittgenstein is considerably less interesting than the real one. Before World War I he appears in Cambridge as a pleasant, anxiously polite young man with a difficult father and problems about his sexuality. There is

<sup>14</sup> Cf. F. R. Leavis, "The Secret Sharer", in *Anna Karenina and Other Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), pp. 111–20; the quotation is from p. 114.

<sup>15</sup> For its real sources see Monk, Chap. 1; or for a source available to Duffy, S. Toulmin and A. Janik, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

little of the fierce independence and quarrelsomeness which made him such a trial to Pinsent, or got him expelled from Johnson's classes and tried even Russell's patience. The picture of schoolboy heroism that Duffy paints of Wittgenstein's conduct in the war is a similarly conventionalized version of the truth. Wittgenstein confronts rough, cynical, and antisemitic working class troops with all the ineffectual bewilderment of a well-meaning middle-class teacher confronting a rowdy class in an inner-city problem school. The contrast between Duffy's conventional picture and the reality revealed from Wittgenstein's notebooks, especially by McGuinness's biography, is striking.

There are memorable scenes in the novel. The last days of Karl Wittgenstein and the visit to Beacon Hill (until the disastrous *viva* begins) are well done. So, too, is the picture of Moore the trencherman, ploughing his way glutinously through a Trinity College meal, and of David Pinsent's school experiences. Duffy manages to capture two peculiarly British horrors: public school sports and institutional cooking. But elsewhere his grasp of the locale seems weak. Zeppelins hardly crossed the Channel to King's Lynn on their way to London, as a glance at a map would show (p. 294). And I doubt the Wittgensteins were reduced to eating horsemeat during World War I (p. 330). It was, after all, a good war for iron and steel, and Karl Wittgenstein had prudently transferred his assets outside Austria before he died.

These strictures cannot be laid against Terry Eagleton's little fantasy, which departs completely from the facts to have Wittgenstein leave Russell in Cambridge in 1916 to go to Galway with Nikolai Bakhtin (the brother of the famous Leningrad literary theorist). In real life Nikolai Bakhtin moved to Britain after the Revolution and became Reader in Linguistics at Birmingham. In the novel they meet up with James Connolly, the Irish revolutionary leader on the run from savage British repression after the Easter Uprising. Holed up on the Galway Coast, Bakhtin the hedonist, Wittgenstein the ascetic, and Connolly the revolutionary, are set up for an often amusing conversational novel on revolution, oppression, the value of philosophy and the meaning of life. Eagleton is much more successful than Duffy at weaving the real Wittgenstein's thoughts together with those of his fictional counterpart. The result bears little comparison to Wittgenstein's actual thought, however. For example, Wittgenstein speaks with a Dostoyevskian passion about the sufferings of the innocent—it sounds convincing, but is unrelated to the reality of Wittgenstein's implacable self-absorption.

It seems to me that Russell came as close as anyone to the key to Wittgenstein's personality when he said "he had the pride of Lucifer" (*Auto.* 2: 100). The pride is perhaps most strikingly evident in the episode of his "confession". The confession, as Monk says (p. 371), was intended to "dismantle" his pride by admitting his sins to those closest to him. Fania Pascal was one of

the chosen recipients, and by her account (Rhees, pp. 47–52) the exercise was an elaborately self-stultifying speech-act. The event occurred in 1937 after one of Wittgenstein's stays in Norway. He rang Pascal up requesting a meeting as a matter of urgency. It was a bad time for Pascal (one of her children was sick), and she tried to put it off. Wittgenstein insisted that it couldn't wait. How could anyone suppose that the care of sick children was more urgent than saving Wittgenstein's soul from pride? The confession itself was a prepared statement delivered in such a formal manner as to preclude any emotional response from Pascal. But the most ironical touch occurred when Pascal burst out impatiently: "What is it you want? You want to be perfect?" Wittgenstein "pulled himself up proudly, saying 'Of course I want to be perfect'" (p. 50). One is reminded of one of Benjamin Franklin's maxims which greatly amused Russell: "Be humble—imitate Jesus and Socrates."

The two biographies of Wittgenstein left me wondering why I continue to find him so impressive. Of course, he was intellectually impressive. That can't be denied, but, even so, it can be exaggerated. There seems to have been nothing in Wittgenstein's whole career at all comparable to Russell's glorious two decades from 1894 to 1914, a period in which Russell formulated three widely different philosophical positions of unprecedented rigour (and almost unprecedented scope), found extremely subtle but compelling objections to two of them, and faltered only when Wittgenstein found the fatal objections to the third.<sup>16</sup> It is chiefly the younger Wittgenstein—Russell's *W1* (*MPD*, p. 216)—that I find intellectually impressive. *W11* was known to bluster and—much worse—on occasion to waffle.

Consider, for example, the famous letter to Russell written in the early summer of 1913:

I can now express my objection to your theory of judgment exactly: I believe it is obvious that, from the prop[osition] "*A* judges that (say) *a* is in the Rel[ation] *R* to *b*", if correctly analysed, the prop[osition] "*aRb*. v.  $\neg$ *aRb*" must follow directly without the use of any other premiss. This condition is not fulfilled by your theory. (*Letters*, p. 23)

The objection is subtle, devastating, and absolutely precise; a surgical strike at its best. Compare this with what he has to say of Russell's paradox in his lectures in 1939, by which time he was more self-indulgent, his audience less critical and (it seems hard to deny) his mind less sharp:

<sup>16</sup> Much of Russell's work during this extraordinarily fertile period is unknown because he never published it, and what he did publish generally falls outside the rather narrow limits of the (well-entrenched) Russellian canon. It is especially galling, in view of this, to find Russell dismissed as a shallow publicist by the likes of Duffy.

Take Russell's contradiction. There are concepts which we call predicates—"man", "chair", and "wolf" are predicates, but "Jack" and "John" are not. Some predicates apply to themselves and others don't. For instance "chair" is not a chair, "wolf" is not a wolf, but "predicate" is a predicate. You might say this is bosh. And in a sense it is. (Monk, pp. 416–17)

If the remark in 1913 was surgical bombing, that of 1939 is like the British in the Falklands: shooting at every sheep that moves, and more for the benefit of the newspapers than for any strategic gain. What, exactly, does "this" refer to in the second last line. Is it "bosh" to say that the word "chair" is not a chair or that the word "word" is a word? And if so, is it also bosh to say that the planet Mars is not a star? We need, even on Wittgenstein's own terms, to know where the bosh begins; and, in my view, we need to know why.

There is, however, also a personal quality to Wittgenstein that makes him impressive—for all his arrogance, self-absorption, misogyny and tyrannical treatment of his friends. His independence is certainly attractive. I warm to anyone who uses chemical beakers instead of cups. But it is, perhaps, the austerity of his life that impresses me most. There is a lovely story that Monk tells of when Wittgenstein and Skinner went to stay with Maurice Drury, a former student of Wittgenstein's, on the west coast of Ireland, around the time when Wittgenstein and Skinner were thinking of going to live in Russia. Drury gave them a rather large dinner which ended with suet pudding and treacle. Afterwards, they got to talking about Russia, and Skinner, to explain his desire to go there, said he wanted to do something "fiery". Wittgenstein thought that was a dangerous motive. But Drury said: "I think Francis means that he doesn't want to take the treacle with him." Wittgenstein was delighted: "Oh, that is an excellent expression: I understand what that means entirely. No, we don't want to take the treacle with us" (p. 343). The world, of course, is full of people without treacle, but those who leave it behind are worth knowing.