

# SPIRITED SATIRE: THE FICTION OF BERTRAND RUSSELL

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Among the writers contributing to the resurgence of satiric fiction in the twentieth century, Bertrand Russell is an unexpected figure. His reputation rests primarily, of course, on his contributions to logic and on his efforts to make philosophy scientific—that is, to identify its methods with those of the sciences. These interests seem far removed from literary endeavours. Even his Nobel Prize for Literature does not characterize Russell as a fiction-writer, for the prize recognized the literary value of his philosophical and social commentary addressed to the general public. The award citation described his work for this audience in these words: “varied and significant writing in which he champions humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought”.<sup>1</sup> In fact, at the time Russell received the Prize (1950), his fiction-writing for publication still lay ahead. Then in the next decade, when past the age of eighty, Russell produced three volumes of short stories. Today, however, some forty years later, while his popular essays and books continue to attract wide readership, the stories are still little known. Perhaps, as he himself declared, both publishers and readers have been reluctant to accept him as a writer of fiction, preferring to emphasize his role as a social prophet (*Auto.* 3: 34). Yet the stories reward thoughtful readers.

This positive assessment admits the limitations of Russell’s fiction, which lacks the keen and confident mastery of his expository prose. He hardly is a skilled architect of plot or a creator of substantial char-

<sup>1</sup> Irving I. Polonoff, “Bertrand Russell”, in *British Winners of the Nobel Literary Prize*, ed. Walter E. Kidd (Norman, Okla.: U. of Oklahoma P., 1973), pp. 171–2.

acters. His stories tend to demonstrate ideas by means of flat figures rather than to illustrate compelling human situations or the complexities of human nature. Critical response to Russell's stories, while varied, has included some restrained praise and negative judgments. Indeed, one literary critic declares that the fiction "merits ... oblivion" and that its publication is "injudicious".<sup>2</sup> But such criticism fails to consider Russell's intention to work by his own method within the context of traditional satire and fails to reflect on the ways his stories turn satire's possibilities to good account.

Influenced by wide reading in earlier eras, Russell tended toward a formal, elegant style in accordance with past manners; Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson once praised it as having "the quality of the best seventeenth-century prose, which is the highest praise one can give."<sup>3</sup> Temperamentally drawn to satire, Russell admired its skilful practitioners, particularly the Enlightenment figure Voltaire. Russell evidenced enjoyment of seventeenth-century wit when he parodied another French writer in "Newly Discovered Maxims of La Rochefoucauld".<sup>4</sup>

Satire produced during the Victorian era, in which Russell spent his first three decades, generally reflected the period's prevailing belief in progress. Russell, despite many changes in thought over his long life, considered himself as remaining, in some way, characteristically Victorian in personality: "I grew up in the full flood of Victorian optimism, and although the easy cheerfulness of that time is no longer possible, something remains within me of the hopefulness that then was easy" (*PfM*, p. 8). This lingering effect may explain why Russell, when he turned to short stories, frequently employed a humorous, even playful, approach characteristic of that earlier time of "easy cheerfulness".

As massive new problems jostled each other early in the twentieth

<sup>2</sup> S. P. Rosenbaum, "The Logic of a Literary Symbol", in *Russell in Review: the Bertrand Russell Centenary Celebrations at McMaster University, October 12-14 1972*, ed. J. E. Thomas and K. Blackwell (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, Hakkert, 1976), p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Letter, 21 July 1912, quoted in *The Collected Stories of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Barry Feinberg (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 10. References to this work hereafter are cited in the text as "CS".

<sup>4</sup> In *Fact and Fiction* and *CS*.

century, the age generated energetic new uses of satire. The various satirists often laced their works with a strong, even bitter, message. Russell's approach, while lighter, likewise allowed him to treat anxieties and dreads. Seemingly originating in his sense of fun, the fiction was inspired by Russell's deepening need to speak in a new way of the problems of the times, as the *Autobiography* explains:

The writing of these stories was a great release of my hitherto unexpressed feelings and of thought which could not be stated without mention of fears that had no rational basis. Gradually, their scope widened. I found it possible to express in this form dangers that would have been deemed silly while only a few men recognized them. I could state in fiction ideas which I half believed in but had no good solid grounds for believing. In this way it was possible to warn of dangers that might or might not occur in the near future. (3: 31-2)

The resulting stories boast at least three virtues: insight into Russell as a thinker; illustration of traditional satire's influence on a contemporary writer; and original contribution to the genre, in the small but clever form Russell called the "nightmare" and deemed appropriate to our age.

Russell held imaginative composition in high regard. While he intended his social and political writings to be strongly persuasive, he never held fiction to a narrowly didactic purpose: "To appreciate *Hamlet* will not be much use in practical life", he commented, "except in those rare cases where a man is called upon to kill his uncle."<sup>5</sup> Russell's respect for the imagination appears in his comment in "Notes for a speech to the Authors' Club, 11 February 1953": "Fiction emancipates man from the tyranny of fact & liberates the Imagination. Imagination, not slavery to fact, is the source of whatever is good in human life" (*CS*, p. 5).

Those words were written just after Russell had published the first volume of stories, *Satan in the Suburbs* (1953). He followed this book the next year with a second group of stories, *Nightmares of Eminent Persons* and, later, with *Fact and Fiction* (1961), a medley containing

<sup>5</sup> *On Education, Especially in Early Childhood* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926), p. 22.

some additional "Nightmares". For readers of his social and political commentaries, this venture seems a natural development of Russell's turn of mind. Satiric wit is a chief attribute of his style, one that surely helped him attract and hold a wide reading public, especially as that wit seems to invite readers into an inner circle of shared ironic vision. Russell himself declares: "I should not wish to be thought in earnest only when I am solemn."<sup>6</sup> The comment and the nature of his fictive production suggest that Russell's "muse" was the strong psychological complex that manifests itself as the satiric spirit.

Before his first story appeared in 1951, Russell tested the waters by publishing it anonymously in a London magazine, *Go*, where a contest to guess its authorship brought no winner. The story was "The Corsican Ordeal of Miss X", later included in *Satan in the Suburbs*. Russell describes it as a warning to his secretary against the perils of a holiday in Corsica. In this fanciful tale, Russell adopts a frolicsome tone, telling us that with this little story he held in mind two works, the gothic romance *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and the romantic satire *Zuleika Dobson*, Max Beerbohm's extravagant burlesque of Oxford life and Edwardian attitudes (*CS*, p. 11). Written in 1910, this zany book—whose beautiful heroine wreaked havoc upon the hearts of Oxford's masculine population—was such a huge popular success that, according to Beerbohm's bibliographer, whole printings of it were "read to pieces."<sup>7</sup> In "Corsican Ordeal", Russell gives Miss X adventures much like those of Emily St. Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*: vendettas, assaults, and encounters with mountain bandits. But Russell's conclusion, unlike Mrs. Radcliffe's, does not present the

<sup>6</sup> *Bertrand Russell's Best: Silhouettes in Satire*, ed. Robert E. Egner (London: Unwin, 1958), p. 7.

The acknowledgment that in his work meaning is likely to be embodied in wit undoubtedly touches on a factor in Russell's appeal as a writer, but his practice of wit does not always receive applause. Some readers consider satire inappropriate in scholarly works; in Russell's canon an example that has met criticism on this basis is *A History of Western Philosophy*. Even Russell's ever-devoted first wife, Alys, wrote of the *History*: "It is very good reading, especially in the character sketches, but they are too full of sly fun, like Lytton Strachey's 'the dirty ears of the cardinals,' slightly malicious & very Bertiean ..." (letter to Bernard Berenson, 11 Jan. 1946, Villa I Tatti, Florence, Italy; copy in RA REC. ACQ. 23).

<sup>7</sup> A. E. Gallatin and L. M. Oliver, *A Bibliography of the Works of Max Beerbohm* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952), p. 22.

traditional marriage of young lovers; it rests, instead, like that of *Zuleika Dobson*, on the parodying of a romantic convention, a heroic death on the field of honour.

In contrast, the narrative "Zahatopolk" gives a complex, serious treatment to the theme so lightly treated in "Corsican Ordeal", the suppression of human beings by rigid social institutions. This theme of society's restrictiveness first became significant in Russell's *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (1916). Using Platonic dialogue, the story employs for its central, questing character the name of Socrates' "instructress", Diotima, but puts these materials, together with allusions to Blake, Shaw, Swift and others, into new patterns. Within these patterns, we recognize elements in Russell's thought that Ronald Jager discusses in "Russell and Religion": his wistful search for justification for emotions of awe, his residual Puritan ethic, and his use of a perspective that attempts to transcend human limitations.<sup>8</sup>

Exemplifying this use, Russell opens his story in the Incas' restored hall at Cuzco, where enormous mountain peaks surround the community, isolating it in the way characteristic of utopias, and further distances the community from us by setting the time forty centuries into the future. We must see our own time as the Past, a way of thinking favoured by Russell in his early essays and recommended by him as a means to increase wisdom and diminish sorrow. Professor Driuzdustades, lecturing to the hundred best students of Peru, comments on our age in a way that is literal from his viewpoint and ironic from ours. His society is one of world domination based on "the innate superiority of the Red Man" and the "smooth perfection" of the system instituted by the "divine" Zahatopolk (*CS*, p. 83). This society looks back on ours as an era in which the Graeco-Judean-Christian world was being replaced because its culture was becoming invalid. While certainly a critic of our present world structure, Russell makes a point against this future "utopian" society: the professor is "dry as dust", an inhabitant of a dead world. Preaching the myth of Zahatopolk, he occupies a wasteland where there is no fountain; more than boring, he is unable to inspire, to be a source of wisdom. Russell

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted for the line of thinking in the discussion of this story to Jager's insights throughout "Russell and Religion", in *Russell in Review*.

suggests a vision of wasteland like T. S. Eliot's, but challenges the confidence of those who, like Eliot and others, believe social ills can be ameliorated by dogmatizing mythic views. Speaking to a subject important to other writers of the era, such as Thomas Mann, Russell warns against making even science a mythos.

The necessity of keeping a living, progressive, and evolutionary process at work in the affairs of humanity becomes Russell's chief theme in this story. Because its targets are abstract (for example, the myth-making that tends toward racism, nationalism, or rigid orthodoxy) and its themes are grand and solemn (the necessity of our facing continuing change and employing the historical imagination), this story bears a heavy cargo of philosophical issues. Despite Russell's obvious efforts to provide and connect symbols, the tale is probably too complex and allegorical to entertain modern readers, and it satirizes what may be too many targets. Yet as it breaks apart and reassembles the ingredients of past and present cultures, "Zahatopolk" scores a technical success, the able use of multiple narrators, and, more than the other stories, offers a strong and complex sense of Russell's own religious quest, an emphasis on what he earlier termed "the life of spirit" (*PSR*, p. 8).

As these stories were taking form, Russell was also working on a non-fiction book, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (1954). He states that he wrote it to answer criticism that he had largely ignored ethics. This gap in his philosophical writing was, indeed, the result of his having come "to agree with Santayana that there is no such thing as ethical *knowledge*. Nevertheless," he explains in the *Autobiography*, "ethical concepts have been of enormous importance in history, and I could not but feel that a survey of human affairs which omits ethics is inadequate and partial" (3: 28). The most important aspect of the book *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* is, Russell continues, "the impossibility of reconciling ethical feelings with ethical doctrines. In the depths of my mind, this dark frustration brooded constantly. I tried to intersperse lighter matters into my thoughts, especially by writing stories which contained an element of fantasy" (3: 30). Thus we see as Russell's creative motivation the wish to cheer himself; in spinning fantasies, he was coping with the problems of his rational life. The creation of stories provided an escape from the discomfort of ethical dualism and revealed the potential for sharing his ethical plight

with others.

This brooding, "dark frustration" is thematic in what is probably Russell's most successful piece of fiction, the long title story of *Satan in the Suburbs*. Mixing fantasy with satire, as in "Corsican Ordeal", Russell manages a more workable fusion. "Satan in the Suburbs" belongs to the genre of science fiction, utilizing as it does the familiar figure of the evil scientist, here a Dr. Mallako, whose diabolical machinations create a semi-allegorical plot. The story had its genesis in an actual event, Russell's meeting in Mortlake with a man who, upon seeing him, crossed himself and walked on the other side of the street. Given by accident, the funny happening offered fictive possibilities. The story opens with a clash of meanings, the nameless narrator's statement "I live in Mortlake." If we miss the implications of death in the prefix [*Mort-*], menace is reinforced by the hint of *murder* in *Murdoch* (Dr. Mallako's first name) and the prefix [*mal-*], stressing the bad in *Mallako*.

Surrounded by gray banality in Mortlake, the narrator one day discovers Dr. Mallako's new brass plate on the gate of a villa he passes every day. The words intrigue him:

HORRORS MANUFACTURED HERE

Apply Dr. Murdoch Mallako

With its defiant gleam, the plate is a lure to the restless and bored. It hints of psychological horrors that touch each person's individual fears or risk his individual dreams, flashing an appeal to the gambler's instinct, a message made explicit in Dr. Mallako's response to a letter of inquiry. The doctor preys on the desire to escape from the ordinary: in the hope of providing "thrills and excitement" for his patients, Mallako has entered his "wholly novel profession" (*CS*, p. 44). But his profession is perhaps not novel at all; it may be the ancient one of the Tempter, and the story's real horror may be that the "victim of uniformity" is enticed into becoming Mallako's victim.

Dr. Mallako's "innocents" are the inhabitants of Mortlake, typical citizens of a contemporary suburb, whose typicality is underscored by Russell's naming: Mr. Abercrombie, Mr. Beauchamp, Mr. Cartwright, Mrs. Elleker, and the peripheral Mr. Gosling. Suggesting "Mr. A", "Mr. B", "Mr. C" from a problem in algebra, they are semi-allegorical

figures whose naming mocks their individuality just as it underlines the universality of their temptations. One after the other—in nearly alphabetical order—they are drawn into the net of circumstances Dr. Mallako spreads. Even the narrator, at first merely a spectator—a “scientific observer”—is at length entrapped. Despite initial resistance, he meets at last his own “horror”, the need to become a murderer, the slayer of Dr. Mallako.

Obsessed by his compulsion, the narrator takes the reader with him: the reader sees a “logical necessity” in the destruction of Dr. Mallako, the Devil. But what if he is only an arrogant and eccentric medical man? Like Milton in a greater temptation scene, Russell successfully portrays temptation and a Fall that involves the reader, while adding a contemporary note of moral confusion. And his narrator not only repeats the weakness of Adam, but also the homicidal criminality of Cain: Mallako and the narrator are brother scientists. When they become competitors as inventors of a death-dealing device, the chief difference that separates them is their attitude toward the human race. The narrator’s problem becomes a series of questions for the reader. Is Dr. Mallako only, as French literary critic Phillippe Devaux calls him, “a disguised misanthrope”?<sup>9</sup> Can the modern reader believe otherwise? But what is Mallako’s classification when his scientific discoveries have given him the power of universal life and death? An integral part of our response relates to Mallako’s occupation. We may see him in three ways: as an innovative medical practitioner literally at work in the suburbs, who perhaps playfully, but surely irresponsibly, releases the id of each patient to the regret of all; as an advocate of the cult of irrationality, who is internalized by the narrator into a nightmare figure, appearing in bad dreams “sometimes with hooves and tail and with his brass plate worn as a breastplate” (CS, p. 46); or—viewing the story metaphysically—as the embodiment of ultimate evil. As a force in the community, he allows Russell to satirize the thinkers who lapse from the standard of rationality and weapon-making scientists, the one contemporary group able to offer the world “Horrors Manufactured Here”.

<sup>9</sup> “Essais romanesques de Bertrand Russell”, *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 26 (1973): 560.

Dr. Mallako’s method is to implant suggestions into the minds of his patients. But the implantations are malignant, breaking down the barriers of resistance and control. The crux of the story is that Mallako’s powers can become truly Satanic—he can wreak irrevocable destruction on all humankind—only when the narrator himself in a great surrender to irrationality supplies the final knowledge that this devil-figure needs. Russell’s first-person narrator, a scientist, is a spectator as the story begins. His gradual change from observer to participant in evil provides the plot, a paradigm of the plight of the atomic scientist: no restraints remain on human bestiality except reason and self-discipline. In the aftermath of World War II and the Bomb, Russell finds the fiction of a nameless Faustian narrator and a devil-figure a device for presenting the struggle of chthonian forces against the rational. Knowing Russell’s general impatience with supernatural explanations, we understand that fiction allowed him to traffic in ideas he otherwise could not put forward. Although as a philosopher he refused to deal with the origin of evil metaphysically as part of a system, as a writer he treats the subject artistically, organizing a complex criticism of contemporary life into a unified satiric fiction. In this vision, Russell faces the great challenge of our age, the exploration of human personality, and makes that inward journey ironical. When we venture there, horrors are manufactured. As with Kurtz in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*—a work Russell much admired—the heart of darkness in “Satan in the Suburbs” is each character’s own. And we all live in Mortlake.

If we reject the metaphysical level of the story, we must read it on the level of the psychological. We are then led to reflect that the narrator ends his communication with us from a mental hospital, where he now resides, along with his “dear Mrs. Ellerker”, “wondering whether there will ever be in the world more than two sane people.” Here we feel the ironic distance between author and character as Russell implies an ideal of rationality above the actions of the well-intentioned, but murderous, scientist-narrator and the ladylike, but indirectly murderous, woman he cannot save. They are ironically “at home” in the universe of their mental hospital, where an ironic order rules; once a year, they are allowed to meet at a “well-patrolled dance” for the “better behaved patients” (CS, p. 81). This vision barely skirts the tragic, placing on human individuality and participation such high

costs as crime and madness, but it is ultimately a complex, satiric vision.

Russell's fascination with the discoveries of the inner self increases in the set of stories called *Nightmares of Eminent Persons*. These complex little fables are his most distinctive contribution to fiction, and Russell seems to have special zest in creating them, as he indicates by writing a dozen. Their format is a pointed way to comment on current issues or philosophical ideas. Each "nightmare" involves a dream sequence, set into a frame of waking reality; thus each combines reality with fantasy. Taken together, they allow Russell to express his interest in the forces of the unconscious and his fear that these may lead to irrational modes that endanger humankind. The genre permits comment on timely issues and specific personalities, but such subjects may become dated, as we see from the titles "Dean Acheson's Nightmare", "Stalin's Nightmare", and "Eisenhower's Nightmare". Fortunately for today's readers, Russell also used the form to satirize types, such as "The Existentialist", "The Theologian", and "The Mathematician". A quick look at two "nightmares" indicates the range to which Russell can take their common theme, the opposition of intellect and emotions.

The fable "The Mathematician's Nightmare", for example, ironically contrasts the diminished world of modern mathematical "reality" with the possibility of mathematics as religious experience or "vision". It presents a fictional mathematician, Professor Squarepunt, who is a friend of Sir Arthur Eddington, the twentieth-century physicist, astronomer, and evolutionist who tried to reconcile science and religion. The story introduces mathematics as a great cosmic dance, a ballet of all the numbers, in which two, the prime number 137 and the irrational number Pi, play extraordinary roles. One charm of this story is Russell's ability to personify abstractions: "Pi's face was masked, and it was understood that none could behold it and live. But piercing eyes looked out from the mask, inexorable, cold, and enigmatic" (CS, p. 236). Number 137 (which held magical properties for Eddington as does 666 for some Biblical interpreters) represents the lone protester who stands against the mistakes of organized society, a "blasphemer" against the tradition that mathematics embodies eternal, Platonic verities. When Squarepunt at last turns the members to mist—in an action like that of Lewis Carroll's Alice when she disperses the court

members as "nothing but a pack of cards"—he cries, "Avaunt! You are only Symbolic conveniences!" As he wakes from his nightmare, he cries, "So much for Plato!" (CS, p. 239), and the remarks resonate with the resolution of Russell's early Platonic dualism while the story itself suggests the problematic relation of the individualist and authority.

Dismissing Plato so airily, however, is more easily said in this little story than done in Russell's actual philosophical development. From his autobiographical writings, we know that for decades the Platonic world of absolute, timeless ideas exercised enormous appeal for him and that he saw mathematics as a structure in that world, offering perfection and delight. In *A History of Western Philosophy*, Russell discusses this association of mathematics with Plato's thought; suggests that it is an element that originated in the teachings of Pythagoras; and treats Plato's pervasive influence on later thinkers, including philosophers, scientists, and theologians. Not until World War I changed him, Russell tells us in "The Retreat from Pythagoras", did he lose "the feeling that only Plato's world of ideas gives access to the 'real' world" (MPD, p. 213).

An illustration of Plato's influence appears in the outline for an unwritten story.<sup>10</sup> The outline is entitled "A Judge's Nightmare: Socrates through the Ages" and dated 20 January 1953. (See the Appendix for the text of the manuscript.) Although fragmentary, the sketch is rich in implications, many revealing Platonic influence: like Plato, Russell has chosen a literary form to present his philosophical ideas and make us think about thinking—here, thinking about justice. Further, he illustrates the abstract ideal of Justice—*one* Justice—through its opposite, Injustice, by taking the Platonic idea of the *one* Injustice (the essence of what Injustice is) and giving it fictional concreteness. In the outline he proposes to begin his little narrative with the last speech of Plato's revered Socrates from the *Phaedo*, thus presenting the level of political practice as Plato saw it in his time. For the body of the story, Russell projects a series of "incarnations" of Injustice, with the trial and execution of Socrates followed by a listing of other martyrs, persons similarly convicted throughout Western history of trumped-up, false, or absurd charges. From his note "*muta-*

<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Blackwell for bringing this document to my attention.

*tis mutandis*", we surmise that Russell intended the examples to present permutations and combinations of social and political injustice.

Russell opens his outline with the cryptic statement "Pythagoras right, not Orpheus". He probably refers to the push toward the rational that Pythagoras gave to Orphic religious tradition in Greek thought. Orpheus, Russell tells us, was "a dim but interesting figure", perhaps "actual", perhaps an "imaginary hero ... said to have been a reformer." His teaching "spiritualized" the lusty, drunken, sometimes brutal and violent practices that characterized the worship of Bacchus, the ancient god of wine and revelry. Orpheus's disciples attempted to purify their rites to attain union with the god through mental, not physical, intoxication (*HWP*, p. 16).

This tendency toward mysticism, important in Greek temperament, Russell explains, characterized Pythagoras; but he was also strongly intellectual, and his intense contemplation developed into mathematical insights. He was, in Russell's amusing description, "a combination of Einstein and Mrs. Eddy" (*HWP*, p. 31). Like Orpheus, Pythagoras acted as a reformer, reinforcing the mysticism of Orphic religion with the rigor of mathematics and passing this combination of elements onward to Plato. The influence helped to shape Plato's doctrine of the world of ideas and to establish the ongoing trend in religious philosophy toward a blending with reasoning. It is easy to see why Russell—drawn to both mysticism and logic—attributes immense influence on intellectual history to Pythagoras as well as to Plato.

Reading this outline makes the reader wish for the finished story. For one thing, just what Russell intends by the phrase the "last speech" from the *Phaedo* is arguable. Does he mean the long, somewhat digressive, but ultimately informative dialogical total that presents Socrates' faith in absolutes and thus defines his relation to the Law, creating his impressive final portrait? It is this acceptance of the Law as ideal that inspires Socrates' conception of morally responsible citizenship and prevents his effort to escape or even to postpone death: "I should only be ridiculous in my own eyes for sparing and saving a life which is already forfeit." Does he have in mind Socrates' "tale" of the soul's sojourning after death at *Phaedo* 110b–115a? Or does Russell refer simply to the haunting little passage, "Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt?" If the whole dialogue of the *Phaedo* is meant, the portrait reveals Socrates' equanimity and

integrity in this situation and makes credible Phaedo's claim that Socrates, of all men he knew, was "the wisest and justest and best". If only the very last words are meant, Russell's explanation of the passage adds an illuminating stroke to the picture: "Men paid a cock to Asclepius when they recovered from an illness, and Socrates has recovered from life's fitful fever" (*HWP*, p. 142). In any case, the theme of the story appears to be that although Injustice occurs, the proper philosophical outlook both ennobles and liberates. In a relevant discussion of Spinoza, Russell comments: "On the last day of his life he was entirely calm, not exalted, like Socrates in the *Phaedo*, but conversing, as he would on any other day, about matters of interest to his interlocutor." Such an outlook, one that meditates on life, not death, Russell points out, liberates "men from the tyranny of fear" (*HWP*, p. 574). The outlook also permits its possessor to maintain calm in the face of accusations such as those levelled at both Socrates and Russell—of being a gadfly to society and a corrupter of youth.

It could almost be claimed that the outline stands as a story itself. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates is talking about the immortality of the soul and about reincarnation. Russell's vision in the outline reinforces these themes by implying the incarnation of the soul as Socrates would have had it. The process is not finished in human history, and neither is the story.<sup>11</sup>

In demonstrating Socrates' (and Plato's) theme, Russell has created a modernist "plot": open-ended, unfinished. Perhaps Russell didn't finish the story because he was engaged in immediate, practical struggles for world safety and lost interest in battling an abstraction, in simply writing a story about the *idea* of Injustice. Or perhaps he left the story unfinished because he never resolved his own "dialogue with Plato"; in the 1950s, he held, despite early platonic leanings, that Plato as a philosopher should be treated "with as little reverence as if he were a contemporary English or American advocate of totalitarianism" (*HWP*, p. 105). Possibly, Russell did not finish the story because, in the end, he could not envision a stoppage to humankind's repetition of injustice. The plot left him with the substantiated thesis that the maltreatment and persecution of good persons will continue. But this

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Nadine Dyer, personal communication.

concept conflicts with Russell's lifelong efforts toward progress. For readers, however, this listing of the multiplicity and variety of recurring injustice in human affairs shocks us into assent. Injustice *can* occur: it can happen to *us*.

The outline of "A Judge's Nightmare" furnishes new evidence of Russell's literary interest in this small, but powerful, narrative form. Even the sketch reveals his strong irony; his cleverness and wit; his skilful consciousness of his audience; and his wealth of information. Perhaps these speculations on the story, lengthier than the outline itself, suggest an important characteristic of the genre of the "Nightmare", displayed even in fragmentary form: each small story's astonishing density.

One difficulty with the "nightmares" may be that remarkable quality. In its few pages, a "nightmare" may compress technical material, moral concerns, parody and other literary allusion, caricature, and the juxtaposition of the serious with the flippant. "The Psychoanalyst's Nightmare", for example, opens with a double meaning. Its subtitle is "adjustment—a fugue". The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers this definition of a fugue: "A polyphonic composition constructed on one or more short subjects or themes, which are harmonized according to the laws of counterpoint, and introduced from time to time with various contrapuntal devices." To this definition for the field of music, we may add a definition for psychiatry from *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*: "a state of psychological amnesia during which a patient seems to behave in a normal and rational way, although he cannot remember the period of time nor what he did during it; temporary flight from reality." Russell, of course, blends the meanings.

The principle of counterpoint is the chief structural method of the story. Six voices are basic: Macbeth, Lear, Othello, Antony, Romeo, and Hamlet. They belong, in fact, to the "Committee of Six" of the "Limbo Rotary Club", which is holding its annual meeting. The contrapuntal device is literally a device: "a gramophone in the interior" of the statue of Shakespeare that presides over the meeting. As in a musical fugue, a central theme appears among the voices, as each in turn takes up the subject, his experience of a state of psychological fugue, or a "flight from reality", from which condition he has been "cured" by the psychoanalyst, Dr. Bombasticus. Each describes past behaviour as the result of "fancies", "fantasies", "imagination", "excessive feel-

ings", "fantasy-passions", or "hallucinations". Each statement leads to a counter-statement from the statue of Shakespeare, so that the voice of Shakespeare is always a reply to the thematic statement of the characters. And, just as one "exposition" of a fugue must be complete, so the episode of Hamlet carries the statement and contrapuntal answer further than the other episodes carry them. The consequence is the climax of the story, the culmination of the fugal exposition, and, simultaneously, the moment of profound psychological knowledge, an epiphany.

The story's setting is crucial. By placing the characters in Limbo, Russell suggests the contemporary theme of the suspended man and alludes to the conversation of reason held in Limbo among the great poets of antiquity in Dante's *Inferno*. As the only living person among spirits, Dante is a special case. Similarly, Russell sets one voice apart, that of Hamlet. He is the "outside" voice, the one that escapes conformity (slyly suggested by the Rotary Club). Though Hamlet cries, "I never have dreams" (*CS*, p. 227), a "spark" remains in him, to be fanned into flame by the words of the Shakespearean voice.

Thus a second principal theme of this story becomes the power of language. Here, Russell adds to his targets. Besides psychoanalysts and groups of "do-gooders", he teases the "ordinary-language philosophers". This group of thinkers (ironically, descendants of Russell's own pioneering recognition in the early 1900s of the influence of language on philosophy) made up a school of analytic philosophy of the "linguistic persuasion" rather than, like Russell, of the "logical persuasion". A chief difference creating the conflict between the two groups was the value of an artificial, constructed language. Russell, after his success in developing symbolic logic in collaboration with Whitehead, wanted to advance such a language for philosophy also; his opponents held that, through its analysis, ordinary language is adequate to provide the map for reality. In his popular essay "The Cult of 'Common Usage'", Russell declares himself "totally unable to accept this view" and characterizes the school as discussing "what silly people mean when they say silly things ..." (*PfM*, p. 160). In the way that Dr. Bombasticus changes Macbeth's speech from the "stilted language that in those days he employed" to "ordinary English" (*CS*, p. 222), Russell pokes fun at the idea that natural language contains some innate knowledge justifying deference toward it as a complete



medium for meaning.

The combination of the change in language with a Freudian cure is surely deliberate, pointing up another likely target for the story, Russell's one-time pupil Ludwig Wittgenstein. As we know, Wittgenstein developed two positions toward language. With the first, that language mirrors reality, Russell was in accord, finding Wittgenstein's thesis that metaphysics does not permit meaningful problems related to his own dualistic positing in *Mysticism and Logic* of two realms of reality. In a widely quoted statement, Wittgenstein says of the mystical: "That of which we cannot speak must be assigned to silence" (*Tractatus*, 7). In the story, Russell follows Hamlet's self-recognition scene with a counter-statement in which the statue speaks Hamlet's last words from Shakespeare's drama:

"O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" exclaimed Hamlet. "To Hell with Dr. Bombasticus! To Hell with adjustment! To Hell with prudence and the praise of fools!" With this Hamlet fell in a faint.

*The statue:* "The rest is silence." (CS, pp. 227-8)

Here, Russell alludes to both the tragedy *Hamlet* and the effort of Wittgenstein to consign metaphysics to silence.

As satire, however, the story appears to be aimed more directly at Wittgenstein's later ideas. In his second position, while reiterating that metaphysical problems are not real, Wittgenstein shifts the philosopher's task to discussing why we are tempted to ask meaningless questions at all, seeing this need as "linguistic anxiety". Russell, calling Wittgenstein's later work an abnegation of talent, says it makes philosophy "at best, a slight help to lexicographers, and at worst, an idle tea-table amusement" (*MPD*, p. 230). When we consider his six characters in "The Psychoanalyst's Nightmare", we realize that, despite Russell's satirizing of Freudian standards of "normalcy", the characters as Shakespeare treated them were all possessed to some degree of a "madness" that led to death. In Russell's vignette, however, at least they can talk about their madness, discussing (as psychoanalysis does) what is reasonable in feeling and behaviour and what is not. And Hamlet, in Russell's story—after hearing the words of the statue—achieves a victory, the restoration of his perspective on life.

The concept of the "nightmares" rests on the possibility that dia-

logue can take place between the rational and irrational parts of human nature, permitting a new kind of self-knowledge. In that sense, the works of fiction are rhetorical strategies by which Russell as a rationalist was enabled to work with doubts, fears, intuitions, and human emotions. Emerging as a satirist of the smiling Horatian rather than the angry Juvenalian school of satire and trying out the familiar satiric genres (parody, fantasy, aphorisms, science fiction), Russell contributed this clever new form: ironic to express his plural perspective and envisioned as a nightmare to reflect the era's need to bring the unconscious into dialogue with reason.

Throughout his writings, Russell struggled against the belief that philosophers have to live with silence, to abandon what he called their "grave and important task" (*MPD*, p. 230). With more than sixty books and a lifetime of campaigns, lectures, and impassioned speeches, Russell manifested the belief that philosophers should voice ideas in varied areas of human inquiry. He came to believe that humankind can learn to live with perplexities, doubt, even nihilism. For him, the essential act was trying to express them all—while leaving room to articulate values. It is significant that narration, while ostensibly a minor mode of discourse for Russell, gathered strength as a method for him. Under the impetus of the World Wars and driven by fear of the Bomb, Russell turned more and more of his primary work into non-fictional social criticism and warning. Quite rightly, this lucid and powerful prose brought his chief recognition. But under these influences, in a late and dramatically new chapter in a lifetime of creativity, he also produced varied imaginative literature. Fiction allowed him to enter realms where he otherwise would have been silent.

At the very time Russell was writing "Satan in the Suburbs", W. H. Auden declared of satire:

In an age like our own it cannot flourish except in private circles as an expression of private feuds; in public life, the serious evils are so importunate that satire seems trivial and the only suitable kind of attack prophetic denunciation.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 385.



Judges say: if you were dying for a principle like Giordano Bruno.

5) Next Sacco in Boston

*Phaedo* speech

Judges say: "Martyr indeed! Do you dare compare yourself to those noble men who died for the faith in 1793"

6) Next Trotsky in Mexico

*Phaedo* speech

Judges say:

The next incarnation of Socrates, dear Reader, was born in your home town.

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