Articles

RUSSELL AND HIS OBITUARISTS

Kirk Willis
History / U. of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602–1602, USA
kw@uga.edu

Even in a life full of unusual achievement and distinction, Bertrand Russell managed the remarkable feat of dying twice—first, in China in 1921, and then, in Wales in 1970. He prompted, therefore, two distinct sets of obituaries, written five decades and much controversy apart. This paper examines both clutches of obituary notices, traces Russell's evolving public renown over the twentieth century, and makes plain how he himself set the contours of much of this memorializing thanks to his own many autobiographical writings.

INTRODUCTION

Few individuals have the good fortune to read their own obituaries; fewer still have the cheek to write them. Bertrand Russell, never short of either luck or nerve, did both. Students of Russell's reputation, therefore, have an unusually rich body of material from which to trace his evolving renown from the notices of his first, mistakenly reported "death" in China in March 1921, to his own mock "auto-obituary" published in August 1936, to the eulogies issued after his genuine death in Wales in February 1970. Stretching over 50 years of controversy and achievement, these notices give expression both to his remarkable longevity and to his dichotomous reputation as at once crank and prophet, saint and sinner, sage and rebel, socialist and Whig, logician and romantic. Although making sense of Russell is today the happy task of a growing international band of scholars, the first efforts to do so were offered by two groups of memorialists writing a dizzying five decades and six continents apart.

russell: the Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies
The Bertrand Russell Research Centre, McMaster U.
n.s. 26 (summer 2006): 5–54
ISSN 0036-01631

I

Russell's first death came in Beijing in the spring of 1921. He had ventured to China the previous summer as the result of an invitation from the Chinese Lecture Association to spend a year travelling and lecturing at the National University in Beijing—a prestigious appointment held the previous year by the American philosopher John Dewey. Just returned from several harrowing weeks in Soviet Russia and in the midst of a fraught personal crisis—his divorce from Alys Pearsall Smith was in the works and his relationship with Dora Black on the boil—Russell had seen the trip as both an opportunity to learn about a part of the world of which he had been utterly ignorant and an escape from the legal and emotional tangles awaiting him in London. Accompanied by but not yet married to Dora, Russell had arrived in Shanghai in the second week of October 1920.

As he made eloquently and repeatedly plain in *The Problem of China* (1922), in contemporary journalism and correspondence, and, later, in his *Autobiography*, Russell was entranced by virtually everything he encountered in China—its architecture, landscape, food, politics, and people. He was also pleased to be the recipient of the nearly universal acclamation of his hosts and found himself in the enviable position of being lionized as a sage, fussed over as an honoured guest, and appealed to for advice relating to every topic under the sun—from the control of the birth rate, to the best path to political and economic reform, to the future of philosophy. A man of strong opinions and considerable self-worth, Russell was both flattered and delighted to hold forth.[1]

It was in the midst of this idyll—in early March 1921—that he fell victim to bronchitis and pneumonia during a visit to the countryside near Beijing. So ill did he become—suffering from delirium and a fever of 107°—that his life was despaired of. Indeed, in the third week of March Russell's doctors at the German Hospital let it be known that his life was failing. Given his celebrity status, word of his near-hopeless

[1] Full descriptions of Russell's time in China can be found in *Auto*., 2: 124–49; Dora Russell, *The Tamarisk Tree* (London: Virago, 1977), pp. 106–46; Clark, pp. 383–97; Monk, 1: 584–604; *Papers* 15: 247–332; and Suzanne P. Ogden, "The Sage in the Inkpot: Bertrand Russell and China's Social Reconstruction in the 1920s", *Modern Asian Studies*, 16 (1982): 529–600.

condition spread quickly, and on 29 March 1921 an article appeared in a Tokyo newspaper announcing his death (*Papers* 15: lx). News travelled across the Pacific to North America and by 20 April East Coast newspapers were noting Russell's death.

Typical of such notices was an article in Philadelphia's *Evening Bulletin* on 21 April. Russell, it will be recalled, had become known to Philadelphia's Quaker elite as long ago as 1894, when he had married Alys Pearsall Smith, and he had visited the city in 1896 and 1914. Confirming the truism that all obituaries are local, the *Evening Bulletin*'s article emphasized both Russell's pacifism and his connection to the city in its heading: "Bertrand Russell, Pacifist, is Dead / Radical Heir to Earldom Jailed in England During War for Slur on U.S. Army / Wife is a Philadelphian". According to the *Evening Bulletin*, Russell had "died in Pekin, China, March 28 of pneumonia". Reminding its readers of his "extremist course during the World War", which had included unspecified "trouble with the authorities" over conscription and six months' imprisonment thanks to "the utterance of a slur against the American army", the article also mentioned the British government's refusal to allow him to teach at Harvard in 1916 and his subsequent anti-war appeal to President Woodrow Wilson in the winter of 1916. Mistakenly stating that Russell's pacifist views had caused him to be "removed from the chair [*sic*] as professor of philosophy he held at Trinity College, Cambridge", the article made only the vaguest of references to the academic work and intellectual distinction that might have won him such a position, contenting itself with the lame observation that "he was a prolific writer on sociological, philosophical and mathematical topics."

Reports of Russell's death made it to Britain by the first week of May 1921. They were met, on the whole, with a far more robust dose of scepticism than they had received in America. The august *Times*, for example, declined even to acknowledge the rumours, while the scrupulous *Manchester Guardian* offered this piece of studied non-commitment on 4 May under the heading "Mr. Bertrand Russell":

According to New York papers of April 20 the death of the Hon. Bertrand Russell is reported in a despatch from Shanghai published in the *Japan Advertiser* of March 29. Attempts made in New York to verify this report brought, however, no results.

Mr. Russell after a lecture tour in South China arrived in Peking the week before the date of this despatch in order to fulfil a lecture engagement at Peking

University. He is said to have been taken to the German hospital on March 25 suffering from acute pneumonia caused by influenza, and to have grown rapidly worse. Professor John Dewey, of Columbia University, who was also lecturing at Peking University, is reported to have been with Mr. Russell and to have taken down his will.

On inquiry being made yesterday of Mr. Russell's relatives in London it was learned that a rumour of his death had reached them but they did not believe it.[2]

A similar note of caution was struck by the *Daily News* on 5 May. Remarking with characteristic understatement that "some uneasiness has been caused by a report from America … that Mr. Bertrand Russell died of influenza and pneumonia at Peking on March 25", the article, which was accompanied by a photograph of Russell, hurried to report both that "no confirmation of the statement … can be obtained either in America or England" and that Russell's own friends and relatives "have had no news beyond the newspaper report mentioned and are sceptical about its accuracy."[3] For its part, the Labour Party's *Daily Herald*, to offer a final example, stated simply on 6 May: "An unconfirmed report has reached America, via Shanghai, that Mr. Bertrand Russell died of influenza and pneumonia at Pekin in March."[4]

The popular press, although not nearly as raucous as their contemporary incarnations but already alert to the heady possibilities of a story mixing aristocracy, sex, and an ancient university, were less reticent to speculate about either facts or motives. Especially irresistible was the coincidence of the arrival in Britain of reports of Russell's death (on 4 May) and the issuance of a divorce decree from Alys (on 5 May). Two

[2] *Manchester Guardian*, 4 May 1921, p. 6. In 1955 Russell wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* asserting that he had "the pleasure of reading my own obituary notice in your forward-looking journal thirty-four years ago." Alas, either Russell's recollection was mistaken or the edition he read was not among those chosen for microfilming. The letter can be found in *Papers* 28: 124.

[3] *Daily News*, 5 May 1921.

[4] *Daily Herald*, 6 May 1921, p. 2. One person close to Russell who did believe the rumours was Constance Malleson, who recalled: "That news broke me. A neat job: short, sharp, and permanent. Death admits no argument, anguish, or wild regret" (Malleson, *After Ten Years* [London: Cape, 1931], p. 155). Years later she remembered that she had been in Paris at the time and had seen the announcement of Russell's death in French papers (Malleson to Elizabeth Crawshay-Williams, 21 May 1949, RA3 REC. ACQ. 501h).

obvious possibilities for creative journalism presented themselves. In the first place, editors wondered aloud over the technical legal point of whether a dead man could in fact be divorced. In the second, reporters questioned whether some sort of disreputable stunt had been pulled by a heartless, privileged, Cambridge-educated aristocrat at the expense of his loving, innocent, Quaker spouse. The *Daily Express*, for example, offered the eye-catching heading: "Divorced from a 'Dead' Man / Mystery of the Hon. Bertrand Russell" and asked, "Is the Hon. Bertrand Russell, heir presumptive to Earl Russell, dead or divorced?"[5] The *Daily Chronicle*, to offer another example, chose to head its article on the Russells' divorce: "Philosopher's 'Road to Freedom' / Hon. Bertrand Russell Divorced by His Wife."[6] And the *Daily Mirror*, for its part, tried to cover all its bases: "Wife Gets Decree Nisi from Hon. Bertrand Russell / Reported Dead on Day His Wife Obtains Divorce / Loved Someone Else / Earl's Socialist Brother Who Went to Prison".[7] Given Britain's restrictive libel laws, all such papers were careful to offer little beyond innuendo and most were scrupulous enough to acknowledge that the reports of Russell's death were neither confirmed by British or Chinese authorities nor believed by members of his family.

These accounts all focused on three aspects of Russell's life: his aristocratic lineage, his marital misbehaviour, and his anti-war activities. To an extent now difficult to recapture, Russell's noble birth was a crucial part of his identity in the Britain of 1921. Not merely was he referred to in virtually every paper as "the Hon. Bertrand Russell", but his standing as heir to his brother's title—"heir presumptive to Earl Russell"—was also prominently mentioned in nearly every article.[8] In immediate post-war Britain, it is important to remember, Britain's aristocracy—especially a family as politically durable and socially prominent as the Russells—still possessed a social preeminence and cultural curiosity far beyond their real power, although silent film stars were just beginning to displace them. Similarly, the strong grip of Victorian morality had barely begun to lessen its hold, and divorce still carried a stigma which it came

[5] *Daily Express*, 6 May 1921.
[6] *Daily Chronicle*, 6 May 1921.
[7] *Daily Mirror*, 6 May 1921.
[8] See, for example, *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 6 May 1921, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 6 May 1921, and *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 7 May 1921.

to lose only after a second world war. Not merely was divorce still productive of social disgrace and political extinction, but Britain's arcane divorce laws made the process of ending a marriage cumbersome in the extreme. The divorce of a noted aristocrat—to bring the two points together—was therefore the journalistic equivalent to a modern celebrity breakup, but with all the fascination of novelty. The details of the Russells' divorce hearing—at which Alys had appeared but Russell had not—were thus reported in rich specificity and to Russell's detriment—how they had "lived happily together" from 1894 to 1911, how he had then told Alys "he was in love with another woman", how he had later "sent a message through a friend that it was better for them both not to meet again", how he had engaged in "misconduct" with another woman at the Charing Cross Hotel from 8 to 11 August 1920—details which provided titillation to a reading public not yet jaded by such reports.[9]

Russell's controversial stance during the Great War was the third facet of his career to be emphasized in these early death notices. Although a sizeable number made no mention of his anti-war writings and actions,[10] others drew attention variously to his "pacifism, internationalism, and socialism", his "articles and books on social subjects", his "pacifist tendencies", his "£100 fine in 1916 for a No-Conscription Fellowship leaflet", his "wholly adverse" verdict on Soviet Russia, and his "six months' imprisonment for suggesting in an article that the American Army would be used here to intimidate strikers".[11] The best any could do about Russell's intellectual reputation was to repeat Alys's description of him at their divorce hearing as a "professor of philosophy and mathematics".[12] Only the *Daily Chronicle* mentioned any of his specific books—*Principles of Social Reconstruction*, *Mysticism and Logic*, and *Roads to Freedom*—and none saw fit even to speak of his work in logic, mathematics, epistemology, and metaphysics.[13]

All these themes came together in what was incomparably the longest,

[9] See, for example, *Daily Graphic*, 6 May 1921, *Liverpool Echo*, 6 May 1921, and *Daily Mail*, 6 May 1921.

[10] Two examples are the *Daily News*, 6 May 1921, and *Liverpool Echo*, 6 May 1921.

[11] *Daily Express*, 6 May 1921, p. 1, *Daily Chronicle*, 6 May 1921, *Daily Herald*, 6 May 1921, *Evening Standard*, 5 May 1921, *Daily Mail*, 6 May 1921, *The Star*, 5 May 1921.

[12] (Glasgow) *Bulletin*, 6 May 1921.

[13] *Daily Chronicle*, 6 May 1921.

most detailed, and nastiest of obituaries—in the Conservative *Sunday Express*. Written by James Douglas, the Director of London Express Newspapers and a protégé of Lord Beaverbrook, the article was a piece of delicious invective under the misleading heading "The Professor's Love Story". Its over-the-top tone was struck at the outset:

> Bertrand Russell was a complete and perfect eccentric of the kind colloquially known as a crank. There never was a crankier crank in this crank-ridden age. He was a learned professor of philosophy, an erudite mathematician, a pacifist, an anti-conscriptionist, a conscientious objector to everything. He was more like a discarnate and disembodied intellect than a human being.[14]

Although conceding the sophistication of Russell's technical philosophical work, Douglas observed that "his writings are lucidly insane and limpidly lunatical. Too much logic and too much mathematics drove him mad." Although sharply critical of Russell's political leanings—"he was a philosophic anarchist, and a Socialist who travelled through Marxian and Neo-Marxian Socialism to Guild Socialism"—and even more hostile to his anti-war campaigning—"he spoke so drearily that I enlivened his pacifist banalities with rude interjections"—what most upset Douglas was Russell's heartless desertion of Alys—behaviour which he saw as deriving not from a character flaw but from the inevitable inability of an abstract thinker to live a normal human life. "What tickles me", Douglas chortled, "is the spectacle of this phantom intellect in the toils and throes of passion." And after presenting a litany of abusive descriptions of Russell's "glacial theorizings", "bleak intellect", "chilly gloom", "alpine peaks of pride", and "logarithms of love", Douglas offered a glorious peroration worth the cost of the paper:

> And all this transcendental soaring in the nullity of abstract mathematics comes a cropper in the Charing Cross Hotel!
>
> The moral is not obscure. They take too much upon themselves, these high priests of the higher priggery. Their practice limps far behind their precepts. Their contempt for ordinary mortals and morals is not so austere as it seems.
>
> Although they can rise above the common love of country, they cannot rise above the common frailty of human nature. There is a conscription which they cannot escape. In a word, they are human beings like the rest of us. Though

[14] James Douglas, "The Professor's Love Story", *Sunday Express*, 8 May 1921.

they be without humour, they are humorous. Though they be without humility, they are humbled. For this is the nemesis of intellectual pride—the more it separates itself from life the more surely does the whirligig of time bring in its revenges. And yet the philosopher wriggling in the coils of life is more lovable than the philosopher sneering on a pyramid or pedestal of disdainful dialectic. Bertrand the Divorced is more human than Bertrand the Pacifist, throned on unctuous arrogance. (*Ibid*.)

Any further such venomous commentaries were forestalled by a brief letter from Frank Russell to *The Times* on 11 May:

Sir,—An unauthenticated report of the death of my brother Bertrand Russell published in many papers (though not in *The Times*) has caused much distress to his numerous friends. The Chinese Legation have most kindly made official inquiries at my request and now inform me that although it is true that he has been ill with pneumonia, he is now recovering. Perhaps you will be so good as to allow me to reassure those who have been anxious by making this announcement in your columns.[15]

Not unexpectedly, this announcement prompted both a flurry of confirmations in other papers—"Mr. Bertrand Russell / Authoritative Denial of Death Report", "Mr. Bertrand Russell / Death Report Unfounded: Alive in Pekin", "Divorce Mystery Solved / Mr. Bertrand Russell Alive"—and an end to his momentary celebrity.[16] Upon his return to Britain in August 1921, Russell was therefore in the uncommon position of confronting a stack of his own obituaries—his own favourite having appeared in a religious newspaper: "Missionaries may be pardoned for heaving a sigh of relief at the news of Mr. Bertrand Russell's death" (*Auto*., 2: 132). Although Russell was about to throw himself into a new round of activities—marriage (with Dora Black), fatherhood, parliamentary campaigning, lecturing, schoolmastering, and journalism—all of which would be productive of even more controversy and attention in the years ahead, he would have seen that it was his aristocratic heritage,

[15] *The Times*, 11 May 1921, p. 6. *The Nation*, a magazine friendly to Russell, reported on 11 May that "Mr. Bertrand Russell's many friends will be glad to know that he is making a good recovery from the attack of double pneumonia from which he suffered in Peking, and that he proposes to return to England" (*The Nation*, 29 [11 June 1921]: 392).

[16] *Pall Mall and Globe*, 11 May 1921, *Evening Standard*, 11 May 1921, and *Daily Express*, 11 May 1921.

his extramarital behaviour, and his anti-war activism which most defined him in the minds of his contemporaries. And although it would have seemed scarcely possible both to Russell and to those contemporaries, he was in fact at age 49 at only the mid-point of his life.

II

The 1920s and 1930s are usually seen as the low point in Russell's personal and intellectual fortunes. In contrast to his ebullient post-China expectations, marriage and fatherhood led to unhappiness and divorce (and remarriage), political campaigning to defeat and disillusionment, schoolmastering to the financial insatiability of Beacon Hill School, lecturing to wearying and repetitive tours of North America, and writing—always writing—to both non-demanding journalism—"Should Socialists Smoke Good Cigars?"—and lightweight books—*On Education* (1926), *Marriage and Morals* (1929), *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930), and the like. At the same time, however, these activities—however far from the idealized, intensely intellectual life later commentators would have preferred Russell to live—also attested that Russell was much in demand as a lecturer in both the US and the UK, that his books sold well and even his evanescent journalism found an eager readership, that he remained in contact with the leading outlets of contemporary British cultural and literary life, and that he possessed an uncommon gift for the popularization of science and for journalism—indeed that he had become what he wanted to be: one of post-war Britain's preeminent public intellectuals, a man of letters in the Victorian tradition of Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, and Mill.

Evidence of this standing was an invitation in the spring of 1936 to join a project, created by some bright spark in the BBC, to ask several leading literary, cultural, and political figures to write their own obituaries. Titled "Auto-obituaries", the series included the cartoonist David Low, the artist William Rothenstein, the writers Rose Macaulay and Edith Sitwell, the politician George Lansbury, and the polymath H. G. Wells.[17] Russell's contribution, which appeared in the 12 August 1936

[17] The full list of auto-obituarists also included Vernon Bartlett, Sylvia Pankhurst, and Arthur Salter.

issue of *The Listener*, took the form of a death notice supposedly destined to appear in *The Times* on 1 June 1962 to mark Russell's death at age 90. Full of his habitual wit and written with his tongue fixed squarely in his cheek, it nonetheless allowed Russell to provide an assessment of his own life—then in its 65th year.

Written in the obligatory third-person of obituarists, the 800-word piece opens with a striking illustration of Russell's own longevity and aristocratic lineage:

> By the death of the Third Earl Russell (or Bertrand Russell, as he preferred to call himself) at the age of ninety, a link with a very distant past is severed. His grandfather, Lord John Russell, the Victorian Prime Minister, visited Napoleon in Elba; his maternal grandmother was a friend of the Young Pretender's widow.

Pausing to mention that a curiosity of that aristocratic heritage was a private education—"he did not enjoy the advantages of a public school education"—it stressed his years at Cambridge as the crucial period in his intellectual development and as the time when he had done "work of importance in mathematical logic": "During the fifteen years that followed, he produced the books upon which his reputation in the learned world was based" ("Obituary", *UE*, p. 221).

For Russell, it was the Great War which marked the turning-point in his life and fortunes. "Although (to do him justice) he never minimized the wrong done to Belgium" in 1914, he argued, Russell "perversely maintained that, war being an evil, the aim of statesmanship should have been to bring the war to an end as soon as possible.... Throughout the war, he continued to urge that it should be ended, on no matter what terms." Adopting a sly irony that was his own but an Olympian tone familiar to any *Times* reader, Russell suggested that "it must be supposed that mathematical studies had caused him to take a wrongly quantitative view which ignored the question of principle involved.... Trinity College, very properly, deprived him of his lectureship, and for some months of 1918 he was in prison" (*ibid*., p. 222).

After the war, by contrast, Russell noted that he had returned not to his earlier academic base at Cambridge but instead had ventured to Russia—"whose government did not impress him favourably"—and to China—"where he enjoyed the rationalism of the traditional civilization, with its still surviving flavour of the eighteenth century." His many

essays, books, and lectures on education, marriage, sexuality, popular science, and history he described, mockingly, as "dissipating" his energies and, more seriously, as "by their style and their wit, conceal[ing] from careless readers the superficiality of the antiquated rationalism which he professed to the end" (pp. 222–3). Of his failed political campaigns, frustrated schoolmastering, and two marriages, divorces, and children of these years, Russell spoke not one word.

An especially arresting feature of Russell's auto-obituary was his account of his activities during the as-yet unfought "second World War", a struggle in which we are told "he took no public part, having escaped to a neutral country just before its outbreak." Asserting that "in private conversation he was wont to say that homicidal lunatics were well employed in killing each other, but that sensible men would keep out of their way while they were doing it", Russell allowed his otherwise light touch to slip into something more heavy-handed at the prospect of life after a second cataclysm: "True, much of what was once the civilized world lies in ruins; but no right-thinking person can admit that those who died for the right in the great struggle have died in vain" (p. 223).

In summing up his life, Russell offered both prophecy and retrospection. Prophetically, he noted—as would his genuine obituarists 34 years later—that "he had many friends, but had survived almost all of them" and that "he appeared, in extreme old age, full of enjoyment, no doubt owing, in large measure, to his invariable health.…" By way of review, he returned to the matter of his aristocratic background and his connections, both intellectually and genealogically, with the world of late eighteenth-century rationalism and drew together earlier references to his devotion to the discipline of logic, to his principled objection to the Great War, to his fondness for what he judged to be China's traditional rationalism, to the "antiquated rationalism" of his popular writings, to his approval of the writings of Jeremy Bentham, to his "ignorance" of religion and "those higher considerations that transcend mere logic", and to his hostility to the Second World War. With considerable pride and no little regret he closed his memoir:

> His life, for all its waywardness, had a certain anachronistic consistency, reminiscent of that of the aristocratic rebels of the early nineteenth century. His principles were curious, but, such as they were, they governed his actions.… He was the last survivor of a dead epoch. (*UE*, p. 223)

III

Russell died in the early evening of Monday, 2 February 1970, at his home, Plas Penrhyn, Penrhyndeudraeth, Merionethshire. Although a man of legendarily robust health, he had grown increasingly frail in his mid-90s and rarely ventured far from the North Wales home he had come to love. In the end, he would succumb to a succession of familiar winter ailments—colds, bronchitis, influenza—that had dogged him in his last years.

The sudden death of a 97-year-old man was at once not unexpected and a complete surprise. That Russell was in the last year of his life had been clear to family and friends for some time; that he would die at the very hour and on the very day that he did was unforeseen and a testimony to the frailty that had accumulated over the last months of his life. Certainly Russell's widow, Edith, was not prepared for her sudden loss and, under a doctor's care herself, left the details of handling the announcement of the death of one of the world's most famous men to their trusted friend Ken Coates, the co-director of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. It was Coates, therefore, who reported Russell's death to the world in the late evening of 2 February and who thereby prompted obituarists around the world to prepare their assessments of Russell's life and achievements.[18]

As is the way with modern newspapers and wire services—unwilling to be caught either short or, worse still, silent in the face of a famous death—draft obituaries of the great and the good, as well as of the disgraced and the disreputable, are prepared far in advance of anticipated need. Russell's death on the evening of 2 February therefore prompted British editors to reach into their files and to update existing copy, rather than to prepare notices from scratch under tight deadlines. Pride of place went to the authoritative *Times*, then in its pre-Murdochian incarnation as the British paper of record and as the rest of the world's exemplar of smooth prose, sober tone, and dispassionate judgment. Although a paper whose leader writers for over a half a century had rarely approved of Russell's anti-war activities or political opinions, *The Times* nonetheless

[18] Russell's final illness is well described by Clark, pp. 631–9, Monk, 2: 497–500, and Moorehead, pp. 549–51.

pulled out all the stops with a four-column obituary on 3 February, a lengthy leading article and full page of photographs, commentary, and remembrances on the 4th, and a description of his cremation in Wales on the 6th—treatment usually reserved for such resolutely Establishment figures as field marshals, archbishops, minor royals, and former prime ministers.

Headed "Earl Russell, OM FRS / Philosopher Who Sought Involvement with Problems of the Age", the notice predictably gave pride of place to Russell's philosophical work and to his aristocratic lineage. Of Russell's philosophical achievement, it stressed his early work on the philosophy of mathematics and logic: "Bertrand Russell's claim to be remembered by history rests securely on his work in mathematical and symbolic logic and in philosophy, on which his influence was pervasive and profound." Indeed, the obituarist observed, "the story of symbolic logic and of the philosophy of mathematics in the twentieth century is the story of the expansion of the edifice which Russell and Frege founded."[19] Acknowledging that "there exist no disciples of Russell", the author insisted that instead, and more importantly, "there exist scores of inquiring philosophers driven by questions which Russell was the first to ask." And to identify those pathbreaking questions, the obituarist offered a brisk account of Russell's birth, family background, Cambridge education, and early philosophical development, stressing the excellence and influence of his celebrated book on Leibniz as well as his intellectual kinship to the great German polymath—"in outlook as well as in achievement he resembled Leibniz closely." The author then moved to the intellectual heart of the notice—a remarkably full account of Russell's pioneering work culminating in *The Principles of Mathematics* and *Principia Mathematica*. Although a reader without the blessings of a formal training in logic would have had to take the obituarist's word for the judgment that the *Principia* "is one of the decisive books in the history both of mathematics and of logic", he would have been much enlightened by the clear discussion of how the new logical tools fashioned by Russell—"freeing logical analysis from the tyranny of ordinary grammar or syntax"—had revolutionary implications for the study of epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of science. All the usual

[19] *The Times*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 11.

suspects are trotted out, dusted off, and appraised—golden mountains, round squares, authors of *Waverley*, present kings of France, and the rest—and Russell's use of "the destructive power of this logical technique … [as] a source of clarification and enlightenment, particularly in his analysis of relations, classes, continuity, infinity, and language forms" made plain.

The second half of the obituary focused on Russell's political activities, popular writings, and marital trials. Emphasizing the transforming effect of the First World War on Russell's political outlook and social reputation—"without hesitation he flung himself wholeheartedly into the pacifist campaign … the unhappy results made him a national storm-centre"—*The Times*'s writer pushed quickly forward to sketch how "after the war [Russell] allowed his mind to range over almost the whole gamut of human studies"—from two visits and resultant books about Soviet Russia and China, to two failed parliamentary campaigns in irredeemably Tory Chelsea, to two "beautifully lucid expositions" of *The ABC of Atoms* and *The ABC of Relativity*, to several "exaggerated" books on education, marriage, and the family, to a number of sober books on history and economics, and a myriad of jazzier articles on contemporary trends and events.

By contrast, Russell's North American exile during the Second World War merited barely a mention, except as the occasion for what the obituarist judged to be the "monumental" *History of Western Philosophy*. Far more attention was given to Russell's immediate post-war spell of acclaim and approval—as inaugural Reith Lecturer, as recipient of both the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize for Literature, and as "a popular, a revered, even a respectable figure". Facing the superficially alluring prospect of a senescence of distinction and calm—"the serene old age of a tame philosopher, a domesticated sage, publicly honoured, listened to with affection and respect, vouchsafing the occasional quip often enough and sharp enough to keep alive the legend of the rebel"—Russell "chose otherwise". Or, more precisely *The Times*'s writer observed, Russell was driven to do otherwise by what he judged to be the supreme threat presented by nuclear weapons and superpower rivalry. He thus exchanged a peaceful dotage of respectability and quiet for a contentious old age of notoriety and upset—from the broadcast of "Man's Peril" of 1954, to the founding of CND and the Committee of 100, to interventions over the Cuban Missile Crisis, to the organizing of the International War Crimes

Tribunal, all of which activities were highlighted by *The Times* in a remarkably even-handed account.

And how to make sense of this long and controversial life—"inspiring to some, misdirected or ridiculous to others"? *The Times*'s writer sought to pull together the disparate strands of Russell's life and achievement in two ways. In the first place, although Russell's greatest intellectual accomplishment was indisputably his pre-1914 philosophical writings on logic, mathematics, and epistemology, that early work had been followed by a half century of "extraordinary achievement" as a popular writer and broadcaster. Indeed, "he was the intellectual in the twentieth century who, perhaps, before all others in this country, solved the problem of communications. Russell found a way of communicating with ordinary men." The source of his "genius as a popularizer of unfamiliar or difficult ideas", in turn, was due in part to Russell's gift of language and in part to his temperament: "his clear-cut antitheses, his magnificent self-assurance, his polished ruthlessness of argument, his dazzling paradoxes, his wit and gaiety"—the same qualities, that is, that marked his technical philosophical work. Indeed, *The Times*'s writer judged, in both Russell's broadcasts and writings "when passion intruded, when the Whig possessed the philosopher, his writing must be ranked with the noblest in the language." In the second place, as the last quotation hints, *The Times*'s obituarist sought to link Russell's writing with his lineage: "His thought was English to the core", a fact which the obituarist asserted to be responsible for the brevity of Russell's youthful infatuation with Hegel—"no one with his roots as firmly in English thought and in England, Whig England at that, could have long remained an apostle of Hegel"—his fundamental empiricism and liberalism—"a man born with the blood of the Russells in his veins could hardly avoid carrying the spirit of Locke in his head"—and his ability to stand out against professional and public disapproval—"He spoke his mind with Olympian disregard of the censure he might incur from established persons or received opinions or for that matter the law." Not merely did Bertrand Russell "look every inch a Russell" and possess a full measure of "the 'crankiness' of a Russell", but he was a man whose connection to England's history and whose habits of mind and natural talents had fused to produce the most distinguished and inimitable English "intellectual in the twentieth century".

The next morning *The Times*'s leader writer weighed in with a sub-

stantial assessment of Russell's life under the heading "Sane Men Say No". Although focusing the bulk of his remarkably sympathetic remarks on Russell's anti-nuclear campaigning, the editorialist summed up Russell's long public life by echoing many of the observations of his colleague. Opening with a mention of Russell's childhood recollections of his aged grandfather and with the arresting fact that as a young man Lord John had first been elected to the Commons before Waterloo, it stressed Russell's direct connection with England's national past—ranging from "a style as clear and ironic as Swift's", to "the Victorian smugness of his childhood", to his capacity for authoritative disdain: "like a medieval Pope, he showered the rulers of the world with anathemas for their crimes and blunders; like medieval kings and emperors, they heard and disobeyed." And far from being simply an historical pleasantry or a sentimental irrelevance, this remarkable lineage was in fact the source of "Russell's greatness and one of the qualities which endeared him to all generations … his refusal to accept as final the idiocy which he saw all round him". Russell, concluded *The Times*, unconsciously mimicking his own auto-obituary, was "the last true Whig".[20]

No other newspaper—British or foreign, daily or weekly—matched *The Times*'s notice in length or comprehensiveness. Not surprisingly, it served as a source for later assessments in places as far afield as New Delhi, Jerusalem, and Hong Kong. Its only rivals among British papers were the obituaries published in the left-leaning *Guardian* and the Conservative *Daily Telegraph*. To the *Guardian*, a paper habitually much in sympathy with Russell and for which he had written occasionally over the decades, Russell's death merited a front-page, above-the-fold announcement (complete with photograph), a five-column obituary, and a substantial leading article.[21] Under the heading "Bertrand Russell Dies / Philosopher, Scientist, and Scourge", the front-page article strained to pay tribute to Russell's "immensely long and full life" and contented itself with observing that he was "an illustrious son of the lineage of the high intelligentsia of England [whose] life linked the world of his Whig ancestors with the revolutionary tumult of the twentieth century …. [It

[20] "Sane Men Say No", *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 11.

[21] Not content even with this extensive coverage, the *Guardian* also ran a local interest piece on Russell's neighbours' reaction to his death, on 4 February, and a brief article, on 6 February, described his cremation.

was a life] astounding in its failure to conform to any stereotype."[22]

The obituary itself, five full columns including a photograph of Russell sitting outside the Ministry of Defence in 1961, was curiously lopsided. Focusing a full three-quarters of its discussion on Russell's post-1945 life as an anti-nuclear campaigner, it did little to explain the nature of Russell's early philosophical achievement other than to extol it. The closest it came to a serious assessment of Russell's philosophical work was:

> [H]is logical and philosophical reputation mainly rests … upon two exceptional intellectual achievements. The first was his large measure of success in deriving the whole of mathematics by rigorous methods from a few very simple logical principles…. The second was the substitution, in philosophy, of "logical constructions" for "inferred entities"…. In both of these endeavours his object was the same: to bring exact and agreed techniques of thinking to bear upon intellectual fields in which all previous thinking had been emotionally tinged or philosophically vague. (*Ibid.*, p. 5)

This intellectual achievement, summed up by a writer obviously lacking the blessings of a philosophical education, made him "the last late-Renaissance scientific humanist of our time". And as for the sources of Russell's political activism, the obituarist put them down to "his inborn and Whig love of liberty" and "his thirst for social justice"—two facile phrases that could have benefited from a more thorough dissection.

To the *Guardian*'s leader writer, appearing under the heading "Philosophy and Zeal", it was the dual nature of Russell's life—as at once abstract thinker and practical activist—that made him a unique and irreplaceable figure in twentieth-century Britain: "Bertrand Russell's immense contribution to successive generations of English life has to be seen, as it were, through a bifocal lens. In the background and all around us is his original work in philosophy, mathematics, and logic, the importance of which will long outlive the youngest student today." By contrast, "the foreground is so different that if he had never written a word of philosophy he would still have been a remarkable man." And how to bring these two perspectives into a single focus? After his promising beginning the *Guardian*'s editorialist did not even try, preferring

[22] *Guardian*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1.

limply to marvel at Russell's "intellectual austerity", "keenly mathematical mind", and "trenchant views on pacifism, feminism, and sexual mores".[23]

To the *Daily Telegraph*, a paper whose successive Tory editors had rarely had a good word to say about Russell in any context, it was his anti-nuclear activity which merited pride of place in its obituary notice. Under the heading "Bertrand Russell, Nobel Prizewinner and Philosopher", the notice opened by calling attention to Russell's "recent" anti-nuclear activities, specifically "anti-bomb marches and sit down demonstrations in Trafalgar Square and outside the Ministry of Defence". Unfortunately, the *Telegraph* reporter observed sarcastically, "they led to traffic dislocation, arrests, terms of imprisonment and fines without noticeably contributing to the amelioration of world tension."[24] The same snide tone pervaded the entire piece, which devoted two of its three columns to hostile assessments of Russell's anti-nuclear and anti-Vietnam campaigning and which portrayed his powers throughout as "failing" and his actions as under the control of Ralph Schoenman.

As for Russell's pre-1945 intellectual attainments, the *Telegraph*'s notice made no mention of *The Principles of Mathematics*, *The Problems of Philosophy*, or *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, preferring to dismiss his philosophical work as wholly out of date: "his own philosophy was already outmoded, seeming already to belong more to the nineteenth century than the present." Instead, the obituary—which had all the marks of a cut-and-paste job assembled by a writer with no direct knowledge of either Russell or his work—degenerated into a succession of short, discrete paragraphs hopping more or less chronologically from his Cambridge education, to his imprisonment in 1918, to his effort at schoolmastering, to his difficulties in war-time America, to his survival of a plane crash in 1948, to the sale of his papers to McMaster University, to his marriages, divorces, and heirs. The most complimentary thing any regular *Telegraph* writer could say about Russell was left to the political diarist "Peter Simple". Offering his own "farewell" to "this wonderful old Englishman", the writer observed that in the happier days of the early 1960s' protest this

[23] *Ibid.*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 10.
[24] *Daily Telegraph*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 5.

White-haired, aristocratic, supremely intelligent, misguided, admirable and absurd … philosopher-king sat down with the crowd, was arrested and released; issued indignant manifestos; instructed the rulers of the earth in their philosophical duties.

Nowadays, alas, Russell's place has been usurped by "a rabble of boors, prigs, publicity-seekers, wet-minded students, foul-mouthed ruffians, [and] conspirators ineffectual even in their power seeking".[25]

Only the senior Tory MP and former Cabinet minister Edward Boyle could find anything genuinely and unambiguously complimentary to say about Russell in the pages of the *Telegraph*. A former Minister of Education about to leave the Commons to become Vice-Chancellor of Leeds, Boyle offered an appreciation of Russell under the title "A Great British Philosopher". Opening with the assertion that Russell was "the greatest British philosopher of the period 1900 to 1950 and a lifelong, passionate critic of established, conventional opinion", Boyle offered a brisk biography of Russell, interposed with mentions of his most important writings —some of which Boyle seemed actually to have read. Although his account of Russell's technical writings was long on assertion and short on explanation—"Russell and Whitehead revealed the identity of principle between the simplest laws of logic and the most abstruse theorems of advanced mathematics"—he at least made an effort to tackle the question of Russell's influence—"all subsequent developments in mathematical logic have been largely based on the new foundations which [he] laid down."[26] Ranging from a mention of Russell's ethical and religious writings to an account of Russell as a scientific popularizer and successful broadcaster, Boyle's discussion concluded by paying homage to "the power and grace of [Russell's] literary style" and by locating him as "a true heir of the 18th-century Enlightenment and of the British 18th-century empiricists, Berkeley and Hume, whom he especially admired".

Although *The Times*, *Guardian* and *Telegraph* printed the lengthiest and most comprehensive assessments of Russell's life and achievements, every British daily paid front-page tribute. The immensely popular *Daily Express*, for example, opened its article—complete with a photograph of a smiling Russell—by describing him as "philosopher, mathematician,

[25] *Ibid.*, 5 Feb. 1970, p. 12.
[26] *Ibid.*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 16.

author, pacifist, and advocate of sexual freedom". Because this was the *Express*, Russell's leering profile faced that of a mini-skirted, go-go-booted "Mata Hari" which headed an article on how this twenty-one-year-old London medical student had tried and failed to nobble one of the visiting Springbok rugby team. To its credit, the *Express*, after describing Russell as "one of the outstanding Englishmen of the century" who, over the course of an immensely long life, had been "reviled by some as a crank and revered by others as a sage", offered a straightforward—if hurried and bizarrely non-chronological—biographical sketch, beginning with his aristocratic lineage, touching only lightly on his pre-war philosophical writings, and ending with his anti-nuclear campaigning.[27]

For its part, the *Daily Mail*, to offer another prominent example, put a brief announcement of Russell's death on its front page and then presented an unusually heartfelt appreciation under the heading "Russell … The Old Man Who Was a Hero to the Young" on its features page. Making no reference to the date, place, or circumstance of Russell's death, the author, the distinguished journalist Peter Lewis, chose to present Russell not simply as "our foremost philosopher" but as an improbable survivor of the Victorian age who had remarkably managed both to embody his own convictions and, as a consequence, to forge a connection of respect and authenticity with generations of Britons far removed from the prosperous, secure, and high-minded Gladstonian world into which he had been born. To Russell's great credit, argued Lewis with pardonable exaggeration, "he cared nothing for veneration" but sought instead only "in the name of humanity … to change the climate of opinion". Indeed, even into his late 80s, after a lifetime of writing, politicking, and broadcasting, Russell was never

> … too old, too busy or too dignified to sit on the pavement, to disobey authority, to be hauled gently through the dust and imprisoned for the sake of reason as he saw it.

"There was something splendid about this", concluded Lewis affectionately, "and that is why such an old man from another era was such a hero to the young. He never resigned himself. He never compromised

[27] *Daily Express*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1.

on ideals."[28]

In London's popular *Evening Standard*, to offer a final example, Russell's death won at once a front-page mention, a lengthy obituary notice, and a full-column leading article. Although a paper which had approved of few of Russell's opinions and fewer still of his actions over the years, the *Standard*'s editorialist acknowledged that Russell had enjoyed "a most extraordinary career", one in which "his political writings, his vigorous speaking, his ceaseless campaigning and his recent almost messianic posturing" had won him a position "as a sage that has scarcely been equalled since the Middle Ages." Searching for the apt word, the editorial writer landed on one that positively screamed 1970: "he was the great *guru* of the Western world".[29]

To explain how Russell had come to attain such a status, the *Standard*'s unnamed obituarist provided an accompanying article which presented a substantial biographical account that was essentially a potted version of Russell's recently published *Autobiography*. Titled "Russell: Thinker in the Grip of Passions", the notice opened with the celebrated prologue of the first volume of the *Autobiography*—"three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life"—and then built its discussion of Russell's life on his self-professed "longing for love", "search for knowledge", and "unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind". Although a perfectly reasonable—and in comparison with Russell's other English obituaries quite novel—approach to a comprehensive look at Russell's life, in practice it produced a disappointingly uneven treatment. Perhaps not surprisingly given the intellectual challenge involved, the "search for truth" received embarrassingly short shrift; *Principia Mathematica*, for example, was said only to have "had a profound and enduring influence and is acknowledged to be one of the outstanding works of the human mind", and none of Russell's books published after *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* was mentioned by name. Instead, Russell's emotional upsets and marital difficulties received pride of place, followed hard by his anti-war campaigning from the Boer War to Vietnam. Any attempt either to draw these strands together or to assess Russell's impact or influence was left to the reader.

[28] *Daily Mail*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 8.
[29] *Evening Standard*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 13.

For his part, the *Standard*'s obituarist contented himself with the observation that although Russell's arguments "were often badly presented and often just plain wrong", Russell's "willingness to participate and his capacity to communicate with people in all walks of life—indeed in every country of the world" set him apart from his contemporaries and "set an example" of engagement and activism that his intellectual brethren would do well to emulate.

IV

It was the London bureaus of the major international wire services—Associated Press, United Press, and Reuters—who told the world beyond Britain of Russell's death, first through a brief announcement of the death itself and then through an accompanying (and obviously prewritten) obituary article. Although, as will be seen, a few major foreign newspapers—such as *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, and *La Stampa*—offered their own previously prepared notices, most papers relied on the wire service stories as the basis of their own appreciations of Russell's life. Indeed, the nearly invariable sequence for newspapers world wide was for their front page to offer a paragraph-long notice and photograph taken directly from a wire service, an inside page to present a multi-column obituary based closely on that of a wire service, and—usually the next day—the editorial page to offer a several-paragraph leading article devoted to an assessment of Russell's life and achievement. Given the lateness of the hour of Russell's death and the realities of publishing deadlines in 1970, moreover, nearly all the newspapers to the east of London were not able to publish such articles until 4 February, while those to the west usually printed them on 3 February.[30]

Associated Press was by a good measure the most commonly used international wire service in 1970 and newspapers from Chicago to Mexico City to San Francisco to Tokyo drew on its presentation of the facts of Russell's life and death. On the morning of 3 February, therefore, western hemisphere papers as diverse as the *Atlanta Constitution*, *Chicago Tribune*, (Toronto) *Globe and Mail*, (Mexico City) *Excelsior*, *San*

[30] There were some European exceptions to the rule. The (Milan) *Corriere della Sera*, and (Turin) *La Stampa*, for example, each printed notices on 3 February.

Francisco Chronicle, and (Havana) *Granma* all printed virtually the same paragraph on their front pages:

> Bertrand Russell, thinker, fighter for peace and a figure of controversy most of his life, died at his home in north Wales Monday night. He was 97.[31]

In some cases, such as the *Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Tribune*, this introductory paragraph led directly into the presentation, beginning on the front page, of the full AP obituary; in others, such as the *Globe and Mail* and *San Francisco Examiner*, this paragraph served merely as a tease to the longer article in the formal obituary section. Although the text of these various notices was either a word-for-word presentation of the full AP obituary or else a lightly revised—and often shortened—version of the AP article, each paper provided its own headline and, thus, its own thumbnail assessment of Russell's life. To the *Atlanta Constitution* and *San Francisco Examiner*, for example, Russell was simply described as "philosopher"; to the *Excelsior* and *Washington Post*, Russell was, respectively, a "Pacifist Philosopher" and "Philosopher, Pacifist"; to the *Japan Times*, "Sage, Writer, Pacifist" covered the field; to the *Los Angeles Times*, "Philosopher and Fighter for Peace" did the trick; and to the *Chicago Tribune* and *Milwaukee Journal*, Russell was above all else a "Lord".[32]

The complete AP obituary ran to 1,600 words. Although few papers published the entire text, the full notice provided a sweeping and resolutely non-scholarly overview of Russell's life. Reminding its readers early on that Russell "was a giant of his times, author of more than 40 books, and a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature", it focused not on his philosophical or literary achievement—the only one of his philosophical books it mentioned was *Principia Mathematica*, about which it commented accurately if uneasily that it somehow "entrenched Russell firmly in the history of philosophical thought"—but on his social activism. Using as its organizing theme the dichotomous nature of Russell's

[31] *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1.

[32] *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1; *San Francisco Examiner*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1; *New York Times*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1; *Excelsior*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1; *Washington Post*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1; *Japan Times*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 1; *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1; *Milwaukee Journal*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1.

reputation—"few men prompted such extreme feelings as he did"—the notice highlighted what it judged to be the "paradoxes", "controversies", and "changes" of Russell's life and thought: his aristocratic birth versus his radical opinions, his Establishment standing as FRS, OM, and Nobel Laureate versus his anti-war arrests, his logical mastery versus his "passionate scepticism", his professed socialism versus his denunciation of the Soviet Union, his liking for the United States versus his virulent anti-Americanism in the 1960s.[33]

Unhappily, the AP obituarist made no attempt either to reconcile these paradoxes or to explain them away. Rather, he satisfied himself with noting the emotional tensions and political difficulties Russell endured as a consequence of holding them—from his dismissal from his Trinity College lectureship in 1916, to his four marriages, to his repeated imprisonments, to his trouble in America in 1940 at the City College of New York and with the Barnes Foundation, to the bitter recriminations of the Committee of 100 and of the War Crimes Tribunal. Although on its face remarkably even-handed, by focusing on Russell's many emotional, intellectual, and political twists and turns without making any attempt to explain them and by neglecting the intellectual work that made him a famous man in the first place, the notice, for all its superficial fairness, was thus sharply critical. Upon completing the full account, a casual reader would have well understood why Russell had been "reviled as a crank" by some over the course of his long life but not why he had been "regarded as a sage" by others (*ibid.*).

The UPI and Reuters reports of Russell's death appeared, with some few exceptions, in papers to the east of London and on 4 February.[34] The UPI obituary was much briefer than its AP equivalent and ran to barely 600 words. Describing Russell as a "mathematician and pacifist", it did little more than mention his "titled" background, his Cambridge education, his "lucid style of writing" and authorship of "more than 40 books", his "many laurels" ranging from the FRS and OM to the Kalinga and Sonning prizes, his four wives and three children, his anti-nuclear views, and his capacity to do serious intellectual work well into his 80s.[35] Of Russell's philosophical writings, anti-war campaigning, popu-

[33] *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Feb. 1970, pp. 1 and 7.

[34] One prominent exception was the *Boston Globe*, which printed its Reuters obituary on 3 Feb. 1970, pp. 1 and 7.

[35] The best, most complete version of the UPI notice appeared in the (Taipei) *China*

lar books, lectures, and broadcasts—of all the things, that is, that combined to make him both a "mathematician" and a "pacifist"—there was scarcely a mention. *Principia Mathematica*, for example, was said simply to be "for specialists only" and *The Problems of Philosophy* "a noted work". Although the UPI notice would have made its readers aware of the bare fact of Russell's death, it would have done little to enlighten them about the nature of his life and work.

The Reuters obituary was much fuller and far more widely printed, appearing in papers as diverse as *Le Figaro*, the (Nairobi) *East African Standard*, *Jerusalem Post*, *South China Morning Post*, and *Buenos Aires Herald*. Stretching to an impressive 2,500 words, the complete Reuters article—which, like its AP counterpart, was commonly either shortened or supplemented by individual papers—began with a brief announcement of Russell's death intended to appear on the front page:

> Bertrand Russell, the British philosopher who fought to save the world from the horror of nuclear war, died last night at the age of 97.
>
> He died peacefully at his home near this North Wales town [Portmadoc] at 8pm local time yesterday, a spokesman for the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation said. He had been ill with influenza.[36]

Although some papers printed a few additional paragraphs of the Reuters story before continuing the notice on an inside page, others limited themselves to this barebones account before directing the reader inside the paper. The persistent reader who turned the page found not merely a substantial obituary, but also both a brief description of Russell's planned "non-religious" cremation as well as a short collection of international press reaction to his death.[37] Virtually every paper, moreover, also carried on its opinion page an assessment of some kind prepared by the editorial staff of the individual paper.

In common with its AP counterpart, the complete Reuters obituary was long on Russell's political activism and cultural notoriety and short on his philosophical and intellectual attainments. Written by the British

Post, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 8.

[36] *Buenos Aires Herald*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1.

[37] *Jerusalem Post*, 4 Feb. 1970, pp. 1 and 3, and *Boston Globe*, 3 Feb. 1970, pp. 1 and 7 and 4 Feb. 1970, p. 13.

journalist Gerald Ratzin, it was snappily titled "Bertrand Russell: Sage, Rebel and 'Crank'" in some versions, "Russell: A Knight against All Evil" in others, and "Russell: A Life Dedicated to Campaign against Evil" in yet others.[38] Based firmly on Russell's recently completed *Autobiography*—which it both quoted directly and drew on surreptitiously—the piece echoed its AP competitor by focusing on the contrasts in Russell's public reputation:

> For much of his life, he was regarded as a rebel or a crank by those in power. But he was also revered as a sage, particularly by the young.[39]

To demonstrate its point that Russell was "a modern Voltaire", the notice devoted the bulk of its attention to the many controversies which Russell either provoked or enriched, ranging from opposition to the Great War, to advocacy of sexual freedom and educational reform, to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, to criticism of Soviet human rights abuses, to the War Crimes Tribunal. Interspersed throughout this account of "a life dedicated to campaigning against evil in all its forms" were brief references to Russell's aristocratic lineage, Cambridge education, religious scepticism, post-war schoolmastering, wartime American interlude, and four marriages (*ibid*.). Missing, by contrast, was any examination of Russell's writings—philosophical or otherwise. Of all his books, only *Principia Mathematica*, *The Principles of Mathematics*, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, and the *Autobiography* were mentioned by name, and Russell's collective intellectual achievement was summed up in the bland judgment that "he had perhaps the most profound effect of any [philosopher] in the first half of the 20th century." But as to what that influence might be, or what his major arguments, insights, and innovations were, or who his many disciples and critics had proved to be, the Reuters article spoke not a single helpful word.

Although most newspapers contented themselves with wire service notices of Russell's death, a few major foreign papers had the resources to produce their own accounts—again, prepared well in advance and lightly revised to take account of the circumstances of Russell's actual

[38] *Jerusalem Post*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 9; *South China Morning Post*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 16.

[39] *Jerusalem Post*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 3.

death.[40] Of these incomparably the most striking was that published in *The New York Times*. Stretching across eight complete columns and thus filling an entire page of the paper, the notice was written by the *Times*'s celebrated obituarist Alden Whitman.[41] As an experienced memorialist with the twin luxuries of virtually unlimited time and space in which to prepare and present his work, Whitman crafted one of the finest appreciations of Russell's life to appear in 1970.

Whitman began his article by quoting the opening sentence of the prologue to the first volume of Russell's *Autobiography*—"three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life"—and then built his obituary around it. Interestingly, he chose to tell the story of Russell's life and reputation backwards—beginning with his post-1945 anti-Vietnam and anti-nuclear campaigning and then searching for the origins of that radical activism in Russell's antecedents, education, and early life. Whitman believed that the key to Russell's life was to be found in his strong ethical sense—"he was at bottom a moralist and a humanist"—but as to either the nature or the source of that moral conviction Whitman was unhelpfully silent. The closest he came was to declare that Russell's "eccentricity, or, as he would have it, his independence of mind, was familial"—an observation which then led to a lengthy discussion of Russell's Stanley and Russell ancestors drawn closely from the *Autobiography*.[42] But as to either the emotional or the intellectual sources of Russell's political activism, Whitman made no direct connections beyond mentioning his early membership in the Fabian Society and support of female suffrage—preferring instead to accept Russell's own testimony that the Great War "transformed him into a political animal".

As for Russell's philosophical achievement, Whitman—perhaps naturally for a professional journalist but untrained philosopher—glided

[40] See, for example, *Excelsior*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Le Monde*, *Osservatore Romano*, and *New York Times*.

[41] Unusually, in a world of anonymity, Whitman's obituary notices were signed. Unusually, as well, he made every effort to visit his subjects before their deaths. In Russell's case, as the *New York Times* notice makes plain, Whitman had travelled to North Wales in 1967.

[42] *New York Times*, 3 Feb. 1970, pp. 1 and 30. Reprinted in Whitman, *The Obituary Book* (New York: Stein and Day; London: Michael Joseph, 1971), and *Come to Judgment* (New York: Viking, 1980).

over Russell's philosophical writings. Although discussing Russell's time at Cambridge and mentioning by name both the titles of Russell's early books and the intellectual influences on Russell from Mill to McTaggart to Peano, he contented himself with the repetition of passed-along praise, such as describing *Principia Mathematica* as "one of the world's great rationalist works" and the *Principles of Mathematics* as helping "to determine the direction of modern philosophy". Instead, in line with his desire to offer an account of Russell as an individual rather than an icon, Whitman chose to focus on the emotional difficulty involved in, rather than the formal arguments of, Russell's early works—quoting repeatedly from the *Autobiography* such well-known lines as "every morning I would sit down before a blank sheet of paper" and "my intellect never quite recovered from the strain."

This insistence on presenting Russell as a functioning, emotionally intelligible human being, rather than as a marble bust on a shelf of Great Minds squeezed between Freud and Wittgenstein, was the great strength of Whitman's notice. Not merely did he trace the major events of Russell's long life, but he peppered his account with lively observations and asides that served to put flesh on the skeleton of chronology. Repeating the common description of Russell as "the Voltaire of his time", for example, Whitman quipped that for all the undoubted truth of that comparison Russell "lacked the Sage of Fernay's malice". In his acknowledgement that Russell possessed "a mind of dazzling brilliance", to offer another instance, he also noted that Russell "could not change a light bulb" and downed "seven double Red Hackle scotches a day". In particular, Whitman punctuated his detailed discussion of Russell's many honours with the observation that "he scorned easy popularity and comfortable platitudes" and interspersed in his narrative of Russell's many marriages and loves the observation that Russell was "a gentle, even shy man" and "delightful as a conversationalist" whose "glittering eyes and half-smile, combined with a shock of white hair, gave him the appearance of a sage, at once remote and kindly."

And how to end this lively, comprehensive presentation of an "extraordinarily long, provocative and complex life"? Skilled writer that he was, Whitman chose to allow Russell the last word, closing his own splendid account with a lengthy extract from Russell's own auto-obituary:

His life, for all its waywardness, had a certain anachronistic consistency, reminiscent of that of the aristocratic rebels of the early nineteenth century. His principles were curious, but, such as they were, they governed his actions. In private life he showed none of the acerbity which marred his writings, but was a genial conversationalist and not devoid of human sympathy.

Although the *New York Times* obituary was incomparably the longest, shrewdest, and most comprehensive non-wire service notice to appear outside of Britain, it was by no means the only such independent account to appear. Major papers as diverse in location and perspective as *Le Monde*, *La Stampa*, *Irish Times*, *Toronto Daily Star*, *Rand Daily Mail*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Osservatore Romano*, and *Times of India* all produced their own substantial assessments written in some instances by their own in-house obituarists and in others by contributing journalists and intellectuals. Although varying considerably in focus, quality, and reliability, these notices nonetheless contained several common themes and, collectively, offered a striking portrayal of Russell's life and achievement.

It was Russell's remarkable capacity to court controversy that received pride of place in these assessments. To *Le Figaro*, for example, he was incomparably "*le patriarche de la contestation*", to *Le Monde* "*un rebelle anachronique*", to the *Times of India* a habitual "figure of opposition", to the *Rand Daily Mail*, quoting the British journalist Philip Toynbee, "a gadfly on the rump of the affluent society", and to the *New Zealand Herald* the possessor of "one constant feature in a long career of much brilliance, paradox and diversity—his facility to provoke people".[43] But it was not merely the ability to provoke that Russell possessed, these obituarists noted, he also enjoyed the capacity to win not simply the assent but the adoration of others. "Few men can have prompted such extreme views in others", noted the *Irish Times*:

Reviled as a crank in his early years for his pacifism, for the freedom of his sexual views and behaviour, he came to be revered throughout the world as a sage and philosopher. Then, as an octogenarian and nonagenarian he was reviled and revered again. It was a measure of the liveliness of his mind and the newness of his views that the reverence he received came from the young.

[43] *Le Figaro*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 28; *Le Monde*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 6; *Times of India*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 9; *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 11; *New Zealand Herald*, 5 Feb. 1970, p. 8.

To the *Washington Post*, no other intellectual in the twentieth century had been "so idolized by so many as had Russell." And to the *Globe and Mail*, to offer a final instance,

> There was this about the Right Honourable Bertrand Arthur William Russell, 3rd Earl Russell, that in his nearly 98 years he stood for something to infuriate those who at the end loved him and for something to confound those who thought him an evil old fool.[44]

And as to the source of that intensely felt, if dichotomous reputation? Russell's independent obituarists universally pointed to two places: his anti-war campaigning stretching from the Great War to Vietnam and his writings (and behaviour) concerning sexuality, marriage, and education. It was Russell's unexpected, bitter, and unremitting opposition to the First World War, Russell's obituarists unanimously agreed, that both changed the trajectory of his life and transformed his reputation in the public mind from that of a cloistered academic to that of a "perennial dissident".[45] After 1914, observed the leading Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*, for example, Russell "left his study and began preaching", sermonizing against both the Great War specifically and the impulses to war more broadly.[46] Rare indeed was the obituarist—and headline writer—who failed to label Russell a "pacifist", a notoriously slippery term whose evolving meaning and suitability as a description Russell himself helped to confuse in the second half of his life. In the unanimous judgment of his obituarists, however, his pacifist convictions were firmly established after 1914 and served to explain his principled opposition to nuclear weapons and to the conflict in Vietnam. "Bertrand Russell laboured from his youth to his old age for peace", observed the Mexican journalist Eamon Garamendi in words echoed by many, "from his defence of conscientious objectors in the First World War to his censure of the atrocities committed in the war in Vietnam."[47] Russell's anti-nuclear and anti-Vietnam campaigning therefore made perfect sense to

[44] *Irish Times*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 8; *Washington Post*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. A4; *Globe and Mail*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 6.
[45] *Excelsior*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 15.
[46] *Corriere della Sera*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 3.
[47] *Excelsior*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 6.

his obituarists.

What needed explaining was where, given his advanced years and honoured old age, he found the energy and courage to do so. As the (Melbourne) *Age* marvelled, "advancing years did not quench his campaigning energy or extinguish his crusading fire".[48] Questions of physical stamina notwithstanding, Russell's willingness—indeed, his determination—to court controversy in his anti-war crusading struck his obituarists as at once foolhardy and brave. It was foolhardy because it made him enemies, opened him to charges of being "the world's busybody … the world's governess", and necessarily led him in the fluid first quarter-century of the nuclear age to moderate his opinions, change his views, and even contradict himself as circumstances shifted and technologies evolved.[49] As every memorialist noted, Russell's serial strictures on American, Soviet, Indian, Chinese, Israeli, British, and French foreign and defence policies in the years after 1945 led him to be termed everything from "an evil old fool" to "the devil in disguise" to "one of the most important philosophers of our time" whose final years seemed "a sad or irritating waste of a great and unique mind".[50] At the same time, Russell's determined anti-war publicity-seeking was brave and won him the admiration of thousands of like-minded souls across continents and generations. "He did everything one man could possibly do to exhort, preach, wheedle and otherwise influence" his fellow men, wrote *Le Monde* admiringly, including two spells in prison over 40 years apart.[51] Indeed, Russell's willingness to sacrifice his comfortable respectability—he "knew the price he would have to pay in person and paid it," remarked *Osservatore Romano*—won him both the grudging regard of his critics and the enduring affection of his adherents.[52] Even the *Rand Daily Mail*, a paper which described Russell as "merely a long-lived failure", conceded that there was something noble about an 80-year-old man who

[48] *The Age*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 7.

[49] *Canberra Times*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 4; *Irish Times*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 8.

[50] *Globe and Mail*, 4 Feb., 1970, p. 6; *Age*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 7; *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 32.

[51] *Le Monde*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 6.

[52] *Osservatore Romano*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 3.

did not think himself too old or too busy, too important or too clever, to lead a protest in the streets against nuclear weapons.[53]

The other feature of Russell's life that his non-wire service obituarists all singled out as a source of controversy and contention was his writing on marriage, sexuality, and education. Without exception, this popular writing from the 1920s and 1930s was discussed in tandem with his own four marriages, and many affairs and not a few obituarists repeated the quip of the *Sydney Morning Herald* that, for better or worse, Russell had "practised what he preached".[54] Interestingly, neither the exact titles of Russell's many books on marriage and education nor the precise nature of his views were much discussed. The *Irish Times*'s observation that his "views on sex provoked expressions of horror from the conventional" was typical in its vagueness, as was the *Morning Herald*'s observation that Russell's "unconventional views on marriage and sexual morals" won him "notoriety" in the interwar years.[55] More common was to cite the controversy over Russell's appointment in 1940 to a "chair of indecency" at CCNY and the celebrated denunciation of his writings as "lecherous, libidinous, lustful, venerous, erotomaniac, aphrodisiac, irreverent, narrow-minded, untruthful, and bereft of moral fiber".[56] Unlike his strident anti-war opinions, which remained a matter of intense and ongoing cultural and political dispute until the very moment of his death, Russell's writings on sexuality, marriage, and childrearing had lost their polemical edge by 1970. In an age of sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll, his interwar writings seemed of more historical than contemporary relevance, as evidence of a change in mores rather than as an issue of continuing controversy and as testimony to his remarkable longevity. For good or ill, the sex war had been fought and won, and Russell was among the victors.

[53] *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 11.

[54] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 2.

[55] *Irish Times*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 8; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 2.

[56] See, for example, *Corriere della Sera*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 3; *Le Monde*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 6; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 2.

V

Lord Russell, Myth-Fighter (*Miami Herald*)
He Asked Hard Questions (*Milwaukee Journal*)
High-Minded and Light-Hearted (*The Nation*)
A Volcanic Life (*Corriere della Sera*)
An Angry Old Man (*New Zealand Herald*)
One of the Giants (*The Oregonian*)
A Great Philosopher (*South China Morning Post*)
The Passionate Sceptic (*Sydney Morning Herald*)
The Last of the Victorian Rebels (*Time*)
He Shunned the Ivory Tower (*Atlanta Constitution*)
The Human Philosopher and Passionate Sceptic (*Buenos Aires Herald*)
Unquenchable (*Christian Science Monitor*)
The Messianic Witness of the Twentieth Century (*Revue du Liban*[57])

Just as war is too important to be left to the generals, so is the passing of one of the world's most famous men too important to be left to the obituarists. In the days immediately after Russell's death, most of the world's leading daily newspapers supplemented their obituaries with an editorial statement of some kind reflecting on Russell's life and achievements. Nearly always written anonymously by editorial page contributors, these pieces were usually short—often barely one or two hundred words—and briskly composed to follow up the earlier obituaries (most commonly, as has been seen, provided by wire services). Their purpose was therefore to allow the individual paper's editorial staff to offer their own assessment of Russell, no matter how perfunctory. And thus from Chicago to Buenos Aires to New Delhi to Auckland to San Francisco to Toronto, editorial teams hustled in the week immediately after Russell's death to find something to say by way of final appreciation or judgment.

In addition, the world's Sunday papers and weekly magazines took advantage of their less stringent deadlines to offer their own appraisals of

[57] *Miami Herald*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 6A; *Milwaukee Journal*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 18; *Nation*, 16 Feb. 1970, p. 166; *Corriere della Sera*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 5 Feb. 1970, p. 8; *Oregonian*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 14; *South China Morning Post*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 22; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 2; *Time*, 16 Feb. 1970, p. 22; *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 4A; *Buenos Aires Herald*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 10; *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 Feb. 1970, p. 20; *Revue du Liban*, 7 Feb. 1970.

Russell's long life. Seeing no reason to repeat the factual details of Russell's biography, they chose instead to attempt to present a sense of his larger cultural and intellectual significance. In the fortnight after Russell's death, therefore, publications as diverse as *Nature*, *The Sunday Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Der Spiegel*, *Paris Match*, *Time*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *New Scientist* all searched for some way not merely to sum up Russell's life but to account for his standing in the world. Combined with the brief assessments of editorialists, these accounts served to wrap up Russell's life for his contemporaries.

But where to begin? 97 years, 60 books, four marriages, three children, two jail terms, one Nobel Prize … how to come to grips with Russell's astonishing productivity, fecundity, and capacity for controversy? For most commentators the place to begin was the beginning—with the early philosophical writings that had made Russell's intellectual reputation and against which his later political activities would so often be contrasted. Although William Ready, the McMaster University librarian who had led the successful effort to purchase Russell's papers for that hitherto little-known provincial Canadian university, could have been forgiven his special pleading concerning Russell's historical standing—"line him up with Aristotle and then put Newton and Voltaire on the sides"—no commentator doubted that Russell's pre-war philosophical work had been innovative, demanding, and influential.[58] The difficulty such non-philosophers faced, however, was how to explain the nature of that work and to trace its influence. Neither *The Principles of Mathematics* nor *Principia Mathematica* is, of course, for the philosophic faint of heart, and the best Russell's editorial commentators could offer were therefore robust, if vague, assertions of significance and influence. To the (Mexico City) *Excelsior*, for example, the *Principia* was "a fundamental book of the culture of the twentieth century", to *Osservatore Romano* it stood as "one of the principal works of the intellect of our times", and to the *Washington Post* it was simply "an unquestioned classic".[59] Given its significance, the *Principia*'s co-author was therefore variously "a giant" of the twentieth century, "one of the greatest intellects of the age", or "the greatest philosopher of his age".[60]

[58] Quoted in *The Age*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 1.

[59] *Excelsior*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 15; *Osservatore Romano*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 2; *Washington Post*, 6 Feb. 1970, p. A18.

[60] (Taipei) *Central Daily News*, 20 Feb. 1970, p. 9; *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 Feb.

As might have been expected, professional philosophers and experienced critics did a much better job, and shrewd appraisals of Russell's work and legacy appeared from Nicola Abbagnano (*La Stampa*), A. J. Ayer (*New Statesman*), George Steiner (*Sunday Times*), and Robin Gandy (*New Scientist*).[61] Such careful, often quite technical, treatments were, however, rare and most papers contented themselves with a version of the (Portland) *Oregonian*'s approving if unenlightening observation that Russell left "a legacy in mathematics, philosophy, and literature that commands the wonder and esteem of all mankind".[62]

Nor were commentators much better at describing what they judged to be the second most important feature of Russell's long life—his ceaseless and outspoken social and political activism. Preferring wisely not to imitate earlier obituarists and to detail that half-century of contention and controversy, commentators chose instead to attempt to explain the deeper reasons—both emotional and intellectual—behind his incessant activism. Their explanations, as might have been expected, differed wildly and irreconcilably. To the (London) *Catholic Herald*, for example, Russell's "primary motivation was a moral indignation that lashed oppression or folly." To the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "pessimism and doubt were the defining values of [Russell's] temperament." To the *Canberra Times*, Russell's "greatest gift was a determined common sense." For its part, *Le Monde* saw Russell's life as "the precocious rebellion of a solitary and unhappy adolescent", while the (London) *Observer* judged him to be "a perfect example of the proverbial adolescent", and *Newsweek* intoned that "too great a gift for abstract thought and too little patience led Russell astray."[63]

And how best, in the end, to sum Russell up in that final astute sentence or striking image loved by editorial writers everywhere and always? Even in death, Russell continued to defy easy description or facile con-

1970, p. 38; *South China Morning Post*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 10.

[61] *La Stampa*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 3; A. J. Ayer, "Russell the Philosopher", *New Statesman*, 6 Feb. 1970, pp. 182–3; George Steiner, "Russell: Voice of Passionate Reason", *The Sunday Times*, 8 Feb. 1970, p. 12; Robin Gandy, "Bertrand Russell and *Principia Mathematica*", *New Scientist*, 12 Feb. 1970, pp. 314–15.

[62] *Oregonian*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 14.

[63] *Catholic Herald*, 6 Feb. 1970, p. 4; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 2; *Canberra Times*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 4; *Le Monde*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 6; *Observer*, 8 Feb. 1970, p. 21; *Newsweek*, 16 Feb. 1970, p. 63.

sensus, and the world's pundits offered valedictories almost laughably at odds with each other:

He was a man of his time. (*Buenos Aires Herald*)
He was a man ahead of his times. (*Miami Herald*)
He was a man of all seasons. (*Central Daily News*, Taipei)
He was one of the immortals. (*Atlanta Constitution*)
He was the last of the angry old men. (*New Zealand Herald*)
He was the last of the Grand Whigs. (*The Spectator*)
He was the salt of the earth. (*Times of India*)
He was, in the truest sense of the words, a righteous gentile. (*Jewish Chronicle*)
He always shook the coconut palm. (*L'Orient*[64])

VI

His life was a feast for any obit writer. (*Alden Whitman*[65])

And how best to conclude a trawl through obituaries from some 70 of the world's premier newspapers and magazines? Easily the most striking feature of these many notices is the extent to which all obituaries are local—local not just in geography but also in ideology, political affiliation, profession, interest, and audience. And because Russell's remarkable longevity and astonishing variety of interests and crusades led him to cross perhaps more boundaries than any other twentieth-century British intellectual, rare was the obituarist who failed to stress some "local" connection between Russell and the paper's readers. The most common such connection was a hybrid of the geographical and the intellectual. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, for example, reminded its readers that two of Russell's first three books had focused on German subjects—*German Social Democracy* (1896) and *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (1900).[66] Similarly, both *La Stampa* and *Corriere*

[64] *Buenos Aires Herald*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 10; *Miami Herald*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 6A; *Central Daily News*, 18 Feb. 1970, p. 9; *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 4A; *New Zealand Herald*, 5 Feb. 1970, p. 8; *Spectator*, 14 Feb. 1970, p. 208; *Times of India*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 6; *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 Feb. 1970, p. 6; *L'Orient*, 8 Feb. 1970, p. 9.
[65] *The Obituary Book*, p. 263.
[66] *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 32.

della Sera informed their readers of the "momentous influence" of "our" Giuseppe Peano on Russell's early logical theories, while *Le Figaro* and *Paris Match*, not to be outdone, made the point that it had been in France at the "universal exhibition [of 1900] that symbolized the brilliant dawn of the century" that Russell and Peano had first met.[67] In other instances, the link was a mixture of geography and personality. The *San Francisco Examiner*, for example, ran an entire article on Russell's connection with the *Examiner*'s great publisher, William Randolph Hearst, while the *Times of India* printed a photograph of a beaming Russell shaking hands with an equally smiling Jawaharlal Nehru and recalled that Russell had been "temperamentally sympathetic to the Indian struggle for liberty" and had served as chairman of the India League for a spell in the 1930s.[68] And in the same fashion, both the *Toronto Daily Star* and *Globe and Mail* made much of the "particularly fortunate [foresight] of the authorities at McMaster University" in acquiring Russell's papers and library.[69]

Another local connection favoured by the obituarists was an amalgam of the political and the ideological. The London-based *Jewish Chronicle*, for example, devoted its entire notice to Russell's Zionism, anti-semitism, and "persistent appeals to persuade governments to treat Jews with tolerance and humanity"—activities which led its editorial writer to judge Russell to be "in the truest sense of the words, a righteous Gentile", an opinion which the *Jerusalem Post* echoed in its pages.[70] By contrast, *Granma*, the organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, saluted Russell as a "distinguished anti-war man of science" who had bravely and rightly condemned "North American

[67] *La Stampa*, 4 Feb 1970, p. 3; *Corriere della Sera*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 3; *Le Figaro*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 28; *Paris Match*, 14 Feb. 1970, p. 74.

[68] *San Francisco Examiner*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 8; *Times of India*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 9.

[69] *Toronto Daily Star*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 6; *Globe and Mail*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 3.

[70] *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 Feb. 1970, pp. 6 and 38; *Jerusalem Post*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 1. Not to be outdone and as evidence of Russell's remarkable political range, some of the arab-world press also counted him as one of their own greatest champions. In an article titled "Bertrand Russell et la culture islamique", for example, the (Beirut) *Soir* observed that "amongst the greatest contemporary philosophers who have manifested their free and lively sympathy for the Arabic and Islamic world," Russell was the most "real and sincere" and the most appreciative of Islamic "science, mathematics, and civilization" (*Soir*, 11 Feb. 1970).

aggression in Vietnam", convened a "War Tribunal for crimes committed by the Yankee imperialists" in South-East Asia, and left as his last political intervention "a demand for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories" in Palestine and the Sinai.[71] And to both the (Hong Kong) *South China Morning Post* and (Taipei) *Central Daily News*, to offer a final example, pride of place in their assessments of Russell went to his early, approving visit in 1921 and to his later, critical judgment against the "true nature" of the Communist regime of Mao Zedong.[72]

Another variant of ideological connection was provided by religious writers. To Lo Gwan, the Catholic Archbishop of Taiwan, Russell's "principled pacifism" was a residue of his early Christian education, rather than a consequence of political conviction or the result of ideological conversion.[73] To both the *Catholic Herald* and *Church Times*, Russell's long-standing and oft-expressed dissent from traditional Christian teachings both merited close attention and held a lesson for believing Christians. In the *Herald*, the Jesuit theologian Peter Hebblethwaite paid tribute to Russell's life-long attempt to "retain the attitude of religion without the metaphysic that sustains it", although concluding in the end that that effort had been an intellectual failure. And the editorial writer for the Anglican *Church Times*, after describing Russell as a "Socratic genius … a giant in heart as well as in mind", observed that "it is a sad reflection for Christians that such a man should have been so irreconcilably opposed to true religion" and suggested that "the Church might do well to reflect on its failure, nowadays, to have much positive influence on men of outstanding intellect."[74]

Another local connection made much of by Russell's obituarists was professional. Not merely did the distinguished British philosophical journal *Mind* break tradition and print a photograph of Russell in its

[71] *Granma*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 1, and 5 Feb. 1970, p. 8. Interestingly, neither the (Beijing) *People's Daily* nor the (Moscow) *Pravda* and *Izvestia* seem to have printed obituaries, although *Izvestia* broadcast a statement over the radio. *The Times* quoted *Izvestia* as remarking that Russell "was long respected in Russia and considered most representative of the progressive spirit outside the communist world as the celebrated English philosopher and militant for social action" (*The Times*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 9).

[72] *South China Morning Post*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 10; *Central Daily News*, 20 Feb. 1970, p. 9.

[73] *Central Daily News*, 18 Feb. 1970, p. 9.

[74] *Catholic Herald*, 6 Feb. 1970, p. 4; *Church Times*, 6 Feb. 1970, p. 12.

April 1970 issue by way of marking his passing, but the *Journal of Philosophy* took the unusual step of publishing a page-long quotation from "A Free Man's Worship".[75] For its part, the *Times Literary Supplement* opened its 5 February issue with an essay on Russell's place in the twentieth-century "Republic of Letters" and on his "unique place in the intellectual history of the past seventy years". Noting Russell's "astonishingly prolific" and "extraordinarily lucid" literary output, the *TLS* praised "the highly distinctive" clarity and "unfailing relevance" of Russell's writing throughout his life.[76] And since by the time of his death Russell was the senior member of the Fellowship of the Royal Society (elected 1908), his scientific colleagues also paid tribute to one of their own.[77] The preeminent British scientific periodical *Nature*, for example, offered an unusually lengthy eulogy. Focused as might be expected on Russell's scientific contributions, the *Nature* article detailed not merely his early logical doctrines—"their effect on modern logic (and mathematics) has been incalculable"—but also both his many writings on popular science and his pathbreaking role as a "pioneer who called for social responsibility on the part of scientists".[78] Similarly, the American journal *Science* praised both the "monumental" influence of *Principia Mathematica* and the "committed intellectual activism" that had characterized Russell's life after 1914.[79] For its part, to offer a final example, *New Scientist* struck a discordant note. Presenting a detailed account of Russell's early mathematical philosophy under the title "Bertrand Russell and *Principia Mathematica*", the Oxford mathematical logician Robin Gandy offered few concessions either to his readers or to Russell. In an essay bristling with logical notation and peppered with references to Frege, Cantor, and all the usual mathematical suspects, Gandy asserted that there was much less to Russell's early philosophical work in logic and mathematics than commonly met the eye. To Gandy, Russell was "not a problem solver; he was a seeker after truth", the *Prin-*

[75] *Mind*, 79 (April 1970): 160; *Journal of Philosophy*, 67 (26 Feb. 1970): 115.

[76] *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 Feb. 1970, p. 122.

[77] A formal, lengthy obituary, written by the distinguished mathematician Georg Kreisel, appeared in *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society*, 19 (1973): 582–620.

[78] *Nature*, 225 (14 March 1970): 1,080–1.

[79] *Science*, 167 (20 Feb. 1970): 1,110–11.

cipia was not "as exciting a work as its auspices promise", Russell's historical importance was "not as great as that of his near contemporaries Frege, Hilbert, and Brouwer", and thus "the *essence* of Russell's work in mathematical philosophy was a disappointment." Conceding in a final sentence that Russell had had a "great and largely beneficent influence … on other branches of philosophy", Gandy nonetheless insisted that Russell's logicist programme "cannot be expected to cast light on foundational problems, nor can it be ranked as one of the greatest discoveries of our age." And as to the source of Russell's failure? To Gandy it was simple: Russell's deficiency as a pure mathematician: "Russell seems never to have sought out the sort of mathematical fact that would be relevant to the problem. It is precisely because he stayed aloof from actual mathematical experience that his ideas have had so little influence on subsequent work in the foundations of mathematics."[80]

A final area of local terrain prominent in Russell's obituaries was the personal. Although Russell's remarkable longevity meant that he outlived all of his Cambridge contemporaries and that he therefore had the opportunity to become an accomplished obituarist in his own right, his great age and diffused energies also meant that by the time of his death he had become personally known to thousands of broadcast personalities, anti-war activists, professional philosophers, publishing executives, anti-nuclear protestors, and peers of the realm, among others. Many of his obituarists, therefore, had been directly acquainted with him through one or another of his campaigns and contexts, and most were naturally eager to draw upon that personal connection in their eulogies. The distinguished Italian philosopher Cornelio Fabro, for example, enlivened his notice in the *Osservatore Romano* by recalling a meeting with Russell at the International Congress of Philosophy in Amsterdam in 1948: "anyone who has met and listened to him … can never forget him: that lean and sunken face, crowned with white hair, the eyes bright and calm, but with a touch of melancholy which was a sign of wisdom and of suffering at the same time."[81] And by way of a second example, the British scientist and broadcaster Jacob Bronowski devoted his entire memoir in the American political magazine *The Nation* to recalling their

[80] Gandy, "Bertrand Russell and *Principia Mathematica*", *New Scientist*, 45 (12 Feb. 1970): 314–15.

[81] *Osservatore Romano*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 3.

time together as participants in the BBC's popular Brains Trust programme in the 1940s and 1950s. Remarking that Russell was "as spontaneously happy in the play of mind as an athlete in his body", Bronowski noted admiringly that "there was a grace of style in the way he thought and talked … that made all of us younger men envy and imitate him even as we argued." "The recollection that I carry with me from those evenings, earnest and fun together", Bronowski concluded his reminiscence, "is how single his personality was wherever one probed it; that is what made him so powerful to argue with and to learn from. There were no two ways about Bertrand Russell."[82]

A second striking feature of Russell's obituaries when read in aggregate was the remarkable extent to which he himself succeeded not merely in laying down the master narrative of his life but also in providing an interpretive structure for its understanding—one which has endured to this day. Russell was, of course, a compulsive and accomplished autobiographer, and his many essays and broadcasts in the 1950s and 1960s—collected as, or in, *Portraits from Memory* (1956), *My Philosophical Development* (1959), and *Fact and Fiction* (1961)—found a wide and approving audience. In the last three full years of his life, moreover, he published his hugely successful three-volume *Autobiography* to international acclaim.[83] Rare, therefore, was the obituarist who set to work on Russell's death notice without an open copy of the *Autobiography* at his elbow. As a result, a serial reader of Russell's death notices is struck by two features. In the first place, one meets the same stories over and again—often given directly in Russell's own words and nearly as often in a lightly paraphrased version: how his grandfather Russell met Napoleon on Elba, how his grandmother Stanley knew the widow of the Young Pretender, how his grandmother Russell taught him "not to follow a multitude to do evil", how his brother introduced him to the "dazzling" and "delicious" world of Euclid, how his arrival at Cambridge in the autumn of 1890 opened a new world of companionship and scholarship, how he fell under the neo-Hegelian spell of McTaggart only to be disenchanted by the robust realism of Moore, how he laboured mightily on

[82] Jacob Bronowski, "High-Minded and Light-Hearted", *The Nation*, 210 (16 Feb. 1970): 166.

[83] The publication history of the *Autobiography* is comprehensively told in B&R, 1: 275–84.

the manuscripts of *The Principles of Mathematics* and *Principia* and fell out of love with Alys … how he travelled to Soviet Russia and republican China, how he married four wives and divorced three, how he became a father and then a schoolmaster … how he took refuge in America but found controversy in New York and Philadelphia, how he returned to Cambridge in triumph and to the Order of Merit and Nobel Prize … how he came to oppose nuclear weapons and to espouse World Government, how he organized both Pugwash and CND, how he became a bitter critic of American imperialism and Soviet expansionism alike, how he came to be first bewitched by and then disillusioned with Ralph Schoenman…. In the second place, Russell's autobiographical writings offered far more than his own recollections, told in his own distinctive voice. Not only did the *Autobiography* contain much hitherto unpublished correspondence with Russell's family, friends, and associates, but it also offered his own clearly stated self-interpretation: "Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life", Russell told his readers. And although he did not directly dare his obituarists to prove otherwise, he did provide a candid and compelling account of his "longing for love, search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind" that went a long way to vindicate his view (*Auto.*, 1: 13). Along the way, moreover, Russell offered a series of assumptions and assertions that both justified his version of his life's meaning and influenced all later commentators on it—assumptions and assertions which stressed the centrality of the Great War, which emphasized his family heritage and aristocratic background, which dwelt in detail on his various marital and romantic upsets, which saw his life as one marked by a succession of sharp turning-points leading to ever greater emotional maturity, intellectual insight, and political wisdom, which gave little attention to his intellectual work and philosophical doctrines, which gave pride of place to his work on behalf of peace and interventions in world affairs, and which saw history as the accumulated product of the actions and ideas of individual men and women and historical change as driven by the will and decisions of such individuals.

An absorbing narrative, elegantly and candidly told; a trove of memorable character sketches full variously of wit, affection, and distaste; a plausible set of organizing principles and an attractive edifice of interpretation and understanding—short of writing them himself, Russell came as close as an individual could to setting the terms of his own obituaries,

to say nothing of writing his own rough draft in 1936. And it is therefore hardly surprising that when the moment came in February 1970, his obituarists used the tools he had provided. Although the very best of them, as has been seen, did their best to transcend Russell's account, many—such as Roy Perrott in the (London) *Observer*, Jean Knecht in *Le Monde*, and Edgardo Bertoli in the *Corriere della Sera*—offered little more than a brisk retelling of Russell's life story essentially on his own terms.[84] By their very nature, of course, autobiographical writings have their own purposes and conventions, and Russell's are certainly marked by the score settling, special pleading, and preemptive striking characteristic of the genre. But even he could scarcely have expected that his memoirs would be as formative and enduring as they proved to be.

A third, and final, noteworthy feature of Russell's obituaries taken as a whole is the wisdom of the adage of the Seven Sages: "Do not speak ill of the dead." Although Russell accumulated more than his fair share of enemies in his life and although many of his harshest critics survived him, few were prepared to offer direct, unsparing criticism in the first days after his death. Of major world newspapers, only the conservative *Chicago Tribune* seems to have had either the candour or the bad taste to speak what it judged to be the plain truth: "The tragedy of Bertrand Russell was that he lived so long after his great mind had degenerated … and that he died far advanced into senility."[85] Instead, most obituarists preferred to pull their punches and to resort either to euphemism or to the third-person anonymous. By way of euphemism, a studied understatement was the most common approach. The *Buenos Aires Herald*, for example, simply subsumed all discussion of Russell's marital and extramarital woes by commenting, "he lived a somewhat untidy personal life", while the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* glided over a great deal in its observation that "he was not always wise in his militancy or in his choice

[84] Roy Perrott, "In Search of Bertrand Russell", *Observer*, 8 Feb. 1970, p. 21; Jean Knecht, "Un Rebelle Anachronique", *Le Monde*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 6; Edgardo Bartoli, "L'Ultima Opera del Filosofo [The Last Work of the Philosopher]", *Corriere della Sera*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 3.

[85] A further taste of the *Tribune*'s remarkable nastiness is this assessment of Russell's last secretary, Ralph Schoenman: "In recent years he apparently was under the evil influence of a young American secretary, Ralph Schoenman, who lost his American passport when he visited Hanoi in 1967 and was deported by Britain in 1968" (*Chicago Tribune*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 12).

of associates." For its part, the *Corriere della Sera*, to offer a final instance, tried its best to accentuate the positive: "his life was greater than the sum of its parts".[86] A more common tactic to avoid direct personal criticism of Russell's behaviour was to refrain from offering such condemnation oneself but to observe that unattributed "others" had done so. Canada's national paper the *Globe and Mail*, for example, acknowledged that there were "those who thought him an evil old fool", while at the other end of Bay Street the Liberal-leaning *Toronto Daily Star* noted that Russell had been "reviled as a crank by many", "condemned by others for his four marriages", and accused by still unnamed "others of being a pro-Communist and selling out his class".[87] The use of such anonymous criticism had, of course, three great advantages: first, it was true—Russell was indisputably one of the most controversial public men of the twentieth century; second, it allowed his obituarists at once to rise above such unseemly name-calling themselves yet at the same time to include it in their notices; third, it freed the obituarists to focus their own comments on his intellectual distinction and political activism and to adopt a benevolent tone of generosity and high-mindedness in their own eulogies. For all these reasons, Russell received a respectful and affectionate send-off which, one suspects, would have both surprised and disquieted him.

And what is missing from Russell's obituaries? Most obvious among the ranks of the absent is any appreciation—indeed, in most cases, even a bare mention—of his irrepressible wit and high good humour. As anyone who has spent more than an hour in Russell's intellectual company—in his correspondence, in his historical writing, in his journalism and essays—is aware, cheerfulness was always breaking through. Although Russell's emotional register easily stretched to scorn, indignation, dudgeon, rage, and self-pity, he was incapable of staying on his emotional high horse for long and, indeed, one of his most enviable qualities was his remarkable emotional resilience. To be sure, obituaries are by their very nature solemn occasions and not the moment for rhetorical pratfalls, but the failure of all but the barest few of Russell's memorialists to make mention of one of his most striking characteristics is at

[86] *Buenos Aires Herald*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 10; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 2B; *Corriere della Sera*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 3.

[87] *Globe and Mail*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 6; *Toronto Daily Star*, 3 Feb. 1970, p. 10.

once surprising and regrettable.[88]

So, too, was the failure of all but the rarest of them to come to grips in any serious fashion with Russell's philosophical achievement. At its most creative, of course, Russell's early work in logic and the philosophy of mathematics was fearsomely technical—and in its details beyond the reach even of most professional philosophers then and now. The inability of non-philosophically adept writers or readers either to describe or to understand it was therefore hardly surprising. At the same time, however, Russell was both a determined popularizer of philosophy and the possessor of a luminous prose style that made such non-technical books as *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) and *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945) as well as such non-academic essays as "The Study of Mathematics" (1902) and "A Free Man's Worship" (1903) into widely read classics. Moreover, after 1914 Russell deliberately widened the range of his writings far beyond the topics of what might loosely be called professional philosophy—logic, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics—into political theory, social policy, history, popular science, marriage and sexuality, education, and beyond. He became, that is, twentieth-century Britain's greatest man of letters, writing about anything and everything in publications both prestigious and obscure. And surely it is not misplaced to judge that obituaries of an intellectual which fail to make careful reference to his ideas are seriously deficient—as well as evidence that Russell was no ordinary intellectual.

A final absence in nearly all of Russell's obituaries is any serious effort to assess his historical standing. To be sure, as has been seen, several obituarists likened Russell to Voltaire, while a few others used the term "Whig" in some manner in their notices and still others quoted his own declaration that even in 1936 he was "the last survivor of a dead epoch". But scarcely any of his eulogists tried to locate him in intellectual and historical time and space. To be sure, obituaries are a form of a daily journalism and by their very nature a genre which aims at immediacy

[88] In his own memoir of his father, Conrad Russell singled out "the spirit of fun" as one of Russell's chief qualities and, indeed, the one he himself would most miss ("My Father—Bertrand Russell", *Illustrated London News*, 14 Feb. 1970, p. 256). There were, of course, instances of unintentional humour, such as *Time* magazine's priceless description of Ottoline Morrell as "a rangy, red-haired bluestocking" (*Time*, 16 Feb. 1970, p. 95).

rather than long-term assessment. Nonetheless, virtually none of Russell's memorialists seem either to have taken the time or to have felt the impulse to offer even a provisional appraisal of Russell's cultural standing or intellectual reputation beyond vague assertions of his "immortality".

VII

> Bertrand Russell made his mark as a thinker before most of us living today were born. He can justly be called the British Voltaire and, like Voltaire, his conversation was even more brilliant than his writing.
>
> Controversy over the activities of his last years will continue for long after his death. But for longer than that will continue the unanimous admiration of all his fellow countrymen, and a far wider world community, for his contributions to the advance of scientific thought and to the advance of civilized ideals which he proclaimed over more than half a century of philosophic expression.
>
> (Prime Minister Harold Wilson[89])

Were Bertrand Russell once again to confound his doctors and to push his lifespan even further beyond its scripturally allotted three score and ten—were he, that is, to die on the evening of 2 February 2007, his twenty-first century obituarists would universally hail him as one of the world's premier "public intellectuals"—a term scarcely coined in 1970. Aristocratic scion, professional philosopher, popular essayist, defiant disobedient, accomplished broadcaster, tireless organizer, Russell certainly merited the description and would not have been ashamed to be seen in the company of such other members of the species as Sartre and Sontag, Chomsky and Camus, Sakharov and Said. He himself, however, would almost certainly have preferred the term "man of letters". A proud and unrepentant Victorian, Russell would have chosen to be connected with the sages of his nineteenth-century youth—with Ruskin and Carlyle, Mill and Darwin, Arnold and Bentham, Coleridge and Newman—for whom the term public intellectual would have been a redundancy. Convinced as an article of faith that ideas have consequences and that, as a result, men of ideas have shaped human history from the ancient world to the present, Russell would—and did—find

[89] "The World Pays Tribute to Bertrand Russell", *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1970, p. 9.

nothing at all surprising in a life of controversy, engagement, and upset—especially if one's surname was Russell. The surprise would have been the contrary—a life exclusively of the academy, of teaching and professional scholarship. And indeed, as few of his obituarists failed to remark, he had consciously refashioned himself in the years after losing his Cambridge lectureship in 1916—pushing himself into an almost exclusively public life.

In 1936, as has been seen, Russell imagined that by the time of his projected death in 1962 he would stand as "the last survivor of a dead epoch". In part, of course, this assertion was a simple tease, in part an element in his familiar argument that the Great War had marked the end of the nineteenth century and all its benefits, and in part a recognition that even by 1936 the life of the mind was not what it had been. But Russell then confused matters still further by living another three full decades past 1936 and nearly a decade after 1962. Importantly, moreover, he lived those years not in quiet retirement or private study but at full stretch—publishing furiously, campaigning indefatigably, and inserting himself into so many disputes great and small, East and West, that there came to be something in his life to offend everyone and to confuse even the most acute and well-meaning of his contemporaries. In February 1970 this Victorian man of letters was still a going concern—even chastising the Israeli government from the grave in a posthumously released statement.[90] Is it little wonder, therefore, that his contemporaries were not certain what to make of this remarkable survivor, dinosaur, throwback, freak, relic, …? Two who tried to identify and to locate Russell in intellectual and historical time and space, Roger Angell in *The New Yorker* and George Steiner in the *Sunday Times*, therefore merit the last word.

Although conceding that "few lives are less susceptible to neat memorialization" than Russell's, Angell confessed that meditating on the long course of Russell's life could only be done "with pleasure and gratitude". Pleasure was to be found through admiring "a life so deeply filled", so long, and so "self-explained". And gratitude derived not merely from Russell's "famous, breathtaking expeditions to the highest mathematical

[90] Russell's statement on Israeli treatment of Palestinians can be found in *Granma*, 5 Feb. 1970, p. 8; *Le Monde*, 5 Feb. 1970, p. 2; and *Yours Faithfully, Bertrand Russell*, ed. Ray Perkins, Jr. (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2002), pp. 410–12.

ranges and most distant philosophical pampas", but also from his irrepressible habit of "going too far":

> He was guilty of too many opinions, too many recantations, too many jailings, too many love affairs, too many marriages, too many professions.

That gratitude and not censure was the appropriate reaction to Russell's habitual excesses, Angell maintained, was due to the simple fact that they were almost always in a good cause:

> Often, though, what had seemed ridiculous or excessive at the time looked more nearly essential later on, and in the end, in his tenth decade, it could be noticed that the central concerns of his lifetime—the utter necessity of peace, the universal reaching out for love, a compassion for all human suffering—were precisely the concerns of the youngest and most hopeful generation on earth.

But above all else, happiness and gratitude were prompted by the remarkable but joyful fact that even in his 98th year Russell

> died, so to speak, unfinished—still changing, still wondering, still unsolemn and incautious, still sceptical, still asking not the last question but the one after that. These qualities, it occurs to us, are perfectly suitable not only for a philosopher but also for a journalist, a statesman, a student, a teacher, an artist, a mother, a rock musician, a weather forecaster, a recluse, an activist, a gardener, a minister, or a man-about-town. They are suitable, in short, for each of us and for every occupation, and Bertrand Russell, if we are to sum him up after all, seems to fit best into that rarest of all occupations, the exemplar.[91]

To George Steiner, then in the second decade of a distinguished critical career that has stretched into the twenty-first century, Russell's death was a major cultural event which "literally leaves the world a little emptier." Not since the death of Tolstoy (1910), Steiner suggested, had there been "a similar silence, a catching of breath in world-wide tribute". And what was it about Russell that had provoked such collective international mourning? In part, Steiner observed, simple longevity mattered: "the

[91] *The New Yorker* article appeared anonymously in the magazine's "The Talk of the Town" section (*The New Yorker*, 46 [21 Feb. 1970]: 29). Angell's authorship is confirmed in B&R, 2: 508.

plain fact of Russell's existence was a vivid link with a past which, as distance lengthens, seems to have possessed exceptional intellectual force and moral distinction." Indeed, in Steiner's view, Russell "carried with himself, in a physical way, assurances, assertions of human quality which, more recently, have been very difficult to come by." Thus, with Russell's death "the nineteenth century has slipped over the visible horizon, like one of those galaxies whose strange escapements in time and along the curves of space fascinated Russell's imagination." In part, the impact of Russell's death was heightened by his family background. Astonishingly, Steiner observed, a man still alive in 1970 had been John Stuart Mill's godson, had dined with Gladstone, and had had a nanny who "had clear recollections of hearing news of Waterloo." And in part the sharp sense of loss felt around the world upon Russell's death derived from his enduring intellectual achievements. Unlike Voltaire, whose writings contain nothing "that has philosophic value of the first rank", Steiner asserted,

> Russell's achievements in mathematical logic and in the development of the English empiricist traditions will matter even when many of the political controversies to which he devoted his genius are historical footnotes.

Also to be considered, Steiner argued as the perceptive critic that he was and remains, was Russell's incomparable capacity to speak—both in person and on the page—to a wide audience spanning three generations. Or, rather, Steiner being Steiner, if not incomparable, then one had to return at least to the distant days of Hume "to find any major thinker as able to state his views with lucidity or as committed to the job of wide communication." And far from being either innate or fortuitous, "that style, with its spareness, its scrupulous regard for connection and full statement of premiss" derived from Russell's early, demanding work in logic: "what is certain is that the long obsession with absolute clarity of discourse equipped Russell, as it has no other modern philosopher, with a style of complete expressive directness." Indeed, in a sentence which only George Steiner could have written, "Russell's language has the unobtrusive tang of mountain water. It is the idiom of a man who knows his own mind (a rare gift) yet is wary of it." And by way of illustration and conclusion Steiner made mention not of any one of Russell's books, essays, or broadcasts but of all of them:

The massive Archive catalogue, published in 1967, covered 70 books and more than 25,000 letters. Our time has produced no other document quite like it, none that bears witness to a more unbroken identity of moral, intellectual presence. The last item in the bibliography will be a letter of protest concerning Israeli policies written a few days before Russell's death. The cause is thorny and unpopular. Russell knew that the truth very often is, and that a man must speak out precisely when it is tactless or upsetting to do so. There are not many left just now to remind us of that. As Auden wrote at the occasion of Freud's death, "the house of intellect mourns." (*Sunday Times*, 8 Feb. 1970, p. 12)[92]

[92] I am grateful to Andrew Bone and Sheila Turcon for making copies of Russell's 1921 obituaries available to me, to Sabine Adair, Joseph Berrigan, and Tom and Lisa Ganschow for translation help, and to Andrew Bone, Guy Ortolano, and the Editor for their careful readings of the manuscript. Many of the obituaries cited are available in the Russell Archives.