

“THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE”

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

Miranda Seymour. *Ottoline Morrell: Life on the Grand Scale*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992. Pp. x, 452. £25.00.

Ottoline Morrell has hitherto been better known in caricature than in reality. The most famous literary hostess of her time, she appears frequently in the letters, diaries, and novels of those she entertained—and rarely in a flattering light. The Bloomsberries set the tone for this, and the next generation of writers whom she entertained after the First World War took their lead from them. It was, as Miranda Seymour points out, safer to mock Ottoline with the Bloomsberries than to be mocked with her by them.

The role of a literary hostess invites suspicion, especially among those of a

somewhat iconoclastic temper, who, like the Bloomsberries, are prone to a degree of armchair psychologizing. Did they really want or need aristocratic patronage? Was Ottoline, while devoid of artistic ability herself, attempting to acquire an artistic reputation by associating with them? Was she manipulating them for her own greater glory, arranging them like so many jewels in a setting of which she was to be the centrepiece? The Bloomsberries thought so and said as much to each other in many memorably malicious letters.

But even more memorable were her appearances, lightly disguised, in the fiction of her friends (or, more usually, her former friends—for her friendship rarely survived a published novel unbroken). There were many such appearances.⁵ The most savage and least distinguished, *The Aesthetes* by Walter Turner (1927), came late in her career, after the path had been well trodden. More notable was Aldous Huxley's amusing satire of the whole Garsington community in *Crome Yellow* (1921) in which Ottoline appears as the extraordinary Priscilla Wimbush, whose clothes suggested a combination of the royal family and the musical hall and whose head was "surmounted by a lofty and elaborate coiffure of a curiously improbable shade of orange".⁶

Huxley's novel was easily recognizable as caricature (though not less hurtful on that account). More serious in obscuring Ottoline was D. H. Lawrence's portrayal of her as Hermione Roddice in *Women in Love* (1917), where the line between caricature and reality was much finer. We have no account of Ottoline's actual conversation more vivid than the following from Lawrence's Hermione:

Hermione took no notice. Suddenly her face puckered, her brow was knit with thought, she seemed twisted in troublesome effort for utterance.

"Do you really think, Rupert," she asked ..., "do you really think it is worth while? Do you really think the children are better for being roused to consciousness?"

A dark flash went over his face, a silent fury....

"They are not roused to consciousness," he said. "Consciousness comes to them, willy-nilly."

"But do you think they are better for having it quickened, stimulated? Isn't it better that they should remain unconscious of the hazel, isn't it better that they should see as a whole, without all this pulling to pieces, all this knowledge?"

... "But knowing is everything to you, it is all your life," he broke out. She slowly looked at him.

"Is it?" she said.

"To know, that is your all, that is your life—you have only this, this knowledge," he cried. "There is only one tree, there is only one fruit, in your mouth."

⁵ Seymour provides a comprehensive list, pp. 431–2.

⁶ Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow*, Chap. 2 (London: Heron Books, 1968), p. 17. Russell himself appears in *Crome Yellow* as Mr. Scogan. His role there is discussed by Margaret Moran in "Bertrand Russell as Scogan in Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*", *Mosaic*, 17 (1984): 117–32.

Again she was some time silent.

"Is there?" she said at last, with the same untouched calm. And then in a tone of whimsical inquisitiveness: "What fruit, Rupert?"⁷

Nor are there many descriptions of Ottoline as vivid as Hermione's entrance in the novel:

[A] tall, slow, reluctant woman with a weight of fair hair and a pale, long face.... Now she came along, with her head held up, balancing an enormous flat hat of pale yellow velvet, on which were streaks of ostrich feathers, natural and grey. She drifted forward as if scarcely conscious, her long blanched face lifted up, not to see the world.⁸

After a score of pages like this, it is difficult to avoid reading Hermione into every story one hears about Ottoline.

Ottoline was deeply hurt both by the caricatures and by the gossip spread about her. Yet, in the end, she forgave almost everyone who had maligned her. She never broke with Lytton Strachey, perhaps the most disrespectful of the gossip-mongers, and in her last years she became very friendly with Virginia Woolf, who ran him a close second. She made up with Aldous Huxley, despite *Crome Yellow*, and even made her peace with Lawrence before his death, though they never met after *Women in Love* was published. More remarkably, she even welcomed Frieda Lawrence (whom she held mainly responsible for Hermione Roddice) to her home when Frieda returned to England after Lawrence's death—an act of notable charity, one would have thought, even without the offence of a novel. Perhaps she felt it was an honour to have been written about at all by such writers, as Stephen Spender consoled himself on finding he'd been maligned in Virginia Woolf's diary.⁹ The one exception was Walter Turner. After *The Aesthetes* was published she never spoke to him again, and couldn't bear to hear him mentioned. Perhaps, she thought (not unreasonably) there was little honour in this case.

The way she has been presented by others isn't the only obstacle to seeing Ottoline sympathetically. Her presentation of herself is often equally damaging. Her letters to Russell, for example, when they are deciphered, prove a severe disappointment. Only occasionally in them did she rise to a paragraph of connected prose. Vague, fragmentary, clichéd, and over-emphatic, the

⁷ D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (New York: Viking, 1971), Chap. 3, p. 33. Russell appears in the novel as Sir Joshua Matheson, "a learned, dry Baronet of 50" (Chap. 8, p. 76).

⁸ *Ibid.*, Chap. 1, p. 9.

⁹ Cf. Stephen Spender, *Journals 1939–1983*, ed. John Goldsmith (New York: Random House, 1986), p. 387.

letters jump waywardly from topic to topic and give every impression of a mind that wasn't properly upon its task. The letters are full of elevated generalities and short on specifics, grandiloquently but often vacuously emotional. Russell's letters to Ottoline, it true, occasionally suffer from some of the same faults—an emotional elevation that sometimes seems forced and artificial—but the contrast between Russell's fluency and Ottoline's inarticulateness is often astonishing. It must be admitted that at times she can sound like a scatter-brained, artsy aristocrat from a 1920s farce. Even Ottoline's handwriting contributes to the impression, with its elaborate ornaments and curlicues. It looks very striking on the page, but is almost impossible to read. In many different respects, the ratio of ornament to substance in the letters is high.

Ottoline's two volumes of memoirs, published after her death,¹⁰ do not dispel the impression. Here she is in Sicily:

One day, walking inland up the steep rocky hillside along a little rough old path between wild lavender and marble, there came dashing down upon me a flock of goats with their goatherd—Pan himself, alive and wild, dancing down in wild career singing a queer song as he went. (*Memoirs*, I: 115)

And here, two pages later, in Syracuse:

It is very moving to be in places where rushing life has been lived, life terrible and tragic, mad and gay, but now all past and gone, leaving only dry shells behind, overgrown with vegetation, and with the vague thoughts of the gazers. How few really feel or are moved by the life that was lived so passionately in these ruins some two thousand years ago? (*Ibid.*, p. 117)

Little wonder that she found her travelling companion, Hilda Pennant, "too detailed" in her interests (p. 118). There are times when Lawrence's Hermione seems all too real.

With all this, one wonders what Russell saw in her. There is no doubt his love affair with her was one of the great passions of his life. His infatuation lasted for years and they remained intimate friends long after physical passion had ended. Physical attraction was, in any case, only part of the explanation—and perhaps, for Ottoline, not even that. In some curious way, they found each other deeply compatible, intellectually, spiritually, and morally. Four years before her death Ottoline wrote of Bertie in her journal: "he is the one real friend I have. We talk the same language.... He and I

know what we mean" (Seymour, p. 378). And a week later they turn up, "two old friends" arm-in-arm, at Virginia Woolf's (*ibid.*). Yet, on the face of it, it would be hard to suggest two more improbable companions. Was it that Russell was blinded to the faults that others saw so easily? Or was it that he saw deeper and found virtues the others missed?

It is one of the merits of Miranda Seymour's excellent new biography of Ottoline Morrell that it challenges so many of our preconceptions about its subject. It is a tribute to her skills as a biographer that, against the formidable opposition of Lytton's letters, Woolf's diaries, and Lawrence's novels, she is able to convince us that Ottoline was much more serious and much more likeable than we had supposed. In setting aside Bloomsbury mischief, and seeing Ottoline through her letters and journals from the inside, Seymour presents a much more sympathetic portrait of her, a portrait which is much closer to the woman Russell loved than the apparition that entertained Bloomsbury.

For all their differences, Bertie and Ottoline had one thing in common: they were both aristocrats who had chosen to live outside their class. As Bertie put it, though they hated "the cruelty, the caste insolence, and the narrow-mindedness of aristocrats", both felt "a little alien in the world in which we chose to live, which regarded us with suspicion and lack of understanding because we were alien" (*Auto.* I: 205). But more important than this common repudiation of an aristocratic heritage, both had had lonely childhoods, brought up amidst the faded glory of an earlier generation.

Bertie was orphaned by the time he was four and brought up by his grandmother at Pembroke Lodge surrounded by mementos of his grandfather's political career, while his brother was packed off to public school. Ottoline's father died when she was four and two years later her half-brother unexpectedly succeeded a distant relative as the sixth Duke of Portland. As a result, Ottoline and her mother went to live in Welbeck Abbey, the Portland family seat in Nottinghamshire. Welbeck was vast and largely ruined by the astonishing renovations of the eccentric fifth Duke, who had excavated huge underground chambers and tunnels under the old building and who was known in consequence as "the burrowing duke". Ottoline's mother, with amazing fortitude, set about making it habitable and it was there that Ottoline spent most of her childhood. Her brothers were away for much of the time and ignored her when they were not. Years later in her journal she recorded her sense of inferiority to them and the terror they inspired in her: they treated her, she said, like "a stupid dog ... they were brutal to me" (Seymour, p. 346). Her education at home was rudimentary, since it was assumed that she would marry into the aristocracy, for which purpose intellectual attainments would be a serious liability. Worse still, her

¹⁰ *Ottoline: the Early Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), and *Ottoline at Garsington: Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell 1915–1918* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), both edited by Robert Gathorne-Hardy.

mother became completely dependent upon her company and emotional support—a fact which did not prevent her from cutting Ottoline out of her will in 1884.¹¹ Ottoline took refuge in religion. Seymour describes her at nineteen, when her mother died, as “lonely, shy, undereducated and devoid of self-confidence” (p. 28).

That Ottoline’s upbringing imposed on her some disadvantages that Russell escaped was largely the result of gender. It seems doubtful that Lady Bolsover would have disinherited a male child, nor would she have expected a son’s life to revolve so claustrophobically around her own. Her sons were allowed much more independence than Ottoline. They were also given better, though admittedly conventional, educations. In consequence, they went on happily to entirely nondescript roles in the declining aristocracy. Ottoline, by contrast, was driven to make something of her life and succeeded, overall, rather spectacularly. The internal cost, however, was high, for Ottoline was not naturally the self-confident, gregarious hostess she often appeared to be, and success was only achieved by exercise of her formidable will. It was a savage irony that the very features of her birth and early life which many of her guests thought had made her rich, powerful, over-confident and well-nigh invulnerable—her aristocratic background over which D. H. Lawrence on occasion gushed so sentimentally—had had exactly the opposite effect.

Similarities in their background formed, however, only a basis for Bertie and Ottoline’s love. Another thing they had in common was a belief that life should be lived on the highest possible level, “on the grand scale” as Seymour puts it in her title. Ottoline idealized artists and felt that their lives, if freed from mundane concerns, would be dedicated to Great Creative Tasks. Her task as a hostess was to bring them together, to encourage them, and to help them solve some of their mundane problems, thereby enhancing their creativity. This was the programme for Garsington which Ottoline went so far as to write down as a sort of manifesto for those who visited:

Come then, gather here—all who have passion and who desire to create new conditions of life—new visions of art and literature and new magic worlds of poetry and music. If I could but feel that days at Garsington had strengthened your efforts to live the noble life: to live freely, recklessly, with clear Reason released from convention—no longer absorbed in small personal events but valuing personal affairs as part of a great whole—above all to live with passionate desire for Truth and Love and Understanding and Imagination. (Seymour, p. 273)

The language now seems absurdly inflated, but in many ways Garsington,

¹¹ The reasons for Ottoline’s being disinherited are not clear.

even in these terms, must be counted a success: it does bulk large in the literary history of its times. Nonetheless, the all too human artists and writers who went there felt some constraint in being expected to live up to Ottoline’s exalted idea of their calling. Siegfried Sassoon recalled in his autobiography his alarm at reading the words just quoted. Seymour suggests quite reasonably that some of the malice Garsington attracted from its guests resulted from irritation at being expected to live up to ideals imposed by Ottoline from outside. This, however, was not the case with Russell. As Seymour perceptively notes, Russell, though from hard experience much less inclined to idealize writers and thinkers, felt obliged to judge himself by no lower standards than the ones Ottoline laid down. A life devoted to Truth, Love, Understanding and Imagination (capital letters and all!)—he felt it would be base to turn down the challenge. The very values Ottoline apostrophizes reflect the ones he had extolled in his letters to her. He didn’t have Ottoline’s faith that creative people could achieve these ideals very easily, but they were the ideals by which he hoped his own life could pass muster. A good part of the sympathy between Ottoline and Bertie came from this shared sense of what the ideal life should be.¹²

It seems clear that the affair with Bertie began with Ottoline in her familiar role as *confidante*. It is significant that Ottoline’s most vivid memory of Bertie before they became lovers was the occasion he had turned to her a during a dinner and said, “There is always a tragedy in everyone’s life, if one only knows them well enough to find it out” (*Memoirs*, 1: 193). Seymour sees this as an unequivocal “invitation ... to share the knowledge of his unhappy marriage” (p. 94). But, while Bertie was plainly thinking of his unhappy marriage as the tragedy in his own case, it is no so clear that his intention was to spill the beans to Ottoline. After all, he had many other friends, more intimate than Ottoline then was, to whom he had confided his unhappiness but not very much about its cause. It was Ottoline, it seems, who got the truth out of him on their first night together at Bedford Square in March 1911, and to Russell, after nine years of misery and silence, the relief was unspeakable.

Ottoline’s passion for confidences arose partly from her own loneliness and her, at times desperate, desire for friends. But it was not a passion for meddling, muddling and manipulating, as the Bloomsberries supposed. There

¹² Another denizen of Garsington with a similarly supercharged view of life was Lawrence—whose own plans for a religious commune were more half-baked than Ottoline’s. Initially, he hoped it would be founded at Garsington, but he seems to have lost interest once he realized that, if it was, Ottoline, not he, would be its dictator. Little wonder that in *Women in Love* he complains so frequently about Hermione’s implacable will!

was something pastoral about Ottoline's relations with other people, especially with men—a desire to know their troubles and to help with them. Bloomsbury, of course, recognized her desire to help and came often to resent it. But what they tended to see as an exercise in pure egotism, in reality sprang from a deep need for friends coupled with a strong religious sense which called for good works. It is significant that the most important thing Russell remembered about her before they became lovers was her kindness and the seriousness with which she took politics (*Auto.* 1: 202). It is possible that only Russell knew how deeply religious she was—at least, he seems to have been the only person who wrote at length about it, and he took it seriously even while he was apt to lament her credulity.

Ottoline's religious feelings prompted her to many activities which can only be regarded as charitable. An example Seymour cites is her regular visits to the Eliots after Vivien had gone mad. She dreaded the meetings, for Vivien was having paranoid delusions and would shout and storm unpredictably, while Tom was "grim" and "horrid". But Ottoline made a point of seeing them regularly and especially of trying to maintain some human contact with Vivien (p. 389). Another example, not mentioned by Seymour, concerns a childhood friend of Ottoline's who went blind and became a bitter recluse. The woman lived alone in great poverty in London, but Ottoline regularly braved her unpleasantness for a visit, always taking a gift. Her kindness is the more impressive because the woman is completely unknown, and Ottoline mentioned it only in passing to Russell to say how upset she had been to see the state in which the woman lived.¹³

Her charitable work was not confined to individuals known to her. She did regular work at a hostel for homeless women until a stroke in 1936 forced her to give it up. Her concern for, and generosity towards, the inhabitants of Garsington village is still remembered. Perhaps most notably she took a special interest during the First World War in trying to help the families of German nationals who had been interned as enemy aliens. The families were often left without financial support, turned out of rented accommodation, and generally found themselves pariahs in their own communities. Ottoline did not make herself popular by trying to help them. Again, her work for unknown victims of circumstance or government policy seems to me more impressive testimony to her benevolence than the aid she and Philip famously provided to (relatively well-known) literary pacifists during the First World War; though the latter, too, was seriously intended and originated from the same impulse to help, and its return to the Morrells was meagre enough in

¹³ Letter to Russell, 11 May 1911.

terms of the gratitude of the pacifists and their contribution to agriculture at Garsington. (The pacifists effectively bankrupted the Garsington farm.)

It was this aspect of Ottoline that won Russell round. Initially, she had offended his Puritan prejudices by her "excessive use of scent and powder" (*Auto.* 1: 202). Indeed, despite all the very obvious differences between Ottoline and Russell's first wife, Alys, in their charitable work they did have something in common—though one senses that Alys undertook it with rather more conspicuous piety than Ottoline. In other respects, however, it was the contrast between Alys and Ottoline that attracted Bertie. He enjoyed (and sometimes feared) Ottoline's sense of humour, a trait in which Alys seems to have been deficient. He also liked the Ottoline's flamboyance as contrasted to Alys's Quaker plainness. Ottoline had a strong visual sense. It is attested to by her decorations in her first house, 44 Bedford Square, and later at Garsington,¹⁴ by the fine Italianate garden she developed at Garsington, and by her activities on behalf of the Contemporary Arts Society (for which she did a stint as buyer). This was one respect in which Russell felt himself deficient and hoped to improve by association with her, though without notable success.

Another, and much more important respect in which he looked to Ottoline for guidance, was in reconciling what he took to be the conflicting demands of intellect and the emotions. The last nine years of his marriage to Alys were ones of intense emotional restraint and even more intense intellectual effort. Russell was an extremely emotional man, and he felt that the combined trials of *Principia Mathematica* and his marriage had exacted too great a toll on his emotional life. If, as Pascal says, the heart has its reasons that the head knows nothing of, Russell was quite convinced that Ottoline had plumbed them. He came for a while to think that she had achieved a wisdom about human life that had eluded his more purely intellectual efforts, and that, by combining their talents, they might reveal it to the world. Thus began surely the most improbable attempted collaboration in the history of philosophy.

As far as religious doctrine was concerned, Russell could have no truck with Ottoline's beliefs and several of their deepest quarrels were over religion. Beliefs, Russell held, require evidence, some ground for thinking them true, but if instead of religious beliefs one were to adopt a religious attitude, these epistemic problems would be circumvented. Attitudes could be recommended or not, they could not be confirmed or refuted. Accordingly, Russell sought a non-doctrinal religion. Ultimately, this led him to the emotive theory of

¹⁴ Seymour says little about the decor in her last home, 10 Gower St., London.

ethics, a non-doctrinal ethics.¹⁵ But, it also led to two of his least happy works: an unpublished work on religion called "Prisons", only fragments of which survive, and a short *Bildungsroman*, "The Perplexities of John Forstice", which was published only after his death. (What remains of both works can be found in *Papers* 12.)

It is on Ottoline's intellectual influence on Russell that I have my only serious disagreement with Seymour. She writes:

The philosophy of mathematics had dominated Russell's mind until he met Ottoline. The year 1911 marked the end of what he described as his imprisonment in "that cold and unresponsive love" and the beginning of his larger and, in the view of many people, more important career as a philosopher concerned with human matters. His love for Ottoline played a significant part in this transformation. (P. 115)

I think Seymour here overestimates Ottoline's influence and exaggerates the benefits it had on Russell's development. It is true that by 1911, with the completion of *Principia Mathematica*,¹⁶ Russell felt he had accomplished all he could in the philosophy of mathematics. It is true also that in 1914 his interests turned towards politics. But this was the effect of the war and would probably have occurred with or without Ottoline's influence, though she certainly influenced the form it took and her support contributed to the energy and enthusiasm with which he undertook it. Between 1911 and 1914, however, he planned substantial interlocking works on the philosophy of physics and theory of knowledge and wrote part of the latter. It seems to me a great pity that he did not devote himself more completely to this work (or to other work on the foundations of logic). That he did not do so is partly due to Ottoline's influence, which led him to think his work in technical philosophy was of less importance than his attempt to articulate a philosophy of more general appeal. I do not regret his involvement in politics, but I do think the time he devoted to work on "Prisons" and "Perplexities" was wasted. Whether or not there was anything there to be discovered by way of a non-doctrinal religion (which is doubtful), it was work that was ill suited to Russell's talents. Russell's genius as a philosopher lay in his extraordinary ability to formulate beliefs and assemble evidence for and against them. If the religious philosophy he sought was to be entirely devoid of religious doctrines, there was little to be said in a book like "Prisons" and especially little

¹⁵ See *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 1: *The Private Years (1884-1914)*, ed. Nicholas Griffin (London: Allen Lane, 1992), pp. 411-14. It is usually supposed that Santayana's criticism of Russell's earlier objectivist ethics (based on Moore's *Principia Ethica*) was alone responsible for this change.

¹⁶ Apart from the fourth volume on geometry, which was to be Whitehead's work alone.

for someone of Russell's cast of mind.

Even if the philosophy of physics was destined to be a dead end for Russell, there is still reason to regret Ottoline's influence. She and Russell began their affair in 1911, the year Wittgenstein became Russell's student. Ottoline and Wittgenstein couldn't well have been more different, and by 1912 Bertie found his loyalties torn between them. Wittgenstein was beginning to find fault with the foundations of *Principia Mathematica* and to urge Russell to greater rigour in logic and greater scepticism about empirical matters. The work he attempted under Ottoline's tutelage led him in exactly the opposite direction.

Wittgenstein spotted it immediately. A chapter of "Prisons" had been salvaged and published in the *Hibbert Journal* for 1912 under the title "The Essence of Religion". Wittgenstein lost no time in telling Russell how much he detested it:

Wittgenstein was really unhappy about my paper on religion. He felt I had been a traitor to the gospel of exactness, and wantonly used words vaguely; also that such things are too intimate for print. I minded very much, because I half agree with him.¹⁷

By 1913 Russell was telling Ottoline of the curious parallelism that had developed between her relationship with him and his with Wittgenstein:

Wittgenstein affects me just as I affect you—I get to know every turn and twist of the ways in which I irritate and depress you from watching how he irritates and depresses me; and at the same time I love and admire him. Also I affect him just as you affect me when you are cold. The parallelism is curiously close altogether. He differs from me just as I differ from you. He is clearer, more creative, more passionate; I am broader, more sympathetic, more sane. I have overstated the parallel for the sake of symmetry, but there is something in it. (1 June 1913)

At this time, Russell had no intimation of Wittgenstein's own mysticism, which figures prominently in his wartime notebooks and appears briefly but importantly at the end of the *Tractatus*. What saved Wittgenstein from being "a traitor to the gospel of exactness", was that Wittgenstein denied that the mystical could be expressed: "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical."¹⁸

¹⁷ Letter to Ottoline Morrell, 11 Oct. 1912. "The Essence of Religion" is reprinted in *Papers* 12: 112-22.

¹⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 6.522.

Had Russell caught any trace of this view before the war, he would surely have seized upon it as a means of reconciling Wittgenstein's demands for linguistic rigour with Ottoline's mystical longings. Wittgenstein's mysticism may, indeed, have been a wartime development.¹⁹ Russell, at any rate, thought so and was astonished to discover that Wittgenstein had become religious when they met again after the war. Ottoline, mistakenly, was inclined to view this as the cause of the later differences between the two men. In 1932 Russell told Ottoline how much he still loved Wittgenstein (who had recently returned to Cambridge). "I was so pleased to hear it," Ottoline recorded in her journal, "for he used to but turned against him when he was religious" (Seymour, p. 376).

Seymour has made excellent use of Ottoline's papers, not only of her unpublished correspondence, but also of her journal and the unedited version of her memoirs. The story of her memoirs is particularly unfortunate. They were edited twice after her death, first by Philip Morrell who added his own comments and (much more seriously) excised some of Ottoline's; and then after Philip's death by Robert Gathorne-Hardy. The work of both men is to be deprecated. Some of the blandness of the memoirs is attributable to Philip's bowdlerizing. For example, Ottoline describes a journey to her country home Peppard with her lover, Henry Lamb, and Philip thus: "there was a miserable journey down to Peppard. H. and P. like two dogs growling at one another" (Seymour, p. 101). Philip's version in the published memoirs, however, reads: "It was not an easy journey down. However, it was managed without any quarrel" (*Memoirs*, 1: 202). It is clear from Seymour's account that the memoirs as published have to be treated cautiously and there is a clear case now for publishing them as they were originally written.

Some respects in which they are misleading cannot be blamed entirely on the editorial activities of Philip and Gathorne-Hardy. Ottoline had objected to the account of her affair with Russell in the draft of his *Autobiography*, and Patricia Russell, his third wife, had objected to Ottoline's including letters from him in her memoirs. In the end, they each agreed not to publish anything about the affair while the other was alive. Accordingly, when the first volume of Ottoline's memoirs appeared in 1963 the only references to Russell were relatively insignificant. Nothing in that discreet volume would suggest that they had an affair. In 1967 Russell published his account of the affair in the first volume of his *Autobiography*, and in 1974 Gathorne-Hardy produced

¹⁹ Ray Monk, in his biography of Wittgenstein, takes a different view, suggesting that Wittgenstein was a mystic all along and that Russell missed it. The evidence is not conclusive, but it is certainly a mistake to suppose that Russell, at this time, was so hostile to religion that he would have ignored or sought to explain away any hint of mysticism from Wittgenstein.

the second volume of Ottoline's memoirs and included an account of the affair, out of context, in an appendix. One sympathizes with his difficulties, being unable to include the affair where it belonged in the first volume, and yet unable to ignore it in the second after Russell had made it famous. Nonetheless, his account is slipshod.²⁰

What really distorts the account, however, is Ottoline's self-censorship in her memoirs and even in her journals from which many extracts are included in the published memoirs. Anyone who reads Ottoline's letters to Bertie and compares them to her account of the affair in her memoirs (and in the journal extracts published there), will be struck by the difference between them. The letters, though they sometimes express misgivings or suggest a holding back against Russell's passion, are genuine love letters. Ottoline was less ready than Bertie to "shoot Niagara" as he once put it, but if her letters are not the most stirring declarations of passionate desire ever penned they are rarely less than encouraging and in many cases seem lukewarm only in comparison with Bertie's extraordinary tempests. By contrast, in her memoirs she rarely mentions the affair without blaming Bertie for it entirely, expressing her own reluctance, or comparing Bertie unfavourably with Philip. Thus, for example, she writes of the beginning of the affair:

I was utterly unprepared for the flood of passion which he now poured out on me. My imagination was swept away, but not my heart, although it was very much moved and upset. All Bertie's eloquence was brought to bear on me ... and in spite of myself I was carried along in this spate of emotion.... Bertie's almost abstract passion was shattering and overwhelming, for he seemed almost a stranger.... It was as if he had suddenly risen from the grave and had broken the bonds that held him.... Letters from him poured upon me; interviews were asked for.... I was indeed partly overcome, carried away and elated by this new experience; but underneath there lay a cold, horrible feeling of discomfort.... (*Memoirs*, 2: 267-8)

When I edited his letters to her, therefore, I faced the dilemma of whether to believe her journals or her letters. While it was not possible to accept the coolness of the journals quite at face value, I did on the whole think them a more reliable guide to her feelings than the letters. The latter, I suspected, were influenced by her reluctance to withdraw herself from anyone who needed her as desperately as Bertie did and by the fact that she found Bertie's attentions distinctly flattering. Seymour's account makes it clear that in this I

²⁰ To give an example: some of Ottoline's remarks about Roger Fry are given as being about Russell. Even so there is still some value in Gathorne-Hardy's version, because he had been an intimate of Logan Pearsall-Smith and was therefore in a position to add something from Alys's side.

was mistaken. Ottoline's journals were not the private jottings I had supposed: both they and her memoirs were written with the expectation that Philip would read them. And that, in writing them, she was above all concerned not to hurt Philip's feelings. (The full explanation of her solicitude for Philip emerges only from Seymour's book.) In consequence, I now find her less manipulative than I did when I edited Russell's letters.

Seymour is able, for the first time, to throw some light on her curious marriage to Philip Morrell, though Philip himself remains at best a shadowy figure. It seems he fell in love with Ottoline on seeing her bicycling through Oxford. He wooed her shyly but determinedly, and she was, therefore, all the more surprised to discover on her honeymoon that he was not sexually attracted to her. Thereafter, sex was not an important part of their relationship. (Lawrence, perceptively, turned them into brother and sister in *Women in Love*.) Ottoline concluded that Philip was not very interested in sex, but this proved a serious error. Throughout their marriage he had a series of affairs, though Ottoline did not learn of them until 1917 when her maid and his secretary were both pregnant by him, and the maid was attempting blackmail. Worse than this, however, was the fact that Philip fell completely to pieces when the affairs had to be acknowledged. He had had "nerve-attacks" (as Ottoline called them) before, and during them he would become agitated and even incoherent, but now he became so unstable that he had to be put in a nursing home. In the end he rallied, though the attacks persisted and they were never again free of the fear that he would go mad. Indeed, Ottoline seems to have lived with this fear most of her married life, and it accounts for the assiduous way in which she tried to protect his feelings in her journals.

Philip fits well into feminist typology as the silenced spouse. It is Ottoline whose letters are preserved, whose memoirs were published and whose life is recorded by her friends. Little of what Philip thought, said, and did has come down to us. He did attempt his memoirs, but never managed to complete them. He was, by all accounts, a markedly ineffectual man. (His one success was in pig-farming, from which he actually made money. But even there his gains were wiped out, through no fault of his own, by swine-fever.) Philip's insecurities pre-date his marriage, though in marrying so many levels of the class-system above himself he exacerbated them. In 1898 his brother, the family favourite, committed suicide, and this seems to have cast a pall over his entire life. One senses that he saw in Ottoline a strong woman who would look after him; and one senses that Ottoline saw in him a weak husband who would not get in her way. In the end, however, no amount of Ottoline's pastoral care could cure Philip of his anxieties.

This was because, to some extent, both Philip and Ottoline shared the same weaknesses. In particular, both were desperately anxious to be liked and

deeply hurt when they felt they were not. Ottoline, aided by an iron will, strong enough to make even Bertie think twice before challenging it, and by a much greater degree of pride and self-possession than Philip, was better able to hide her wounds. In later years, Philip's were often embarrassingly open. In some ways, however, this worked against her. I doubt that Bloomsbury would have been quite so cruel had they known how much their cruelty wounded. But that was something Ottoline couldn't bring herself to show. Nor would she let her friends know that she had been cut out of her mother's will. As a result most people who knew her thought she was extremely rich. All too often they seem to have expected hospitality on a scale commensurate with her imagined wealth.

For all that the malign wits of Bloomsbury have said about it, I think Garsington must be counted a success. Physically and socially, it was Ottoline's own work of art. Yet, although physically the house embodied her ideals of beauty, socially it was a tremendous disappointment to her. It was not the oasis of sweetness, art and light she had hoped for. It taxed her nerves. It exhausted her finances. It was the centre of incessant bickering and crises. And in 1927 she gave it up and returned to London.

Beneath the surface that she crafted for presentation to the world, there is an unmistakable air of tragedy about Ottoline's life. Her health was almost continuously bad: daily headaches, nerve pains, a major, disfiguring operation for bone cancer in 1928, innumerable mysterious symptoms and ailments often created or exacerbated by the appalling quack treatments to which she subjected herself and which in the end killed her. She kept as much of these troubles to herself as possible. She would not let others see how bad her health was, but could not stop them seeing that she was continually in the hands of physicians. Inevitably, as cure succeeded cure, word got about that she was a hypochondriac. Even Bertie, blest with unfailing health, was hard pressed to be sympathetic.

Something similar occurred when she became the target of gossip and mockery. Given the way she chose to live, a worldly third party would think some of each to be the inevitable consequence. But few people knew, and she wouldn't let herself show, how much she was hurt by it. Far from being invulnerable, her need for friendship and approval was at times desperate. The crisis over Philip's infidelities and his breakdown in 1917 coincided with serious financial difficulties which led her to sell her jewels (one of the few things of value her mother had given her) in order to save Garsington. Later love affairs went wrong. Bertie left in 1916. Her love for Siegfried Sassoon was unreturned. And when at last, at forty-seven, she had the one physically satisfying sexual relationship of her life with a village boy who worked on the

Garsington estate, he died suddenly of a brain haemorrhage two years later.²¹ The final chapters of Seymour's book speak volumes for her courage and will-power as she tried to keep a brave face through so many tragedies and disappointments. But, at times, the private entries in her journal show just how hard it was for her to continue.

Ottoline emerges from these pages both more likeable and less absurd than one had previously supposed. Her life was in many unsuspected ways a very difficult one. She did not always handle the difficulties prudently, but she faced them always with unflinching courage. Having appeared already in so many books, it is good that at last she should appear in one which does her justice.²²

²¹ Seymour suggests that this affair was used by Lawrence for *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

²² Research supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
