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Dear John,

It was great to see you and the others here the other day : what a nice gang you have ! I hope you got something of what you wanted. I saw Ursula on Thursday. She was away with the fairies most of the time – droll chatter-chatter-chatter ; but she listened attentively when I read her some of her letters to me. It is very moving. As you can imagine, it has been a fairly surreal experience for me to be back-tracking like this : and when she and I get together, in a funny kind of limbo, the situation takes on a kind of irony that Henry James would have made a meal of !

I was aware that I was stalling somewhat around the whole Adeline issue ; and in fact – you may not be surprised – I've been wringing my hands a wee bit in the aftermath. (I guess you must often get people in a fuss about what they may, or may not, have said ?). My worries have always stemmed from my keen awareness that none of the parties can speak for themselves – and we mustn't forget Michael (Wood) in all this. We can only speculate ; and I feel that I, as an extremely late-comer on to the scene, am the least qualified to voice an opinion. Everything Ursula told me long ago – sometimes not exactly in our cups, but with one or two gins behind us ! – was off the record. Was it a 'white' marriage with Adeline? When did that start ? Not really our business. The enduring image, the true image, which should put everything into perspective, is of the three of them lying together, in tempore belli, with the young one – Ursula – between them, holding both their hands. Nothing more really needs to be said. I do hope that goes in somewhere in your film ?

I didn't emphasize the most obvious thing - maybe we touched on it when we spoke before ? - that Ralph was driven to sublimate all this energy and passion in music. (Which is why it is so explosive sometimes : Janacek was rather in the same pass). And effectively – especially with so active and energetically busy life – he doesn't appear to have been harried or stressed by frustration. There's no evidence as far as I can see, from photos etc., that he was a fretful or unhappy man in all those years before he met Ursula.

I know it's irresistible, but I still can't help feeling a bit mean, probing that situation of long ago – which must have been awkward and difficult, maybe privately painful for all three (four?): in which everybody obviously tried to behave decently. (Ursula's situation eventually – the 'secretary' to wife transition – was not unlike TS Eliot's with Valerie: raised eyebrows and condescension in some quarters – almost saucy postcard material). I suspect Michael Kennedy, who was much closer to the whole scene, will have a shrewd view on things.

All of them are mute now. My unease has very much to do with the fact that they cannot answer for themselves, and here we are chewing over it. I was a very close friend of Jackie du Pre, saw a lot of her right through to the end ; and I still feel the deepest revulsion at what Hilary did in writing her account of that whole business with Kiffer. (Our relations – and the Finzis were virtually my second family - have never fully recovered). Extraordinary, awkward things happen : people make shift : but real love, and respect, and discretion, which was shown in such good measure by those other three, ensures that nobody is humiliated, even historically.

John, please don't mind my saying all this : I'm sure you understand.

(Incidentally, I think the reason Ursula got so hooked on Job, was that it was a dramatic spectacle, and as a budding actress at the Vic, with a strong interest in poetry, she found that involving. I would like to see it again, properly – ie. not reduced pit-orchestra. The actual choreography – which I suspect Ralph also found fell well short of his own concepts – was pretty humdrum, and posturing: like bad Martha Graham ! Or Dalcroze!)

Very best wishes,

JEREMY DALE ROBERTS

(Letter written following interview included in John Bridcut's film 'The Passions of Vaughan Williams')