THE CURIOUS CASE OF "THE CAMBRIDGE OBSERVER"

Bibliography and editing are related disciplines, each being an art dedicated to the gospel of exactness. For any collected works purporting to be a definitive edition, all potential bibliographical leads must be explored

and competing texts likewise examined. This is especially true of an author such as Russell whose prolific output is located in publications diverse and often esoteric. It is disappointing to follow a bibliographical lead and to come to the negative conclusion that the author did not write the piece in question. It is even more frustrating however for a bibliographer to find no evidence or, alternatively, conflicting evidence, and not to be able to conclude anything at all.

The frustrations of the bibliographer-*cum*-editor are apparent in Kenneth Blackwell's article (*Russell*, n.s. 1, no. 2) on Russell's alleged student journalism in *The Cambridge Observer*. Blackwell maintains that Russell must have been mistaken in recollecting to Lady Ottoline that his first publication was an 1895 review in *Mind* of Gerardus Heymans' *Die Gesetze und Elemente des wissenschaftlichen Denkens*. According to Blackwell, there is good reason to believe that during his undergraduate years Russell authored two pseudonymous articles published in the *Cambridge Observer*. In dissenting from Blackwell's point of view, my intention is not purely one of refutation since my own arguments to the contrary have developed in friendly consultation with him.

Exhibit *A* in this bibliographical narrative is a letter Russell wrote on 1 May 1892 to his grandmother, Lady John Russell. Russell discloses that with other people he is working on the journal's first number in discussing a prospectus and submissions from other authors. He also informs her of having seen a performance of Ibsen's *The Doll's House* the previous day with the intention of reviewing it—"A joint-stock criticism will probably be found in our second number [of the *Cambridge Observer*]." But the "probably" becomes probably not and exhibit *A* turns into a red herring when upon scrutiny the review is found initialled by the mysterious "M." whose identity Blackwell claims to be that of Stanley Victor Makower, a Cambridge friend of Russell's who worked on the journal's editorial committee.[1]

Makower did contribute to the *Cambridge Observer* but not under that pseudonym; discussion of Makower's pseudonym I will postpone for the time being. As Blackwell has discovered since writing his article, "M." was Russell's good friend, Sir Edward Marsh (1880–1953), an Apostle

[1] Five letters which Russell wrote to Makower between 1893–95 have survived (originals in the possession of Mr. Peter Makower). The earliest letter, 6 April 1893, was written by Russell on his return from a walking tour. It is important to note that the extant correspondence begins after the *Cambridge Observer* ceased publication. From a philosophical viewpoint, the most interesting letter is that of 8 Oct. 1893 in which Russell offers a theory of aesthetics. Copies of Russell's letters are available to researchers in the Russell Archives. Only one letter from Makower to Russell can be found in Archives 1, and it is a congratulatory message on Russell's election to a fellowship.

who completed the second part of the Classical Tripos, translator of La Fontaine and Horace, founder and editor of *Georgian Poetry*, and holder of numerous governmental posts including private secretary to Winston Churchill and Chancellor of the Exchequer. Oswald Valentine Sickert, the leading member of the journal's editorial committee, whose pseudonym Blackwell rightly identifies as "O.", dedicated *Helen*, his novel of literary life, to Marsh. Marsh's participation in the *Cambridge Observer* is discussed in his autobiography and in greater detail in the excellent biographical portrait by Christopher Hassall.[2] Marsh played no actual part in the management of the journal, but he contributed poems, dramatic and musical criticism, in addition to literary essays on Irving, Ibsen and Verlaine.

Besides exhibit *A*, Blackwell adduces other pieces of circumstantial evidence to support the case of Russell's alleged authorship. For example, Russell's closest friend and fellow student of the Mathematical Tripos, C. P. Sanger, informs Russell in a letter (16 July 1892) of his decision reached with A. G. Tansley not to write material for the Cambridge publication called *The Tennyson*.[3] This, Blackwell suggests, indicates that at least Russell contemplated contributing to student periodicals. Another letter (24 Nov. 1892) written to Russell by his future brother-in-law, Logan Pearsall Smith, mentions Sickert in passing and tells of Smith's invitation to submit an article to the *Cambridge Observer* from the later chief editor, George Warrington Steevens. Blackwell argues that Smith's references link Russell's association with the editors throughout the short life of the journal. A further piece of corroboration cited by Blackwell is Russell's only mention in the magazine's entire run: during Steevens's editorship a talk was held in Russell's rooms at Trinity by a Mr. Nunn on the history and philanthropic work of Toynbee Hall.[4] Finally, Blackwell quotes from a letter (3 Aug. 1893) Russell wrote to

[2] Marsh, *A Number of People: A Book of Reminiscences* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), pp. 49–54; Hassall, *Edward Marsh, Patron of the Arts: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green, 1959), especially Chap. 3, "The *Cambridge Observer*", pp. 28–37. A serious breach in Russell's friendship with Marsh occurred in September 1914 when they disagreed about the First World War.

[3] Arthur George Tansley, later Sherardian Professor of Botany at Oxford, met Russell at Cambridge in the autumn of 1891 when Russell was in a state of melancholy. Tansley regarded Russell as his best friend and claimed that he learned more from him than from anyone else during that time. They saw little of each other after Russell's marriage. *See* Tansley to Russell, 11 Dec. 1894.

[4] Blackwell speculates that it is possible that Russell was the reporter of Nunn's address but this is hardly likely. An article entitled "The Toynbee Hall" by "J.W.H." was published in the *Cambridge Observer*, 1, no. 5 (31 May 1892): 8–9. If anything, it is probable that "J.W.H." would have done the reporting.

Makower in which he expected both Makower and Sickert to visit him at Pembroke Lodge.[5] Russell's letter to Makower contains a syllogistic allusion to the pseudonym Sickert used in the *Cambridge Observer*—the letter "O."

An omission from Blackwell's account which partially explains Russell's relationship with the editor, Steevens, is the following letter of reminiscence Russell wrote to Samuel Rosenberg on 2 April 1957:

> You ask me about the reputation of Nietzsche in England in 1893. The following facts will enable you to conjecture a complete answer: in that year a clique of high-brow and extremely literary Cambridge undergraduates founded a review called "The Cambridge Observer". They invited an Oxford man named Stevens [*sic*] to communicate whatever was of cultural importance in his university. In his first letter as their correspondent, he said that everybody at Oxford was talking about Neitzsche [*sic*]. This is the first time I heard of Nietzsche, and I think the same was true of my Cambridge friends.[6]

Steevens's communication on Nietzsche in fact appeared in the first number of the magazine (3 May 1892, pp. 8–9) in an anonymous column entitled "Oxford". With the exception of the journal's final number, the column appeared as a regular feature. It is doubtful whether Steevens authored all of the columns since many of the later ones are signed "L.", at a time when Steevens was living in the Cambridge vicinity as the magazine's editor-in-chief.[7] His reference to Nietzsche begins:

> "Oxford is the place where good German philosophies go when they die": this is another form of [Matthew] Arnold's dictum not so useful for quotation. One of these arrived here last term, being introduced, appropriately enough by a Craven Travelling Fellow. Its author is Friedrich Nietzsche, once Professor at

[5] Russell's letter contains a misspelling of Sickert's name, and in Smith's letter printed in Russell's *Autobiography*, "Steevens" is rendered "Stevens". These two misspellings raise the issue of how well Russell knew both men although in his *Autobiography* Russell describes Sickert as a close friend.

[6] *See also* Rosenberg's *Naked is the Best Disguise: The Death and Resurrection of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 61, where Russell's letter is altered to read: "You may deduce the answer to your question from the following facts: In the spring of 1893, several of us at Cambridge began the publication of a student journal. In a moment of generosity we invited a student at Oxford to contribute a paper. To our dismay he sent us a brilliant essay about a philosopher of whom we had never heard: *Friedrich Nietzsche!*" The thesis of Rosenberg's book is that Conan Doyle had patterned his villain, Professor Moriarty, on Nietzsche.

[7] Blackwell attributes the pseudonym "S." to Steevens but aside from mere alliteration, I can see no reason for accepting this attribution.

Basle, now dying or dead in a madhouse at Jena.

A couple of years later Russell no doubt remembered Steevens's analysis of Nietzsche's philosophy when during his stay at Paris he argued with Alys's sister, Mary Costelloe (later Berenson), who was lionizing Nietzsche as an innovative thinker.[8]

What has been presented thus far constitutes the external evidence to support Russell's alleged authorship in the *Cambridge Observer*. These pieces of evidence prove very little, only that Russell helped to organize publication of the first few numbers of the magazine and that he was acquainted with the members of its editorial staff. We do not know whether Russell continued to have any editorial influence after the first few numbers were published. Moreover we are totally in the dark about his specific role in writing anything.

Blackwell brings other considerations to bear on Russell's alleged authorship. He points out that Russell read works by both Sickert and Makower. For example, besides Sickert's *Helen*, Russell's reading list "What Shall I Read?" dilvulges that he also perused Sickert's "Kathy" and "The Purple Patch" in February and May 1894, respectively. The fact that Russell read works written by the editors again testifies to his association with them.

On another plane, a potentially powerful argument which Blackwell uses to his advantage is that many of Russell's contemporaries such as G. L. Dickinson, Maurice Sheldon Amos and L. P. Smith contributed to the *Cambridge Observer*. In particular, Sanger (probably "C.S.", claims Blackwell) and Tansley ("A.G.T.") contributed to the journal, and these two friends of Russell are mentioned in Russell's letter (exhibit *A*) to his grandmother. On this basis, it seems reasonable to suppose that Russell was also a contributor. But this argument is tenuous because "C.S." is not Charles Percival Sanger. Oddly enough, the identity of "C.S." is linked to Makower's pseudonym and also that of Sickert's.

Sickert's *Helen* was one of many such works published by T. Fisher Unwin in The Pseudonym Library. Russell read two of the books from the series in May 1891: no. 1, *Mademoiselle Ixe*, and no. 5, *Amaryllis*. No. 30 of the series is a collection of short stories published in 1893 and

[8] Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, 26 Sept. 1894. "By the way Nietsche [*sic*] is a pessimist, rather disjointed, not a regular orthodox philosopher at all—I have never seen any allusion to him in any philosophical writing—I fancy it is a 'philosophy of life', which is a different thing." Russell probably judged Steevens's analysis in the *Cambridge Observer* as a literary treatment. *See also* Russell to Alys, 5 Nov. 1894. "She [Alys's sister] has produced her Nietzsche and I have produced my German too, and I foresee we shall have a battle royal on the Psychologist's Fallacy."

entitled *The Passing of a Mood*. The same title is used for a short story which appeared in the *Cambridge Observer* dedicated to "C.S." and signed "O.", Sickert's pseudonym.[9] The story concerns a certain Dr. Droz whose pet subject is expounding the views of a German philosopher friend and in order to prove a disputed point, tells the story of a young girl who comes close to committing suicide. *The Passing of a Mood* is authored by "V., O., C. S." and the pseudonyms have been revealed as those of Makower, Sickert, and Arthur Myers Smith, respectively.[10] Makower wrote nine literary pieces for the *Cambridge Observer*, the first being an appreciation of Sir Arthur Sullivan and the last a short story, "The Reparation of a Life".[11] As Blackwell has stated, "C.S." i.e. Arthur Myers Smith (1871–1936) wrote fifteen items in the *Cambridge Observer*, usually vignettes of travels and conversation. Little is known about him except that he was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1889, completed a law degree in 1892, and served in the Red Cross during the First World War.[12] It is a trifle puzzling why his pseudonymous initials do not match up with his actual name.

This exhausts the *external* evidence that has come to light with respect to Russell's association with the *Cambridge Observer*, and we must now turn to the question of *internal* evidence upon which Blackwell's allegation of Russell's authorship heavily depends. Although no articles in the magazine are signed "B.A.W.R." or "B.R.", Blackwell suggests that the two articles signed "R." would have acted as a signal to Russell's grandmother and to others who were aware of his relationship with the journal. But this assumption begs the issue since it presupposes that, as a matter of course, Russell must have been a contributor. The simple alliterative coincidence of "R." and "Russell" is hardly a reason to believe the former served as a pseudonym for the latter. One might have settled on "B." for "Bertrand" or perhaps, on one of Russell's middle initials. Even if alliteration were a reason, surely there were many other young men in the Cambridge environs who had surnames beginning with the letter "R".

Ultimately Blackwell rests his case of Russell's authorship on the style and content of the two articles. A discrepancy which Blackwell buries in a

[9] 1, no. 19 (21 Feb. 1893): 8–9.

[10] James Kennedy, W. A. Smith and A. F. Johnson, *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous Literature*, new and enl. ed. (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1928), 4: 307. I owe this citation to the kind assistance of Catherine Funnell of the Bertrand Russell Editorial Project who was pursuing the matter for Blackwell.

[11] Respectively 1, no. 6 (7 June 1892): 5–6; and 1, no. 20 (28 Feb. 1893): 3–4.

[12] J. A. Venn, comp., *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), Part II, 5: 541.

footnote is the following statement issued by the editorial committee in the second number (10 May 1892, p.11): "We wish to thank various contributors, and 'R' especially; we regret that we cannot print his verses." In fact, in the spring of 1892, "What Shall I Read?" records that Russell was reading Elizabethan poetry, and possibly, then, he may have composed an essay on Elizabethan lyrics, a paper now lost.[13] There is no evidence however that during that time or later, he was writing verses of any kind. Despite his appreciation of verse rhythms and imagery, poetry was not a genre at which he worked or excelled.

This brings us to the two articles by "R.", "The Day of Judgment" and "The Strike at Arlingford". Did Russell write them? The former is a sardonic morality tale reminiscent of the fables and "nightmares" Russell published in the 1950s. As Blackwell points out, the theme and phrasing of this first article are quite Russellian. Indeed if the dating of the piece belonged to the 1950s, then given enough circumstantial evidence, it would be plausible to assume that Russell was the probable author. But the dating is not from that era, and it is wishful thinking to presume a universal Russellian style whose maturity was reached by the time Russell was twenty. Russell's proficiency in the fable was a later development. When the first of such fictional writings, "The Corsican Ordeal of Miss X", was published anonymously, a competition was held with a prize for guessing the correct authorship.[14] No one identified Russell as the author although respondents suggested more than twenty different possibilities, with Somerset Maugham being the popular choice with six votes and Winston Churchill with four.

Blackwell is less convinced about "The Strike at Arlingford". This second piece by "R." is a review of George Moore's play by the same title concerning the conflict between capital and labour. A half-hearted attempt is made by Blackwell to tie in the content of "R."'s review with Russell's early interest in socialism. "R." praises the playwright's ability for discussing political issues impartially, and "R." also comments

[13] Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, 4 Sept. 1894. "G.T. stands for Golden Treasury, because I once wrote a paper on Elizabethan Lyrics (which is now at Friday's Hill among my papers), and I wanted to quote things not in the Golden Treasury, as those that were in it would be so well-known." The book Russell is referring to is probably Francis Turner Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* (London: Macmillan, 1890). The copy in his library is inscribed on the half-title page by his grandmother, Lady John, May 1891.

[14] *Go*, n.s. no. 5 (Dec.–Jan. 1951): 69–74, 76–7. Reprinted in *Satan in the Suburbs and Other Stories* (London: The Bodley Head, 1953), pp. 61–84. Russell's authorship was disclosed in *Go*, n.s. no. 10 (Jan.–Feb. 1953): 7. *See also The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1944–1967* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 35.

favourably on the cohesiveness of the play's construction; both these features of "R."'s review Blackwell considers Russellian although not overwhelmingly so. Here I think Blackwell is straining the case of Russell's authorship to the point of special pleading. Finding "The Day of Judgment" Russellian in character, Blackwell argues unconvincingly that even though "The Strike at Arlingford" is not terribly Russellian, it is not altogether implausible given the same attribution to "R." that Russell wrote both pieces. With its first paragraph references to Shaw's *Widower's House* and the production of Flaubert's *Le Candidate*, "The Strike at Arlingford" could have been penned by any number of literary critics.

Ordinarily when an article appears anonymously or pseudonymously, authorship can only be ascribed on the basis of direct external evidence—for example, correspondence, tear sheets, an editor's or publisher's ledger, etc. The external evidence supporting Russell's authorship in the *Cambridge Observer* is weak. The internal evidence is questionable. Since "R."'s identity remains concealed, it is logically possible that in fact Russell is "R." The existence of a marked copy of the journal would, of course, settle the issue entirely. However, given the totality of evidence accumulated thus far, we simply do not know whether Russell was a contributor. Despite Blackwell's past record of success in detection, the *Cambridge Observer* is a publication with few authorial signposts where the chance of error in attribution is enormous for even the most intuitively gifted bibliographer.

At best, the two articles by "R." may be regarded as Russellian apocrypha. On the other hand—and this is the position which I prefer to adopt—we may judge the articles attributed to Russell by Blackwell as not being by Russell at all. Russell's description of the *Cambridge Observer* as "a high-brow undergraduate magazine" and its editorial staff as "a clique of high-brow and extremely literary Cambridge undergraduates" implies that he was never part of the journal's inner circle. The pressures of the Mathematical Tripos were onerous enough to almost exclude normal extracurricular activities. There is also the *prima facie* evidence against Blackwell, namely, Russell's letter to Lady Ottoline (#976, *c.* 21 Jan. 1914) in which he vividly remembered that his first publication was the 1895 review in *Mind* of Heymans.—Carl Spadoni