

Arch-priggery

a note on Bertrand and Alys Russell's
as copy of Whitman's "Leaves of Grass"

A very interesting book that was once part of the library of Bertrand and Alys Russell has surfaced in the Walt Whitman collection of Mr. Charles E. Feinberg of Detroit, Michigan.¹ The book is an edition of *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1882). It bears the familiar bookplate of the couple, with the name *BERTRAND* above the small, square picture of neoclassic figures and with *& ALYS RUSSELL* beneath it. Of special interest, the book is a presentation copy to Alys from Whitman; it bears the inscription: "Alys W Smith from the author with love." For the Russell scholar, the book has two additional intriguing aspects.

Both of these aspects invite speculation. The first is another inscription, this one in pencil in the center of the flyleaf:

For Bertie from Alys
1894-1950

From a former Arch-Prig to the
other former Arch-Prig!

The first date, 1894, doubtless marks the year of Bertrand and Alys's wedding, which took place on December 13, 1894. The second date, 1950, is more puzzling. The third volume of Russell's *Autobiography* suggests

¹I am indebted to Mr. Feinberg for the opportunity to examine this volume in his library, as well as for helpful discussion. The book is now in the Charles E. Feinberg Collection, the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

I wish also to thank Artem Lozynsky, the Whitman scholar, for calling my attention to the existence of this book and for providing me with a copy of the Bucke letter below.

²*The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. III: 1944-1969 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 50-57.

an explanation. Letters of Alys to Bertrand included there reveal that the first meeting of the two in many years took place in 1950; that Russell paid several visits to Alys in that year; and that she returned to him some early letters and articles and sent him books of mutual interest.² Clark's biography of Russell records that in that year Alys arranged Russell's 78th birthday-party.³ It seems likely that she inscribed this copy of *Leaves of Grass* for him during this period of renewed friendship, and it may even have been a birthday gift. In the term "former Arch-Prig", there seems to be the reminder of the shared life and attitudes of their early years, a backward glance, both affectionate and rueful, at the two young people they were; there seems to be also the claim to companionship of maturity achieved, although achieved separately.

While "Arch-Prig" may seem a harsh term, we recall that it had a special meaning to Alys and Russell. It was Alys's brother, Logan Pearsall Smith, who drew up the rules for the group he named The Order of Prigs. Logan's purpose, Russell tells us, was "to persuade free-thinking young people to preserve a high standard of personal discipline and self-denial." When he sent the list of rules to Russell, still an undergraduate at Cambridge, Logan attached to the list the statement that "The Arch Prig or the associate Prig is empowered to give temporary or permanent release from any of these rules, if he deem it expedient." Of this statement Russell writes: "I don't know who the Arch Prig was, or even whether he existed outside Logan's imagination."⁴

Alys's reason for reviving old memories with the use of the term "Prig" may well be connected with the second intriguing aspect of this copy of *Leaves of Grass*, the fact that a number of pages have been cut out. These missing pages (pp. 79-94) include almost an entire sequence, "The Children of Adam". Fourteen poems are missing, and only the last two remain, "Facing West from California's Shores" and "As Adam Early in the Morning". In addition, the last six lines of "Song of Myself" are missing, an excision probably necessitated only by the fact that the "Song" concludes the first page of "The Children of Adam" grouping. The removal of most of the sequence prompts the curious reader to a look at the missing poems.

The sequence might well be called "controversial" from the Victorian

²Ronald W. Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (London: Cape/Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), 509.

⁴*Autobiography*, Vol. 1: 1872-1914 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), 80, 88-89, 89n.

point of view. There is, for example, the analogue of procreation underlying and characterizing the entire sequence; the explicit admiration for the human body of "I Sing the Body Electric"; the recurrent hint of homosexual emotion; and, finally, the overall tone of passionate celebration, of surging vitality that "arch-prigs" might have found libidinous. The poems may have been excised because Bertrand and Alys found the sequence too objectionable for their well known custom of reading aloud in the evenings. In conversation, Mr. Feinberg has remarked that it is his impression that at least up to the "Calamus" poems (which follow the "Adam" grouping), Bertrand and Alys had read all the poems aloud; even some later poems in the volume are marked.

It is entirely possible, of course, that Alys cut the pages from the book before she and Bertrand were married. Certainly well before then, she had become displeased with Whitman, once a welcome visitor for all the members of the Smith household. We must judge that the poet wrote the warm inscription from Alys before 1891, for in that year we have evidence of coolness in the relationship. In a letter to Whitman in that year, Dr. Richard M. Bucke, the physician who was a great admirer of Whitman (and, later, the author of *Cosmic Consciousness*), wrote from England:

On Saturday I went again to the Smith's at Haslemere. Mrs C[ostelloe, Alys's sister], was (and is) away on the continent (Mr C[ostelloe], too). I had plenty of talk with Mr, Mrs, and Alys & Logan S[mith]. Logan desired me to send his love to you he is very friendly to you, Mr S[mith], only moderately so and Mrs & A[lys]. S[mith], *not at all* as far as I can find out. Mrs C[ostelloe]. I believe is in her heart friendly but "for reasons" she says nothing--this matter is too delicate to write about even to you but I will tell you all when we meet...⁵

While this letter might seem to support the theory that Alys cut the pages herself in distaste for Whitman's words, the conjunction of the cut pages with the unusual inscription from Alys to Bertie inclines me to the other theory. It seems likely that Bertrand and Alys demonstrated the Victorian proprieties in their early reading together by removing embarrassing or "improper" material from their book, and that Alys, in later years, is reminding Bertie in this inscription of their early ties and of their mutual development beyond immature attitudes.

Department of English
Wayne State University

Gladys Leithauser

⁵Letter of Dr. R[ichard] M. Bucke to Walt Whitman, 10 August 1891, in the Feinberg Collection; referred to in Walt Whitman, *The Correspondence*, Vol. V: 1890-1892, ed. E.H. Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 225n.

(continued from p. 14)

the External World.⁴⁵ There is thus no external evidence that Russell read proofs of the last three *Monist* articles, although there is external evidence in the case of the last, and internal in the case of the fourth, that he altered their texts from the manuscript versions. But because of the slips of "chapter" for "part" and the continuous references to an exploration of theory of knowledge, it seems that Russell did not revise the original versions *very* carefully for publication. And since he did not revise them very carefully, it seems likely that he did not revise them extensively. It follows that the text of the six *Monist* articles can confidently be adopted as that of the missing six chapters of "Theory of Knowledge".

The Bertrand Russell Archives
Department of Philosophy
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

Kenneth Blackwell
Elizabeth Ramsden Eames

⁴⁵(Chicago and London: Open Court, 1914), p. 120n., 2nd edn. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926), p. 126n. Misprints in the citation in the first edition suggest that it was added at the final stage in proof. Russell noted to Lady Ottoline on 20 June 1914 that proofs of his Lowell lectures had come. See I. Grattan-Guinness, "Wiener on the Logics of Russell and Schröder", *Annals of Science*, 32 (1975), 103-32 (esp. 105 and n.8).