

## A FRIENDSHIP FORGOTTEN

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Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy. *The Interior Castle: a Life of Gerald Brenan*. London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992. Pp. xii, 660. £25.00.

Gerald Brenan and his American wife Gamel played a far more significant role in Russell's life than a reader of Russell's *Autobiography* would believe. They are briefly mentioned there as "interesting and delightful" when Russell comments that he met them for the first time in the 1930s upon renting their house near Malaga, Spain. He gives an additional two sentences to Gamel alone, concluding she was an "autumnal" person. Two of Gamel's letters to Russell are also printed in the *Autobiography* along with one from Gerald.

Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy's excellent biography of Gerald Brenan reveals far more about the friendship and provides many leads for Russell research. The friendship was certainly not central to either man's life, but it is worth more than Russell indicated. Brenan is known primarily for his writings on Spain. Born on Malta to British parents in the year of Russell's first marriage, 1894, he was raised in a comfortable upper middle-class existence. There are similarities in the men's early life stories despite differences of class and generation. Both of them found solace during difficult adolescence in the poetry of Shelley; both were religious in nature but did not believe in God.

In the 1920s both Brenan and Russell were members of the Cranium

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Club. Gathorne-Hardy's reference to this club (p. 209n.) led me to further investigation; it was the first mention I had ever heard of Russell's membership. This informal dining club was founded in 1924 by David Garnett and either Stephen "Tommy" Tomlin or Francis Birrell, or both.<sup>9</sup> Members met monthly at the Verdi Restaurant in London; no minutes were ever kept. Many of the members, all male, came from the inner circle of Bloomsbury, but others, like Russell and Brenan, did not. Three of Russell's closest friends, G. Lowes Dickinson, Charles Sanger, and Roger Fry were also Cranium members. The present secretary of the club, Stephen Keynes, has provided the Russell Archives with a complete list of the members, totalling sixty-one, who belonged before World War II. He also sent a copy of Sassoon's invitation letter, dated 26 April 1929, which lists a membership of only twenty-eight, including Russell and Brenan. It is quite possible that the first meeting between Russell and Brenan took place at the club. A letter from Brenan to Carrington in April 1927 indicates he was seeing Russell then.<sup>10</sup> As early as 1924 Brenan was acquainted with Russell's writings: he taught young Igor Anrep by dictating to him from *The ABC of Atoms* (p. 206).

It appears, however, that their first significant meeting did not take place until 1933 at Yegen, Brenan's first home in Spain, chosen mainly for reasons of economy. A photograph of Russell and Peter at Yegen is printed in Brenan's *South from Granada*. Gathorne-Hardy notes (p. 277) that it was Blair Brenan, Gerald's younger brother, a BBC employee, who suggested the trip. Presumably Russell and Blair met at the BBC; there is no known correspondence between them. Blair's daughter, Ann Cary, sent me a photocopy of an undated letter (in RA) from Gerald to Blair which confirms that Blair was responsible for sending Russell and Peter to Spain. Gerald and Gamel, Russell and Peter spent ten days together at Yegen, a small village high in the Alpujarra. Gathorne-Hardy provides a beautiful description of the isolated community with its towering mountains and stunning views. This is one of his many strengths as a biographer. He has visited all the places that Gerald lived and firmly anchors this biography in place and culture and time.

In his letter to Blair, Brenan notes that he was immediately fascinated by Russell while finding Peter "a nice girl". Russell and Peter stayed on at Yegen after the departure of the Brenans for a holiday of their own. Gathorne-

Hardy notes that Russell fell ill with food poisoning and on his return was discovered by Trumpers (where Russell got his hair cut) to have lice (p. 278). The relationship with both Brenan brothers was to continue; Ann Cary remembers visits throughout the 1930s, but clearly the friendship with Gerald was the strongest. Ann describes a tired Russell being irritated by the doctor who lived with the Blair Brenans wanting to argue about mathematical problems. She also remembers being excluded from a trip to the Caledonian Market during which Kate and John bought swords and fought on the way home on the tube, much to her mother's distress.<sup>11</sup>

In the summer of 1934 Russell and Peter visited Gamel and Gerald at Lulworth; in August 1935 the Brenans came for a visit at Telegraph House. Gerald took lengthy notes of the conversations they had (p. 295). He used these notes as a basis for the portrait he drew of Russell in *Personal Record*, his second volume of autobiography. The manuscript of this book is at the University of Texas at Austin. Possibly the notes have been kept and are there as well; if so they would provide a more unbiased look at Russell than the published chapter, assuming the conversations were accurately transcribed. Brenan concludes his chapter on Russell by calling him a great man despite his flaws.

In February 1936 the Russells returned to Spain, staying with the Brenans at their new home in Churriana, near Malaga (p. 298). It is to this visit that Russell is referring in his *Autobiography*. The visit lasted six weeks. Russell is mistaken in saying they rented the house—it was the one in Yegen that they had rented—although Caroline Moorehead notes that they did contribute to expenses.<sup>12</sup> Gathorne-Hardy states that Peter made scenes while Russell got on Gamel's nerves by showing too clearly his attraction to her.<sup>13</sup> The two irritations were perhaps not unrelated. That summer the Spanish Civil War broke out, and Brenan enlisted Russell's help in getting his articles on the war published in *The Manchester Guardian*. This Russell was quite willing to do, but it seems his sponsorship was unnecessary as the excellent articles sold themselves. Brenan, who had long been searching for a subject, had found his strength.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Gathorne-Hardy credits Stephen "Tommy" Tomlin as being the co-founder while Robert Skidelsky in his biography *John Maynard Keynes*, Vol. 2: *The Economist as Saviour 1920-1937* (Macmillan: London, 1992), p. 13, believes it was Francis Birrell.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Gathorne-Hardy to Sheila Turcon, 25 January 1993, paraphrasing Brenan's letter. Dora Carrington (always known as Carrington) and Brenan were involved in an intense love affair.

<sup>11</sup> Kate has no recollection of fighting but does remember the sword, which she treasured for years (letter to S. Turcon, 12 March 1994).

<sup>12</sup> *Bertrand Russell: a Life* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992), p. 419.

<sup>13</sup> For a study of Russell's relationship with Gamel see Kenneth Hopkins, "Bertrand Russell and Gamel Woolsey", *Russell*, n.s. 5 (1985): 50-65.

<sup>14</sup> Russell's library contains three of Brenan's books one of which predates Brenan's writings on Spain. Written under the pseudonym of George Beaton, *Dr. Partridge's Almanack* is inscribed "Bertrand Russell from Gerald Brenan"; it was published in 1934. Gerald has added some nonsense names to p. 54 which was left blank in the published version. The other two books

Conrad, Peter and Russell's son, was born in April 1937, and on 22 June Russell wrote to the Brenans asking them to take charge of Conrad if he and Peter were to die. "We do not know anyone else whose atmosphere and way of life and general outlook is so completely what we like", wrote Russell (pp. 314–15n.). Gerald's answer is not known. This letter is quite extraordinary at first glance—of all the people that Russell knew, it was to the Brenans that he would entrust his beloved son. It survives with others from Russell and also letters from Peter with Lynda Pranger in Spain. She spent the last years of Gerald's life as his intellectual companion and friend and kindly agreed to make copies of these letters available to the Archives.<sup>15</sup> One of Peter's letters, dated 23 January 1946, offers a partial explanation of why the Brenans were chosen. Russell's letter discounts all relatives as being unsuitable, and, in fact Peter's fear was that Conrad would go to her mother. She notes how difficult it has been meeting Bertie's friends in England and indicates that Gerald and Gamel are an exception—friends to both of them. She states that she has been tied to the home by Conrad and, to some extent, by Kate and John and that Russell has led his own life. Cambridge society, while embracing Russell on his return, has ostracized her. It should not be denied there was a closeness between the Russells and Brenans and that Russell found an affinity with them, but the decision to choose the Brenans should be seen in the context of the social isolation that Russell and his third wife lived their lives while in England.

How suitable were the Brenans as parents? Not very, according to Gathorne-Hardy in his letter to me (see fn. 2). Elena, the daughter of Gerald and a young Spanish village girl from Yegen, was born in January 1931. By that time Gerald had met Gamel and impregnated her as well, but Gamel was never able to carry a child to term. Renamed Miranda, Elena did not come to live with the Brenans until 1934. They tried their best to be good parents, but obviously the challenges were great and in a few years Miranda was sent off to boarding school.

The publication of Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* had a great impact on Brenan, who received from Russell the American edition. Brenan was so excited by Russell's "magnificent book" that he had to take a sleeping

concern Spain. *The Spanish Labyrinth* from 1943 contains a printed card from the publisher; there are brief notes in the back in Peter's hand. *South from Granada* (1957) was sent with the compliments of the author.

<sup>15</sup> The lengthy letters from Peter to the Brenans are a very valuable addition to Russell scholarship. They are particularly good on the years the Russells spent in America. All of the original archival holdings relating to Peter remain embargoed. Over the last several years portraits have emerged of his other three wives; Peter continues to remain in the shadows.

draught to calm himself down and forget Plato when he was not busy making copious notes.<sup>16</sup> Gathorne-Hardy believes that Brenan's *The Literature of the Spanish People* (1951) was modelled after Russell's method of combining biography with exposition (pp. 362–3). It was Brenan's most successful work.

In 1953 the Brenans returned to Spain to live there permanently. Russell remarried and went to live in Wales soon after. Gamel did visit Russell in Wales; as far as I know, Gerald never did. On 8 February 1970, just after Russell's death, Brenan wrote to Frances Partridge, the widow of one of his closest friends: "I used to enjoy his company very much, but I never cared for him as a man. Like Milton he was unloveable because he had no warmth in his personal feelings and too much hatred and rancour" (p. 520n.). Brenan's assessment of Russell is off the mark for a number of reasons. Gamel apparently did find him unloveable, but many women did not. Brenan saw Russell most just after his break-up with Dora, which involved an extremely bitter and unpleasant divorce. It would have led inevitably to expressions of rancour. Finally, it is possible that Brenan was jealous of Russell's undeniable success with much younger women. Brenan was very attracted to them as well, but was never successful with them sexually.

This review, because of where it is being published, has concentrated on the relationship between Brenan and Russell. This forms only a very minor part of a wonderfully crafted biography which is complemented by both annotations which appear at the bottom of the page as well as reference endnotes, a bibliography, index (which unfortunately does not collect all the Russell references<sup>17</sup>) and photographs. A very useful device is the inclusion of the year as part of the running head. The author has done an exemplary job of sorting through all the confusing and somewhat contradictory evidence left by this man who, like Russell, lived into his nineties. Gathorne-Hardy knew Brenan and uses this to his advantage as he does his knowledge of Spanish. He examined journals, letters, and published works to reach his conclusions on character and motivation which always seem to be soundly argued and convincing.

Brenan had no qualms about depending on inherited money to allow him to pursue a life as a writer. He never had to write a book he did not want to write (p. 243). He excelled in his factual writing on Spain which Gathorne-Hardy believes released him from his "interior castle" of self-doubts (pp. 436–7). But in his heart of hearts he remained a failed poet. His life makes a fascinating read, not only because of the story told but also because of the

<sup>16</sup> Letter in RA1 710.047625.

<sup>17</sup> Add these references to the index entry for Russell: *The ABC of Atoms* 206; and Cranium Club 209n.; and Gamel 296.

author's skill in telling it. The chapter on Gamel's long and painful death from cancer is beautifully written and haunts the memory. He clears up the confusion of Brennan's last years which included a well-intended but ill-fated return to a nursing home in Britain.

Biography is not an easy genre. Gathorne-Hardy, an experienced writer of social history and children's literature, has mastered it on his first attempt. This book will reward any reader with an interest in the mysteries of human nature.

