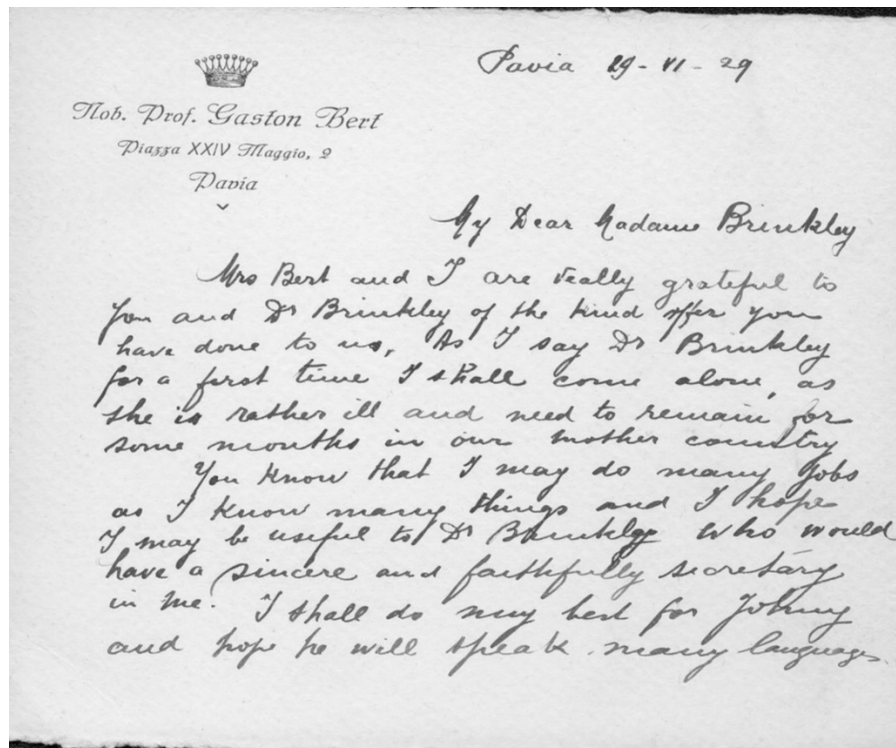


Letter from Gaston Bert to Minnie Telitha Jones Brinkley

1929

KHS BertG-to-BrinkleyM-1929



Transcribed by Gail Parker and Oby Frank Arnold

English 618: Research Methods in English

Dr. Brian Gastle

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Introduction to the Series

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography was prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English degree program at Western Carolina University (WCU). The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship.
 - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, bibliographies, etc.) appropriate to a subject.
 - Students will be able to use a wide variety of such tools and evaluate those tools.
 - b. Find appropriate advanced research (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
 - Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, evaluate both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correctly and effectively.
 - c. Develop accurate bibliographies and reference citations.
 - Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format.
2. Understand the process by which the texts we use are made available.
 - Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is presented as submitted by the graduate students. While they take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are possible. As they learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires meticulous research and corroboration by authoritative sources. Our objective is to provide transcriptions and annotations of WCU's Special Collections materials that will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, patrons, and all users of our library's resources.

If you wish to submit an emendation or correction for this document, please email Dr. Brian Gastle (bgastle@wcu.edu).

Introduction to the Document

Prof. Dr. Gaston Bert (1893-1972), referred to in the document as “Comte de Bussy de Saint Romain,” was born in Burgundy, France. Little is known about the man prior to his 1925 correspondence with Dr. Brinkley, however, it is clear that he served in some capacity as a professor in Italy and perhaps also as legal counsel for Brinkley, as suggested by the use of the term client with regards to Brinkley. Bert facilitated Brinkley’s examinations at the University of Pavia, where Brinkley was able to obtain a degree through a combination of bribery and the hustling of slapdash credentials. Bert would go on to immigrate to the U.S. in 1929, working first as Brinkley’s secretary, and then as a contributor to Brinkley’s radio station KFPB, where he could be heard twice daily, teaching French to children, as well as translating Brinkley’s lectures into French, Italian, and Spanish. At first, Gaston Bert’s wife, Magdelaine Bert, referred to as “Comtesse de Bussy de Saint Romain,” did not accompany him to the U.S. due to illness, but after a period of just a few months, she joined her husband in Kansas and also offered advice to children on the radio station.

Minerva “Minnie” Telitha Jones Brinkley (1892-1980) was the daughter of a physician, Tiberius Gracchus Jones, a member of an old and respected Tennessee family. She became Dr. John R. Brinkley’s second wife and the mother of his son John Richard Brinkley aka “Johnny Boy.” She married Dr. Brinkley first in 1913 and then three years later when his divorce from his first wife had been finalized. It was Minnie’s inheritance which allowed the Brinkleys to found the Brinkley-Jones Hospital in Milford, Kansas. She managed much of the business side of Dr. John Brinkley’s enterprises, helped cultivate his public image, and later assisted in running his powerful border radio station, XERA. Minnie described her role at the clinic as “counseling, collecting and good will” (Brock 116). As a matter of fact, she took on the task of contacting the employers of Brinkley’s clients who couldn’t afford to pay their bills to have the company garnish their wages until the bill was settled. She was later arrested for bank fraud related to John’s schemes.

This letter is from Gaston (and Magdelaine) Bert to John Brinkley’s wife, Minnie Telitha Jones Brinkley. In the letter, Bert tells Brinkley that he will be visiting from his home country of Italy alone because his wife is sick, and that he hopes to receive a job as Dr. Brinkley’s secretary. He discusses the fact that he is capable of doing many jobs and extends his thanks to the Brinkleys for providing him employment. In the Postscript, his wife Magdalaine also thanks the Brinkleys and sends her love to them. This letter establishes a relationship between Minerva Brinkley and the Berts and elucidates a timeline for the Bert’s immigration to the States.

Editorial statement

This letter is written on thick cardstock paper with a deckled edge. The letter is a simple front and back and the paper is relatively square in shape. There is no envelope. The single piece of paper measures 5” wide and 4.25” tall, and appears to be personal stationary as there is a printed letterhead at the top left of the letter with a nine-pointed Corona de conde, below which the words “Nob. Prof. Gaston Bert / Piazza XXIV Maggio, 2 / Pavia.” There is a small arrow tip below the address which appears to have been written by hand. In the top righthand side of the letter is the word Pavia followed by the date, written in Bert’s hand. The script is written more hastily than other letters by Bert and becomes slightly more difficult to decipher in places. Following his signature, which he signs simply “Gaston Bert,” his wife leaves her own short note for Minerva, followed by her signature.

While we have striven for accuracy in the transcription, it is worth noting that the author was not a native English speaker. It is known from his later appearances on the XERA radio station that he spoke at least four languages, with English being just one of them. As a diplomatic edition, we have preserved all original spelling, grammar, and word choices as best as we can make them out. We have not made any ‘corrections’ to his English.

In the original, the author chose to right-align the text on the front page, seemingly to accommodate the letterhead. This does not carry through to the back page, and so for readability, we have presented the entirety of the transcription left-aligned, with paragraph indentations matching where the paper in the original. Line breaks between sentences are also true to the original.

Cover Image: Deckled cardstock on which the short letter from Bert to Minerva Brinkley was written.

Courtesy of the Kansas Historical Society.

[MS Page 1]

Pavia 9-11-29¹

My Dear Madame Brinkley,²

Mrs. Bert and I are really grateful to you and Dr. Brinkley of the kind offer you have done to us. As I say Dr. Brinkley for a first time I shall come alone, as she is rather ill and need to remain for some months in our mother country.³

You know that I may do many jobs as I know many things and I hope I may be useful to D. Brinkley who would have a sincere and faithfully secretary in me. I shall do my best for Johnny and hope he will speak many languages.⁴

[MS Page 2]

I wait your kind answer and
in the mean time Mrs. Bert
and I send you our best
love

Kisses to Johnny.

Yours, very sincerely,
Gaston Bert⁵ [Signature]

I hope you are all well.
Thousands of thanks and
Kisses for you and Johnny.⁶
Ms. Bert [Signature]

¹ Speculative. Given the cross out of the first number, the date could be 19-11-29.

² John Brinkley's wife Minnie Telitha Jones Brinkley.

³ Magdeleine Bert is the wife of Gaston Bert. Dr. John Brinkley invited the Berts to stay with him and later offered them a spot on his radio station. Outbreaks of influenza and parrot fever were circulating in Pavia in 1929, which is possibly what is referred to here. Dr. Gaston Bert's native country was presumably France, perhaps the Saint Romain region, though he is known to have resided in Italy, as indicated from the letterhead.

⁴ Bert taught French lessons to children on Brinkley's radio station in Kansas, and presented Brinkley's lectures in French, Spanish, and Italian.

⁵ Bert is inexplicably credited in *Souvenir Album of the Artists and Others at Radio Station KFKB* as Prof. "Doctor Gaston Bert Comte de Bussy de Saint Romain," though I could find no record of such a conferred title.

⁶ John Richard Brinkley aka "Johnny Boy."

Works Cited

Brock, Pope. *Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam*. Crown, 2009.

This book offered deep insight into Brinkley's life, particularly regarding his relationship with Minerva.

Carson, Gerald. *The Roguish World of Doctor Brinkley*. Rinehart, 1960.

This source verifies information about the Brinkley's son "Johnny Boy," as well as information about their radio stations.

"Doubs, France, Censuses, 1906-1921." *Ancestry.com*.

This census data records the birth of Gaston Bert.

"France, Death Records, 1970-2021." *Ancestry.com*.

<https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/fichier-des-personnes-decedees>, Accessed Dec 2, 2025.

This source indicates that Bert died in the South of France in 1972.

Lee, R. Alton. *The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley*. UP of Kentucky, 2002.

This source verifies Minnie's role at the Brinkley hospital and information about her inheritance.

"New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists (Including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957." *Ancestry.com*.

This source confirms that Gaston Bert traveled to the U.S. in 1929.

Souvenir Album of the Artists and Others at Radio Station KFKB. KFKB Broadcasting Association, 1930. p. 27, <https://www.worldradiohistory.com/Archive-Station-Albums/KFKB-Milford-Kansas-Souvenir-Album-1930.pdf>, Accessed 15 Nov. 2025.

This source contains the only known photo of Gaston Bert and his wife Magdalaine.

This is also the source that describes the contents of their radio programs.

"United States Federal Census Record, Milford Township-1930." *Ancestry.com*.

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/6224/records/32866586?tid=&pid=&queryIid=80c27c14-41bf-4958-97ff-acd9dfb2e1c4&usePUBJs=true>, accessed Dec 2, 2025.

This source verifies that Gaston and Magdalaine Bert resided in Milford Texas alongside the Brinkleys.