

January 1992.

APOLOGIA PRO MARGINALIIS SUIS

I have to apologise for the long delay in dispatching MARGINALIA Nos.3 and 4. The first copies of No.1 were posted in mid-March 1990, two days after the big fire that burnt down half my house and my whole archive with it. Over the summer of 1990 I continued to post further copies as and when my shakey finances permitted expenditure on postage. No.1 brought in a surprisingly large amount of correspondence, replies to which were very demanding on my time. Nos.2, 3 and 4 were ready by August 1990 but there was no money to print, let alone post them.

Meanwhile external events started moving rapidly in my normally uneventful life. In May 1990 I was awarded the International Prize "Le Muse" of the City of Florence, for lyric poetry, oddly enough under the aegis of Calliopé, the Muse of Epic. This led to a series of television appearances and a lot of interviews with the press and a mountain of correspondence from inquisitive viewers, not to say unannounced callers at my house. Needless to say, none of these activities involved my earning so much as a single *lira*.

In December 1990 my bilingual book of lyrical poems, *Teorie e altre liriche*, a large and handsome hardbound volume (miraculously with less than thirty misprints) was published in Rome. And in the same month I posted a thousand and more MARGINALIA No.2, all original work in Italian. Postage and printing of this cost me over £3,000 (six million lire). A year later I can triumphantly say that it has earned me less than £100. What especially amused me was that of two hundred academics, all people I know personally, to whom I addressed the issue, only one replied. This gentleman, a University librarian, asked me how he could send money to me. You'd think an Italian adult would know how to do this, or am I asking too much of human intelligence? After 15 months he still has sent nothing.

A dead loss of £3,000 spurred me into some desultory action, and during 1991 most of my time has gone on giving lectures in schools, Universities and other cultural institutes, mainly in Switzerland. Some of these lectures are listed later in this issue. Somehow I've managed to keep going financially during 1991 and at last I am in a position to send out MARGINALIA No.3.

In October 1991 I received the International Prize "Dante Alighieri" for my Dante studies published in my three lectures on "Dante and Islam" and at the end of that month I gave four subsequent lectures on the "Figure of Woman in medieval Islamic and Christian Mystical Poetry" at the Carl Gustav Jung Institute, Zürich. In January 1992 I give a lecture at University of Aachen on "Tolkien and the Imagination" and also a new Dante lecture "Dante and the Ascent of Mohammed". And in February I expect the first printed copies of a new bilingual book of lyrical poems, *My Wild Heart*, from Il Salice, Milan.

All this may look impressive, but it brings me in less per annum than the salary of the office boy in our Comune. But what is worse it is counterproductive. While I certainly need that basic amount of money per year just to cover rent, food, heating, car, telephone etc., what I need equally urgently is *time* to study and write. Dante, in the *Convivio*, equated study with Love, and made that the central thing in his life. That of course is why he was such a great poet. Perhaps it is just because many of the poets of today have nothing in common with Dante's viewpoint, that they are such a wretched lot, -- vulgar, demotic, superficial, more motivated by the media than inspired by the Muses.

EDITORIAL NOTES OF *AUGUST 1990*

I SENT OUT the first issues of MARGINALIA No.1 on 9th March, two days after the fire destroyed the whole of my archive, all my notebooks with drafts of poems and research notes, and all my personal and family documents going back to my childhood. These four months have been uncomfortable ones with the abundant spring rains pouring through the no longer existing roofs and through the upper floors (cracked by the heat, which was intense) into my downstairs living and working quarters. The water often came in faster than I could bale it out and I had to wear rubber boots and erect an umbrella when cooking and writing. The walls, which I had repainted last October, are covered with mildew and black stains, the brick floors are still holding water even after a six week heat wave. A gritty dust falls from the intact roof over my bed and into my upstairs rooms.

HOWEVER, MARGINALIA No.2 (in Italian) and No.3 (in English) are edited and ready for the photocopier, (which of course, is out of action and the *tecnico* on holiday!). So now, I am starting on Nos.4 and 5 (odd numbers will be in English, even numbers in Italian).

THE FIRE only slightly modified my plans. I originally thought of producing this new one-man review in the spring of last year when I was in Paris to preside over the commemorations of the lifework of PETER WHIGHAM, the English poet and translator of Catullus and Martial and Meleager, whom I had known since 1946. Whigham was killed in a motor accident in California in 1988. In 1987 I had shown him my extensive archive and my many hundreds of notebooks, and told him how I planned to go through the whole lot and transcribe the very many poems and translations of mine which I had never typed out, edit the numerous unpublished prose pieces (mostly lectures given over a twenty year period), and arrange the documents in order, with my own explanatory notes and comments. At just on seventy I could hardly expect to ever finish the whole task, but I thought I had a good chance of completing a substantial proportion of the work, and leaving the whole collection as a valuable inheritance for my three children (now aged 15, 14 and 12 respectively). All this was not to be! In completing this vast work, as well as the publication of the 30,000 folios of my own poetry already typed out but not yet published, and which is lodged in the unburnt part of the house, I realised that I faced considerable obstacles. First and foremost the negative (and often hostile) attitude of poetry editors and the Establishment in general. Only two editors had published my poetry in the past six years, and in each case delays between acceptance and publication had amounted to 4 or 5 years. At that rate, if I was lucky, I might see another twenty of my poems published before I died. Editors of poetry of course have plenty of difficult problems too, and because of them they often keep submitted poems for several years before they make a decision (if they ever make one!). This means that the poems submitted are "dead" -- one can't submit them elsewhere. It seemed to me that only inordinate ambition or vanity could justify sending more poems out to editors. In any case, they rarely pay for poems, and at best can print very few.

TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, the readership of poetry magazines is minimal. I meet many people who would like to buy and read my poetry, but very few of them indeed even know of the existence of such reviews, or if they do know them express the opinion that the poetry in them is mostly beneath contempt.

THIS LEADS ME to another observation. I have come to realise during the past ten years that there are two quite distinct audiences (markets!) for poetry. First, there are the people who are actively and professionally concerned with poetry, mainly university and school teachers of literature and people in the publishing business itself. Of them, in general, I can

only say with the ancient writer "Niuno segno di buono spirito si vede in loro" (letter to Nic. Sod., speaking of the "Prelati della Corte di Avignone"). Snyder remarks from Oxbridge dons or Liverpool Irish come back to me through third parties. "Oh, Peter Russell's been around a long time" or "Oh, Peter Russell writes about nymphs and fauns", (didn't Mallarmé, and Valéry and Pound write about "elemental creatures" too?), or, even more to the point "Peter Russell doesn't even have a university degree" or "We never see Peter Russell". I wonder why they never see me????? The truth is, of course, that these "professionals" work in small mutually backscratching cliques and want nothing to do with an independent spirit. SECONDLY, there is a vast mass of people who are in no way professionally involved in poetry but who really care for it when it has the kindred touch of true humanity and is not a mere exercise in academic exhibitionism or the latest fashionable trivialities. Children in schools I visit, modest and anonymous people who come to poetry readings and buy four or five of my books at a time without ever speaking of themselves, and above all, the audiences in the Teatro Parioli in Rome when I've read my poetry for the Maurizio Costanzo Show on Italian TV. Their reactions to poems of serious human sentiment have been overwhelming.

W.H.AUDEN USED TO SAY that the poets of today read nothing but their own poems and "The Beano". I doubt they even read the "Beano". Certainly other poets or teachers of literature have rarely if ever come to my own poetry readings. When I visited my Alma Mater, Queen Mary College in London in 1985, not one member of the English Department attended, even though I wrote to them saying that I would talk about my eminent teachers there forty-five years ago (e.g. James Sutherland and Norman Callan). It was in fact the Astronomers who invited me! MEANWHILE, THERE ARE OTHER SERIOUS IMPEDIMENTS in the way of earning a living from the art of poetry. The posts are incredibly slow and incredibly expensive and unreliable. The former staff of our local post office are all suspended and under indictment for fraudulent conversion. I myself lost several million lire I had paid for book parcels and International Money Orders, which they never sent. We found some of the parcels in a garbage collection bin (without any postage stamps on them). I wrote a formal complaint to the Director of Posts in Arezzo, (copy to the Minister), but after one year have never received any reply! The present staff are so dull-witted that they can't calculate the proper charge for Printed Matter without reference to the Manager. One of them had to telephone to the district office to find out whether Yugoslavia was in Italy or not. They would not believe me that it was a sovereign state (1989).

SELLING SINGLE VOLUMES (or even several at a time) through the post has simply become uneconomic. The bureaucracy involved in paying IVA (= VAT) is so complex and the bank charges on small cheques so exorbitant that one necessarily loses on the deal. In 1984 when the U.S. dollar rose to peak value my local bank, (Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, Filiale di Pian di Scò), charged L.34,000 (which then equalled \$14.00) for each check they negotiated. I had twenty checks for \$10.00 each. I would have had to pay \$280 to negotiate my \$200!!!!

READERS OF "MARGINALIA" may well feel that the production is slipshod. It's the best I can manage. Quite apart from the high price of printing, if I employ a printer to produce MARGINALIA it will involve a six month's delay (or more) and innumerable mistakes which will necessitate numerous visits to the printer's shop ten or twenty kilometers away, without any guarantee that new mistakes will not appear on each subsequent set of proofs. BEARING ALL THE ABOVE in mind I decided to produce the simplest format possible and to save time and nervous energy for editing, writing and study. As for MARGINALIA being a one-man show I make no apology whatever. With the sheer quantity (back log) of my poetry and the diversity of styles, subject matter and 'tones' of what I write, I have need of every inch of space I can get. The reaction to the first issue of MARGINALIA makes it more than plain that there is a considerable demand for it. I note without surprise however, that the demand does not come from other poets! I don't read "The Beano" very often but I do read quite a lot of contemporary poetry (thirty different younger poets this year alone). I would add that I am not one of those poets who do a full-time job (for Mammon or the State) and write dinkie little poems at the weekend. I am a 24 hour a day poet (my dreams are an important element in my work, -- for instance my book *Africa's Dream*). I also write poetry in several different languages. Many of my poems written originally in Italian, as well as my own translations of my English poems, have been published in the Italian magazines or broadcast, and some are used in the Italian schools. My original poems in Serbo-Croatian were broadcast by me on the Yugoslav TV last October, several times, and I have translated poetry into English from at least twenty languages. Blah blah! you may say. What I mean is that I am a poet first and foremost and one who only "teaches" occasionally. Most of the poets today are teachers, or copy-writers, or cost accountants who write poems "occasionally". Some of these, at least a dozen writing in the English language, though mostly Irish or Scottish, are very good poets indeed. There are also some very interesting Italian poets and I hope to present their work in my English translations in future issues of MARGINALIA as well as to translate some English-language poets into Italian for the Italian issues.

I want to end this long editorial with a few suggestions. Many poets expect the Arts Council and the Foundations to help them to survive (and it really is a matter of basic survival if we are full-time poets -- please ask yourself honestly if ~~we~~ could survive, as I have, for forty years without a salary?). I wish poets good luck with the Arts Council but suspect that few will find that luck coming their way. I want to suggest that poets try to help themselves a bit more. I am presently trying to sell several ideas. I am trying to persuade the big dailies and the glossy weeklies to publish good poems, not just gossip about personalities in poetry. Poets could visit far more schools if they tried. The snag here in Italy is that the schools (unless they are private) all say they have no allotment of money for visiting poets, but I feel there are ways around the regulations of a Ministry of Education reputed to give no money for poetry. A Classical Liceo near here invited me to read to the whole school this spring. At first they said they had no money,

then later, they said, Yes, they would pay me, but they couldn't say how much. I read there in March. Ten months later I still haven't received a check, but I am sure I will, if I don't die of old age before it arrives. Anyway, the experience was one well worth taking a risk on. I've always found schools among the very best poetry audiences.

I AM ALSO trying to persuade organisers of classical chamber concerts to get poets to read in between the longer items. Last Christmas our local Comune invited me to read at a concert of baroque music in our (beautiful romantic) church. To my amazement the poems were greatly appreciated (not least by the members of the very fine Orchestra da camera di Arezzo). I am to give readings soon with a fine flautist from that orchestra. People are used to jazz and poetry, or even pop and poetry, but I think there's a great opportunity for serious poets to read at classical concerts. My neighbour, the folk and blues singer Sabrina, and I, have alternated song and poetry also. And lastly I'm suggesting that people should give dinner parties after which a poet and musician would entertain the guests. If up to now people have been quite willing to shell out unheard of sums for a dinner, but unwilling to invite a poet, I think it's mainly because most of the poets have been total bores and incompetent to boot. Surely listening to a few poems and a few good pieces of music is better than watching TV or playing bingo? All hosts are not Trimalchios.

EVERYTHING I HAVE WRITTEN ABOVE points to the odd fact that while poetry is much respected in theory, in practice the poet is the one artisan who is not customarily paid for his production. This is quite scandalous and reflects badly on the "educated" public and the authorities. But it also reflects badly on the poets themselves, who seem to me to be going around in ever smaller circles, with nothing to say whatever, and no gift for saying it.

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS involved in publishing MARGINALIA is that it demands an enormous amount of correspondence. Since the first issue was sent out nine months ago, over three hundred replies have seemed to me to cry out for an answer. This requires very many hours of unremunerated "work", but I undertake it gladly. To those readers who have not yet received my replies I would say here "Please be patient, I shall do my best to answer all letters". Each issue of MARGINALIA costs me £4 (about \$8.00), exclusive of my own work on it. Since I don't want to be tied down to a precise regular schedule or subscription accountancy I prefer to distribute MARGINALIA gratis, and rely on your generosity for donations. Donations should be thought of as contributions to give me more time to study and write rather than as payment for copies of MARGINALIA.

LASTLY, if anyone has old books or documents of mine or copies of articles referring to my work, or even old letters of mine, I would be most grateful for the opportunity to buy the books or receive photocopies of the documents. In

particular, I hope to find copies of my unpublished translations from Mandelstam and Blok, copies of which I remember giving to friends, but alas, they seem not to have preserved them. All this material was destroyed in the fire. TO RETURN TO POETRY (?), while Geoffrey Hill says he attempts "a florid grim music broken by grunts and shrieks" (Michael Longley says Mr. Hill is "a profound genius, the best poet writing in England, and makes exquisite, immaculate music"), the new Poet Laureate of U.S.A., Josip Brodsky, enjambling himself in his public image, writes:

*From the height of a glacier I beheld half a world, the earth,
With. Twice have drowned, thrice let knives rake my
nitty-gritty.*

I owe this quotation to the New York Professor of Classical Logic, Barbara Celarent, and thank the learned lady kindly.

BRODSKY BELIEVES that there is a market in U.S.A. for fifty million copies of a book of poetry. The Literature Officer of Britain's Arts Council, Alistair Niven, believes that 18 million people in U.K. read poetry regularly (*Poetry Review*, Winter '91). Italy too is having a poetry boom (they say). Both Brodsky and Niven describe themselves as public (or government) servants.

THE BOYLSTON PROFESSOR of Rhetoric at Harvard, Seamus Heaney, seems closer to the elusive nitty-gritty when he quotes a rhyme he and his school companions used to sing in peaceful Co. Derry:

One fine October's morning September last July
The moon lay thick upon the ground, the mud shone in
the sky.

I stepped into a tramcar to take me across the sea,
I asked the conductor to punch my ticket and he punched
my eye for me.

I fell in love with an Irish girl, she sang me an Irish dance,
She lived in Tipperary, just a few miles out of France.
The house it was a round one, the front was at the back,
It stood alone between two more and it was whitewashed
black.

Barbara informs me that this is far more in accord with Aristotle's posteriors than any of the linguistic utterances of today's great poets. Anyway...

*Hafez, drink wine, and be glad and reckless: but don't
copy these*

Who make reciting the Book a cover for lies.

(Heath-Stubbs / Avery tr.)

SHELLEY'S GHOST

Saw Shelley's ghost the other night
Howling along the Riviera past
The Ancient Hebrew Cemetery,
His freckled face all bloodied, horror like the plague
Making his eyes a scream
Before he ever uttered sound.

He staggered like a drunken beast from side to side the road,
Muttering, growling, screaming, moaning,
Hands clasped to his ears to keep the tempest out, --
And moaning, groaning, groaning, moaning,
Loud enough to drown the wind and spray

I heard the ghost of Shelley say:

*" One of the black cherubims -- Saint Francis,
When I was dead came for me, Heaven-sent, --
But one said 'No, -- his life's all fraudulent stances, --
He's not to thrive who will not him repent:
Repentance and desire's extravagances
Are contradiction and inconsonant. "*

He howled the words like one who was a man
Once when the sun lit up his youthful face,
And Love had smiled sweet greetings from the lips
Of a young girl, whose body now decayed
Visibly and hideously before his sight,

And who, bare come to man's estate
Lived as a wolf the nights haunting the lonely roads,
Baying with bloody muzzle at the moon,
Dragging his great brush from kerb to kerb
And baring dripping fangs...

Into the shadows like a thief the phantom crawled,
And terror-stricken I was left alone.
'twas midnight and the hidden buoys
Rang through the night their mournful bells,
That clanged across the silent grey Lagoon
Of crouching Venice.

Then, slinking home, myself a wolf
Or blood-mouthed fulmar of the ways,
Exhausted as of wounds,
Scarcely escaped from some dread enemy,

Weeping and trembling I sank upon the ground
Safe once again in my illuminated house.

After long hours of chattering idiot fear
When I lay prostrate as one paralysed,
Face down upon the flecked cold marble floor,
Slowly the good sun came trickling in
And warmed me gently with his rays. --

I thought

*"Bysshe Shelley here! who knew this place so well
Just fifty and a hundred years ago.
Is this an omen? Or some terrible threat?"*

Lido di Venezia,
January 1971

Note: The above poem was considered by the editor of my *All for the Wives: Selected Poems 1947-1975* (Anvil Press 1984) "too romantic" and unworthy of inclusion. It was in fact printed in *The Vitalist Reader* (edited by James Hogg, University of Salzburg 1982) and I thank Dr. Hogg for permission to reprint it. As far as I know no one has ever read the poem.

A DOG'S DEATH

The little dog will no longer chew up my slipper.
He has gone down to the Hades of all good dogs
Leaving an ordinary family stark and bereaved.
The keening of three children was heard round the valleys,
ōmoi, ōmoi, rose and fell through the length of Valdarno.
Trojan and Argive women lamenting the heroes' fall
Were not heard as these were heard in Vallombrosa,
Nor were the Babylonian virgins mourning for Tammuz
Ever as noisy or clamorous as these broken-hearted children.

Pian di Scò, 1985

MOSCOW THE THIRD ROME

The pagan Russian envoys to Byzantium
Entered the churches there in ecstasy.
When they returned they said 'We did not know
Whether we were in heaven or on earth.'

Hagia Sophia was brought to Moscow,
Vladimir pressed the new religion on his souls.
Then Boris Godunov sent out young Russians
To study in the West; -- not one returned.

The Third Rome flourished under Peter.
The civil alphabet replaced the Church Slavonic.
And Peter Chaadayev went to Rome --
Came back with new ideas. He was declared insane.

They kill their poets or imprison them
In the new third pagan Rome.
I ask the tourists who return from there
'And is it heaven, or earth, or hell?'

Venice,
3rd March 1968

AN IMAGE FROM MAXIM GORKY

Sad herald of the Russian winter --
A troika's passing bell --

First ice upon the ponds
First mist upon the grizzly peaks

The howling of the wolves, the blizzard's storming
In the warm guest-room cheers me like a fire --

Nature's no enemy

It's Man
Who kills his fellow-men or beats a woman
Or lets a child grow stunted or unloved

That raises mountains in the human heart
And angers mutely valleys in our heads

Impruneta,
21st August 1966

GIRADISCO

We will hear the songs of the Troubadours
Which they sang in the courts of forbidden love;
We will see if the turning of a plastic disc
Will wind us back across time.

The living voice and the live instrument
Reconstructed according to learned studies
Will bring us the songs of warlike poets --
Coeur de Lion, Bertrand and Arnaut.

The Germans too will hiss in gutturals
For they too went on Crusades;
We will recreate what the Church destroyed
When it exterminated the Albigenses.

Their plainsong, counterpoint, Latin
Does not move us like the song of our time --
Pierrot Lunaire, Wozzeck and Lulu
Cry out to us from near-by sepulchers.

But the poetry stands on the page and the music moves --
A fresh spring dance in ripped-out tendons.
Next time we will hear Chaliapine
Sing the portentous Coronation of Boris,

And once again the tears will well up
Flooding our eyes with astounded pain --
As the words of Pushkin live once again
And the murdered past fills full our cup.

Venice,
13th October 1966

MUSSORGSKY -- EQUIVOQUE

Modest Mussorgsky -- he was very proud
Of all the brassy row he made.
I find his "*Pictures*" rather "loud",
"Night on the Bare Mountain" -- *assez forte*.

But in the Songs one's in a sacred glade
Or exquisite enchanted forest,
Where sloe-eyed, goggles some Circassian maid,
Nocturnal acrobat, or loris.

Then when in solemn noble " *Boris "*
He once pulls on the tragic buskin, --
He *pulls it off* (as quick as Joris),
Thanks to Shakespeare and to Pushkin.

Lido di Venezia,
13th October 1966

VEVEZIA MORTA

When Napoleon took upon him to divest
Venice and its lagoon in '98
Of certain ancient churches and its best
Paintings, and all the archives of the State,

And later gave to Austria for good
The hollow shell of grandeur and of fame,
Its fated Arsenal, its galleys made of wood,
And the last Doge had quietly died of shame --

The new opera house in S.Fantin,
The hope of Cimarosa and his friends,
Was named the Phoenix, as it should have been,
And by its beauty strove to make amends.

But since that time nothing has happened here
(A last attempt at greatness by Manin)
-- United Italy -- a hearty cheer!
The trains on time -- the streets are all kept clean.

Venice your guiding star is drowned in mud,
Your glittering diamonds are *Murano glass*
And all your woeful tourist-products dud --
The mere idea of "Renaissance" a farce.

Venice,
9th March 1968

LA NAZIONE

Martedì 29 ottobre 1991

BORGO ALLA COLLINA / CERIMONIA ALL'ACCADEMIA

Il premio di poesia «Dante Alighieri» va al letterato inglese Peter Russell

Servizio di

Massimo Orlandi

Il poeta e letterato Peter Russell, 70 anni, inglese è il vincitore del premio internazionale per autori stranieri intitolato a Dante Alighieri. L'ambito riconoscimento gli è stato consegnato nei giorni scorsi al professor Vittorio Vettori presidente dell'Accademia casentinese di lettere, scienze, arti e economia. La cerimonia si è svolta nelle suggestive sale del castello di Borgo alla Collina, sede dell'Accademia. La consegna del premio, una medaglia realizzata da Bino Bini, è stata l'unico momento protocollare di una giornata dedicata esclusivamente alla poesia e a questo carismatico professore di Bristol, che all'arte delle parole ha dedi-

Da molto tempo il professore vive

a Piandiscò: due anni fa il fuoco

devastò la sua ricca biblioteca e

la corrispondenza con Ezra Pound

cato una vita. Dopo una gioventù vissuta in Inghilterra, Russell ha sviluppato una esistenza avventurosa. Professore di filosofia, Russell ha ottenuto cattedre negli Stati Uniti, in Canada e persino a Teheran. Ma ha vissuto per lunghi periodi anche in Italia, soprattutto a Venezia.

A partire dal 1983 Russell si è stabilito nella nostra provincia, a Piandiscò, isolato da tutti, assorto nel suo

mondo letterario. Purtroppo da poco più di un anno il suo patrimonio di cultura è andato distrutto. Un incendio ha ridotto in cenere 5.000 volumi e la sua corrispondenza con il poeta americano Ezra Pound grande amico di Russell. Un danno irreparabile «anche se — come ha spiegato il professor Silvano Zoi presentando il personaggio Russell — questo straordinario signore porta

dentro di sé, nella sua mente fervida, un patrimonio letterario unico, con una conoscenza profonda di tutti i 'grandi' da Omero a Pound».

Tra i geni di sempre Russell ha una particolare predilezione anche per Dante. Per questo, dopo aver ricevuto il premio ha pensato bene di affrontare il pubblico dell'Accademia con un argomento assai complesso «Dante e l'Islam». «E' un po' ardito per un forestiero come me — ha detto — parlare di Dante. Ma mi sia concesso di osare, dopo 30 anni trascorsi in Italia». Dopo una appassionata lezione il professor Russell è tornato a Piandiscò. E' nella quiete del piccolo paese che continuerà a coltivare il suo profondo amore per la poesia e per la cultura.

Just published:

THEORIES and other lyrics

THEORIES *65 visionary lyrics, 1945-1982*, by Peter Russell. Bilingual edition (English, with Italian translation opposite). Carlo Mancosu Editore, Roma, 1991. pp 240pp. Large 8vo. Cloth bound, lettered gilt, heavy duty plasticised jacket with photograph in colour. Introduction and philological notes. A very handsome book production.

The Italian translations by Pier-Franco Donovan are about as near to literal versions as one can get without ever lapsing into mere prose, but preserve much of the poetry. Students of the Italian language will find them a most useful exercise for improving their knowledge of Italian.

KATHLEEN RAINE, in 1979 in a London weekly review, praised a small English edition (printed in Teheran) of 20 of these poems as highly crafted traditional poems. Mr. William Oxley referred to the same collection as "lyrical poems of the highest quality all sustained by an exceptional intellect".

The Milanese poet, FRANCO LOI, recently wrote in the Italian national daily *Il Sole 24 Ore* (31st July 1991). "In these poems of Russell, I recognize the style of that highest tradition which unites intensity of thought, simplicity of language, musical quality and the sacrality of imagery, with a profound general culture. He seems to continue that ancient dialogue, the troubled terrible discoursing of poetry which spans the generations and reaches out to the peoples of the world in the mirror of human folly and of renewed hope [...] and like Homer, wrings from the darkness of the self and of the world, greater realities and hidden truths."

And *THE TIMES* of London in 1985 described Russell as a "poet of the high romantic tradition" and the creator of a "supreme fiction". Reviewing *THEORIES* in *Chronicles* (Chicago), the classical scholar, Thomas Fleming, called Peter Russell "the last of great modernists".

Peter Russell's poetry has also made a powerful impression on mass audiences on TV (Canale 5, Rome; TV1 and TV2; Teletruria, Arezzo) even making headlines in the Italian national dailies.

The whole series of poems are in the same external form, -- four line stanzas with alternating rhymes and iambic or trochaic metre -- and yet achieve a very wide variety of rhythmical and musical effect. The fact that a poet who has published a large amount of unrhymed free verse can at the same time write in strict rhymed forms is perhaps not without interest for the contemporary reader of serious poetry.

If a single key concept can be used to characterize these poems in their homogeneity, it would be the idea of "transcendence".

You may order direct from PETER RUSSELL:

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SCHOOLS, COLLEGES, UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS, please note that Peter Russell is always willing to lecture or read his poems, and to enter into dialogue with interested audiences. He has lectured in over 100 Universities in three continents.

QUINTILIANA

PETER RUSSELL: METAMEIPSEIS NOERAI or, *Intellectual Transformations*

An Epyllion of Cittinus Aurelianus Quintilius Stultus in which the lunatic poet (born Hadramaut, Africa, c. A.D. 376), innocently irate at his patron Stilicho the Goth's cowardly assassination by Roman patricians and eunuchs, forsakes Court Circles and pagan religion alike, removes to Palestine and sets up as a shepherd of sheep. After a momentous conversion to Judaism, he acts out unknowingly the part of Amos the first literate Prophet, but is ill-received by his co-religionists, who object strongly to interference in their internal affairs, especially by a Prophet. They are more concerned with colonisation and turning out troublesome nomads than with the voice of their God, JHWH.

Disgusted by their ill-behaviour Quintilius Stultus turns Christian, and worse still, Christian poet. Latter-day philologists and students of early Christian literature will be delighted to find that the mystery of "Who was Commodianus?" has been solved at last. Commodianus was not Commodianus; he was Quintilius. No wonder his poetry was so awful.

After some years of ardent missionary life in Africa and Gaul, Quintilius, as was ever his wont ("won't power" rather than will-power was always his ruling passion) backslides into a new round of obviously reactionary paganism, venting his spleen on the Church's dogmas, its politics, its fiscal dexterities, and especially on his old friend and fellow-student Augustine, whose views on music he deplures.

Quintilius settles for the Platonic *nous*, that is the Intellect, and accuses the Church of having settled on NOS, that is, "Us" -- *Christiani' uber alles*, a viewpoint somewhat ironically confirmed by recent historians, who see the Church as having insinuated itself into the Emperor's clothes, or rather, the Imperial Diadem of sociology.

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PETER RUSSELL's most recent book (apart from Quintilius) is THEORIES (Mancosu, Roma, HB, pp.240, bilingual). Highly praised in reviews in Italy, France, U.K., U.S.A. and Germany, these 64 lyrics, in spite of having rhymes that rhyme and meters that measure, earned their author the title of "the last of great modernists" from *Chronicles* (Rockford Institute, Chicago). According to *Swiss Review* Russell's "learning underpins [...] a poetry of great clarity [which] is far more rewarding than that of many more fashionable English poets". According to *Couriers* these poems have "a muscular quality which is peculiarly effective [...] there is no doubt about their memorability [...] the neglect of him is something of a mystery". ACUMEN speaks of "an underrated voice [...] it has a power and a range far beyond the reach of most poetry that is fashionable". All this is gratifying. It suggests that poetry is to be enjoyed, not decodified only by linguists and their students. The Milanese poet Franco Loi wrote in a leading Italian daily (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 31 July '91) "I recognise the style of that highest tradition which unites intensity of thought, simplicity of language, musical quality and the sacrality of imagery, with a profound general culture. Russell seems to continue that ancient dialogue, the troubled terrible discoursing of poetry which spans the generations [...] and like Homer, wrings from the darkness of the self and of the world, greater realities and hidden truths."

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TWO VIEWS OF THE RECENT QUINTILIUS POEMS

"Instead of the Poundian technique, as it appears in the *Cantos*, of a modern consciousness penetrating into the past, Russell uses the device of a consciousness from the distant past that 'knows too much' because it continually hints at an intuition of fifteen hundred years of intervening history. Russell gets plenty of rich humour, learned innuendo and historical *double entendre* out of this literary invention. As I read the poem, I was struck over and over again by the wealth of the intelligence at work, the co-presence of different levels of communication, the dramatic interweaving of series of quickly moving thoughts. A poet such as this, succeeding against all the odds, using a demanding but rewarding mode that most contemporary poets would not even be capable of attempting, deserves strong support."

Prof. Anthony Johnson, University of Pisa.

"Speaking of new forms, I wonder if one can add to the 'phantastoria' of Graves and others and the 'fantascienza' of Clarke and his kin another term to describe your own work with Quintilius, namely 'phantapoesis' in which one has a poem blending truth with that which appears to be true as well as that which is untrue. Of course, all poetry seeks to convey truth in part and does so with an admixture of elements that are not true, seeking a 'willing suspension of disbelief' as Coleridge notes of Shakespeare. Yet in your poems with this persona there is an intentional falsehood at the centre so that the work is consciously deceptive and should be read as such — Graves may in fact peddle what is not true but he does not intend it to be so while Clarke peddles phantasy but intends that the essence of what is said is in fact true under the convenient disguise of other worlds and times. But what you offer is a conscious fiction with which one is expected to collude and which one should enjoy. Perhaps Borges has done the same with his fictions in prose. And perhaps earlier writers may have done so also. If so, you have at least revived and given new life to a form which has its uses and which should appeal to an age so fond of deconstruction.

David Burnett, Durham.

"*All my anachronisms are contemporary.*"

Quintilius

from PN REVIEW (Poetry Nation), 1987

A SPELL AND AN APOCALYPSE

William Cookson, *Spell, A Sequence* (Agenda Editions).
Peter Russell, *Quintilii Apocalypses Fragments* (Agenda Editions).

From Agenda Editions, two books of poetry inhabiting contrasting worlds: an intimate sequence of love poems and a hard-hitting satire. Two strategies against sterility. Both poets are noted Poundians, and would wish their work to be judged on its poetic principles: making it new; direct treatment of the object; economy of means. Few attempt such a programme, and even fewer succeed in it; so it is good to read two collections that achieve these ends, and with such differing results.

[...]

If *Spell* began with an echo of Pound, Peter Russell's new Quintilius discovery seems to end with one, Elpenor from Canto I: 'Drunk, I admit, at the foot of the ladder.' This, although also in a confessional mode, is an altogether more public text, and in this case the scalpel cuts straight to the bone, across a wide array of faces. Quintilius is an odd, unsatisfied poet, Pound's Propertius surviving, with increasing dismay, into the schismatic confusions of the late 4th century, having swallowed Juvenal at his most acerbic on the way. The cast of characters reads like a *Who's Who* of late Imperial politics, the embattled narrator anxiously scanning Vandals, Goths, Alans and Huns at the Northern and Eastern borders and in Africa the threat of the heretical Donatists, while closer to home Theophilus and Eudoxia plot against John (called here 'Gilt-lips') Chrysostom. In a savage commentary on 'decline and fall. / The barbarian at the gate... / A challenge, not a catchword for panic', Quintilius tabulates the horrors: the 'new deaconesses', the 'skylarking Consuls', government not 'a well-knit bundle of rods to smite the oppressor' but 'a mish-mash of faggots'; or there are the 'upstart theologians', 'Demagogue bishop

against demagogue bishop, a fine way / For an Empire to fall'. Behind this persona is a bitterness verging on despair, a contempt for new-fangled mores that (astonishingly) leaves him nostalgic for nationalistic government, the bundle of *fasces*. The speaker is intelligent, a well-informed and witty mainland Greek, conscious of the value of culture but dangerously alienated from his contemporaries. His language is vivid and colloquial, the subjects contemporary (this Quintilius is surprisingly well-informed about the Anglican synod, the Irish Troubles, the Falklands War) and he has a confident, assured speaking voice.

And yet: in this collection of fragments one passage stands out against the dissatisfaction and anger, a moment of personal testimony in the final lines that speaks of another world, and offers the reader (only to withdraw it) a more creative, harmonious and sympathetic vision: 'Like a gleaner I came late to the harvest, content / To scrounge a crumb here, to pick a bone there, / (I think of the mountain valleys of Moesia knee-deep with damsons / In August), I was always first, though, in thinking about things, in caring, / And have drunk my fill of the best wine as much as the sweating grapepicker.' This, even in its modesty, is a large and noble claim, one on which another, more tender and outgoing, autobiographical poem might be founded. Perhaps the voice of Quintilius is too sour, or his nose too sharp. I shall be interested to see his *inter ego's* next poem.

Both books are hand-set and printed, and attractively priced. The purist may cavil at the occasional blemishes of setting and proofing (in the Quintilius an involuntary indent, or in three of the four words of Greek a total of five errors in accent, breathing or spelling) but these are pleasing books to handle and read, making their own statement about craft in an age of mass production.

PAUL MERCHANT

from OUTPOSTS Poetry Quarterly, London, Summer 1987.

Quintilii Apocalypses Fragments PETER RUSSELL and *Spell* WILLIAM COOKSON (Agenda Editions)

It's just about the turn of the fourth century. The Roman Empire, corrupted and crippled, is breaking up, and it's time to turn away to the solaces of wine, women and the dramatic monologue. Quintilius, Peter Russell's prophet-commentator of the decline and fall, has a last swipe at upstart theologians, half-baked egalitarians, bureaucrats and weak-minded militarists. The contemporary parallels are not too deeply disguised. It's an entertaining piece of writing, and you can't help liking Quintilius — a grumpy, arrogant, stylish, Poundian figure. His aversion to cant and his plain speech are attractive, even if his politics aren't.

[...]

STUART HENSON

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