

## PETER RUSSELL, POET &amp; CRITIC

*A Catalogue of works in print, and some ongoing activities (1994)*

ANNOUNCEMENT from University of Salzburg (Austria),  
Department of English.

Widespread recognition has come to Peter Russell late. After a life of devoted service to the Muse, his published works are legion. Many of them can be obtained directly from the poet: Peter Russell, La Turbina, I-52026 Pian di Scò (Arezzo), Italy (Tel. & Fax: 055/960674). As the poet lives exclusively from the sale of his books and pamphlets, he is totally dependent on public support.

The TIMES described Peter Russell in his collection ALL FOR THE WOLVES (1984) as "a poet of the high romantic tradition" and the creator of a "supreme fiction".

The Milanese poet, Franco Loi, wrote of his latest volume of poems THEORIES (TEORIE - bilingual edition in English and Italian, Rome 1991) in IL SOLE 24 ORE (31 July 1991): "In these poems of Russell, 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. 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." The volume was also reviewed at length by Thomas Fleming in CHRONICLES: A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE, published by The Rockford Institute, Chicago, in November 1991. Fleming called him "the last of the great modernists".

Peter Russell also edits an occasional review MARGINALIA "combining lyric and satiric poetry with acerbic observations on the anti-poetic scene", which he distributes gratis against a contribution towards the printing and mailing costs.

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SALZBURG (or direct from Peter Russell):

Outsiders Vol. 3: *The Pound Connection*, 1992.

Outsiders Vol. 4: *The Image of Woman as a Figure of the Spirit*, 1992.

Outsiders Vol. 5/6: *Poetic Asides*, 2 vols., 1992, 1993. Lectures and addresses

Outsiders Vol. 7: *The Duller Olive: Poems 1942-1958 previously uncollected or unpublished*, 1992

Outsiders Vol. 8: *A False Start: London Poems 1959-63*, 1993.

Outsiders Vol. 9: "The Angry Elder" *The Epigrams of Peter Russell*. pp50 essay by James Hogg. Plus essays on Ashbery, M.I. Fornes, Tom Stoppard, W. Oxley.

Outsiders Vol. 10: P.F. Donovan, *Condensations* (Introduction by Peter Russell, pp17), 1993.

Outsiders Vol. 11: Glyn Pursglove, *A Bibliography of the Writings of Peter Russell*, 1995.

Outsiders Vol. 12: Berlin-Tegel 1964 with pp50 Introduction by Peter Russell.

Outsiders Vol. 15: *Venice Poems 1965*. With long Introduction, pp300.

Outsiders Vol. 16: *Studies in the Poetry of Peter Russell*. Semiotic studies by Anthony L. Johnson, pp207.

In preparation:

*From the Apocalypse of Quintilius* (1984-1993). With Introduction and Notes. Due Autumn 1996.

*Omens Elegies Descent* with some translations. Long Introduction. Due Summer 1996.

*One Hundred Sonnets* (Seattle, Washington). Final proofs passed Oct. 1995.

**Prices vary between \$12 and \$25. Ask for Proforma in your own currency.**

Order from PETER RUSSELL, La Turbina, I-52026 Pian di Scò (Arezzo), Italy (Tel. & Fax: 055/960674).

OTHER TITLES BY OR ABOUT THE SAME AUTHOR  
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- Vitalism and Celebration*, 1987. Includes brilliant structuralist-semiotic analysis of Russell's "Smoke" (pp.40) and "Touchstone & his Dilemma" by S. Wade (on Russell). \$25.00
- The Pound Connection*, 1992. Earlier poems with Russell's reminiscences of Pound, and extensive notes on Pound's influence. Previously part-published in "Swansea Review". \$15.00
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- Contemporary Views on the Little Magazine Scene* by W. Gortschacher. Contains very long interview with Russell. \$15.00
- A Bibliography of the Writings of Peter Russell*. 1938-1993. by GLYN PURSGLOVE. (Late 1994)  
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- ANVIL PRESS (London) have also published:**
- The Elegies of Quintilius*, 1974. Out of print. Photo-reprint. \$20.00
- All for the Wolves: Selected Poems 1947-1974*, 1983. Orig. paperback a few copies only. \$20.00
- ENITHARMON PRESS** published *Paysages Légendaires* (1970). Long since out of print. Photo-reprint available from Peter Russell. Bilingual edition, Italian tr. by Peter George Russell (1994). \$30.00
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# AGENDA

PP .330 in all. pp110 on Russell

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Essays, etc. by Dana Gioia,  
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Peter Levi on Heather Buck and David Gascoyne

Alan Neame on Ezra Pound and Desmond O'Grady

Gerry Cambridge on William Neill

Peter Davidson on Christopher Logue's *Iliad*

Kathleen Raine on Lotte Kramer

Vol. 32 Nos. 3 - 4 direct from Peter Russell  
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## TWENTY YEARS AGO

extract from: A REVIEW FROM "THE TIMES" (London) OF RECENT POETRY (June 5th, 1975)  
by Robert Nye.

Of Quintilius we are told the splendid libel that he died of a surfeit of lentils and that when the only copy of his second book of Odes went down in a shipwreck Savonarola said, "The Church can afford the loss". A sharp shadow — and it goes perfectly with the body of verse assembled in Peter Russell's *The Elegies of Quintilius* (Anvil Press, £1.95 and 90p). Russell has been working on this pastiche for years — drafts of the first three elegies appeared as long ago as 1954, when the *TLS* hailed them as "the bitter sweet musings of a Roman country gentleman". That Roman gentleman has grown sweeter and bitterer meanwhile thanks to close textual criticism from Ezra Pound. Russell's *Quintilius* — like Pound's *Propertius* — offers at once a translation and a criticism, and must in the end be reckoned as neither, but something rarer: a poem, a supreme fiction,

*A little vice never did very much harm,  
But Virtue has ruined many an innocent fellow.*

This has that quality of authority which comes when a man achieves his own tone and pitch after a lifetime learning the craft of verse.

The magazine *Agenda*, now in its fifteenth year, has for centrepiece in its current issue an outstanding sequence of sonnets, "Lachrimae", by Geoffrey Hill, as well as some instructive autobiographical fragments by the late David Jones. The merit of *Agenda* is that it has always been committed to difficult and dangerous things like genius — witness its support of Pound when he was still in "the bughouse".

Its editor, William Cookson, like Peter Russell, is a man who deserves recognition for his services to English letters, which have been uncommonly unselfish, dedicated to the thankless task of getting decent verse into print in a country where there is a ready market only for mediocrity. *Agenda* costs £1.50. You can get it from 5 Cranbourne Court, Albert Bridge Road, London SW11 4PE.

Finally, let me recommend a curious little volume which consists of a poem written in 1782 but never previously published — Charles Wesley's *The American War* (Keepsake Press, £3.95 and £1.95 — 26 Sydney Road, Richmond, Surrey). This is a backhand way to add to the celebrations of the bicentenary of the Declaration of Independence, for Wesley's high Tory satire sees Britain's defeat as deliberately contrived by the Whig general Sir William Howe, paw in glove with Washington, whose virtues, the poet concedes, may have been "worthy of a nobler cause". Such [sic] a spirited attack on democracy run riot has its points in the week of our first national referendum. The introduction and notes provided by Donald Baker make almost as delicious an apparatus of entertainment as Mr Russell's learned fictions about Quintilius. At the heart of each of these books there is however an irreducible seriousness, and this is what one values. In Russell's case it is concern for the ideal of good verse. In Wesley's it is concern that the worship of Man might prove more disastrous than the worship of God. The two views are not mutually exclusive, and of all the books in this batch I commend these two unfashionable ones as providing food for thought and other appetites.

The American poet and critic DANA GIOIA, in a long article about Russell in Tennessee Quarterly Vol 2, No I, has written the following notes:

" Peter Russell is a poet of striking contradictions. He is an immensely learned writer with an anti-academic temperament, a Modernist bewitched by classicism, a polyglot rooted in demotic English, an experimentalist in love with strict traditional forms, a natural democrat suspicious of the Left, and a mystic committed to clarity. Of course, these qualities are not really contradictions, but to the conventional literary mind they appear so, and Russell is anything but conventional. He is one of contemporary poetry's few genuine originals.

Russell was born in Bristol in 1921, but for the past three decades he has lived outside England—in France, Germany, Canada, the United States, Iran, and presently Italy. In his early London years, he edited the influential literary monthly *Nine* (1947-1958), which published work by T.S. Eliot, Basil Bunting, Robert Graves, Jorge Luis Borges, Roy Campbell, and especially Ezra Pound. Today, however, Russell, who once occupied a position near the center of London literary life, is a mostly forgotten figure, a footnote to the history of British poetry of the 1940's and 1950's. The second half of Russell's career has become a long exile reminiscent of the first generation of Modernists, like Pound, Eliot, Joyce, H.D., and Lawrence, all aesthetic and spiritual refugees from their homelands.

In an age of literary specialization and institutionalized intellectual life, Russell has remained a freelance polymath. Over his long career he has done distinguished work as a poet, essayist, editor, translator, scholar, publisher, teacher, and bookseller. His most recent venture, *Marginalia*, is a journal consisting entirely of the author's own work whose issues appear alternately in English and Italian—who but Russell could conceive and execute such an enterprise? Diverse, prolific, argumentative, and inspired, he has pursued a singular literary career that ordinary adjectives seem inadequate to describe; his artistic life cries out for nineteenth century modifiers: Balzacian, Byronic, Emersonian. No, even those resonant adjectives don't entirely fit. His talent is too idiosyncratic, his biographical turns too unpredictable, for his identity to be captured under a borrowed rubric. To adapt a line from Weldon Kees: Russell alone provides the image Russellian. It is for the complex features that make Russell unique that one values him..

Russell's current invisibility is particularly outrageous because his recently published poetry ranks with the best work of his career. In poems like "Anziano," "Smoke," or "My Last Birthday," he has emerged as a memorable poet of old age. Wrestling with tradition, especially the ghost of Yeats, Russell has found in mortality his most impassioned subject. Most American readers are only now discovering Russell as his work begins to reappear in our journals after years of absence. *The Bellowing Ark* is reportedly planning a special issue in the poet's honor. Meanwhile in England *Agenda* has just published a special issue focusing on his work. *Agenda* includes tributes by Peter Levi, Charles Tomlinson, Glyn Pursglove, W.G. Shepherd as well as a superb essay by Kathleen Raine. Perhaps Russell will soon be a poet who no longer needs—at least among informed readers—an introductory note."

RUSSELL, now just on seventy-five years old, spent his childhood and youth in the Bath area. His studies of natural history and topography there were formative of his love of nature and the physical world which figures largely in his poetry over a fifty-odd year period.

A modernist with deep roots in many cultures and languages, ancient and modern, Western and Oriental, he has published over a hundred books and pamphlets of poetry, criticism and cultural history.

From 1939-46 he served in the Royal, and later Indian, Artillery in Europe and in India and Burma. After a very active life and extensive travel in four continents, self-employed as a writer and lecturer with brief stints as Visiting Professor at Universities in U.S.A, Canada, Iran and Italy, he now lives with his eighteen-year-old son in an old mill house in the Tuscan mountains and devotes himself to research in many fields, to writing poetry and criticism, and to public lectures all over Europe.

Russell is probably best-known as the inventor (in 1948) of the imaginary late Roman poet Quintilius whose "works" he is still writing after nearly fifty years. Anvil Press published a large volume of the earlier Quintilius in 1974 and Agenda have published others. Anvil also publish Russell's Selected Poems (1984) and Mancosu of Rome a two hundred and fifty page volume of Russell's lyrics -- Theories. The University of Salzburg publish numerous other volumes of Russell's poems, a large Bibliography of Russell's writings 1938-1994, and a Festschrift for his 75th birthday, due September 1996.

THOMAS FLEMING, editor of the U.S. monthly CHRONICLES, has called Russell "the last of the great modernists".

ROBERT NYE in The Times wrote that Russell's Quintilius "offers at once a translation and a criticism, and must in the end be reckoned as neither, but something rarer: a poem, a supreme fiction, with that quality of authority which comes when a man achieves his own tone and pitch after a lifetime learning the craft of verse".

PETER RUSSELL can always be contacted at "La Turbina" 52026 Pian di Scò (Arezzo), Italy. Tel/Fax 055 960 674.

Provisional bookings: Voice Box, Festival Hall. 27th Feb '96  
Bath Festival, Bath Central Library 3rd March '96  
TEMENOS ACADEMY: 3 lectures in February

reprinted from

CHAPMAN (Edinburgh), Winter 1991, No. 67

Born in 1921 in Bristol, Peter Russell left England in 1964 and has lived abroad ever since, mostly in Italy, Canada, U.S.A. and Iran, where he was professor of poetry. Therefore he has not had the recognition in this country his exceptional gifts and dedication should have earned him. In the '50s in London, among much other work, he ran the magazine *Nine*, one of the best poetry reviews of this century. He was a friend of Eliot and Pound, publishing the first anthology of Pound criticism in 1950. He knew everybody then writing, and was admired by most, including MacDiarmid, who rated him highly. His output is large, and the present book of *Theories* (simply "musin(g)s": visions, prophecies, revelations, meditations) and other lyrics, is a hardback collection of some sixty lyrical poems in English with Italian translations, introduction and notes: a small group from his total output, published in 1990.

Most of the poems here are in simple ballad metre, strictly and carefully crafted. But only the form is simple. The content of the poems is as complex and intricate as one would expect from an erudite polyglot poly-math, ranging through history and European literature with the ease of a native. They are full of intellectual struggle, emotional conflict, lyrical beauty, the sense of nature and creature life, spiritual and philosophical questions and the great mysteries. Perhaps the outstanding poem is the one celebrating his own marriage '*Epithalamium*'. This sustains a paralleling of arithmetic and philosophic thought which challenges comparison with the great "metaphysical" canzone of Cavalcanti, '*Donna mi prega*'. I don't fully understand it myself, but recommend readers new to Russell to begin with it and work out to the rest of the book from that. You will then be left wondering how much could be packed into the simple form of these poems so masterfully and, often, with such beauty. Now in the 73rd year of a heroic life of running at life and riding its punches, there can be no doubt this is one of the best poets of our time.

**Tom Scott**

PETER RUSSELL's Selected Poems. The American publisher's announcement. (1983).

*All for the Wolves*

These varied and striking poems have the impact upon the reader of a tour de force—as indeed any such collection by this protean writer would. A British poet, but living abroad for a good part of his life, Peter Russell eludes simple categorization. "His poetry," states the editor of this volume, Peter Jay, "is informed by his knowledge of the languages, literatures and philosophy of many cultures. He is a natural comparatist: his learning is extraordinarily wide-ranging, but it is not remotely academic, since the focus of his intellectual interests runs counter to the academic tendency towards ever narrower specialization." And in the words of Kathleen Raine: "Peter Russell has, all these years, kept faith (as did his master, Ezra Pound) with what is perhaps the greatest imaginative and philosophical conception of the European tradition, 'the Beautiful.' He is, like the Sufis, a poet of the drunkenness of the Spirit."

Gathered here are poems spanning the years 1947 to 1975, and ranging in place from London and the south of France to Berlin, Venice and Vancouver. The poems collected in this volume are drawn from all phases of Russell's writing (including some of his translations as well) and offer a spectrum of his multifaceted creativity.

Peter Russell's *All for the Wolves: Selected Poems* (ISBN 0-933806-20-5) is available from the author (British PB edition, Anvil Press 1984).

Post free \$20.00

Peter Russell, "La Turbina", 52026 Pian di Scò (Arezzo), Italy, Tel. & Fax 055/960764

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PETER RUSSELL'S *Selected Poems*

'BETWEEN THE COVERS': Book Review (Radio Scotland)

TITLE: *All for the Wolves, selected poems 1947-75* by PETER RUSSELL

PUBLISHER: Anvil Press Poetry

TRANSMISSION DATE: 4/8/84

One of the best reasons for reading poetry is that it sometimes allows us privileged access to a mind both broad and deep in learning working in combination with a finely honed sensibility. The result is a wonderful, uplifting experience. Such is the reward for the reader of Peter Russell's *Selected Poems 1947-75: All for the Wolves*.

Perhaps Peter Russell's long exile from Britain accounts for his relative obscurity ... Since 1963 he has lived abroad, in Berlin, Venice, Teheran and Vancouver. Typically, MacDiarmid was one of the few to appreciate his "disinterested, many-sided and sustained service to poetry." This "service" includes editing, publishing, producing critical studies of, amongst others, Edwin Muir, being a prolific poet and, importantly, acting as a mentor and inspiration to many younger poets.

It is impossible to do justice here to the range and quality of these poems, which are of the first order. Russell gives us what we expect of a major poet ... largeness of theme and an exquisite sensitivity, a voice with both wisdom and authority re-asserting eternal values and above all the value of life itself, in a way which is ever fresh and totally devoid of the weary cynicism so common in modern society. In the poem "A Celebration" he tells us:

"It is life, not death,  
Celebration, not success, we must offer  
To our wives, our children, our mistresses...

Without celebration, there is only a flapping of jaws,  
Banging of doors in the wind

Where once Troy was"

Russell's attitude to humanity is summed up in a poem with the unlikely title of "In a Suburban Garden":

"Each man's a star that's travelling with us  
Like holy images  
He bears about within himself  
Natural endowments  
Which correspond with heavenly things"

His control of language and form is masterly, and the task to which these are directed is no mean one. The poem "Colophon" explains:

"The song must sing the spirit of  
Mountain and stone and root and tree,  
From things inanimate strike Love,  
On the anvil words set free."

Almost alone of the English poets, Russell, like MacDiarmid and others in Scotland, believes that poetry must live up to the challenge of the modern world by at least attempting to incorporate scientific material. Disappointingly, only a hint of this aspect of Russell's poetry appears here.

You judge a poet partly by the size of his or her world: Russell's world is indeed extensive. There is a wealth of natural phenomena, delight in physical detail, wide classical and intellectual reference, literary allusion, some remarkable love poetry and more unusual items like "Manuela's Poems" which were dictated to him in his sleep by a female figure who appeared to him on nine consecutive nights and never since — and much else.

No-one who is truly interested in poetry can ignore the richness and maturity of Russell's work. *All for the Wolves, selected poems 1947-75* edited by Peter Jay is published by Anvil Press Poetry. Joy Hendry (Editor of *Chapman*)

British edition (post free): Paperback      £10.00      \$20.00      L.30,000



A review of *Theories and other lyrics* by Peter Russell

Reprinted from the conservative monthly review:

**Chronicles**

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

The Rockford Institute

(Chicago)

November 1991

**Ishmael Among the Scriveners**

by *Thomas Fleming*

**Teorie e Altre Liriche**

by *Peter Russell*

Rome: *Carlo Mancosu*

The heroic age of modern poetry has been over for some time. The learned reactionaries who shaped it for two generations have all been dead for many years: Eliot (1965) and Pound (1972), Valéry (1945) and Claudel (1955), Ungaretti (1970) and Montale (1981). Diverse in style and technique, the great modernists were all ambitious in straining at the limits of expression, in finding the principles that underlie formal conventions, in bringing to bear the weight of human learning upon the inhuman conditions of the 20th century. The poets who have followed, even when they are good, have had neither the erudition nor the ambition to take up their challenge.

There is, however, one outstanding exception to this generalization, Peter Russell. Born in Bristol in 1920, Russell served in the British army in Europe and in the Indian army in the East. He has lived virtually everywhere — Malaya, Berlin, Venice, Tehran, and British Columbia, and at one time or another has studied much of what is worth studying. He can translate from Latin and write in Serbo-Croatian, and the range of his allusions is almost as broad (although by no means as bewildering) as that of Ezra Pound. Russell's connection with Pound goes deeper than style, since it was Peter Russell who worked for years to secure Pound's release from St. Elizabeth's. (Why is it that exile and madness are the two destinies most frequently enjoyed by American poets?)

Quite apart from a long list of volumes of verse and criticism, Peter Russell has, over the years, involved himself in a number of literary projects, as editor of the arts review *Nine* in the 1950's, and more recently of his own newsletter *Marginalia*, which is like a personal letter from a brilliant and learned friend. His work is also to be found in *Temenos*, an unusual journal of "imagination."

These days Mr. Russell is living in rural Tuscany, from which he continues to make lecturing forays, and is regarded with considerable respect in Italian literary circles. His newest volume, a selection of his recent verse accompanied by translations into Italian, might serve as an introduction to readers unfamiliar with Russell's work.

Here we find examples of his hard-edged lyricism put into forms whose rules he manages to twist and bend to his own convenience:

Would I could find the magic arrow  
To shoot up in the seamless blue  
My house of earth is narrow, narrow  
How should I welcome you?

It's ruined too O make it wide  
Strike down these ruins and rebuild  
What if the bolt transfix my side  
If my empty cup be filled?

The following lines begin his poem "By the Lake," which also illustrates Russell's metaphysical bent:

Primordial silence on the lake  
The coots and grebes seem painted there  
The alder boughs' reflections make  
No ripple on the flood or air

Russell prefaces the poem with a line from Luke's Gospel, which he quotes in Anglo-Saxon, partly because he finds it beautiful and partly because he is contemptuous of the pseudo-literary culture of an England that has cut itself off from its past in order to embrace television and comic books.

Russell is no conservative — whatever that term means any more. Sometimes he sounds the mystical note of charity, and at other times he is the embittered reactionary. In the nightmarish "A Ballad" the wandering king describes a kingdom that could be the modern West:

In my old kingdom now they say  
The people rule, the nobles dead;  
The women whores, the men all gay,  
And the black flag changed for red.

A race of lawyers rules the land,  
There's no fresh fruit, no game;  
The milk is powdered, meat's all canned  
And the sour wine's all the same.

Peter Russell will probably bewilder readers of poetry whose sensibilities have been formed on what Conrad Aiken called the "vin Audenaire" of postwar verse. Writing sometimes with the almost Mother Goose simplicity of Blake, he can proceed rapidly to the highest "hermeticism" (a term frequently applied to the great modern Italians). In this volume, however, his verse is never perplexing and rarely as extravagant as Russell has been elsewhere.

The hawk-moth sucks the rosemary  
Whose pale blue flowers are my heart;  
The long scroli of his tongue is me,  
A glowing filament of Art..

Finally, to appreciate Russell's art, consider his fine poem on old age, "Anziano":

I'm going deaf, I'm going blind,  
Scales forming on my eyes;  
Where delicate labyrhinths wind –  
A hammer, – in a vise...

Almost insensitive to pain,  
My finger-tips mere bone –  
Stumps that must knock, to feign  
The well-tempered virginal's tone;

The perfume of the rose or musk,  
Dusky and vague like memories –  
The body's house a dried-up husk,  
An old blanket full of fleas;

Trout broiled on a fire of wood,  
Delicious odours of the past!  
Succulent meat! – surely 'twas good? –  
I'm "No Man" now – could feed on mast!

Deprived then of the boon of senses,  
Say I'm a wretched shell, – decrepit!

Young limbs that vaulted towering fences –  
Blood watered down now barely tepid:

Yet in the brain-box there's a fire  
Burns like a blood-red June geranium;  
Let wrinkled skin get drier and drier –  
A world of wonders fills this cranium!

There is not that much great verse on old age — Sophocles, Shakespeare, W.S. Landor, Yeats; but Russell manages to echo much of it. (The "towering fences," for example, recall Landor's "five bar gate.") The smell of trout cooking on an open fire leads into the great outdoorsman, Odysseus (No Man), who fought the primitive Cyclops, and an allusion to the Golden Age stories of men who lived on acorn mast. But while these echoes and allusions add layers of richness to the poem, no one can escape either the detailed realism of the opening lines or the defiant passion of the conclusion, with its brilliant image of a red summer flower inside an old man's skull. (Does Russell, I wonder, intend a play on "geranium" — as if derived from the Greek word for old?)

When I first began to be aware of Peter Russell, I wondered vaguely why an English poet was living, cut off from his language, in Italy. The more I read, however, the more I realized that the state of Anglo-American culture, our language as well as our literature, would make Britain and America uncongenial places for the last of great modernists.

*Thomas Fleming is the editor of Chronicles.*

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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."

*THE TIMES* of London in 1985 described Russell as a "poet of the high romantic tradition" and the creator of a "supreme fiction".

JOHN MATTHEWS, in *Labrys* No.11 (1984), described Peter Russell as "a word-smith of the highest order."

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Here is the theme poem of Peter Russell's *Theories*

*THEOREM*

How can one bear to be alive?  
 Five hundred thousand things to do!  
 Solitary dreamer in a honey-hive.  
 I dream of you...

The problem *is*, of course, — to *be*,  
 In a dead world of waxen cells,  
 Not that there's monotony  
 Even in insect hells.

To *be*, — it's no good buzzing around  
 Doing as people do in Rome,  
 Droning of penny, shilling, pound —  
 To build the honey-comb.

The honey comes from what you do  
 Each rushing second, minute, hour;  
*Yours* is the sweetness that is true,  
 No matter what the flower.

The plants and trees are all in time,  
 Petals and anthers ranged in space;  
 The *things* are simultaneous, — *I'm*  
 Out of time, out of place.

For when I light on this or that  
 I'm neither there nor am I here;  
 I can't see what I'm staring at,  
 Though nothing's there to interfere.

The air is clear and I am free  
 At any time of day or night,  
 To visit any flower or tree  
 In sunshine, shadow, or moonlight.

What is it then that hinders me?  
 Why is it that I don't arrive?  
 — *I am a solitary bee*  
*Dreaming in a beehive*

Where Time and Space have ceased to be,  
 And so there are no *things*;  
 I'm everywhere and nowhere, — *me*,  
 On imaginary wings.

Solitary but never alone,  
 Freeholder of the emptied soul;  
 Let workers say I'm just a drone  
 And drive me out the entrance-hole, —

Beyond the stratosphere and stars,  
 Past even humming nuclei,  
 My life which was hyperbolas  
 Is now a single "*I*", —

All sets and theorems put aside,  
 All space and matter lost to view.  
 Let insects make insecticide!  
 — *Honey*, for me and you...

Peter Russell  
 Lido di Venezia  
 31st January 1973

PRIORITIES PERHAPS. A guide for librarians and intending readers.

People often ask me "Where should I start with your books?" Much will depend on the individual, but "in general" I suggest, in this order:

Prices include postage & packing.

- SELECTED POEMS: *All for the Wolves* poems 1947-1974. Anvil, London, 1984. \$20.00
- THEORIES & other lyrics, Bilingual, hardbound, handsome edition, Rome, Mancosu 1991, pp.250. \$45.00
- MANUELA'S POEMS. Bilingual. \$15.00
- ELEMENTAL DISCOURSES. 40 philosophical poems. pp.50 Introduction. Photo-reprint of original Salzburg edition (1981). \$25.00
- ELEGIES OF QUINTILIUS (Anvil 1975) with notes & appendices. Photo-reprint. \$25.00
- MALICE AFORETHOUGHT (150 satires) Salzburg 1981 (photo-reprint) \$20.00
- THE GOLDEN CHAIN (lyrics from Berlin & Venice) Venice 1970.  
Hardback, hardbound, large paper. Original sheets, handbound. \$40.00  
Original PB edition, a few copies only. \$25.00
- PAYSAGES LÉGENDAIRES (Enitharmon Press 1971) photo-reprint. \$20.00

#### OTHER TITLES

- AGAMEMNON IN HADES (The English Carmelites 1965) orig. edition. \$25.00
- VISIONS & RUINS (The English Carmelites 1965) orig. edition. \$30.00
- EPHEMERON: An Epic Poem. Originally written 1963-64. This poema of pp.480 was published in an edition of 45 copies from Purdue University in 1977. Photo-reprint. Signed and dated. \$100.00
- PROSE: *An Examination of Ezra Pound*. New York, 2nd revised edition enlarged. 1973. pp.310. Critical essays by T.S. Eliot, E. Sitwell, Allen Tate, E. Hemingway, G. Seferis, H. Kenner, John Drummond, Charles Madge, D.S Carne-Ross, R. Duncan, M. McLuhan, G.S. Fraser, H. Swabey, H.G. Porteus, J. Heath-Stubbs, Wyndham Lewis and Peter Russell. \$45.00
- PROSE: G.V. DESANI's *All about H. Hatterrand Hali* (1952) with comments from T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster, C.P. Snow & others. Photo-reprint. \$10.00

from the dust wrapper of PAYSAGES LÉGENDAIRES (Enitharmon Press 1971)

Did not Dante say that the work of the poet is to express 'beautiful things truly'? The word beauty, thank God, is one which is again coming to have meaning for at least a significant section of the younger generation; but Peter Russell has, all these years, kept faith (as did his master, Ezra Pound) with what is perhaps the greatest imaginative and philosophic conception of the European tradition, 'the Beautiful'. He is, like the Sufis, a poet of the drunkenness of the spirit. Nature, woman, art, and also knowledge, both ancient and new, are his themes. It is useless to advise such a poet to revise in cold blood work which is the immediate expression of the spirit's intoxication; not the naive spontaneity of the 'happening' but the refined delight of some Italian court, of the 'lords and ladies of Byzantium' whose sensibility is attuned to the finest subtleties of expression and experience. Peter Russell is an aristocratic poet in a plebeian world.

Kathleen Raine

Of all living English poets Peter Russell is the least parochial, and the rich resources of his unusually extensive and manifold experience are brilliantly used in his verse, and particularly in a long poem such as *Paysages Légendaires*. Future anthologists of the English poetry of the second half of this century may well hail it as having been a real break-through, a watershed. It is certainly a signal achievement.

Hugh MacDiarmid

## CONTEMPORARY POETS

(fifth edition)

ST. JAMES PRESS  
CHICAGO AND LONDON 1992

RUSSELL (Irwin) Peter. British. Born in Bristol, 16 September 1921. Served in the British Army, 1939-46. Married; two sons and two daughters. Owner, Pound Press, 1951-56, Grosvenor Bookshop, 1951-58, and Gallery Bookshop, London, 1959-63; lived in Venice from 1964. Poet-in-residence, University of Victoria, British Columbia, 1975-76, and Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, 1976-77; Teaching fellow, Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, Tehran, 1977-79. Editor, *Nine* magazine, 1949-58. Address: c/o Anvil Press Poetry, 69 King George Street, London SE10 8PX, England.

## PUBLICATIONS

## Verse

- Picnic to the Moon*. London, Fortune Press, 1944.  
*Omens and Elegies*. Aldington, Kent, Hand and Flower Press, 1951.  
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*Three Elegies of Quintilius*. Tunbridge Wells, Kent, Pound Press, 1954.  
*The Spirit and the Body: An Orphic Poem*. London, Keepsake Press, 1956.  
*Images of Desire*. London, Gallery Bookshop, 1962.  
*Dreamland and Drunkenness*. London, Gallery Bookshop, 1963.  
*Complaints to Circe*. Privately printed, 1963.  
*Visions and Ruins: An Existentialist Poem*. Aylesford, Kent, Saint Albert's Press, 1964.  
*Agamemnon in Hades*. Aylesford, Kent, Saint Albert's Press, 1965.  
*The Golden Chain: Lyrical Poems 1964-1969*. Venice, Privately printed, 1970.  
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*The Elegies of Quintilius*. London, Anvil Press Poetry, 1975.  
*Acts of Recognition: Four Visionary Poems*. Ipswich, Suffolk, Golgonooza Press, 1978.  
*Theories*. Teheran, Crescent Moon Press, 1978.  
*The Vitalist Reader: A Selection of the Poetry of Anthony Johnson, William Oxley, and Peter Russell*, edited by James Hogg. Salzburg, University of Salzburg, 1982.

*All for the Wolves: Selected Poems 1947-1975*, edited by Peter Jay. London, Anvil Press Poetry, e Redding Ridge, Connecticut, Black Swan, 1984.

## Other

- Epigrammata: Malice Aforethought, or The Tumor in the Brain*. Salzburg, University of Salzburg, 1981.  
*Elemental Discourses*. Salzburg, University of Salzburg, 1982.  
 Editor, *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Essays ... to be Presented to Ezra Pound on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. London, Peter Nevill, 1950; as *An Examination of Ezra Pound*, New York, New Directions, 1950. Reprinted, New York, 1974.  
 Editor, *Money Pamphlets by £*. London, Peter Russell, 6 vols., 1950-51.  
 Editor, with Khushwant Singh, *A Note ... on G.V. Desani's "All about H. Hatter" and "Hali"*. London and Amsterdam, Szeben, 1952.  
 Editor, *ABC of Economics* by Ezra Pound. Tunbridge Wells, Kent, Pound Press, 1953.  
 Translator, *Landscapes* by Camillo Pennati (bilingual edition). Richmond, Surrey, Keepsake Press, 1964.

\*

Critical Studies: *A Servant of the Muse: A Garland for Peter Russell on His Sixtieth Birthday*, Salzburg, University of Salzburg, 1981, and *The Salzburg Peter Russell Seminar 1981-82*, University of Salzburg, 1982, both edited by James Hogg; "Touchstone and His Dilemma: The Poetry of Peter Russell" by Stephen Wade, in *Vitalism and Celebration*, edited by James Hogg, Salzburg, University of Salzburg, 1987; "Agamemnon in Hades: Peter Russell's Philosophical Diary" by Wolfgang Reisinger, in *Outsiders* (Salzburg), 1, 1989.

\* \* \*

For me, Peter Russell is one of the major neglected talents of our time — the author of the finest book of purely “English” lyrics (*The Golden Chain*) of the last 20 years; the author of a gigantic, mostly unpublished epic poem, *Ephemeron*, running to some 2000 pages; the author of *Paysages Légendaires*, a book impregnated with great wisdom and that music the Celts call the “cael moer” or the “great music.” In Russell, we are dealing with not just the Poundian theory of the multilingual poet of the future (and Russell was Pound’s greatest disciple), but with the realization of such a poet as fact. The sheer magnitude of the job of investigating the innumerable works produced by Russell since *Picnic to the Moon* in 1944 is not a sufficient excuse for not trying. Still less is it an excuse for the wanton neglect of a poet of whom such a figure as Hugh MacDiarmid has written: “Peter Russell is, in my opinion, a writer who has so far received nothing like due recognition ... no one in Great Britain today has rendered anything like the disinterested, many-sided and sustained service to Poetry” — the latter comment referring to Russell’s work as editor of *Nine* and as publisher of so many of today’s established figures long before they were known.

Of *Paysages Légendaires*, Hugh McKinley’s phrase “tribute open-eyed, yet illuminate, of life entire” is remarkably apposite. This is how the poem opens:

Palladian villas and the changing seasons

An old man digging in the shade

The gold sun varnishes

The small viridian of the elms

And gilds the hidden cadmium of the glades.

In fact, its way of expression throughout is best described as an open-eyed style.

So, too, it is a rare book of unimpeachable seriousness and poetic wisdom. Perhaps the most interesting feature of *Paysages Légendaires* (and the explanation of its style) is the absence of a close or particularly tense (or over-tense) verbal and syntactical density, which induces an unusual clarity in the verse. And this goes a long way towards compensating for the major disadvantage of a modern sequential but non-narrative long poem, namely, the breaks in continuity which so trouble the average reader. It is a poem that reads well.

The sheer intelligence of the poem commands respect; but what matters is that one feels it is an extraordinary “aware” poem — a poem aware of, and in touch with the mainstream of human thought. This awareness of the “now” is undoubtedly

achieved by a profound knowledge of the “then” and exemplifies what is, perhaps, the poem’s central preoccupation:

It will take time to build again,  
To build the soul’s tall house,  
The tower of the wandering self  
Foursquare beneath the moon.

Many people, myself among them, think that poetry — the “real” of the thing, the heart’s meat of the matter — is the line, or lines of words that are necklace-perfect. Something that glitters with ineffable quality, wisdom, beauty, LIFE — a kind of instant revelation in words, the discovery, as Russell puts it, that “Every natural effect has a spiritual cause/ (That which is above, is below).” Indeed, if poetry is the unshakable line, memorable phrase — then Russell is one of the best English poets now writing.

Myth is the stuff of thought one might say and *Paysages Légendaires* is a “thoughtful poem.” There is little concrete description, and, where there is, the object tends towards the emblematic and metaphorical. There is, however, one short passage where the descriptive element is uppermost:

Sweet bones are growing in the earthly night

Slow maturations in the endless dark

Of subterranean galleries, telluric force

That broods whole centuries upon a single grain

That crumbles or coagulates.

One gets a sense of the tremendousness of life, its continual working; the key word is “broods” — it reveals brilliantly the meaning behind the description, the life within.

Apart from the practical problem of the range of this poet’s work, there is another problem, which is only a “problem” in the framework of present-day poetry’s dusty picture. This derives from the fact that the more one reads Russell’s poetry, the more one realises that it demands imagination. In poem after poem, one finds the feeling transcending the flat detail of experience. So, too, there is a copious knowledge displayed of life both past and present, and there is that true linguistic metamorphosis at times, which provides a permanent frame — be it only a single good line — in which the present is held up before our eyes to be seen in infinite terms. Therefore, parodying Pound, these poems must “go to the imaginative” if they are to be understood, and to the serious if they are to be loved.

— William Oxley



Reprinted from:

## WORLD AUTHORS 1980-1985

The H.W. Wilson Company  
New York, 1991

**RUSSELL, (IRWIN) PETER** (born September 16, 1921), British poet, translator and editor, writes in 1990 from his home in Arezzo, Italy: "In 1925, then aged four, I decided that I would be, first and foremost, a poet. Later I learnt how the Muslim mystics call poetry the 'fruit of the Intellect' ('*aql*'), and I noted that the Gospel of St. John has Jesus say: 'The bread of God is that which cometh down from above and revivifies the world.' Jesus was the Logos. It has always seemed better to me to attempt an Imitation of Christ the Word, however ineptly and remotely, than to mimic the chatter around the kitchen sink.

"In 1968, at a loss for a final closure for a long poem I had written, I eventually found the words: 'Good writing is not enough' — a thought perhaps that Schools of Creative Writing might ponder. More recently I wrote that what we need is '*ideas*, not ideologies,' but since then, in addressing TV audiences I have come to realise that the 'revivification' comes from the Spirit, the Presence, the essential 'sense' rather than from the idea. The ideas can be left *implicit*. The emotion that the Spirit provokes is more meaningful than the verbal idea. Audiences are not dumb. 'Meaning' and the whole semantic syndrome are infinitely misleading. The post-Cartesian tradition has caused 'meaning' to be thought of as no more than the most economic and coherent restatement of what has already been said, — ideally a mathematical formula. Wittgenstein held that the meaning of words 'is the use that people make of them in a language.' Modern sociology, having progressively eliminated spirit, soul, mind and even consciousness, leaves us with nothing but an empty field of collective behaviour, — a pseudo-scientific view which simply does not correspond to the facts but which appeals to the rulers of States and of large corporations which want to control personalities as rigidly as they want to control molecules of washing-powder or plutonium.

"Because I have never kow-towed to the Left and its ideologies or to the pseudo-scientific sociological and linguistic theories of literature, I have been labelled by the incompetent 'of the extreme right.' There is no essential difference between the Right and the Left, any more than there is between Democrats and Republicans. The difference inheres only in which gang is momentarily in power — who will cut the cake. After a brief flirtation with the extreme left at the age of twenty-three, I had no further dealings with any political organisation whatever.

"For me, poetry revivifies, as no ideologies, slogans, propaganda, publicity or manifestoes or pills can ever revivify."

Peter Russell was born in Bristol, raised in Gloucestershire, and educated at private schools. "My first efforts in the poetic arts," he writes in a characteristic passage in the introduction to his collection *Elemental Discourses*, "were verse compositions in Latin and Greek at my preparatory school under a certain Mr. Sheffield and Mr. Richard Gordon, later of the Board of Education, both Oxford classicists. This was before Gilbert Norwood the treasonous clerk started to dismantle the old classical framework of English higher education in the 'thirties. Concurrently I wrote fiercely romantic Chattertonian imitations of Homer and Virgil and a series of sonnets, one for each bird on the British Bird list. There were four hundred of them, and I had actually seen and identified a large proportion of these species on my two-wheeled peregrinations all over Britain, but especially on my many long stays in the footsteps of Gilbert White, in and around Selborne."

At the age of eighteen, immediately upon his return from a summer holiday in Nazi Germany, he enlisted in the British Army and served throughout World War II in the European theater and later in the Far Eastern theater in the Indian Army, especially in Burma. After his demobilization in 1946 he read English at London University's Queen Mary College, where he was taught by James Sutherland and Norman Callan (he took no degree), then continued his career as a poet, which had begun in 1944 with the appearance of a 120pp. verse collection, *Picnic to the Moon*, a book later called by him a "mass of prosy scribble."

Despite having published well over thirty volumes of poetry, Russell is little known in his native Britain, and almost completely unknown elsewhere. In part this neglect must be attributed to the ease with which he has made enemies in the world of modern poetry and to the fact that he has pursued his *bêtes noires* — academic poets, movement poets, poetasters, petty versifiers of all stripes, as well as communication experts and trend-followers — relentlessly over many years. Russell's friends and mentors in the late 1940s were well-established literary figures — they included Hugh MacDiarmid, Kathleen Raine, and Roy Campbell; during this period he lived in Italy and southern France and came to know Benedetto Croce, George Santayana, Max Beerbohm, and Richard Aldington, in addition to strengthening his longtime discipleship to Ezra Pound.

Russell's poetry varies widely in style and content. One of his compositions, a portmanteau "epic" called *Ephemeron* that he composed between August never been published in full. Two-thousand-odd pages in length, it purports to be the account of everything that occurs in the poet's mind over a period of some thirty hours. Another poem, comparatively

short at forty-two pages and highly regarded by Russell partisans, is *Paysages Legendaires*. The poem begins with an image of illumination:

Palladian villas and the changing seasons

An old man digging in the shade

The gold sun varnishes

The small viridian of the elms

And gilds the hidden cadmium of the glades...

Written in the Italian Veneto in 1967-1968, the title refers, according to Richard Burns' introduction to the published version, to "those fleetingly glimpsed inner landscapes we all frequently pass through in fantasies, reflections, reveries and dreams, and some experience more vividly and precisely in moments of deep thought, love or contemplation. Inevitably, these landscapes are intimate and personal, rooted in autobiographical experience: this gives them their strength and authenticity... [The poem] offers us a rich, complete network of themes that are both modern and rooted in the best of European (not *just* English) tradition. Russell's poetry has been enriched by an extremely wide reading in the literature, mysticism, philosophy and sciences of many languages."

In his many short poems, Russell has frequently evoked a Poundian feeling of classical severity, of restraint and stately regret, as in "The Fear of War," from *Omens and Elegies*, a lament over the ruin wrought by the war lately ended, and dread of war to come. He was among the earliest poets to envision the complete destruction that would result from nuclear war:

One more tomorrow all our deaths will be  
Annihilated where that fatal tree  
Spreads in the sun. Blossoms will fall  
For the last time on the desolate city.

Where the Spring rejoicings are left by all  
As superfluous where the mushroom ball  
Breaks the air — uncanny silence be  
Where once blackbird and songthrush were.

Elsewhere his classicism is more playful, sometimes taking the form of a Catullian catch, or punchline, as in this untitled love poem written in 1959, from *Complaints to Circe* :

My sleepy dormouse lays her head  
On my shoulder like a child:  
The irksome day has long since fled —  
The night was wild.

Her eyelids on her burning eyes,  
Her head upon my breast has sunk:  
I am enchanted by her sighs, —  
Her haunting gentle snores, — she's drunk!

Russell has composed hundreds of epigrams over the years, collecting the best of them in *Epigrammata, Malice Aforethought*

or *The Tumor in the Brain*. In his introduction to the book, entitled "Epigrammatics, or The Science of Speaking One's Mind," Russell writes, "As far as I can recall I have never sat down with the deliberate intention of writing an epigram. All of these pieces represent a sort of 'spot-reaction' to a limited but typical situation, generally negative. They are the reactions of the whole organism to a minute and perhaps trivial fragment of experience... But really, as for *justifying* my low merriment I say with Iago 'puddings' to justification. Take them as fun or leave them. If you are not English you may find some of the humour painfully 'English' (especially if you read the *New Yorker* for your humour), but then I've always been English (though racially I am 99% Irish) and generally found it rather painful to be so." Epigrams allow Russell to indulge his passion for invective against the many enemies he has made. He is usually able to hit the mark in the neatest, most deadly way, as in this, written in Venice in December 1971:

To Certain (English) Neighbours

You kindly ask me in to tea and crumpets —  
To watch your Telly, smell your filthy dog?  
I'd rather pay my fond respects to strumpets,  
Or pay a little visit to the bog...

Or, on a more famously inimical note, he writes:

On Being Called 'Infinitely Opaque' by H.M. McLuhan

Marshall McLuhan makes a *transparent* mistake  
In calling all those who *see through* him — OPAQUE...

There is, finally, perhaps his most accomplished epigrammatic parody, a "blare" against his dearest and most constant enemies, the bards of Academe:

The Board's Blare

Our Starver, Art without leaven,  
Bellowéd be thy Fame;  
Thy lingam come; thy will be gun,  
On Campus as it is in Tavern.  
Give us this day our Big Success.  
Review at length our vacuousness  
As we review those who evacuate with us.  
And read us not in Profundity,  
But circulate widely our Drivel:  
For Thine is the Foundation,  
The Grants and the Glory,  
For Sabbatical after Sabbatical.

Eh, men?

As a translator, Russell has gone to school to an expert of the genre in English, "the Old Master of the Blue Pencil," Ezra Pound. Pound had dozens of comments to make about Russell's most extended translating effort, the elegies of Quintilius, an engaging poet of the late classical antiquity whose urbane, conversational verse strikes a note of deeply troubled, civilized

ennui, not to mention querulousness, all qualities which found a ready echo in Russell's own poetic persona. Here is the opening of the second elegy, "The Dispossessed," from the earliest (pre-Poundian) published version, *Three Elegies of Quintilius* :

Quintilius has moved: he found the heat  
Of Africa too much for an indolent smallholder.  
Recent proscriptions also threatened him  
(He said) with confiscation of his farm.  
So, taking the better of two evil courses  
(Poor Lycoris distraught at leaving so much behind)  
He has sold the little property at Sfax  
For a small price, and is come to Cagnes.

The six known elegies of the poet (not counting the forty-eight on the papyrus discovered in 1968 at Aphrodisiapolis, still unedited), after considerable reworking "secondo Pound," as Russell put it, were published as *The Elegies of Quintilius* in 1975. In addition to this Latinized labor, Russell has also translated from Persian several versions of the *qasida* of Khâqânî, entitled *The Ruins of Madâ'in*; from Italian, lyrics of Camillo Pennati, *Landscapes*, and from Russian, *Poems of Osip Mandelstam*, which includes one of the great Russian lyricist's most moving poems, the infinitely sad Ovidian lament "Tristia":

I love the way the thread is spun —  
The shuttle runs to an fro, the spindle hums —  
Look now — already like swansdown  
Barefooted Delia flies to meet you!  
O the meagre pattern of our life —  
Even our happiest words are threadbare!  
Everything has been of old and will be again:  
For us, only the moment of recognition is sweet.

— (11. 17-24)

"For me," wrote Russell in his note on the poem in *All for the Wolves: Selected Poems 1947-1975*, edited by Peter Jay, "these last two lines ... are among the most noble and solemn and suggestive lines ever written in poetry, ancient, medieval or modern."

Of further note in Russell's long career is his editorship from 1949 to 1956 of the quarterly journal *Nine: A Magazine of Literature and the Arts*, and his editorship of the festschrift *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Essays ... to Be Presented to Ezra Pound on his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, a volume which included twenty pieces on the works of Pound, at a time when the poet, still a notorious figure in the postwar world, was approaching the midpoint of his incarceration in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington, D.C. The roster of contributors includes T.S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, Allen Tate, George Seferis, Hugh Kenner, Marshall McLuhan, and Wyndham Lewis. "Both the scholar's and the critic's approach to a work of art are necessary ones," Russell wrote in the introduction, "but it is well to remember — to quote an early letter of Mr. Pound's — that scholarship and criticism are only 'handmaidens to the arts.' One of the best tributes to a great poet is good criticism of his work, and if these essays bring to a wider audience the actual poetry of Ezra Pound, the true intention of both scholarship and criticism will have been served."

In various prose works which have treated the life and poetry of Peter Russell — in particular a group of volumes edited by James Hogg and published in 1981-1982 under the auspices of the University of Salzburg — the poet frequently discourses on the idea of "vitalism" in poetry, "the philosophy of the new release, a poetry of ideas, of feeling." As he wrote in the central lines of *Paysages Legendaires*, "All that matters now is poetry / In which the feeling is the thought." He rails against the "mental boutiques and minimal art bazaars of the metropolis": "One of the chief reasons for the pallidness of recent English poetry is its failure to face up to 'feeling';" "What we need is *ideas* not ideologies; original *thought* not conformity... in short, the poetry of the Creative Imagination." Yet for all this doctrinaire certitude, and in many ways because of it, he remains, near his seventieth year, a figure the value of whose contribution to English poetry "may be known," in Peter Jay's words, "to fewer people today than when he was active as an editor and publisher during the fifties and early sixties." According to his old friend and defender Kathleen Raine, "Peter Russell has, all these years, kept faith (as did his master Ezra Pound) with what is perhaps the greatest imaginative and philosophical conception of the European tradition, 'the Beautiful.' He is, like the Sufis, a poet of the drunkenness of the spirit."

Since 1989 Russell has concentrated on writing poetry and prose in the Italian language. He lives in what he describes as "an ancient Tuscan farmhouse," in Arezzo. In March 1990, only a short time after he was awarded the International Prize for Lyric Poetry, "Le Muse," of the city of Florence and was busy preparing copy for a new literary review in English and Italian, *Marginalia*, a fire in his home destroyed his library, manuscripts, notes, an archive of nearly fifty years. Undaunted by this disaster, Russell managed to produce three issues of *Marginalia* by August 1990.

Principal works: *Poetry* — Picnic to the Moon, 1944; Omens and Elegies, 1951; Descent, 1952; Three Elegies of Quintilius, 1954; Images of Desire, 1962; Elegy: Orpheus and Eurydice, 1962; Dreamland and Drunkenness, 1963; Complaints to Circe, 1963; The Spirit and the Body, 1963; Visions and Ruins, 1964; Agamemnon in Hades, 1965; The Golden Chain, 1970; Paysages Legendaires, 1971; The Elegies of Quintilius, 1975; Ephemeron, 1977; Theories, 1978; Acts of Recognition, 1979; Epigrammata, 1981; Elemental Discourses, 1981; Africa: A Dream, 1981; Selected Shorter Poems, 1982; All for the Wolves, 1984.

*Translations* — Mandelstam, O. Poems of Osip Mandelstam, 1958; Pennati, C. Landscapes, 1964; Khâqânî. The Ruins of Madâ'in, 1973; Corbin, H. The Concept of Comparative Philosophy, 1981.

*Prose* — Ezra Pound, 1950; (with K. Singh) G.V. Desani, 1952; Roy Campbell and Nine, 1981; Kathleen Raine: A Study, 1981; Edwin Muir's Poetry, 1981.

About: Contemporary Authors 97-100, 1981; Contemporary Poets, 4th ed., 1985; Hogg, J. (ed) The Servant of the Muse: A Garland for Peter Russell on His Sixtieth Birthday, 1981; Hogg, J. (ed.) The Salzburg Peter Russell Seminar 1981/82, 1982; Hogg, J. (ed.) The Vitalist Reader, 1982.

## OTHER PROSE CRITICISM ABOUT PETER RUSSELL

PETER RUSSELL POET & PUBLISHER (Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades ...der Universität Salzburg, i.e. Ph.D. Dissertation) by MICHAEL WAGNER. pp. 240. Salzburg 1991. (entirely in English)

ANCIENT MYTH AND PHILOSOPHY IN PETER RUSSELL'S *AGAMEMNON IN HADES* (Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades ...der Universität Salzburg, i.e. Ph.D. Dissertation) by WOLFGANG REISINGER. pp.270. Salzburg 1986. (entirely in English)  
Enquiries may be made to Peter Russell, or English Department, University of Salzburg.

Helga Denkmayr, *Music in the Poetry of Peter Russell*, University of Salzburg, 1985.

Wilfried Steiner, *Edith Sitwell in the Poetry of Peter Russell*, University of Salzburg.

JOHNSON, Anthony L. *Two Studies of the Poetry of Peter Russell*, "Four Snowmen and a Fifth" and "Smoke". In all pp.132. Reprinted from Salzburg Studies. \$25.00

SCOTT, Tom *On Peter Russell*, three essays. \$10.00

RAINE, Kathleen *Two Articles on Peter Russell*. \$10.00

HUGH MACDIARMID has written that «Peter Russell is, in my opinion, a writer who has so far received nothing like due recognition... no one in Great Britain today has rendered anything like such disinterested, many-sided and sustained service to Poetry. At a time when many English poets are severely restricting the claims that can be made for poetry's significance in the modern world... he relies upon a Catholic appreciation of the mainstream of the world's poetry, as was shown by his brilliant editorship of the poetry magazine "NINE" (1949-56), a splendid oasis in the Waste Land of current poetics. This thorough knowledge of the past achievements, present position and potentialities of poetry is his distinguishing characteristic, shown by the range of his verse in a great variety of forms, by his fine work as a translator of poets such as Osip Mandelshtam, Alexander Blok and many others, several of whom he has been the first to render into English. At the same time he has been prolific as a critic, editor, bookseller, publisher and lecturer. In the last-named capacity, his wide-ranging knowledge, fine welcoming spirit and elevated standpoint have enabled him to discuss with insight and justice poets so different as Ezra Pound, Edwin Muir, Wilfred Owen, Edward Thomas and the Dorset Poet William Barnes (to name only a few of the poets in English whom he has chosen illuminately to deal), and to discourse on such broad issues as "Poetry and Science" and the "Contemporary Poet's Process".

As to his own work, he has now more than a dozen collections in print, and a further six in course of publication. This is a tale of work few, if any, contemporary poets can equal. In general his verse shows a mastery of many kinds, a devotion to the perennial themes of poetry, allied to a consuming concern with the present and prospective positions of the art, and a complete absence of that provincialism to which English poetry has been so largely relegated in recent years. This breadth of view, diversity of technical equipment, and versatility make him difficult to label or pigeonhole, and incurs the enmity of lesser spirits intent merely on the exploitation of ephemeral little fashions, gimmicks, and the "self-expression" of negligible egos. But it is time his true stature, and his unflagging devotion to Poetry was recognised».

(1963)

reprinted from AGENDA (London, 1985)

PETER LEVI

THE POETRY OF PETER RUSSELL

Peter Russell — *All for the Wolves* (Selected Poems 1947-1975)  
Ed. Peter Jay. Anvil Press £7.95

Peter Russell has long been so remarkable in abundance and variety that not all readers will have grasped the excellent qualities of wit, craftsmanship and tranquillity that make his finest poems valuable and unique. It is not that his vast output has been uneven, which is inevitably true, but that he has used his skills as a poet in many different ways, and needs to be taken seriously on different levels. One has known other writers like this, but few of them publish so much, and none of them that I recollect, at least since the seventeenth century, has suddenly, calmly and with concentration, produced the handful of magnificent poems that Peter Russell has written. The nearest analogy for such a range of verse in nearly modern times is probably Tennyson: which is not very close. No other modern poet unless it were Pound so cries out for a well chosen Selected Poems. Pound in old age asked Cyril Connolly to make his selection, but Faber's were too mean to undertake it. Peter Russell's has been both edited and printed by Peter Jay. Twenty-one pages of the poet's own fascinating and often very funny notes all add a new dimension of pleasure.

*Agenda* has been accused in the past of defending the ragged tail-end of the modern movement in poetry, which we are told is now over. And yet we have Basil Bunting and Peter Russell, and René Char, nor has the modern movement been a barren influence even on writers who dislike the idea of it. Its technical lessons go back through Pound and Yeats to the nineties, and we owe to the modern movement vernacular force and purity of language and a certain musical subtlety which are apparently permanent lessons. Variation of texture, of which David Jones was the last great master, though here again one must remember Bunting, is a special technique, the perfect instrument of a special kind of seriousness, but it is not a permanent and universal ideal of poetry. All the same it has a deeper importance, and its rejection has more alarming results, than people at the moment seem to think.

The truth is that we have and need poems of many different kinds, and that dogmas and theories usually turn out misleading. The development of a poet like Peter Russell, under intellectual pressures and the experience of life and of other poetry, has been unpredictable. His first book appeared in 1944. In 1949 in his *Ode to Evening*, he was a complex, neo-classic poet of great interest: a style not unusual in those days as it would have been at any time between then and the last few years.

...Bright lantern lead sad travellers on!  
Dimming dear hopes with thy wise prose  
Provide new light as purple turns

To indigo.

Let thy blue shadows hide the idle scythe  
In corners, while the late-kindled fire  
Responds to thine; provide sweet fruits  
For tables set.

O star, persist until oncoming night  
Take finally direction from thy beam;  
And bid her hide each anxious fugitive  
From his own gloom.

This poem is not as bookish as it appears, it is curiously original and very modern. No one would have written it before the forties. Not Horace, not Collins, not Auden. And it offers, as Russell at his best so often does, an admirable coherence, a pleasing economy of technical means. I have quoted only the final stanzas, but the procedure of the entire poem is full of pleasant surprises. It has two sentences of two stanzas each, that flow like water, but the interplay of syntax with verse-form produces a kind of half-heard musical rhetoric. Yet *The Ruin* (1951) has an utterly different and sad tone, and belongs both to its Anglo-Saxon roots and surely to the modern movement.

.....

Bullfinch pilfers the apple-bud  
Chaffinch scours the ground  
There are men in the woods  
There are men in the woods

And the wild geese go with their gagging sound.

At the time he was already writing his *Elegies of Quintilius*; two appeared in 1950 and 1951, and one was broadcast in 1953; they were all essentially complete in the fifties, though they were collected and published only in 1975. They are masterly, and I am glad to have read them so late in the day, because I do not think their mature brilliance would have penetrated my befogged brain when they were written. They are both parody and passionately convincing. They are an extremely funny learned joke, Quintilius being an invention, but they are full of truth to life, being based on real characters, conversations and places, particularly Santayana, the Ligurian coast of Italy, and Cagnes-sur-Mer, where Peter Russell used to bicycle through forest-fires to

drink in the vast and rancorous learning of Quintilius from Richard Aldington and Roy Campbell. I do not think either of those writers, or Santayana himself, need be displeased if they are best remembered one day through the *Elegies of Quintilius*. Peter Jay notes that he restrained himself "with difficulty from including all six poems", but the old edition is still in print. The core of these poems is an ideal of some purity and sweetness, which is not false.

The learned Muses on their sacred mountains praised  
And Arts and Sciences pursued for Virtue's cause

Peter Russell's learning as a poet is not perhaps unusual in quality but overwhelming in scale. He seems well able to deal with Persian, Russian and Hebrew, as well as the usual languages. His *Tristia* (1958) is based on Mandelshtam, his *Ruins of Madâ'in* on a Persian source, and these influences on him have been formally fruitful; they have really produced in him a new kind of poet. By the sixties the influences had crumbled into the texture of his own personal voice. This voice has a somewhat level but genuine variety, and sharp teeth. Ezra Pound was obviously a liberating presence, to which we have prose as well as verse testimony, with an effect on the persona of the poet as well as on his technical powers, and imagism was a strong influence, but Peter Russell to H.D. is an armoured car to a Baby Austin. In the sixties he absorbed numerous influences and became more and more obviously his own man. In poems sometimes as laconic as Hellenistic epigrams, and sometimes as full as baroque Auden, he spoke the truth, seeming to do no more than finger the keys of his instrument. His four short poems for Pound's eightieth birthday dissolve in the hand like snowflakes, yet without being forgotten.

He is so little known, so unjustly little known, that one feels in writing this notice as if one had invented such a poet. And yet here he is in print. One needs no longer track backwards and forwards through his works, which in some cases are cyclostyled, to discover his splendid achievement. He can of course, as in *Interim* (Venice, 1965), be pungently autobiographical, but with unusual gentleness and a deadly momentum.

.....

But I have fears that one day they will find me curled  
up  
In a basket-chair in a room of unread books,  
And the telephone ringing, and the door-bell ringing,  
And fate calling aloud my name, but I do not stir.

And they will take me away to a small country house  
Where the knives and forks are chained to the  
breakfast table;  
And the face that I love, the face that I sought, will  
visit me there  
But I shall not recognize it then.

The surface elegance of this writing does not blind one to its reality, nor the syntactic organization to the chaos of suffering, any more than in Landor's best poems. The centre of a number of his poems in the mid-sixties is a nightmare, both personal and cultural, very strongly conceived.

.....

O Century, I loved you once  
You cherished me

The grand betrayal's in the head,  
Dead souls, dead hearts, dead meat in cans...

O Aquileia, your mosaics,  
Venice, your crusades...

We shall survive in paper  
Wrapped up like Martial's fish  
And stink, dear Century  
Immortally...

The dandy contempt is inherited I suppose, but perfectly serious. In recent years, down at least to 1975 where this selection ends, Peter Russell's poetry has become more sharply sensuous and more precise. Minor poet's qualities? But Virgil flowered out of them, not to mention more modern heroes. I take the limitation of theme to be deliberate, and to be a successful device. His travel poems and his love poems profit from it. His poems of authentic dream record interestingly share the same limits for most of their length, though Zeus moves in and out of them.

...Dung-spattered bull tormented by the flies  
Be milk-white, silken-soft like Jove

He has the unusual quality of genuineness. No other living poet in English could write a dialogue with the Holy Vergin of Mileseva which would convince a reader that it was serious. (Think of the same poem by R.S. Thomas or Charles Causley, both admirable and genuine writers in their own way.) Among all his learning and sophistication, I think Peter Russell is uniquely innocent, uniquely direct and unfalse. Yet he is generous in devices, like the early Pasternak and like Mandelshtam. Perhaps he has learnt the most important lesson that true poetry has to teach. This does not make him a great poet, but he is a remarkably good one. And who cares about greatness, a rather common quality? What we want is genuineness: individual authenticity that can inspire. That is the quality of his later poems: of *Smoke* (1971) and *Elegy at the Winter Solstice* (a poem of Quintilius's madness, 1975), in which he digs deeply into the origins of all his poetry. This book may go nearly unnoticed, as so many do, but to praise it is to invest in one's own future reputation as a critic.

FOUR SHORT POEMS by Peter Russell      An antipasto for prospective readers

THE TWO BIRDS

Always in the forest I see two birds  
     Opposed on a single tree.  
 One is pecking the fruits, the other observes,  
     Silently, mockingly.  
 One day seeing me come, they utter words,  
 The one white as snow, the other as black as coal,  
 And in turn they say "I am your body" "I am your soul."

ANOTHER DREAM SONG

A one-eyed woman sat by a well  
     With a cat and a hazel-fork.  
 She rose, and the hazel-fork fell, —  
     Her face was the face of the sparrow-hawk.

A ripe fig on a giant fig-tree  
     I fall to the ground and lie still, —  
 The sweet river flows down to the sea  
     And the wind blows round the hill.

WATER TO OCEAN

She can renew and can create  
 Green from the ground and flowers from stones  
 In valleys parched set streams in spate  
 And raise up with a word dry bones.

(I'm thinking here of "Water" Raleigh's "Sinthia His Ocean")

VENICE IN WINTER  
*for Gitta in Berlin*

The clouds obscure the island and the church  
 And the cold sea is streaked with grey like mud;  
 Dark cypresses (but not a single birch  
 As in Berlin), edge the Venetian flood.  
 Follow the Lido with your wind-swept eye  
 — Long needle of the land that threads the sea —  
 Where white gulls in the stormy distance, fly  
 Past lonely gardens and the last green tree.

You wouldn't think the citizens would dare  
 To venture out upon the streets below  
 With all this frosty dampness in the air;  
 But when night falls you'll see the scarlet glow  
 Of braziers roasting chestnuts near the Square,  
 And sweet potatoes in Sant'Angelo.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS BY PETER RUSSELL (January 1994)

VISION IN THE POETRY OF EZRA POUND, pp.26. An aspect of Pound largely neglected by the critics. A double lecture given in various stages of evolution at University of Durham, University of Cardiff, Morris College (NJ).  
post free U.S. \$15.00

EZRA POUND AND THE CANTOS, pp.20. A lecture given at the British Council, Naples.  
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IN THE TRADITION: A LIVING WRITER LIVING IN ITALY, pp.20. Reminiscences of a poet and the influence of Italy. Lecture given to Sarah Lawrence College.  
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VITALISM OR ABDICATION. (1972). pp 35 Full text of the abridged version published in LITTACK No 2.  
post free U.S. \$20.00

KOSOVO AS A COSMIC SYMBOL, pp.10. An address given at the October Meeting of the Writers Union of the Republic of Serbia (1989).  
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Easiest way of payment is by cash in U.S. dollars or European currency or International Money Order. Checks should include \$3.00 for Bank negotiation.

Peter Russell, "La Turbina", 52026 Pian di Scò (Arezzo), Italy.



## QUINTILIUS. Some items now available.

Of the 1975 Anvil Press edition of *ELEGIES OF QUINTILIUS* Robert Nye, in the Times of London, wrote "Russell's *Quintilius* offers at once a translation and a criticism, and must in the end be reckoned as neither, but as something rarer: a poem, a *supreme fiction*. It has the quality of authority that comes when a man achieves his own tone and pitch after a lifetime learning the craft of verse." Roger Sharrock (The Tablet, 13 Oct 1984) said: "The first of the Elegies of Quintilius must be the best English imitation of the Latin love elegy." "You can't help liking Quintilius — grumpy, arrogant, stylish..." Stuart Henson in *OUTPOSTS*.

Prices, post free.

THE ELEGIES OF QUINTILIUS London, Anvil Press 1975 (Seven Elegies, with notes and Appendices. pp.64 in all. Spiral bound clear photocopy

L.20,000                      £10.00                      \$20.00

QUINTILII APOCALYPSEÔS FRAGMENTA. "Byzantium's golden chamber-pots..." London, Agenda Editions 1986 (out of print). pp.16. Spiral bound clear photocopy

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QUINTILII *Metameipseis Noerai*, or *Intellectual Transformations* London, Agenda Editions. 100 copies only printed. pp.24.

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(QUINTILII APOCALYPSEÔS FRAGMENTA is a collection of several hundred poems of Quintilius, commissioned in 1985 by Anvil Press).

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**ORDER FROM:** Peter Russell, "La Turbina", 52026 Pian di Scò (Arezzo), Italy, Telephone and Fax 055/960-674

PETER RUSSELL

QUINTILIUS

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 Golh'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 Commo-dianus?" 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 über 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.

Most of the longer Quintilius poems are situational epyllia of this sort, historically based with real characters from late antiquity, but they transcend even respectable antiquarianism by reflecting 20th century insanity in quite transparent spirit.

## COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, 1955

THREE ELEGIES OF QUINTILIUS. By Peter Russell. Tunbridge Wells: The Pound Press, 1954. 28 p.

This little book (a fourth elegy has been mimeographed and included), by Peter Russell, is an interesting addition to literature. The poems are said to be translations from the work of a still unknown Latin poet of the fourth century. Mr. Russell, no doubt correctly, gives his dates as A.D. 397-427.

Before the elegies is printed as an introduction a little Latin poem, or compilation, the object of which is no doubt to secure a permanently classical background to what follows. For it is a cento of much Ovid and a little Catullus, as follows:

"How many kissings  
are enough and more for me?"  
(Cat., 7, 1-2)

"The elm loves vines, vines abandon not the elm;  
Why am I so oft separated from the mistress of my heart?"  
(Ov., *Am.* II, 16, 41-3)

"What boot your sacrifices? What now avail the sistrums  
of Egypt? What your repose apart in faithful beds?"  
(*Ibid.*, III, 9, 33-4)

"Applaud thy Mars, O soldier! Arms I detest; peace is my  
delight, and love that is found in the midst of peace."  
(*Ibid.*, III, 2, 49-50)

"What are you doing, wretch? You will lose my girl  
the prayer of her heart."  
(*Ibid.*, III, 2, 71)

"Be wrathful if you will, 'tis forbidden joys delight;  
she only charms whoe'er can say: 'I fear!'"  
(*Ibid.*, III, 4, 31-2)

"And does anyone still respect the freeborn arts,  
or deem tender verse brings any dower?"  
(*Ibid.*, III, 8, 1-2)

"And yet more by night than in the light of day — Night is  
welcome to women beneath whose neck an embracing arm  
is placed."

"I, in my widowed couch, can only court a sleep with lying  
dreams; while true joys fail me, false ones must delight."  
(Ov., *Heroid.*, 13, 105-8)

It is unfortunate that the translator has not hastened his promised publication of the original palimpsest, so that the reader may compare versions and see for himself how well the task has been accomplished. But as luck would have it, for the past few years, the reviewer has been reading manuscripts of the sixth-century poet Maximianus, and others. In the process of working through these, he has had the good fortune to come upon

a florilegium which contains a few fragments of Quintilius.

It is not the present intention to anticipate Mr. Russell's publication of the Latin elegies or to eclipse the lustre which will result from such an edition. The curious reader, however, who may desire to pass judgment upon the translation, is entitled to glimpse a few lines of the original. In conclusion, therefore, we shall add only the opening lines of each poem together with Mr. Russell's sterling translation.

## I

O quotiens, filum moderata luce benignum,  
incendens flamma corpora nostra tua,  
dum tremulum in vacuo lecto me Daunia cecidit,  
tu nostro lusu testis amoris eras!

Generous wick with the oil of the coconut palm  
Kindling each evening our own nuptial flame,  
Witness you were of the love-act a number of times  
[Nightly, in the city of Sfax in my youthful days,]  
Till Daunia left me to shiver in an empty bed.

## II

Quintilius trepido discessit languidus aestus:  
Africa prima sibi fervida causa fuit.  
(Segnis enim fuerat custos his pauperis agri)  
et tabulae damni causa timoris erant.

Quintilius has moved: he found the heat  
Of Africa too much for an indolent smallholder.  
Recent proscriptions also threatened him  
(He said) with confiscation of his farm.

## III

Dum cadere ante fores durabunt arbore grossi,  
iam tenuis, semper spes resoluta cadet.  
Olim sperabam requiem mihi rure futuram  
unde mihi Bacchus lenia vina daret.

As long as the unripe figs keep dropping outside our door  
So long will my modest hopes keep falling away.  
A time there was when I envisaged a future  
Of peace in the country, tillage of fruitful vines.

## IV

Femina Quintilio qualis nunc bella pretenda est?  
Diva movit venerem vel scelerata tuam?  
Vel quae iam tenuit cellas (hesternaque virgo!)  
ex grege, quem statuit Livia magna, cato?

What kind of a femina, now, is it, Quintilius, you're after?  
What goddess, or baggage, engages your amorous nature?  
Is it the latest recruit — some almost recently virgin —  
In the highly trained cohorts stationed in Livia's portals?

E.N. O'NEIL (1954)

from PN REVIEW (Poetry Nation), 1987

*A SPELL AND AN APOCALYPSE*

William Cookson, *Spell, A Sequence* (Agenda Editions).  
Peter Russell, *Quintilii Apocalypseos Fragmenta* (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 *fascies*. 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 *alter 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 Apocalypseos Fragmenta* 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

This sixteen page booklet has long been out of print but I can supply clear photocopies almost indistinguishable from the original, octavo, spiral bound, at £5.00, \$10.00 or L.10,000 post free. If paying by check add bank charge, £3.00, \$6.00. Best to send cash.

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PETER RUSSELL

*Teorie e altre liriche*, Carlo Mancosu Editore.

There have been times when residence (and publication) in Italy has seemed to be an essential element in the development and sustaining of an English poet's fame; Byron, Shelley and Browning come to mind as obvious examples. In our own day the supposed 'Europeanism' of the times has done little to prevent such residence serving merely to isolate a poet from the circles in which 'reputations' are made. Peter Russell has been based in Italy since the mid-1960's (with spells in the U.S.A., Canada and Iran). Now in his seventies, Russell was between 1949-1958 the editor of *Nine*, one of the very finest post-war 'little magazines', a magazine marked by the internationalism of its concerns, and by its rootedness in a sense of the European tradition. Russell's interests and tastes have never been remotely parochial; there is a fitting irony in English parochialism's continuing lack of interest in his work. He has been more properly appreciated by other internationalists like Hugh MacDiarmid — who described him some years ago as "a writer who has so far received nothing like due recognition". Things have not greatly changed. The publication in 1984 of *All for the Wolves: Selected Poems 1947-1975* (Anvil Press Poetry) attracted some attention, including a very favourable review by Robert Nye in *The Times*. Yet little seems to have come of it, so far as knowledge of Russell's work in Britain is concerned. It isn't, of course, merely a matter of Russell's residence abroad; that may, in a sense, be effect as much as cause. Russell's whole poetic temperament and ethos are such to make his work uncomfortable and alien within the critical orthodoxies of Britain in the last few decades. Russell belongs, very broadly speaking, within a Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition of thought — hardly a recommendation to tastes formed by the reading

of such as Larkin, Hughes or Craig Raine. Russell's is learned poetry — even erudite poetry. At times the erudition is explicit and unmissable. At other times the learning underpins, in a deeply 'traditional' fashion (using the word 'tradition' as it is used by thinkers such as René Guenon, Titus Burckhardt and Henry Corbin with whose thought Russell's work has affinities), poetry of great clarity — not by chance has Peter Levi praised Russell's work as "uniquely innocent, uniquely direct and unfalse". (Fascinating explications of the 'simplicity' of two poems by Peter Russell can be found in essays by Professor Anthony Johnson: 'Peter Russell's 'Four Snowmen and a Fifth'' in *The Servant of the Muse*, edited by James Hogg, University of Salzburg, 1981 and 'Peter Russell's 'Smoke'' in *Vitalism and Celebration* edited by James Hogg, University of Salzburg, 1987). Those wishing to explore Russell's work should probably begin with *All for the Wolves*, a selection which illustrates something of Russell's range — the lyrical, the philosophical, the epigrammatic, the visionary, the scientific, the witty. The appetite hopefully whetted by such an encounter, the reader might like to go on to collections such as *Elemental Discourses* (University of Salzburg, 1981) — which has the added interest of a long introduction by Russell setting out central tenets of his poetics — and this new volume published in Rome. (Austria, Italy — and even Iran — feature rather more strongly than England in the bibliography of Russell's publications).

*Teorie e altre liriche* is a substantial selection (some 240 pages) of Russell's work, concentrating on his repeated use of the quatrain (with alternate rhymes) in poems written between 1963 and 1986 — with one exception. The exception is 'Reach for the Stars', written

in 1943 (when the poet was twenty two). Russell quotes this early poem in his introduction to *Elemental Discourses* observing that, though sentimental, the poem "anticipates precisely the form and mood of the lyrics in four line stanzas ... which I wrote in the 'sixties and 'seventies". The poem has, in Russell's own words, on the one hand "a naif vision of a world run by machines and their keepers ... and on the other the realisation that the life of the mind, of art, of imagination, represented man's essential life and nature". The poem ends with a childlike fantasy of men taking their Sunday picnic on the moon! In *Elemental Discourses* Russell comments "it was many years before I realised that 'my picnic on the moon' adumbrated ambiguously on the one hand the rather limited techniques and purposes of space travel and on the other the *Seelenfahrt* of the shamans, of the ascension of Enoch, of Kai Khosrau, of Jesus, and the epic ascents of St. Adamnan ... of the Prophet Mohammed ... of Arda Virag". Both the innocence and the learning continue to inform Russell's best work, the personal experience understood and articulated within an awareness of contexts that include the psychological, the mythological, the anthropological and the religious.

*Teorie e altre liriche* is, in part, an expanded version of the small pamphlet *Theories* published in Teheran in 1977, when the poet was teaching at the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy. In the preface to that booklet Russell declares his position clearly enough. Uneasy (to put it mildly) in a "period of globally pervasive empiricism, rationalism, positivism, historicism, Darwinism, Marxism, Freudianism, Jungianism, all more or less obscured by the reductionism of phenomenology, of existentialism or of structuralism or other systems of flight from the realitas of world and intellect, not to say of man, to the 'reality' of the world as vulgarly conceived — the 'real' relations of what can be measured and weighed (and consumed)". The poet's concern is rather, he tells us, with "the history and evolution of man's totality, his body, soul and spirit" and they are offered, with an irony which is only partly self-deprecatory, as "the mental ravings of one in motley, his burden on his back, who gazing up with longing at sun and moon and stars, and maybe clouds as well ... advances with good cheer, ignoring studiously the profound abyss that gapes below his forward placed right foot...".

*Teorie e altre liriche* reprints poems from *Theories*, as well as from other collections such as *The Golden Chain* (Venice, 1970) and *All for the Wolves*. It also includes previously unpublished work. There are poems of Romantic Dejection and Ecstasy, there are lyrical and

metaphysical poems, mythological poems and poems of dream-like ballad narrative. For Russell poetry is the language of the Imagination, and it therefore has a reality greater than that of the 'real':

Out of chaos order comes,  
Mind and sense evolve their lore —  
Patterns of tealeaves, scattered crumbs,  
A face upon the marbled floor.

For the poem, insubstantial,  
Lasts as long as men may last;  
But the thing, so circumstantial  
Falls away into the past.

(‘Recognition’)

For Russell it is only in poetry and the Imagination that any kind of permanence can be found: "It is the ground on which we stand, / It is the earth of which we're made". Seeing can only be knowing in Imagination:

Primordial silence on the lake  
The coots and grebes seem painted there  
The alder boughs' reflections make  
No ripple on the flood or air

I stare, as any man would do  
Whether from sentiment or awe  
Azure dissolved in steely blue  
Absorbed without a flaw

...

I am the only moving thing  
In the green valley of this dream  
Would I could find the magic string  
To knit me fast to that strange beam

Which without motion drops from on high  
And without motion rises up  
Twin coupling of the earth and sky  
Where earth is wine and sky a cup.

Space precludes a fuller discussion of Russell's work. Suffice it to say that it is far more rewarding than that of many more fashionable English poets (if inevitably inconsistent in its refusal to play safe), and that this handsomely-produced selection (each poem accompanied by a facing-page Italian translation) is very warmly recommended.

Thomas Perkins

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## THEORIES

THE MILANESE POET, FRANCO LOI, recently wrote in the Italian national daily *Il Sole 24 Ore* (28th 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 renewed hope... and like Homer, wrings from the darkness of the self and of the world, greater realities and hidden truths." Loi writes of Russell's THEORIES: 65 lyrics. (Rome, Mancosu). Available direct from author, post free, £22 or \$45.00. Hardback.

*The Times* of London in 1985 described Russell as a "poet of the high romantic tradition" and the creator of a "supreme fiction". Russell has lectured and read his poems in various Universities and lycées, as well as to Anglo-Swiss Societies and private circles in Switzerland on many occasions.

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Nos. 13 and 15 are scheduled for Spring 1994. Nos. 6 & 8 (in Italian) are scheduled also for Spring 1994.

HAVING LOST EVERYTHING in a recent devastating fire (1990) and destructive flash-floods (1992), Peter Russell will be glad to buy any copies of his former publications, including periodical contributions and reviews of his work. Photocopies and *mss* material prior to 1990 would be much appreciated

*"Poetry alone can save the world"* Giovanni Faccenda, Montevarchi, Valdarno  
*"Religions and ideologies have done little else save cause wars"* P.R.

Write to PETER RUSSELL, 52026 Pian di Scò, Prov. Arezzo, ITALY.