

MARGINALIA No. 19.

(with *QUINTILLIANA*)

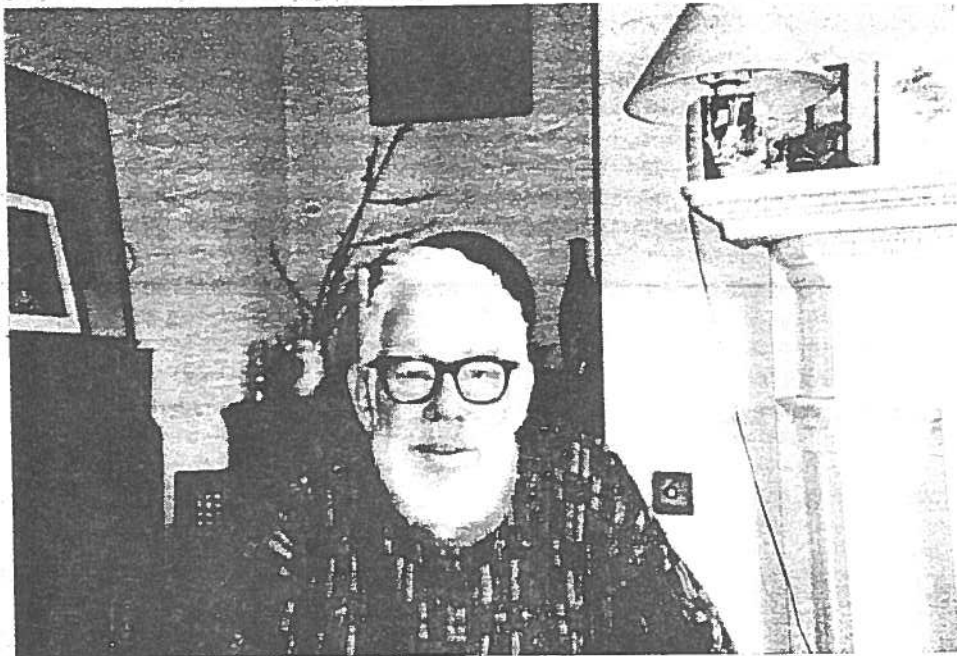
LONDON AND AFTER

(or maybe "London and dafter" ?)

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THE ROAD TO PARNASSUS:

HOMAGE TO PETER RUSSELL

ON HIS SEVENTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY

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POETIC DRAMA & POETIC THEORY

101

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Post free, direct from Peter Russell,
52026 PIAN DI SCO, AR. ITALY. £ sterling 20.00
or \$ 27.50

RECENT PUBLICATIONS OF PETER RUSSELL during the year 1996

January: VENICE POEMS 1965. Long Introduction, pp. 310.

January: STUDIES IN THE POETRY OF PETER RUSSELL, Semiotic studies by ANTHONY JOHNSON (University of Pisa).

March: ACUMEN 25, with nine poems of Quintilius and a review of VENICE 1965.

March: AGENDA IRISH issue, with six of Russell's best recent poems.

March: NORTH DAKOTA REVIEW with long essay on KATHLEEN RAINE by P.R.

May: *L'Umanità*: poesie di M.T. LIUZZO. 15pp. Introduction by P.R. Reggio Calabria

June: FESTSCHRIFT: *The Road to Parnassus*. HOMAGE TO PETER RUSSELL on his seventy-fifth birthday. Ed. James Hogg. University of Salzburg, pp.600. A handsome volume, price £20.00, post free. 80 very interesting contributions, and a summary of criticism about Russell over a fifty year period.

June: *Alles is Beseelt*: Sixty Poems, English texts with German translation by Charles Stünzi opposite. pp.160. A handsome book. Kasskara Verlag, Germany. £10.

July: THREE QUESTS: three long poems by P.R. "The Road", "Wildwood Notes" & "Packing" (all from 1995, not published before). £6.00 post free. Italian translations by Peter George Russell and Leonello Rabatti opposite the English.

July: THE VISIONARY COSMOS. Peter Russell's and Edith Sitwell's Poetry and poetic Theory, by WILFRID STEINER. University of Salzburg, pp. 92

July: THE THEME OF MUSIC IN PETER RUSSELL'S POETRY by HELGA DENKMAYR. University of Salzburg, pp.72.

SOME PUBLICATIONS FROM 1995

January: A Bibliography of PETER RUSSELL. ed. Glyn Pursglove. University of Salzburg, pp. 250. Covers 1938-August 1994.

January: POETRY WALES 30/1. with QUINTILIUS, "Obsisti potest Fortunae" pp.10 and an oil portrait of P.R. reproduced.

January: NORTH DAKOTA QUARTERLY: with Quintilius, "Last Judgements" pp.3.

January: AGENDA Special Issue. TRIBUTE TO PETER RUSSELL. 14 poems (7 by "Q"), essays by Dana Gioia, Peter Jay, Roland John, Peter Levi, W.S. Milne, Glyn Pursglove, Kathleen Raine, Stephen Romer, Tom Scott, W. G. Shepherd, Charles Tomlinson. (in all pp.125. re Russell) Whole issue has pp.328.

March: TENNESSEE QUARTERLY. pp.20 including A Portrait, "A Note on Peter Russell" by DANA GIOIA, 15 poems by P.R., "A Brief Note on 'Q'" by P.R., and two new Quintilius poems.

March: Quintilius, "Non enses at ex Norico carmen" long poem in *Bellowing Ark*, Seattle.

June: BABEL IX. ed. Kevin Perryman. Beautifully printed, contains 3 new Quintilius poems, and five recent sonnets, plus a wealth of new work from English, American, German and French authors. A very distinguished review.

October: "The Lovelessness of Recent Poetry" pp.8 essay by P.R. In ORE No. 50 (ed. Eric Ratcliffe, Stevenage).

If you are interested, write for a Proforma in your own currency.

FORTHCOMING TITLES for late summer and autumn 1996

TEMENOS ACADEMY. Four Lectures given in London in February 1996.

1. POETRY: The Language of the Spirit
 2. MYTH, SYMBOL, ARCHETYPE
 3. THE DEVALUATION OF ALL VALUES
 4. TOWARDS A REVALUATION OF ALL VALUES
- Book publication by TEMENOS with GOLGONOOZA PRESS

ANVIL PRESS: *The Elegies of Quintilius*. The 1975 edition, now quite unobtainable, reprinted with the Quintilius pieces and the Notes on them in *All for the Wolves* (1984), revised and updated. This will be the definitive "earlier Quintilius". Final proofs passed in July.

UNIVERSITY OF SALZBURG: Poems from *The Apocalypse of Quintilius* (1984-1995). A vast collection which may have to be issued in 2 vols.

- OMENS & ELEGIES, DESCENT, possibly with additional material.
VISIONS AND RUINS AGAMEMNON IN HADES
PAYSAGES LEGENDAIRES ACTS OF RECOGNITION proofs passed in July.
VENICE POEMS 1966 (for Winter)
MORE FOR THE WOLVES: *Selected Poems, 1973-1989*
MY WILD HEART: *Selected Poems, 1990-1995* (Salzburg)
SELECTED PROSE: *On the Poet's Craft* ed. Glyn Pursglove

BELLOWING ARK PRESS (Seattle) TOWARDS AN UNKNOWN LIFE. Fifty-one Sonnets (1946-1990). Final proofs passed long ago.

My son Peter George is working on the computer-setting of four new English issues of MARGINALIA, and four new Italian ones.

SWANSEA REVIEW tell me they are printing in the Summer and Autumn issues:

1. "Bad Dreams of Mr. Ion, A Moustertian Gentleman" a ten page poem with learned Commentary, which was a sort of prototype of the actual "Apocalypse" of Quintilius, which was burnt in the fire here in 1990. This poem was originally published in ABIKO REVIEW (Japan) but is unobtainable in Europe, it seems.

2. "Epithalamium" a five page poem in regular rhymed stanzas, which originally appeared in my "THEORIES" (Tehran 1978) and is now very rare. It appears with a note by the late Tom Scott, originally printed in *Chapman*.

Also available are my 36 page brochure PETER RUSSELL, POET & CRITIC (1994) which summarised many of my activities in the 'eighties and early 'nineties, and a similar 32pp. Information Brochure:

PETER RUSSELL: Some Activities with a few texts, 1994-1996. "London and After".

As these are very expensive to print, I shall not be sending them out, but anyone who would like them may write for copies to me, including please £5.00 each for expenses and postage.

Write to PETER RUSSELL 52026 PIAN DI SCO' (AR) ITALY

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."

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

RUSSELL, now 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 bilingual 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 [compiled by Dr. Glyn Pursglove], and a *Festschrift* for his 75th birthday, published in June 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".

The Milanese poet, FRANCO LOI, recently wrote in the Italian 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 people 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), describes Peter Russell as "a word-smith of the highest order."

ANNOUNCEMENT from the 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. and Fax: 055/960-674). 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*. pp.50 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 from \$12 to \$25. Ask for a Proforma in your own currency

Order from PETER RUSSELL, La Turbina, I-52026 Pian di Scò (Arezzo), Italy (Tel. and Fax: 055/960-674).

HONOURING THE UNKNOWN

Poetry has one only secret: the blind union with the Spirit running through the obscure vastness of the cosmos and giving life to all forms. Theories pass, stilemas pass, fashion changes, as do aesthetic prejudices, moralizing options, literary styles, and party-interests, avant-garde and rearguard games and ideological negations all quickly fade away, whereas man's need to express himself by means of 'the word' never passes away. The way of western civilization has privileged the domain of the mind as well as a materialistic view of history. We have tried to surpass art with photography, music with noise, poetry with computer games. Yet poetry lives on invincible, in spite of the decadence of languages today—or perhaps as a direct result of this sad phenomenon, so as to give them new life—the vanishing of popular creativity, the decadence of artisanship. Few are those who realise that in a society that tends to divide man and to present him in his separateness, so as to better reduce him to the status of an object and dominate him from above, poetry manages, nonetheless, to survive, as does man, using the gift of speech to celebrate his nature, his complex unity of body, mind, emotions, soul, his spiritual origin. Since the difference between any casual mode of expression and what we call poetry is clearly seen in the very Greek matrix *poieo*, poetry is a *making*, a *producing*. Whereas in every day common chatter, man says what is 'useful' or what 'reason' suggests to him in a context in which the 'word' is no more than a mere instrument and as such is used, it can be said of poetry that here we find the word serving itself of the man, the word 'telling' the man. The poet *makes*—and this for the very reason that he listens and lets himself be shaped by the speaking voice; he *makes*, or *produces*, for he says that which he does not know with his human mind, therefore letting things that lie hidden inside him and outside his person rise up into consciousness; he *makes*, for he writes into a synthesis the memory of body, emotion and mind; the poet is a *maker*, for he attains, through the art of poetry, greater awareness of both himself and the world around him.

Whereas the ordinary man usually "mediates" reality, the real poet enters into a strict relationship with its essence. There is no interpretation or 'use' in poetry, but life, the preservation of a former way of living.

Science in our own times has overturned all positivistic certainties. Matter, as warned the men of old, is no more than that which *appears to be*; changing social customs and habits do not change what man *is*, as the Marxist movement claimed; the Newtonian mechanism that seemed to govern the cosmos has no effect on the microcosm; life seems to spring from nowhere as if by magic. But old beliefs and long-dead cultures still dominate humanity. More than ever before society is founded on profit—money, banks—and upon fear. Success and wealth and entertainment have taken the place of art, culture, poetry and values. This fracture within man is a fracture (schizophrenia) between one man and another, breaking man's tie with nature and God. We have given up the sacred only to take up 'chaos'. Poetry no longer has any centrality within the human community, indeed it has been banished and has been replaced by its simulacra, in the same way as man has been replaced by the ape. It is perhaps for this reason that Peter Russell, forced to struggle on as best he can in a tiny town in Tuscany, [Italy], is virtually unknown in Europe and completely ignored in the country in which he lives. It is with many good reasons that the American editor Thomas Fleming has

said “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 or America uncongenial places for the last of great modernists.” I wouldn’t agree with the use of the word ‘modernists’, believing modernity—which is always a product of the current fashion—to be a plague of contemporaneity and it is my belief that Peter has chosen Italy as his home rather for this nation’s past—out of love for Dante—and out of love for her people than for recognition of her actual merits today. However what Fleming says about England and America can be said of the whole of Americanised Europe. And I believe Russell to be in his total ‘coherence’ excluded from the ideology of the moribund dominating culture. “This mist has lifted” writes the poet in Venice in 1972; “Books and silence Peter Russell’s life companions” wrote Paolo Martini in the national daily *La Nazione* (Firenze).

But there is another thing in Peter Russell’s poetry that prevents it from being easily assimilated and therefore from being acceptable by the Establishment circles, and that is what Leopardi called “the non-logicality and naturalness” of expression, which plays a vital role in the making of true poetry, though it be also a great impediment to those ears only used to hearing the *ron-ron* of rationality, intellectual abstrusenesses, and the hordes of commonplace clichés, of everyday chatter. “In the cold damp night I walk up the hill/ Past the ruined brick cages crumbling and flaked/ On the slope of the hill above the mill-race// And the ghosts of the beavers move by moonlight/ From the steep hill with the majestic oak/ Down to the water’s edge”, “And I am an old poet prowling the night’s loose tiles, a sick or a senile ghost/ Drunk and abandoned, lost in the billowing mists before dawn”: the more I read these lines the more I feel attracted by this poetry that winds itself around me like gossamer shining, like water beneath a limpid, unfathomably deep sky. How similar to our own human condition is this “prowling the night’s loose tiles [...]”! When I read Russell’s poetry it feels as though I were entering into the central nucleus of all his poetry, a nucleus that is inaccessible to ‘modernity’. The poet is ever-lying in an intermediate zone of reality, that which lies between material consciousness of this world and spiritual tension, between this life of the mind and the soul’s life to come. He neither chooses nor interprets nor does he reduce the wide extension of his own feeling, nor does he parade his knowledge or make a display of brilliant intellectual novelties. His poetry lies dangerously on that line of unbalance along which only the strongest of energies dare stay. As if Dante were forced between the Inferno and the Paradiso. Of course here we are deep into the “selva oscura”, move about blindly not knowing either our fate or what we are doing, but are open to “signs”, calls, and intuit the light. Russell also is aware of this helplessness of his, yet he is equally aware of his hope. He is like a rock which, lying underwater, over and over is submerged by the waves, and yet re-emerges above them, only to be submerged once more. “From nowhere/ Falling again to nowhere” we read in one of his poems. “Listen carefully when the nightingale breaks the silence”. So, as if from nowhere, here we have the poet listening to the Spirit that “breaks the silence”. It is from this position that his “making” is enucleated and his poetry is throughout accompanied by his vocation and his sense of prophecy: “And the shadowy forms of another world/ Move in my mind/ And I scratch on the sand another message/ No one need mind”. It is not my wish here to make any allusions to the learnedness of Russell’s verse: his illuminating scansion, the strength of his words, his music, the alternation of different tones. We all know that every true poet must possess a memorial vocabulary, do a lot of work on what he has already “made/produced”, should be as free as possible with regard to the ‘invading’ voice: technique is as important for one’s voice as artisanship is for art. But here I wish to call my readers’ attention to the magic of his words, the way he keeps together, by an act of the Spirit, such a huge variety of images and tensions, the titanic effort to keep together the broken fragments of a boundless reality hanging over us and in which we are immersed. It feels to us as though for a moment we were penetrating memory and then withdrawing out, not

with the body of our living, with the very state of our emotions, feelings and sensations. And, what's more, it seems as though it were given us to perceive even the unknown valency, the unknown echo of our corporeal life, the shadow of a reasoning light.

There is a precious indication in a poem of his from 1991: "The senses dwindle as the air gets thin" the concept of which bears not small resemblance to our all-time greatest poet: "Perché appressando sé al suo disire,/ Nostro intelletto si sprofonda tanto,/ Che dietro la memoria non può ire". This is because the closer man draws to the Spirit, the less he is assisted by his senses. Let's just consider how different the *Paradiso* is in structure from the *Inferno*, how far the language has got from the crudeness and heaviness of material sensuality. To penetrate into spirituality is to space out and rarefy the word; the word tends towards silence. True it is, as said John of Gaza, that silence does not mean keeping one's mouth shut. A man might speak ten thousand sensible words, and that is every bit as good as silence; another man might speak one only useless word, and by so doing he goes against the Lord's commandment". But it is also true that the spirit converses with the Spirit, and our 'word' is a means by which this may be interpreted, however heavy and inadequate it may be. "It is the heart that hears the angelic voices,/ And knows the lay of phoenix and of swan", says the poet, and this is remarkably true so far as we don't find that "eternal light" which alone resides within itself, which can alone understand itself, no word sufficing to describe the "high imagination". But what makes the teaching in Russell's verse so precious? The value of his work confirms, besides what we ourselves have already said, the position from which the poet speaks to himself and to all men. It is neither through his intellect nor through his cultural knowledge, so wide and subtle though it be, that he lingers in the contradiction of reality, but rather through his heart. It is from the inside of emotion, from the sweet scent and thorn of that rose, which is life itself, that the poet gathers the happenings of matter and stretches forward to the rarified air of the Spirit.

Human suffering! Man's uncomfortable yet useful companion, this key to such vast understanding, this condemnation to salvation! It is not with a light heart that the poet speaks these beautiful lines: "May the rose without a thorn/ Never on earth be born." The element of human suffering is either latent or present in almost all of Peter's poems, and it cannot be otherwise. The body's very life is attrition, and therefore suffering. And suffering resembles what oil is to a gear, or sleep to wakefulness: a thing as necessary as the air we breathe for our life on earth. And, as we can well see from the lives of the saints, the more a man lets himself be dominated by the spirit, the greater is his suffering for material causes. As though in all this suffering there lay a mission for man, as though he were somehow meant to penetrate evil. As Dante eloquently put it, there is greater dignity in evil than in fear.

It is in the light of this concept that one might consider Russell's splendid *Manuela's Poems*. What need has Manuela to enter into the poet's dream? "I shall remember what I saw/ In your real world/ Which was my dream" and "My real world/ Is in your dream". So we have two levels of dreaming—a *this side* and a *beyond*—each one curious of the other's dreams. And also an unknown God, who is perhaps infinitely beyond, and yet so near. We can't help but be reminded of Don Juan of Castenada—we even find "The Sunken Cathedral", nor can we help thinking of what Frantisek Raklich said about his world of the *Baltics*: "There lies but a thin diaphragm of air between the different worlds". And yet on re-listening to Manuela's voice we find no comfort nor any space for more or less suggestive interpretations. "The hours torment me./ I do not want anything—/ Money, a lover's lips, fame,/ Beauty for me, a husband—/ It is all the same". But how can we conciliate this indifference on the one hand with the torment on the other? And with Manuela's prayer? Her very apparition has a meaning going far beyond "indifference": we still do find an intimate longing, wishing, hoping.

But how many words of no apparent sense this unknown woman speaks: her words contain the charm of meaning tightly sealed up within themselves, like gravestones. It is thus that from another world even more intriguing than our own, we are hit by another torment: pain and suffering seem to cross the clouds and cleave the air. Very similar to this is Peter's "Still sleep,/ Mock death/ Chide me Dear stone/ What shall atone/ For lack of faith?" Truly a great poem and a great soul. I was just talking about that form of dislexia from which the poet's word is born, about that silence that is the origin of sound, about that point of instability within which the poet cohabitates with reason and folly. And it is indeed from his way of suffering and facing the challenges of life that the various layers from which it is possible to unravel his poetry derive. It is a human world, perhaps all too human—to confound Nietzsche—but at the same time a 'superhuman' one, the only way to render honour to existence—be this done by means of the 'word' or sanctified by action. All this reminds me of what Claudel wrote about Animus going out and then coming home to hear Anima singing an interesting song. Peter Russell is always venturing out into the world, his Animus freely letting his 'Anima' sing.

In our present age man is deaf to the calling of the Soul as a result of his secret, atheistic negation, of his presumption of possessing truth—against the ancient warnings of Socrates and Kant—, of his pride at having stuffed his belly and rejected the Spirit. Man has been able to reduce his Soul to the like of a rag for serving Mammon. Man has exiled his Soul, does not want either to listen or to expose himself, refuses the existence and worth of poetry.

And for these very reasons the torment gets every day greater and greater, the suffering turns into despair and life itself increasingly resembles death. "Always in the forest I see two birds/ Opposed on a single tree..(..)/ The one white as snow, the other black as coal./ And in turn they say 'I am your body', 'I am your soul'": there is no peace, there is no truth, all things known are on the near side of knowledge. The great strength of poetry consists of the absence of interpretations, in the fact that it sticks to the wholeness of reality, to the pure knowledge of experience, in the liberating modesty of its voice: the poet gives shape to what he hears and sees. And this is Peter Russell's own—Pascalian—challenge: that is to speak, as always has been done since the beginning of time, in deference to reason and faith, of that which man does not know, of that which most profoundly is our life. "The sweet river flows down to the sea/ And the wind blows round the hill": by tracing the river back to its source and listening to the wind poetry is at the service of man.

Franco Loi

original Italian text Onorare l'Ignoto

first printed in The Road to Parnassus: Homage to Peter Russell on his seventy-fifth birthday

Ed. James Hogg University of Salzburg Press 1996

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Peter George Russell

Pian di Scò

28 August 1996

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Peter Russell:
The Forgotten Voice

by
Franco Loi

(*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 31st July 1991)

“My first poems appeared in the reviews in 1939 and my first book of poetry in 1944. Since then, there have appeared over thirty volumes of my poetry, some prose works, hundreds of articles, translations into various languages, as well as monographs and numerous essays and articles about my work. I have given lectures and poetry readings of my own work in more than a hundred universities, and in radio transmissions in England, the U.S.A., France, Italy, Germany, [ex-]Yugoslavia and Iran, always in the local language. To the reader, this may sound like a success story, but it is not. At seventy years of age, merely to survive, I am forced to give private lessons and extra tuition at an elementary level because my work in the field of literature brings little or no recompense.”

I present this short testimony as an introduction to the work of Peter Russell, an English poet whose work has impressed me greatly, and whose words tell us a great deal about the present state of civilisation and the scarce consideration which is and always has been, accorded to poetry.

We are ever-prepared to condone violence, and we reward political banditry with honours—yet to poetry we offer only poverty and exile.

Teorie ed altre Liriche has just been published in Rome by Mancosu Editore. It is a collection of Peter Russell's poems written between December 1963 and September 1986.

One evening, whilst visiting Vittoria Palazzo, I was fortunate enough to hear a reading of one of Russell's greatest poems, and I recognise in this latest collection 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.

*'Run, run, on all sides
The forest's burning
Fire rings the frightened beasts
at every turning.'*

[taken from *A Forest Fire*]

*'I carry my own darkness within me
As I walk in the brightness of day;
A humpback or another deformity
Would get less in my way..*

*What I would like's the time that all the sand
In all the world would take to disappear*

*Through' this small hourglass. I could bear
This cloud of darkness that's in me,
This hump, these horns, this mat of hair,
Had I but Time, to set me free.'*

[taken from *Monster*]

Russell never stumbles or hesitates in his writing. 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. Every poet must transcend his own weakness and, like Homer, wring from the darkness of the self and of the world, greater realities and hidden truths. It is not by chance that this book opens with a dedication to

*'Blind Homer, sniggered at by the ignorant soldiery
Invented Olympus, propped among the mules;
And Greece exploded into golden flames, and Europe
Slowly grew out of his long hexameters...'*

Even today, Europe derides poets, and consigns poetry to the dustbin of history, so we should be grateful to Peter Russell who, among the fragments of our consciousness, in the face of the violence, the fire which 'rings the frightened beasts' and stifles free spirits, contrives to mediate between reason and the secret order of things, to continue the ancient dialogue, and make sense of our ravaged existence.

Even if

*'Reason and will have petrified.
Alas, she's turning into ice.
The Gorgon's gaze has seized the Bride...'*

the poet reiterates his prayer,

*'Pray God, my friend, I'm telling lies!
Pray God, my friend, I'm telling lies...'*

[taken from *The Secret Bride*]

A very human pity for the horrors of the mind.

Franco Loi

*translated from the Italian by
Penelope Bostan*

PREFACE
to the Italian version
of Peter Russell's

My Wild Heart

by
Leonello Rabatti

One is constantly aware of the limitations of translation when faced with poetry as "musical" as that of Peter Russell. The fine balance between the intellectual substratum and the melodic quality of the stanzaic rhythms in the original is not easily reproduced in Italian--a language which, of necessity, tends to rigidify the musicality of the English verse, accentuating the intellectual, cerebral element. The range of references is so vast that the "breath" of the verses often opens itself to a cosmic dimension, adding up to an integral vision of an "ultratemporality" within which the contrasts arising from rationality and intellect converge.

The most striking element in the Italian translations of Russell's poetry is the constant tension which, beginning internally, condenses, through the intellect, an enormous wealth of cultural material and finally resolves itself in the verse. Russell himself insists that the poet must "feel" before the form "declares itself" and the "content issues in a storm".

At times, the mechanism which produces the poetry is very obviously based upon contrasts, upon clear geometrical opposites (see *The Two Birds*, *My Burning Heart* and *Devastation*) leading to a seemingly deliberate transgression of current logic (attained through a series of "conceptual oxymorons") in the name of a higher (or more profound!) logic, within which the opposite extremes converge. At other times, the poet distances himself from the natural human impulse towards suffering, which he seems almost to visualise in a sort of poetic exorcism (see *Three Songs* "I hang my sorrows in the air...")

Russell's intellectualism, at times almost didactic, is sometimes very apparent, and contains the most brilliant philosophical connotations as in, for example, *Le Trucheman des Boulimies* and *In a Suburban Garden*, where the poet expounds his refusal to accept cold scientific rationality, intellectualism untempered by the fire of Love, because

"The world of solid things/ Fades into unreality/ When analysed by science."

and further,

"Persisting marvel escapes the lattice of thought,
In eyes' diapositive cannot be caught.
She is above description. Each attempt
Circumscribes not her but her descriptions'
Pale..."

Intellectual passion must, therefore, be sublimated, it must lose itself in the "inexpressible", to provide, not a convenient mystical bolthole, but a "tangible" ineffability, lit up by Love. And it is in this union of the physically concrete and the mystically spiritual, this effort to evidentiate the inexpressible, to visualise the intangible, where we find Russell's poetic strength. The essence of our earthly transit is so wonderfully expressed in the symbolic poem *Amore Mistico Palese* in

which, even in the title, two opposites are harmonised within the sphere of love; physicality and spirituality are dissolved in the sentiment of Love, for the sake of which we are prepared to lift our bodily veil, uncovering

"...inner worlds/ Secretly manifest..."

and

"...brighter light from darkness that is golden/
Issues precipitous in talking silences."

This ultrareal, transcendent dimension, superior to accepted external forms and attainable only through Love, which fertilises and beautifies matter and reveals hidden inner worlds, is a recurrent theme in Peter Russell's poetry and probably represents its nucleus. The poetic alchemy makes use of the convention, the "physicality" of language, as a representative instrument, allusive of an "other", integrative, dimension. The music of the verse breaks down the restrictive barriers of verbal rationality, it dissolves and then reconstitutes them, harmonising, pacifying. Herein lies the symbolism of the magnificent *Ninna Nanna*, a description of poetic "incubation", the state of latent inspiration which precedes the choice of poetic form; the form within which the poetic "feel" is reordered, and which sets consciousness and intellect to work on the chaos of the subconscious. Eventually, the whole is modulated into verse, like a fledgling which comes cheeping out of its flimsy shell and, once encircled by the solid armour of language, actuates the melodic, golden laws of Harmony, enriching "the Soul's effects and cause;". "Mysterious Time, Nature's eternal Pause..." Indeed, here is poetry describing its own inception. The mystery of the poetic act is contemporaneously revealed and concealed, because it is the poetry itself which exposes the mechanism which frees it: it is both Poetry and Metapoetry. We witness a sort of miraculous fusion of clear didactic intellect and the musicality of the verse, which is true poetry, but poetry "from the intellect" and "in the intellect", poetry which celebrates its own genesis. Once again, extreme opposites unite and merge.

The section dedicated to Manuela, a mysterious female figure who appeared to the poet in his dreams for nine consecutive nights, can be defined as a slow sedimentation of the "real" through the evocative language of poetry. On the first occasion, the figure is ephemeral, inconsistent, her essence hazy, wholly immersed in a sort of undifferentiated "Uroboros", evoking the oneiric magma which seems to have borne her, and back into which she intends to go after her self-destruction. She hides from her own reality, refusing interlocution, but in so doing she gives herself shape and substance "in" the poetic language. Her reality lies in her refusal, in her obstinate reserve "expressed" in repeated denials. Manuela "knows" that "solidity" is death; she feels reality calling upon her but she refuses it, escaping into indifference.

The hours "torment" her, she feels touched by the temporal flow and she is aware of the cruel transience of her existence. She feels life as a dissolving flow, and she suppresses "consciousness". On the fourth night, she tells the poet that she has prayed to the "Unknown God". This prayer would seem to be her key to the door of human reality, although she still maintains that she is "indifferent" and dead to life. At this point she seems to find herself suspended between real and unreal, human and not-human, wondering whether or not to live. On the fifth night, she is showing the first signs of physicality, and realises that her ethereality and purity can survive even in impure terrestrial reality, full of mud and dung. However, she is irresolute and recalcitrant; she still clings to the dying flame of her origins, refusing the gifts of human life which so attract her.

On the sixth night, however, we see her embrace life and, simultaneously, become aware of time ("The days consist of twirling clocks—") and space, bringing, inevitably, an awareness of death and the transitory nature of things. She is, finally, "alive", and the taste of life "burns" her mouth.

Consciousness, reality, and death hurl her into time, a time which assumes mythological connotations. Her memory returns, and with it the echo of an old enchantment which turned her into an almost legendary underwater creature, closed alone inside a vitreous, aquatic silence. On the ninth, and last, night, Manuela completes her circular journey in the mind of the poet who has dreamed her into reality. In a fascinating interchange, which seems both linear and pluri-levelled, Manuela knows that she exists only in the poet's mind, that she has materialised in his dream. Real and unreal, rational and irrational have touched each other. The figure has taken on reality and "shape" through the words which she herself has suggested to the poet. For the poet, too, the dream represents a "no-man's land" for the bringing together of two dimensions with individual but intertwined realities. Manuela steps into the poet's mind for the last time from the "Sunken Cathedral", and observes the fire that burns there with "a red phoenix in it/ Spreading his wings" (a symbol of poetic creation?). Then she disappears and returns to her own world, after telling the poet that she too has dreamed his reality from her own dimension.

Once again, the strength of the poetic language has created an "other" reality, throwing new light upon prevailing, conventional rationality and "solidifying" the ineffable. The intellect, illuminated by Love, has pushed back the frontiers of rational consciousness and, by its extraordinary openness, has created a sense of something greater and more universal.

Perhaps it is in this supreme effort that our future lies: poetry points the way to a widening of rational consciousness inviting us to abandon the worn limitations of our blinkered and utilitarian intelligence, our selfish preoccupation with our own egos, and try, as far as we are able, to refine and develop our humanity. Poetry opens the doors to Utopia--perhaps the doors to "true" reality.

*Leonello Rabatti
Pian di Scò, 1994*

*translated from the Italian by
Penelope Bostan*

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THE POETRY OF PETER RUSSELL

The poems by Peter Russell, which from time to time have featured in Pomezia-Notizie and its supplement, were taken from his unpublished work "My Wild Heart" (Il Cuore Mio Selvaggio). However, we would like to bring to the attention of our readers another of his works, "Teorie e Altre Liriche". It is elegantly printed by Carlo Mancosu, and includes more than fifty compositions in the original English text, with their accurate Italian translation by Pier-Franco Donovan on the opposite page. Furthermore, there is a rich introduction by Russell himself as well as inspired annotation with no shortage of barbed references to our powerful, or at least once-powerful politicians. The volume, comprising 242 pages and costing L36,000, was completed in 1990, but "La Poesia (vera)", according to the author, "Non marcisce come le patate" (Real poetry does not go bad, like potatoes do.)

This is lyric poetry bursting with echoes of ancestry by way of its classic decorum, the fluidity of language, the depth and morality of content and universality of the themes with which it deals. It is far from the usual clichés of modern poetry. Science and humanism are combined because classicism, the theories of Darwin and the discoveries and difficulties of our times - including the environment - have much in common and go well together. To illustrate, consider how the destruction of a wood through fire is to the animals what the Great Fire of Rome was to the world and civilisation. The poetry is compelling, dense with meaning and layered like the earth, from which remains from thousands of years ago are continually being brought to the surface. On the mere four lines of the poem "Blind Homer" one might easily compose a whole treatise, given its great suggestivity and the importance which such poems as the Iliad and the Odyssey have had over the centuries for the growth of Greece and the West as a whole, to say nothing of the union and fraternisation of peoples? The poem dedicated to Lydia Pasternak includes, among other things, the history of Eastern Europe and Asia, of Russia in particular, and through its numerous metaphors such as snow, the long sleep and sudden awakenings of the peoples from these lands, their periods of apparent quiet (hibernation) and disquiet, it becomes clear, as Russell confirms, that

"Fòr Nature, shaping histories,
Is always sharpening her claws".

And what of the cry of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon - "Murderess and Murdered" at the foot of the hill of Mycenae? This may well be the example that instinctually jumps to the minds of every one of us, upon the re-evocation of the place and a knowledge of history, and yet it is the extraordinary capacity of the poet that determines whether such a cry is to sink deep into our hearts and disturb us, whether it is to have limitless enormity, and whether in its power one is to raise to heaven that

"cry
Beneath the dry and bony mountain
Heaving toward the sky".

Venice plays all of its charm in history and beauty. In this strange, eternal, island-ship of the soul, Russell feels he is a human among humans, and that his gaze can roam freely across the waters of canal and sea, or off towards far-distant lands where

"the eagle patrols the highlands".

On this journey,

"over the water, on the Veneto
The Palladian villas, and gardens"

are to be found immersed in solitude, born of the hope for tranquillity and peace, while in the world there was, and is, nothing but war and men who "are making bombs" and whose spirit "hardens".

Russell's poetry is vast and undulating like great rivers and oceans in which our minds can sink themselves. Today, it is often necessary to read entire collections in order to pick up a vague, wandering concept at the end, but with Russell, a single composition or even a mere verse can be enough for one to feel more than satisfied, full to the brim, to the point of overflowing, with the compelling and irrepressible urge to speak, to create and to do. Russell's poetry is, therefore, constant suggestion and ferment.

His classicism is not stale, as it is open to the present, to history, and to science in which it involves the whole Foscolian concept of "bella d'erbe famiglia e d'animali". Prometheus, even though he does not deny his ancient divinity, marries the new, which is incarnate in the poet:

"I never stole the Gods' own fire
But being a poet set men free -
It's not the Gods' , but mens', fierce ire
That chains me up and tortures me".

We must not think, however, that all of his poetry is of such an Olympian tone. In Russell's work, fortunately, there is also irony and entertainment, and double meanings abound.

We have sought to bring to the surface a few nuggets from the mine which is Theories and Other Lyrics, in which are buried all the values which give sense first to life in general, and then to civilisation, and the inner man, ranging from the social to the divine. Russell's is a piety far from formal, and closer to mysticism and prophesy, which is the chant of the spirit and the universe together, because the Divine is poetry (and vice-versa).

Domenico DeFelice, Rome
translated from the Italian
(Pomezie-Notizie, December 1995)

by Laura Simmons

AGENDA

A TRIBUTE TO PETER RUSSELL

Fourteen Poems
(Seven from Quintilius)

Essays, etc. by Dana Gioia,
Peter Jay, Roland John,
Peter Levi, W.S. Milne,
Glyn Pursglove, Kathleen
Raine, Dachine Rainer,
Stephen Romer, Tom Scott,
W.G. Shepherd and Charles
Tomlinson



AN ANTHOLOGY OF 93 NEW POEMS

MARIUS KOCIEJOWSKI: *Salvatore Giuliano* (A Long Poem)

ALAN MASSEY: *Pastorale II*

DONALD DAVIE: *The Dabchik and the Doody* (A Lampoon)

Groups of Poems by John Burnside, Heather Buck, Donald Hall,
Michael Hamburger, Martha Kapos, Peter Levi, and William Neill.

Also poems by Wolfgang Bächler, Peter Dale, James Laughlin,
Moelwyn Merchant, Tom Scott, R.S. Thomas, Christopher Truman
and many others.

A Review Supplement

Alan Wall on Christopher Logue, Thomas Lynch, Paul Muldoon,
Peter Reading, etc.

Patricia McCarthy on John Burnside and C.H. Sisson

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

VISION AND SPLEEN

Venice Poems 1965 by Peter Russell. University of Salzburg. 332pp.; £9.95
"Life is a celebration not a search for success": *Studies in the Poetry of Peter Russell* by Anthony L. Johnson. University of Salzburg. 207pp; £8.95.

Venice Poems 1965 is the latest in the series of retrospective volumes—a kind of complete poetical works in instalments—surveying the work of Peter Russell which have been published by the University of Salzburg. Russell is an extraordinarily prolific poet. The more than 300 hundred pages of this volume contain 208 poems, all dated between 20th November 1964 and 31st December 1965! (Many are previously unpublished). Such an output, however remarkable, obviously has some problematic implications. The sheer quantity of Russell's work has, no doubt, had something to do with the slowness of criticism to come to anything like a full appreciation of his achievement (combine such abundance with an innate lyricism and a commitment to the symbolism of the esoteric tradition and you have the perfect recipe for not being a fashionable English poet in the second half of the twentieth century!). Naturally such an output will be seriously uneven—Peter Russell's Introduction to this current volume declares that "a large quantity of poems is absolutely no testimony of value, seriousness or quality, of course. Since this volume is something like a contribution to a collected edition of my "works" I make no apology for there being in it many pieces of second, third, or even fourth rate". For readers already interested in Russell it is obviously well worth having all this material—even the slightest and most flawed pieces can throw light on the best work. But a volume such as this doesn't make the most inviting entry to Russell's poetry for the uncommitted reader. It would be highly desirable to have—not instead of, but alongside, these retrospective collections—an updated and expanded Selected Poems (a revised, and larger, version of *All for the Wolves* (1984)).

In common with its predecessors, *Venice Poems* contains a long (45 pages) Introduction by the poet. These introductions are, characteristically, compounds of autobiography, poetic theory and miscellaneous animadversions on the way of the world. Provocative, deeply thought-provoking, learned, comic, wise, silly—the Introduction to *Venice Poems* is a virtuoso performance. The poems that follow are very various—in kind as well as quality. The best fall into three main categories: quatrain poems, sonnets, and 'contemplations'. Many of Russell's poems in quatrains were later to be collected in the bilingual volume *Teorie e Altre Liriche* (Rome, 1990). In *Venice Poems* this strand of Russell's output is represented by poems such as 'The Kestrel in Berlin' (at least that's what it is called here—in *Teorie* it appeared as 'Der Turmfalke'), 'A Forest Fire', and the beautiful and resonant lyric whose first stanza I cannot resist quoting:

I lay in fetters linked with bronze,
I begged a gift of the White Dove: -
The silver chains that bind the swans,
The golden chain that binds my love.

(Another case of re-titling: previously published as 'The Golden Chain'—and as such giving its name to *The Golden Chain* in 1970—it is here under the title of 'The White Dove'). Russell's multitudinous sonnets remain to be collected. Indeed, they are so many one is reminded of Sir Egerton Brydges who wrote more than two thousand in three years! (They remain in manuscript in the British Library). Fortunately, Russell's are better than those of Brydges, and the best—such as 'Winter in Venice'—are very good indeed. In referring to some of the poems in *Venice Poems* as 'contemplations', I am borrowing a term Russell used in the Introduction to *Elemental Discourses* (1981) to describe poems intended as "sacred spaces cut out of the chaos of the profane consciousness, spaces in which to consider and observe, to concentrate the mind and to come nearer to an understanding of the realities of existence". The most successful of the long contemplative poems in *Venice Poems*, such as 'Dawn Thoughts of Callimachus' or (with slightly more reservation) 'The Living Fire' are remarkable in their lyric sweep and intellectual scope; elsewhere poetic ambition sometimes founders amongst philosophical diction. But there is plenty in *Venice Poems* to reward all who have a taste for that visionary English tradition which runs through, say, Spenser, Blake, Shelley and Yeats. Russell's invocation, which constitutes 'Proemion' (to *Elemental Discourses*, and here reprinted), is one that all could have shared in:

Give me, immortal daughters, for the hours of flight
The cap of darkness and the winged swift sandals;
The robe, and that bright sword
The lightning chronicles;
Echoes upon the wind of other journeys,
Your flying words that dart between the layers of space,
And everywhere the fire composing heavy blood
Into constrained hymns of the brute creation;
And let me utter the whole universe's matter.

Not everything in *Venice Poems* is pitched at that level. There's plenty which is much more down to earth. Many of the epigrams included—not all of which perhaps merited preservation and collection—are positively scabrous. A poet so capable of both grandeur and bawdry, of vision and spleen ("Dear Lady,—you who fondly think/ Your "circle"'s "an élite", —/ Let me tell you that you stink/ Worse than Allen Ginsberg's feet" ('To A Society Lady')) is one that all seriously interested in the art should get to know.

A brief—but warm—welcome to Anthony Johnson's four-part volume on Russell's work. The first two sections are revised and expanded versions of previously published readings of two of Russell's poems ('Four Snowmen and a Fifth' and 'Smoke'); the third is a study of *Metameipseis Noerai*, through which Johnson seeks to elucidate the strategies of Russell's remarkable Quintilius poems; the last is a long interview with Russell, conducted in July 1994. Everywhere there are both local insights and larger perceptions. Some readers may perhaps find Johnson's critical diction (he is well steeped in modern critical theory, but in no sense confined by it) a little forbidding; if so, they are strongly urged to persist; the rewards of doing so are substantial. This is the first single-author study (as opposed to collaborative volumes) to be devoted to Russell's work. It will surely not be the last; Johnson has set a high standard for whoever comes after him.

GLYN PURSGLOVE

from OUTPOSTS 182 (1996)

LENNY EMMANUEL

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Just recently, between the intermittent chaos of a business trip to New Orleans, two volumes of poetry, Peter Russell's *Berlin-Tegel 1964*¹ and the late Stephen Spender's *Dolphins*² saved me from Omar's 'willy-nilly 'universe and the 'Cypress slender Minister of Wine.' I was in New Orleans for a College of American Pathologists seminar, which was supposed advantageously to offer an opportunity to purchase a residence in the *Quarters* to escape finally the cold winter snows of Indiana and the North in general. Either because I was tired of pathologists who do not want to listen to business principles or because dealing with realtors is worse than going to the dentist, I found myself during every spare moment escaping into Peter Russell's and Sir Stephen Spender's poetry.

Do I dare say that Russell's Introduction is more interesting than the poetry? I'm not even an enthusiastic fan of Pound, but the Introduction which is so much about Pound is extraordinarily fascinating. I was hooked immediately with Russell's struggle between the magnificently luring Nigerian girl and the benevolent Gitta, for who has not been there at one time or another. And Russell tantalises his reader not only with the Gitta affair and Berlin, but his Pound extravaganza, especially toward the end when the old man tapped on Russell's door, with a 'bunch of letters and other documents,' actually trying, apparently to ask for advice as to how to finish *The Cantos*, even more worried perhaps as to how to express his gratitude toward and his feelings for Olga Rudge. As astonishing was Russell's quoting Pound saying 'A man must have something to say out of himself, over and above the facts he's collected and sorted. This is the important thing.'

Nevertheless, given that a poet must have 'something to say,' in my opinion Russell's book, so very interesting regardless,

still is an example of the intellect taking over the poem. Quite simply, Russell is brilliant, yet he is best as in "Clair de Lune," when he does not really *know* completely what he is doing, 'You stand in the cloister fingering roses/Where the light is the ice and the darkness is of the depths/And your voice is a silver thread,' and worse when perfect rhyme and the intellect take over, as in 'Always my soul seeks the violet flame .../It is a misnamed soul that wants a name/And travels far in search of opposites', or 'You, man, going down the road/Have you got a soul?/A jewel gleams inside the toad—/My heart's a glowing coal' or in the long and discursive, philosophical and didactic poems such as 'To conquer the universe a man must conquer himself/Reconcile knowledge with feeling/And establish new harmonies between himself and Nature' in a "Message to Earth". And all too often Russell's endings of poems just dapple off with inadequate climaxes, even in the lovely and witty "Missing a Bus", from the loveable wit in 'The flowering almond by the garden gate/Reminds me that I'm late' to the very weak ending of 'What's Nature but the Poet's Mind?— /O you, whom the storm refreshes' or the anticlimactic 'And the waters and clouds resume intensively/Their perpetual changes' in the poem "Echo".

Though merely a recent fan of Russell, I believe he is at his best in the relatively short poem, the poem within say twenty-five or so lines as in "Girl Breaking Eggs", "Agamemnon in Hades", "Splenetics", or the untitled sonnets such as 'Old Age I dread....' In any case, Russell certainly has a voice, 'The New American poetry/Is full of shit/And is the better/For it,' a colossal sympathy for the poetic spirit as in "Prometheus" with that last quatrain, interestingly enough very climatic in the persona of Prometheus,

I never stole the Gods' own fire
But being a poet set men free—
It's not the Gods' but men's fierce ire
That chains me up and tortures me.

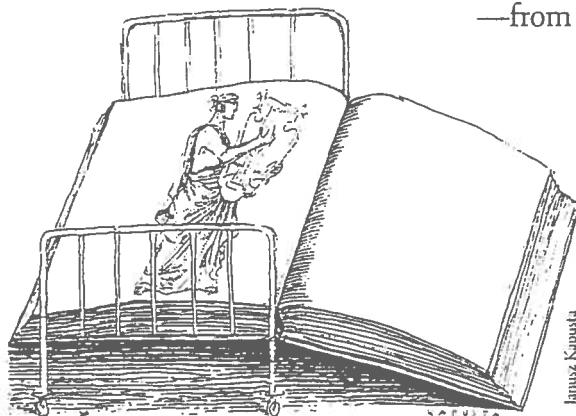
and a mind that is bombarded with flashing light, like fireflies from the dark, which keep us from Omar's 'Annihilation's Waste'; and one, certainly cannot leave Russell by the same door as in he went.

For Love of the Muse

by Stacey Kors

*"All that matters now is poetry
In which the feeling is the thought."*

—from "Paysages Legendaires"



When writing about the poet Peter Russell, it is hard to know where to begin. First, there is the matter of his prolificness, and the sheer vastness of his *oeuvre*: Russell, who describes poetry as being "dangerously near the natural functions for me," has published well over 30 volumes of verse and has written enough poems to fill scores of others. Then there is the extraordinary diversity of this poetry: from works that range in length from a handful of lines to hundreds of pages (his unpublished epic—ironically titled *Ephemeron*—is over 2,000 manuscript pages long), and vary in style from free verse to formalist, from the scabrous epigrams found in his book *Malice Aforethought* to the lush, sweeping lyrics that suffuse *The Golden Chain* and *Theories*. As Russell remarks in his poem "My Voices":

How many voices tell in me,
I cannot say how many call
Night and day insistently,
Or distinguish them at all.

Uncommon such diversity may be; haphazard it is not—for Russell's is a case where the work faithfully mirrors the man, who is at once romantic and contemptuous, serious and silly, simple and extraordinarily complex. The quality of this work, like Russell's character, may not always be consistent; but the end result, in either case, remains consistently engaging.

A British poet of Irish descent, Peter Russell was born in Bristol, England, in 1921, and by age three—"before I knew my alphabet"—had already decided that he wanted to be a poet "or nothing." After serving in the Royal Artillery during World War II, Russell began publishing poetry, critical articles, and interviews in a number of American and English reviews, and in 1949 founded *Nine*, a small, London-based poetry magazine that attracted the attention of both T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Although the editor of a literary review for seven years, Russell never felt at home in the "professional establishment world" of

academics and *litterati*; nor did his steadfast belief in "*ideas*, not ideologies; *original thought*, not conformity," do much to ingratiate him at a time when the Movement poets (like Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis) were beginning to take hold in England. Russell's feelings of estrangement from the London poetry scene in the 1950's were furthered by a move from the city to the countryside, the acquisition and management of an antiquarian bookstore and small poetry press, and the general demands accompanying family life. During this period of what he calls "practical concerns," Russell worked long hours in an effort to make ends meet; in that time, he wrote virtually no poetry.

Russell ended up being no better a businessman than a conformist: by 1963 the bookstore had failed—along, unfortunately, with his marriage. Bereft of both emotional and financial ties to England, and with no love lost between him and the then-reigning *cognoscenti*, Russell moved to Berlin and devoted himself entirely to his poetry. After an intense year of writing, Russell felt that he "had at last become a real poet." Continuing a time-honored tradition, he soon took up residence in Italy, the adopted home of Shelley, Keats, Byron, and numerous other English poets before him:

Elizabeth Barret, Arthur Hugh Clough, W.S. Landor
Lie in the English cemetery, ghosts of our own
In the warm turf tufted with cypresses: And
The trams clatter by—they are closing the shops
For the afternoon. Is this a silence or an unheard
Rumble of innumerable unseen encounters
In the world below? Not a sound disturbs
The utterly still air silent up here.

—from "Florence"

Insatiably curious about the world around him, Peter Russell is always learning something new, whether studying up on Sanskrit or feasting upon the music of Mozart and Monteverdi. Russell's passion for knowledge and keen intellect permeate his poetry, which is peppered with references to science, art, history, linguistics, and literature—including rather obscure allusions to classical Greek, ancient Oriental, and medieval Islamic

Stacey Kors is a freelance writer in New York. She is a contributing editor to *Opera Monthly* and writes regularly for *The Opera Quarterly* and *Stagebill*.

texts. "I like poetry that brings out in me as reader the maximum awareness of as much as the mind can comprehend," explains Russell, who firmly believes that "a hidden vein of intellectuality (genuine) needs to be present even in a comparatively simple lyric."

Given his intense interest in music, and natural affinity for the musical, it is not surprising that lyric poetry is Russell's strength. Russell once wrote that "The finished result of a good poem should be, phrase by phrase, *at least as compelling as music*"; and indeed, at its best his poetry is filled with verses that are richly melodic, verses that create, and are accompanied, by their own music. Such lyricism is manifest in Russell's work regardless of the mood conveyed, be it gravely portentous:

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.
—from "The Fear of War"

or playful and romantic:

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.
—from "Theorem"

Even his scathing epigrams have a sonorous quality about them. Take, for example, "Creeping Professors," one of Russell's many jabs at academia:

Man and the creeping beasts may seem diverse—
The reptiles are not really very *bright*;
Professors *seem* intelligent, all right—
Until they talk of poetry,—or verse.
The creeping *beasts* are higher in the scale
Of shining Justice when our faults are weighed:
Our *Faculties* a pallid cavalcade,—
But creeping bipeds are beyond the *pale*.

Or "Avant Garde," his caustic commentary on popular artistic trends:

The avant garde keeps moving crab-like forward
Hard on the tail of commerce, films and ads;
It's creeping slowly 1934-ward
On Disney's lizard-tail, and other 'thirties fads . . .

Like a true linguist, Russell's preternatural sensitivity to the musicality of language is far from restricted to his native tongue, as is exhibited through his poetic translations. A com-

petent speaker of a dozen different languages, Russell has translated works in everything from modern Russian (Russell was an early translator of Osip Mandelstam and Alexander Blok) to ancient Persian and Greek, from German, Spanish, French, and Italian to African and Slavonic dialects. As noted by the English poet and critic Kathleen Raine, Russell—much in the style of his mentor Ezra Pound—considers words "a living medium," and he possesses a remarkable gift for overcoming the language limitations inherent in translation to capture skillfully the essence of a particular culture or period, however remote from our view.

One sees this most clearly in Russell's translations of the 4th-century Latin poet, Cittinus Aurelianus Quintilius, who, in recognition of the madness that beset him near the end of his life, was dubbed "Stultus" ("a fool") by late antiquity. The bulk of poems now available to us were discovered accidentally by a Nicaraguan engineer who, while digging for potash near the site of the ancient Aphrodisiapolis, stumbled upon a massive papyrus containing dozens of the ancient poet's elegies, as well as fragments of other works.

As sole translator of the poetry of Quintilius, Russell, who feels a certain kinship with this outspoken and somewhat ostracized Roman elegist, has put much labor and love into this endeavor; it is, in fact, his most comprehensive translation project to date, complete with detailed exegetical notes that offer the reader further insight into the sociocultural setting out of which Quintilius and his work emerged. Witnessing the operatic spectacle of an empire in decline, Quintilius became a sort of self-proclaimed prophet-commentator of the times, his poetry a medium for both apocalyptic vision and political satire:

The Lyceum's become truly a Wolf Fold, a shut shop to
screaming.
The Academy closed by idolatrous bigots, I see it
coming . . .
Burn down the libraries, make off with the gold!

Ah well, I may be wrong, and Rome, as Claudian says,
Will last for ever, but seeing these fruits in our
Universities
Serving the barbarians' ends, personally I consider
Us doomed . . .

. . . Rome's a *bordello*.
An Emperor's sister who's having it off with her steward
Is conspiring to topple Augustus her brother,
And found out, has sent for aid to the Huns.
Take it or leave it. The Angel has spoken.

Like Russell, Quintilius has many sides which suffuse his poetry. At one moment he can be offensive and off-color, quick in his condemnations of half-baked egalitarians, bureaucrats, upstart theologians, and weak-minded militarists; at another, his sentiments take on the tone of a Keatsian nature ode:

Me indeed, above all, may the sweet Muses welcome
with gifts,
(Whose sacred emblems driven by absorbing love I
bear);
To me, their servant, may they show the ways of Heaven
and the stars,
Sun's daily setting, and the Moon's diverse phases;

The cause of earthquakes; and the force that makes
 Ocean heave
 Breaking its barriers now, now sinking in its allotted
 basin;
 Why it is that Winter's suns hasten so to dip themselves
 Beneath the sea; and what delay detains the tardy nights.
 Thy countryside and all Thy running streams
 Be my delight, sweet Goddesses; and let me love
 Thy waters and secluded woods.

What is most intriguing about this obscure character from ancient history is that, although born in A.D. 390, he was not conceived until the late 1940's—in Russell's fecund imagination. Like John Shade in Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, Quintilius is a fictional poet, originally inspired by poet and philosopher George Santayana (also the inspiration for Wallace Stevens' "Old Philosopher in Rome"). With Russell's attention to scholarly detail—including a fabricated biographer—Quintilius is a brilliantly developed and executed artistic ruse; and for someone whose preferred models for poetry are Dante, Petrarch, and the ancient Greeks, he is the perfect poetic exercise as well.

Although Quintilius is an invention of Russell's fancy, one cannot really say that Russell writes these poems: they are, rather, an unusual sort of creative translation, where Quintilius is the brash, uninhibited, pleasure-seeking poet of Russell's id, as "translated" by Russell's ego. Words flow "from the pen of Quintilius," not from Russell himself—in fact, in the preface to *The Elegies of Quintilius*, we are told that "the translator has found it necessary to excise several lines which are too raw even for these relaxed days." It is difficult to imagine what these lines might contain, considering the extreme explicitness of some of the ones he has chosen to "leave in." A bit of coarse language, however, should not affect one's judgment of the quality of these poems, which are imaginative, intelligent, and created with good humor. At times, their creed is reminiscent of Pound's *Canto XIV*, in which the true "perverters of language" are defined as those "who have set money-lust / Before the pleasures of the senses." A crime, indeed, that neither Quintilius nor Russell could ever seriously be accused of.

In recent years, Peter Russell has faced more than his share of hardships. In March 1990, a fire damaged Russell's Tuscan farmhouse, razing the poet's vast personal archive of rare books, diaries, essays, and manuscripts, as well as holographs by Montale, Quasimodo, Ungaretti, Pound, and Eliot. Uninsured and impoverished, Russell moved to a converted turbine shed—lovingly referred to as "La Turbina"—with his teenage son, Peter George. In the fall of 1992, while Russell was attending a poetry seminar in Salzburg, torrential rains and mudslides flooded his new home, destroying the remains of his library, his manuscripts, and the copies of numerous early volumes of his work that he had reprinted earlier that year. In a recent interview with William Oxley, Russell took a surprisingly philosophical approach to his recurrent losses: "The Muses have done me the favour of abstracting, or burning, or flooding much of what I've written. They have permitted me to finish off a certain proportion of what I've done, and I'm thankful for that."

For a few months, Russell and his mud-clogged typewriter found shelter in a small spare room in the home of the village priest, while Peter George was cared for by a local family. But the absence of his son, combined with a general sense of dis-

placement, soon made such accommodations unbearable, and Russell returned with Peter George to La Turbina early in 1993, even though its rooms were still buried under several inches of mud.

It is from here that Russell writes his poems, as well as prepares and produces *Marginalia*, "an occasional review combining lyric and satiric poetry with acerbic observations on the anti-poetic scene." Conceived in 1990, *Marginalia's* circulation has grown from a few dozen to 2,000 copies, which Russell sends out to friends and admirers *gratis* (donations appreciated) even though he rarely has enough money to cover the cost of production and postage.

As paradoxical as Russell's editorial generosity may seem given his shaky economic footing, it is actually more shrewd than irresponsible: *Marginalia*—which regularly includes a list of the poet's books available for purchase—is Russell's way of keeping in touch with the poetry scene, keeping his ideas and poems circulating, if only in a small way. For although Russell may be a respected, prize-winning poet in Italy, he and his work have, over the years, been unjustly neglected by the English-speaking world.

There is, however, an even stronger force motivating Russell: simply put, writing, especially writing poetry, is something that Russell not only loves, but *needs* to do. Says Russell, "Poetry is to do with breathing. Breathing is life, *anima, pnuma*." He elaborates on this vital relationship in "Breaking Up?":

It is the final end of living,
 It is the only thing that counts;
 It is the finest form of giving—
 Give it your final ounce.


When broached by Russell's alter ego, this passionate commitment to the art seems more of a burden than a blessing:

For me, I must ply the vowed toils of the dedicated poet,
 Scholar and devotee of every Art and Science,
 And at all time attendant to the visiting Muse,
 —Knocked senseless and left hungry as I may be
 By hostile Fates and the murderous hands of men.

It is hard to say which better typifies Russell's point of view; doubtless, considering all he has endured over the years, both play a role. One can only hope that both man and the fates will eventually reverse their position and bestow upon Russell the recognition he deserves, while he is still able to enjoy it. ☞

Peter Russell's latest poems, trenchant essays, random musings, and polemical outbursts can be found in his periodic journal, *Marginalia*. The journal even offers excellent deals on rare and out-of-print books from Russell's personal library—including first-edition volumes by writers such as Ezra Pound, whom Russell knew personally, and numerous titles unavailable from any other source.

Marginalia comes out irregularly, with even numbers written in Italian and odd numbers in English. You can receive *Marginalia* for free, from the address below, but donations are appreciated.



Peter Russell
 "La Turbina"
 52026 Pian di Sco
 Prov. Arezzo, Italy

WATER TO OCEAN TO MOON

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

Peter Russell

MADRIGAL

The heart has strings attached, is rarely free,
The soul contains abundance of accords.
Spirit alone can make a melody
That sings itself in colour, sounds or words.
It springs on wings from out that secret source
Where feeling lulls yet blows at gale force,
And one can be oneself without remorse.

PETER RUSSELL

THE POET IN THE STREET

Great Pan is dead, the forest all forsook,
The Poets all now have that dead-pan look.

Peter Russell,

Pian di Scò,

10th October 1995

Peter Russell
52026 Pian di Scò, (Arezzo), Italia
Tel. & Fax 055 - 960 674

A series entitled *Poetry and Philosophy* at the Temenos Academy will include the following lectures this Spring:

PETER RUSSELL

Poetry as the Language of the Spirit
Tuesday 6th February 1996

Myth, Symbol and Apocalypse
Tuesday 13th February 1996

The Devaluation of all Values
Tuesday 20th February 1996

*

PROF GREVEL LINDOP

The Path of Poetry
Tuesday 5th March 1996

The Four-Storeyed Palace
Tuesday 19th March 1996

Venue: 14 Gloucester Gate, London NW1 (Camden Town Tube)

Time: 7.00 pm Admission: £5.00, £3.50 Concessions

Details: 0181 - 314 5896

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7.ii.96

Dear Peter

Thank you for a wonderful first lecture last night at Temenos. I am full of admiration for your ability to draw your great learning together into such a powerful and moving message about poetry, love and the human spirit. So I am very pleased that we have brought you to London to speak at Temenos. Let us hope people come again next week (it is not easy, sadly, to bring people together to hear about poetry in any numbers).

With my best wishes,

Stephen

(Stephen Overy,
Temenos Academy)

PETER RUSSELL

will be reading his poems
on Sunday, 3rd March, at 4pm
in Lecture Room 2, Christ
Church. (Entrance £2.50)

*'the heir of Ezra Pound, Eliot's "miglior fabbro", great
maestro of language...'* (Kathleen Raine).

'the last of the great modernists' (Thomas Fleming).

'at last, amongst so much rubbish, I have found a poet'
(Emanuele Occelli).

*'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...spiritual and
philosophical questions and the great mysteries...there can
be no doubt that this is one of the best poets of our time'*
(Tom Scott).

A Gourmet at Large

CLAUDIO PONZIO

OF HARRY'S BAR, VENICE

BY FRED FERRETTI

He recalls some of those he considers to be the best of his customers in his years behind the black marble. "Sean Connery comes in for the fine wines. He is a patient man because so many people want to talk with him. Former ambassador to Italy Maxwell Rabb was a regular customer. He always remembered me with a friendly greeting. A kind man. And Irving Wallace, whenever he came, gave me signed copies of his books." As important to Claudio, however, was Dr. Alberto Pigatti, a former Italian ambassador to Spain. "He lived on the Lido until he was eighty-seven, and came in every day for his glass of Port. And there was Peter Russell, a professor with a long, white beard, who died only a little while ago. He was an amazing man who knew seven different Italian dialects.

"He would arrive at six in the evening and sit under the painting of Torcello over there." He pointed at the wall. "He would smoke the cheapest Italian cigarettes and drink Martinis until eleven o'clock. I wondered how he could read, write, drink, and smoke at the same time. He was one of our great *signori*."

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Dance
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Education

Peter Russell
La Turbin
52026 Pian Di Sco
Prov Arezzo
ITALY

March 14th 1996

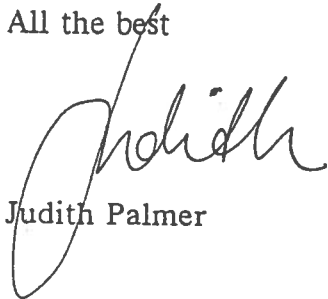
Dear Peter

Just to say thank you for coming to the Voice Box and reading so splendidly the other week. It was a great pleasure to meet you. I scarcely dare ask if you managed to make it back in one piece to find a house untroubled by earthquake, landslide or South Sea typhoon...

I hope Quintilius continues to fare well, and that like your faithful bird you will be back to visit us before too long.

With very best wishes, and heartfelt thanks from all in the literature department,

All the best



Judith Palmer



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Peter Russell

Alles ist beseelt



deutsche Übersetzungen
von

Charles Stünz

Peter Russell

Alles ist beseelt

Gedichte

zweisprachige Ausgabe

deutsche Übersetzungen
von

Charles Stünz

1. Auflage 1996

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