PETER RUSSELL

Peter Edward Lionel Russell
1913–2006

Professor Sir Peter Russell will be remembered as one of the great British scholars of the twentieth century.[1] Russell, who was King Alfonso XIII Professor of Spanish Studies at the University of Oxford from 1953 until his retirement in 1981, belongs to those who not only moved with equal facility between history and literature but also made lasting contributions to each both as scholar and teacher. In a career spanning over seventy years he produced seminal work in the fields of Spanish Medieval, Renaissance and Golden Age literature and culture, of the political and dynastic history of the Iberian Peninsula during the late fourteenth century, and of the Portuguese discovery of the African Atlantic together with the cultural and economic dimensions that attended it. To all of these he brought an intensely human and logical approach, the product not only of a vast and questing intellect but of a wealth of personal experience which made him very much more than a scholar and man of letters.

Though he rarely referred to it more than obliquely, Russell's service to his country both before and during the Second World War stands comparison with his academic career. Recruited into the secret service in the

[1] For this account use has been made of: (i) the four-page typescript memoir of his life up to 1953 (titled 'Peter Edward Lionel Russell', hereinafter 'PELR') which Russell deposited with the Academy in November 1992; (ii) Ian Michael, 'Sir Peter Russell (1913–2006)', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 83 (2006), 1133–44; (iii) obituaries in *The Independent* (by Alan Deyermond, 5 July 2006), *The Daily Telegraph* (by Jeremy Lawrance, 10 July 2006) and *The Guardian* (by Nigel Griffin, 22 August 2006); that in *The Times* (14 July 2006) was an abridgement of one written by the author; and (iv) items from Russell's papers in the author's care together with the author's memories and knowledge.

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mid-1930s, Russell was sent to Spain during the Civil War where tours with parties of undergraduates and research in local archives provided excellent cover for monitoring, among other things, the movements of Nationalist warships which had on several occasions interfered with the passage of British goods into Republican ports. This assignment almost cost him his life in August 1938 when he was arrested by the Guardia Civil photographing the cruiser *Canarias* from the Islas de Cíes in the Ría de Vigo. Russell's position was made the more precarious by the discovery that he was sharing the Hotel Atlántico in Vigo with officers of the German military whose presence in Spain was then officially denied—officers with whom he had dined on at least one occasion. Though facing execution following an interrogation with the Falange, he was released on the orders of Franco himself and after some difficulty obtaining exit papers made for the border town of Túy from where he gratefully crossed the Minho into Portugal. Russell would recall his march across the bridge with machine guns at his back as the longest of his life, but thereafter when the subject of Franco arose in conversation he was wont to recall how he owed his life to the Caudillo.

Russell returned to Oxford where the outbreak of the Second World War brought him into Military Intelligence, though it was not until the summer of 1940 that his service began in earnest. During July and August of that year Russell was involved in ushering the Duke and Duchess of Windsor from Estoril to the Bahamas where the former was installed as Governor for the duration. There were rumours, which Russell did little to dispel, that he was under orders to shoot them if they threatened to fall into German hands during their nightly visits to the casino at Estoril, though he enjoyed cordial relations with the Windsors and in later years would not brook too much criticism of them. Russell was subsequently involved in preparing the British occupation of the Canary Islands in the event that Franco allowed the Germans safe passage across Spain to capture Gibraltar, though it amused him to note that the plans were drawn up using outdated Admiralty charts from the late eighteenth century. After a few months kicking his heels in Oxford Russell was commissioned into the Intelligence Corps (IC) in December 1940 and began training with MI5, mainly at Oriel College where the IC had its wartime headquarters. This came to an abrupt halt in March 1941 when the car in which he was a passenger ran into a parked lorry in the blackout. Rushed to Oxford, Russell nearly died on the operating table in the Radcliffe Infirmary before spending four or five days unconscious. Reconstructive surgery in Basingstoke under the great New Zealand plastic surgeon Archibald McIndoe was

followed by convalescence at Harewood House, though Russell's injuries left him permanently scarred and thereafter required the use of a denture. No sooner had he been discharged in August than he was sent to Lochailort, the Commando and secret operations training centre on the west coast of Scotland. Still recuperating, he was severely beaten by former officers of the Shanghai Police during the part of his training intended to prepare him for the possibility of an enemy interrogation. Russell secured his return to Oxford within a week.

In late 1941 Russell was taken on by the Overseas Division of the Security Service (MI5) and in March 1942 appointed Security Coordination Officer in Jamaica, after which he practically never wore uniform. His duties ranged from examining the holds of ships calling at Kingston to the identification of possible German agents through interrogation. Many refugees from occupied Europe were passing through the Caribbean on their way to safety in Latin America or the United States and on one occasion Russell found himself interviewing a man who weeks earlier had been conversing with Goering in Berlin, the *Reichsmarschall* being susceptible to bribery in return for safe-conduct out of Germany. Russell's service also involved contact with Sir William Stephenson, the Canadian director of British Security Coordination (BSC) better known as 'the Man called Intrepid'. BSC was the umbrella organisation for the entire British intelligence effort in the Western Hemisphere, but Stephenson's zeal to eliminate certain individuals suspected of spying for the Axis brought him into conflict with station officers such as Russell who had to remind him that liquidation was not within MI5's remit. Promoted major, in 1943 Russell was sent to the Gold Coast where MI5 was engaged in security and counter-espionage activities against the Vichy French and German agents who were tracking convoys carrying minerals and foodstuffs from West Africa to Britain. Although based in Accra, Russell's beat included all the then British colonies in West Africa and entailed visits to the French colonies and the Belgian Congo, through many of which he made prolonged journeys by car. The posting was of value to his subsequent research and in his last major work Russell paid tribute to the RAF pilots who had flown him to and over many of the places which loomed large in the Portuguese reconnaissance of Guinea during the fifteenth century.[2]

Russell's final assignment was to the Far East in 1944 and it was in Ceylon that he performed the most important service of his military career. As a result of the breaking of Japanese cyphers MI5 learnt of the existence

[2] *Prince Henry 'the Navigator': a Life* (New Haven, CT, 2000), p. xv.

of an Indian nationalist agent to whom the British gave the codename CARBUNCLE. CARBUNCLE had been recruited to operate in Ceylon by the Japanese in Singapore but was picked up and handed over for Russell to 'turn' him using the 'Double-Cross' system perfected with German agents in Europe. Against the threat of execution, the would-be agent agreed to transmit whatever intelligence the British saw fit to provide his controllers. Although this initially consisted of 'chicken feed'—accurate data of limited value or past importance—the opportunity was eventually taken for a major exercise in disinformation which in CARBUNCLE's case was an attempt to lure a Japanese cruiser out of Singapore against reports that an Allied supply convoy had sailed from Trincomalee. The bait was duly taken and though Russell was evasive on the subject the vessel in question may have been the heavy cruiser *Haguro* which was intercepted and sunk off Penang by a flotilla of British destroyers in May 1945.

The end of the war found Russell in Trincomalee in the rank of Acting Lieutenant-Colonel. Not long after he was invited as ranking officer to command a landing on an island off Sumatra whose garrison had yet to learn of the Japanese surrender. The offer was declined but the incident was one Russell always had great amusement in recounting. Another episode he recalled, though with rather less pleasure, was his interrogation of the Japanese commander in the Andaman Islands which had been under military occupation since 1942. Asking the officer why he had herded a large proportion of the native population into barges and then had them sunk by gunfire in deep water, he received the indignant reply that this had of course been necessary to ensure sufficient food for the garrison, the Andamans being small and relatively infertile.

Russell was by now anxious to resume his academic career in the austerities of post-war Oxford but there remained one final duty: disposing of CARBUNCLE. According to Russell, he was instructed to settle with CARBUNCLE in whatever way he thought fit. Boarding a ship bound for Singapore, it was suggested to him that CARBUNCLE might find a watery grave *en route*, something the latter evidently expected as well. In the event, Russell couldn't bring himself to any such action and when the ship made Singapore he disembarked with CARBUNCLE attached to his wrist by means of a pair of handcuffs. Producing a key, Russell unfettered them both and, to CARBUNCLE's astonishment, told him to 'Fuck off!' CARBUNCLE duly took to his heels and was last seen disappearing into the crowd. Although offered a permanent career in MI5, Russell had no hesitation in turning it down. Nonetheless, one can't help speculating that the many university committees over which he subsequently presided together with the wasp-

ish discourse of academic life and politics must often have seemed trivial in comparison with the harsh realities of wartime intelligence, of death and survival, tragedy and brutality, incompetence and genius. As Russell recalled

> I am one of those academics of the 1930s who, not without a certain unease of conscience, look back on the Second World War as one of the most positive and creative periods of their lives since it gave them a great variety of new experiences as well as opportunities to discover in themselves talents which would have remained hidden had they not been hauled out of academia.[3]

* * *

Peter Edward Lionel Russell was born in Christchurch, New Zealand on 24 October 1913. His father Bernard Wheeler of Halifax, Nova Scotia was a retired captain in the Royal West Kent Regiment, his mother Rita the youngest daughter of Thomas Russell who had made his fortune as a barrister, businessman and newspaper proprietor in New Zealand. A second son, Hugh (later a distinguished epidemiologist) was born in 1916, but the marriage was by then in trouble and, following an acrimonious divorce, Wheeler's sons adopted their mother's maiden name by deed poll in 1929, which in Peter's case meant that he took his fourth given name as his last. Wheeler, meanwhile, played no further part in their lives, even to the extent of leaving the boys' letters unanswered. As Russell put it, he 'dropped dead' in a pharmacy in Sydney one day in 1935. Russell's boyhood was divided between England and New Zealand where the family lived comfortably in the shadow of Knowlescourt, his grandfather's Tudor revival mansion in Christchurch. All his life he retained the fondest memories of this house, his grandfather playing the organ after dinner, his Uncle Gerald tuning in to the United States on his crystal radio set and Russell himself beginning a lifetime of voracious reading in its many passages and recesses. From 1901 Russell Senior had provided a base for officers of Scott's expeditions to the Antarctic while their ships were moored at nearby Lyttelton. With three attractive young ladies in residence it was not long before Captain Scott's men found even more to engage their interest than Mr Russell's generous hospitality and both Peter's mother and his aunt Hilda became engaged to members of the expedition. The former eventually broke off her engagement to Lt Michael Barne but Hilda was married in 1904 to the then Lt Edward Evans, Second Officer of the relief ship *Morning*. Scott and Evans (now second in command) came south again

[3] 'PELR', p. 3.

with the *Terra Nova* in 1910 but the expedition ended in disaster when Scott and his party perished after reaching the Pole on 17 January 1912, thirty-three days after Amundsen planted the Norwegian flag over the uncharted desolation. A year later, Amundsen came to lunch at Knowlescourt. As Peter's mother recalled, 'He asked Teddy [Evans] why Scott did not make more use of his dogs. Amundsen said his dogs did all the work, and pulled all the stores, now and then he killed and ate one, and fed the dogs too.'[4] It is a question that has exercised historians of the heroic era of polar exploration ever since. Tragically Aunt Hilda succumbed to complications during pregnancy while traversing the Mediterranean in 1913, but Evans remained close to the family and went on to find fame as 'Evans of the *Broke*' for his exploits during the Great War, eventually becoming Admiral Lord Mountevans. Uncle Teddy, vain and ebullient, was one of the characters of Russell's youth, and it was through him that Russell once danced to jazz with Queen Maud of Norway, Evans's second marriage being to one of her ladies-in-waiting.

Russell's first formal education came in the muscular environment of St Andrew's College, Christchurch, but in 1926 the decision was made for Rita to accompany her sons to England so that they could complete their schooling in the old country, the boys' grandfather having by now made himself financially responsible for their education. Russell lasted a term at Sedbergh before being sent to Cheltenham College, which he detested. Decades later he explained why:

> In those days it was a school which specialized in training boys for the Indian Army or the British Army and for the Indian and Colonial Civil Services and the emphasis was all on producing conformist types preconditioned for such careers. Though I did quite well scholastically at Cheltenham I was never at home with the demand to conform to a new set of class-bound English social values whose rationale I never succeeded in understanding.[5]

These formative perceptions and the geographical and cultural displacements that marked his youth bring us to some of the defining characteristics of Russell the scholar, at once fascinated by the interplay of societies and ever ready to take up the cudgels against received ideas and conventional wisdom with devastating critiques made from the inside.

However much he loathed Cheltenham, it was here too that Russell first came into contact with Spanish and took the first steps on what became his professional career:

[4] Rita Muriel Russell, unpublished memoirs (typescript copy in author's collection), p. 17.
[5] 'PELR', p. 1.

> I am often asked how I came to be interested in Spanish. The answer is wholly prosaic. I did not wish to repeat another year working at French and German for the Higher School certificate, which I had already obtained. Taking up Spanish, rather surprisingly then an optional subject at Cheltenham College, offered a way out and also gave me the satisfaction of doing something rather out of the ordinary.[6]

Not only that, but Cheltenham had a closed scholarship in Spanish to Oxford, the award of which brought Russell up to read French and Spanish at The Queen's College in October 1931, to which Portuguese was added in 1934 when this subject first became available in the university. In the months since leaving Cheltenham that spring Russell had taken the opportunity to visit Spain for the first time. His arrival in Madrid on 14 April was inauspicious, it being the day Spain was declared a Republic and King Alfonso XIII went into exile. A few weeks later Russell witnessed the burning by Anarchists of the Jesuit residence on the Calle Flor together with its priceless library, archive and artworks. Stopping to question one of the perpetrators as to his motive, Russell was informed 'Porque los Jesuitas son dueños de los tranvías' ('Because the Jesuits own the trams'). It was the beginning of a lifetime's observation of the passions and quirks of Hispanic society. Russell completed a memorable first visit to the Peninsula by signing on as the cabin boy of a British steamer at Barcelona. By the time it reached the Port of London three weeks and a dozen Iberian ports later, Russell was fluent in Spanish.

In 1934 the award of the De Osma Studentship brought him back to Madrid and to the famous Residencia de Estudiantes where he encountered many of the luminaries of the Second Republic, including Américo Castro, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Luis Buñuel and Federico García Lorca whose impromptu piano recitals in the common room were a feature of life there. The following reminiscence, shared by Russell when he was 'well into his anecdotage', not only gives a flavour of his dry humour and critical eye, but also of the air of controlled demolition that was never far from his work:

> I had first met don Ramón [Menéndez Pidal] in 1933 or 34 in the poetically famous garden of the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid. It was, I recall, not the happiest of social occasions. Also with me was another Oxford undergraduate who used to cause us considerable annoyance here in Oxford by his unwanted propensity to correct our spoken Spanish. On this particular afternoon the eminent President of the Residencia, Alberto Jiménez Fraud, a devoted anglophile known personally in later years to a few of us still around, told us that there

[6] Ibid.

> were three distinguished Spanish scholars chatting together in the garden and that he would like to present us to them. The group consisted of Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Américo Castro, and Fernando de los Ríos, a prominent Republican politician. These three scholarly *grandezas*, as I recall, acknowledged our presence with a fairly perfunctory nod after which we stood politely by while don Ramón continued speaking to his friends. Suddenly my companion from Oxford, a tall man, leaned forward and, extending his finger in the direction of don Ramón's nose, declared à propos of something the latter had just said, 'En castellano eso no se dice.' I rather hoped that this clanger would earn my companion his long-awaited comeuppance but don Ramón, as I recall, paid not the slightest attention to this uncivil interruption nor did his friends and it was left to the distraught don Alberto, always a model of good manners, to apologize for his protégé's behaviour and, no doubt, to wonder whether his decision to offer Oxford students *becas* and accommodation in the residencia had been a wise one.[7]

In 1997 Russell presented his 'Recollections of the Spanish Second Republic' at a graduate seminar in Oxford. During it he reaffirmed one of his indelible impressions from the years between 1931 and 1936, namely that Spaniards of all political colours were agreed on one point and one point only: that their country's problems would only be resolved through bloodshed. So it turned out.

Meanwhile, Russell had greatly taken to Oxford where he recalled his undergraduate years as 'totally happy ones' and college life 'like Liberty Hall' after the privations of an English boarding school. A member of the *jeunesse dorée* of the 1930s, he moved in the circle of Maurice Bowra and George Kolkhorst (known as 'the Colonel'), which included John Betjeman and John Sparrow. In later years Russell would smile at the memory of lively parties held at Yarnton Manor, Kolkhorst's residence outside Oxford with its Gobelins and collections of Oriental porcelain and jade of which he gained an abiding affection. Russell was also associated with the circle of W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood which extended to the deserted beach at Maspalomas at the southern tip of Gran Canaria that later became known as Playa del Inglés. These and other social contacts honed an already powerful mind into a formidable tool of perception, intuition and expression which was never blunted. Taking a First in French, Spanish and Portuguese in 1935, Russell turned to history with the encouragement of the then King Alfonso XIII professor, W. J. Entwistle, a decision which much disappointed his grandfather who wanted him to read law and take

[7] 'Reinventing an epic poet: 1952 in context', in Alan Deyermond, David G. Pattison and Eric Southworth (eds.), *'Mio Cid' Studies. 'Some Problems of Diplomatic' Fifty Years On* (London, 2002), pp. 63–71 at 67–8.

over his practice in New Zealand. Nor was Russell Senior the only party dismayed at this turn of events, which offended the better part of the Modern Languages Board and brought a good deal of opprobrium down on Entwistle's head. As Russell recalled, the Board 'in those days suffered from a collective paranoia which led them to imagine that the historians were constantly plotting to do their subject down and to kidnap the best graduates from their Faculty'.[8] It was the sort of absurdity which Russell, never one to conform for conformity's sake, delighted in skewering.

Undeterred, Russell began research on a doctorate on the Plantagenet involvement in the Iberian Peninsula under the somewhat erratic supervision of Sir Maurice Powicke, Regius Professor of Modern History, and particularly with the Balliol medievalist V. H. Galbraith. Deprived by the outbreak of the Civil War of any opportunity to pursue his research in the great archives of Spain, Russell instead concentrated on the rolls and other documentary holdings of the Public Record Office. While acknowledging the grounding Powicke, Galbraith and others had given him in diplomatic, Russell never shared the confidence of the traditional historian in the implicit veracity of original documentation. If there was one dominating theme in his work it was the debunking not only of spurious claims by contemporaneous figures and their apologists, but of the efforts by subsequent scholarship and vested interests to recast history and literature in the service of a regime or ideology. The result was an *œuvre* which, lying at the interstices of history and literature, was always broad-ranging, often sceptical and frequently iconoclastic. In the early 1930s Russell completed a novel which was never published. Though any ambition he may have harboured to become a writer had eventually to be set aside, Russell brought a many-layered style to his scholarly prose which was not only as complex as the man but also perfectly suited to his chosen approach.

Appointed to a graduate scholarship at Queen's in 1935 and to lectureships at St John's College and then Queen's in 1937, Russell's early research resulted in *As Fontes de Fernão Lopes*, a study of the fourteenth-century chronicler which appeared in Portuguese translation in 1941.[9] Russell did not learn of its publication until a volume on the subject caught his eye in a bookshop in wartime Lisbon—his own, as it turned out, published (albeit in Russell's name) by a colleague to whom he had supplied a pre-war typescript. The book was a first exercise in what came to be recognised as the Russell style, demonstrating as it did that the Lopes manuscripts

[8] 'PELR', p. 2.
[9] Trans. António Gonçalves Rodrigues (Coimbra, 1941).

in the Arquivo da Torre do Tombo in Lisbon were not holograph originals as then believed but unreliable sixteenth-century copies. His doctorate was interrupted by the war and not completed as such but research continued after demobilisation and in 1955 Russell published his first major work, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward III and Richard II*, an exquisitely crafted account of the political and dynastic upheavals which beset the Peninsula in the late fourteenth century.[10] Already in 1945 he had while still languishing in the tropics been elected to the Laming Fellowship in Modern Languages at Queen's and appointed to a University Lectureship in Spanish. Then in 1953 he gained the King Alfonso XIII Chair of Spanish Studies which, together with the office of Director of Portuguese Studies (until 1976), he held with increasing distinction for the next twenty-eight years. As Russell recalled, he had only put his name forward at the urging of Maurice Bowra, chairman of the Electors and now Vice-Chancellor of the university, who was unimpressed at the strength of the field. The election of a scholar not yet forty and with only one slender volume in print was not without controversy; two years later the appearance of *The English Intervention* settled any remaining doubts. 'The rest', as Russell later put it, 'is on public record.'[11]

By the end of the 1950s Russell had begun to show the scholarly range and dynamism for which he became famous. In 1951 he stunned an audience by demonstrating through diplomatic that the *Cantar de Mio Cid*, the great epic of Spanish medieval poetry, had been composed not by a minstrel but by a poet with legal training writing a century later than was universally accepted.[12] These conclusions were interpreted in some quarters as an act of *lèse-majesté* against the great medievalist and doyen of Spanish scholarly orthodoxy, don Ramón Menéndez Pidal, and feathers were ruffled both in Britain and Spain, but the application of historical and diplomatic analysis was a turning point in the study of European epic poetry. The legacy of 'Some problems of Diplomatic in the *Cantar de Mio Cid* and their implications' was explored in a conference held in Oxford to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its publication, to which Russell added his own wry perspective.[13] In 1953 came two articles demonstrating that literary relations between Catholic Spain and Protestant England in the

[10] Oxford, 1955.
[11] 'PELR', p. 4.
[12] 'Some problems of Diplomatic in the *Cantar de Mio Cid* and their implications', *Modern Language Review*, 47 (1952), 340–9.
[13] See above, n. 7.

seventeenth century were closer than had ever been imagined.[14] A few years later work started on a full-length biography of Prince Henry the Navigator, to whose soubriquet Russell added apostrophes once he established that the Infante's seafaring credentials consisted of a few trips between the Algarve and Morocco. In 1960 Russell began his assault on the personality cult assiduously propagated by the Infante himself and remodelled by successive generations of the Portuguese ruling élite. The result, a lecture delivered at Canning House in London, so incensed the Portuguese Embassy that strenuous though unsuccessful efforts were made to block its publication.[15] The demolition was completed in a valedictory lecture delivered at Oxford in 1983 and published under the apt title of 'Prince Henry the Navigator: the rise and fall of a culture hero'.[16] The biography itself was finished in the 1960s but Russell was dissatisfied with the result and set it aside for thirty years. Though essentially complete, the project was burdensome to him and for many years Russell mordantly referred to it as 'the Alligator'.

Meanwhile, Russell moved into the literature of the Spanish Renaissance and in 1957 produced the first in a series of essays on the tragicomedy known as *La Celestina*, which among other things exploded a succession of native myths on Spanish fifteenth-century humanism and resulted in a near-definitive edition which appeared in 1991.[17] Next Russell turned to Cervantes and in 1969 brought his penetrating insight to bear in another of his seminal articles, '*Don Quixote* as a funny book', in which he attacked the Romantic notion of Cervantes' hero as a purely tragic figure.[18] His work on Cervantes culminated in a magisterial survey in the Oxford Past Masters series published in 1985.[19] Between whiles he found time to produce a volume on translation and translators in Spain and Portugal (1985) as well as gathering the leading lights in the field to produce *Spain: a Companion to Spanish Studies* (1973) which has provided a matchless

[14] 'English seventeenth-century interpretations of Spanish literature', *Atlante*, 1 (1953), 65–77, and 'A Stuart Hispanist: James Mabbe', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 30 (1953), 78–84.
[15] 'Prince Henry the Navigator' [Canning House Seventh Annual Lecture] (London, 1960).
[16] Oxford, 1984.
[17] The essays are 'The art of Fernando de Rojas', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 34 (1957), 160–7, and especially 'Literary tradition and social reality in *La Celestina*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 41 (1964), 230–46, and 'Arms versus letters: towards a definition of Spanish humanism', in A. R. Lewis (ed.), *Aspects of the Renaissance: a Symposium* (Austin, TX, 1967), pp. 45–58. For the edition, see Fernando de Rojas, *Comedia o Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* (Madrid, 1991; rev. 1993 and 2001).
[18] '*Don Quixote* as a funny book', *Modern Language Review*, 64 (1969), 312–26.
[19] *Cervantes* (Oxford, 1985).

primer to the subject for students in both the English- and Spanish-speaking worlds.[20] His essays on Spanish literature were collected in 1978 and those on Portugal, Spain and the African Atlantic in 1995.[21] By now well into his eighties, Russell turned once more to the Infante and in 2000 produced the long-awaited *Prince Henry 'the Navigator': a Life*.[22] It was the crowning achievement of a brilliant career, a work of immense subtlety, breadth and authority half a century in the making.

Russell's contribution as a scholar was matched by his stature as the pre-eminent teacher of Hispanic studies in the United Kingdom. He was a notable lecturer, clear, coherent, engaging and always grounded in wide reading and deep thought, the material delivered in an elegant Oxford drawl. His tutorials, usually given at home, were conceived as a meeting of minds. Undergraduates found themselves at ease and on first-name terms with a scholar who wore his learning very lightly and never talked shop any more than was necessary. Not for him the intellectual conceit or rebarbative put-down that blighted many student–tutor relationships. Graduate students, meanwhile, were treated as friends and colleagues, their tutorials frequently shifted to a fine restaurant or reconfigured as part of a lengthy excursion at home or abroad. Beginning in the 1970s his students began to fill an increasing number of university chairs in Hispanic studies and history in Britain and abroad, while the Cambridge Iberian and Latin American Studies series became under his editorship the premier forum for new research in the field. Yet for all his massive erudition Russell never lost sight of scholarship as a civilising human endeavour that had necessarily rather more to do with life than with the subject at hand. It was a conviction which, as he admitted, eventually took on a somewhat pessimistic tincture:

> I have always taken what some have thought the unnecessarily pessimistic view that most literary criticism of whatever kind is by its nature a fruit destined to fall ripe from the bough. Or, to recall a Persian proverb [...], the caravan always moves on leaving behind it dogs that go on barking at the site where it previously stood because change has passed them by.[23]

[20] *Traducciones y traductores en la Península Ibérica, 1400–1550* (Barcelona, 1985) and *Spain: a Companion to Spanish Studies* (London, 1973; rev. 1977); Spanish trans. *Introducción a la cultura hispánica*, 2 vols. (Barcelona, 1982).
[21] *Temas de "La Celestina" y otros estudios (del "Cid" al "Quijote")* (Barcelona, 1978) and *Portugal, Spain and the African Atlantic, 1343–1490* (Aldershot, 1995).
[22] New Haven, CT, 2000.
[23] 'Reinventing an epic poet: 1952 in context', p. 63.

Although Russell always found the protocol attaching to the King Alfonso XIII chair something of a burden, in 1962 he hosted the inaugural conference of the International Association of Hispanists at Oxford and took the opportunity to curate a memorable exhibition of *Hispanic Manuscripts and Books before 1700*.[24] From 1962 to 1964 he served on the influential University Grants Committee for Latin American Studies, and was a member of the editorial board of the *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* between 1959 and 1996. In Oxford he established the regular weekly research seminar for graduate students, which continues to meet on Tuesdays at 5 p.m. in the Taylorian Institution. Not himself an ardent conference-goer, Russell was in many respects a shy man who preferred the life of a solitary scholar. His practice was to work quietly and send his manuscripts to press with little or no input from his colleagues before sitting back to watch the *frisson* produced by his findings. This while fending off occasional invitations to take up the headship of colleges both in Oxford and Cambridge.

There were few regrets from a great career which was recognised with election to the Portuguese Academy of History (1956), the Real Academia de Buenas Letras of Barcelona (1972) and this Academy (1977). He received a D.Litt. from the University of Oxford on his retirement in 1981 and in 1989 became the first recipient of the Nebrija Prize conferred by the University of Salamanca. In 1989 he was made a Commander of the Spanish Order of Isabel la Católica, receiving the same dignity in the Portuguese Order of the Infante Dom Henrique in 1993 which Russell was amused to learn conferred the right to use a portable altar. He was knighted in 1995. After his retirement a succession of visiting professorships at the universities of Virginia, Texas, Johns Hopkins and Vanderbilt between 1982 and 1987 brought the Russell style to a generation of graduate students in America. By the end of his life Russell had been the subject of four Festschriften from friends and former students on both sides of the Atlantic and achieved literary immortality by being written into several novels by the noted Spanish author Javier Marías, including the trilogy *Tu rostro mañana* (2002–7) of which he was a dedicatee.[25] He knew, as his

[24] P. E. Russell, D. M. Rogers and O. N. V. Glendinning, *A Catalogue of Hispanic Manuscripts and Books before 1700 from the Bodleian Library and Oxford College Libraries Exhibited at the Taylor Institution, 6–11 September* (Oxford, privately, 1962).

[25] The Festschriften were: (i) F. W. Hodcroft, D. G. Pattison, R. D. F. Pring-Mill and R. W. Truman (eds.), *Medieval and Renaissance Studies on Spain and Portugal in Honour of P. E. Russell* (Oxford, 1981); (ii) Alan Deyermond and Jeremy Lawrance (eds.), *Letters and Society in Fifteenth-Century Spain: Studies Presented to P. E. Russell on His Eightieth Birthday* (Llangrannog, 1993);

students knew, that he had lived in a golden age for Hispanic studies as for academic life generally in the English-speaking world. That he was one of its chief adornments had long been acknowledged.

If these remarks capture Russell's achievements as an officer, scholar and teacher, they do not encompass the qualities of mind and personality that yielded success in practically every endeavour to which he turned his hand, often one suspects in the face of great mental torment. Nor do they capture the immense presence of the man, the imposing figure unbent by age, the huge lion-like head and inscrutable eyes, the person from whom not a word or thought was wasted when things really mattered. Russell had style and throughout his life preserved both his physical stature and much of what in his youth had been devastating good looks. From his extensive flat in North Oxford, opulently furnished and always replete with fine food and wine, Russell presided over a wide circle of scholars and friends that to his last years ranged from college tutees of the 1930s to literary and intellectual luminaries on both sides of the Atlantic. Among them were three friends from Queen's: John Ochs of *The New York Times*, the economist Charles Kennedy, and Lord Franks. His generosity to those of scarcer financial means was legendary and there can have been few people he cared for who were not favoured with his largesse in one form or another, often on the least pretext. Though never in any doubt as to his powers, Russell was an exceedingly charismatic man who delighted in the rare gift of being able to hit it off with anyone. As in his research, he had no time for humbug of any sort—'bogus' was a word that fell often from his lips—and his friends knew that exposure to his gentle but penetrating wit was to be paid his highest compliment. Nor, of course, were those who crossed him likely to forget it. Russell took it all in his stride, always master of the situation, always a model of self-control, never losing his composure. Beyond a flair for language, his secret was a breathtaking command of the art of communication in its fullest sense, and to spend time in Peter's company was to witness a subtle concert of head and hand gestures which conveyed more than words ever could.

In his last years, though much preoccupied with his own mortality, he never lost his sense of humour or boyish glee at the absurdities of life. Asked how he was, he would sometimes reply 'Awaiting a visit from the

(iii) Julian Weiss (ed.), *Studies in Honour of Peter E. Russell on His 80th Birthday*, published as a special number of *Celestinesca*, 17, no. 2 (Fall 1993); and (iv) Alan Deyermond, David G. Pattison and Eric Southworth (eds.), *'Mio Cid' Studies. 'Some Problems of Diplomatic' Fifty Years On* (London, 2002).

Reaper', or just 'Surviving', his voice lowered an octave before issuing a guffaw. However, neither his mental faculties nor his flexibility of mind were impaired by the passage of time. He had the ability to cast aside the tastes and convictions of a lifetime if a better alternative recommended itself. The IT revolution was early and enthusiastically embraced and his home was always filled with the latest gadgets and conveniences which he delighted in showing off, sometimes with alarming results. He was addicted to the Antipodean soap operas that began appearing on British television in the 1980s and at the time of his death at home on 22 June 2006 was plotting the purchase of high-definition TV to watch the World Cup in Germany. To that extent Peter Russell was much the youngest of his circle.

To know Peter Russell was to be admitted to a world—many worlds—to which one would otherwise never have gained access. Whether they were of his discovering such as the Portuguese Atlantic or of his own experience such as wartime counter-espionage, those who shared them always knew that something special was being vouchsafed, just as they appreciated the innate depth and elegance in which they were lived and revealed. For those of us who were his friends Peter Russell was a prince whose passing marks the close of an era more refined and assured than our own.

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