

An Ever River

Palewell Press

An Ever River

Poems by David Russell



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Dedication

This pamphlet is dedicated to all those people who have encouraged and promoted my work through the decades: to the late **Christopher Logue** and **Bernard Stone**, who facilitated the publication of *Exacting Modality of the World Web* with Café Books in 1970; to **Jim Pennington**, who published *A Chip off the Old Block* with Aloes Press in 1973; to **Iota** and **X-Calibre** magazines; to **Forward Press**, who featured me in many of their anthologies; to **Danny Amos Flynn**, who published *Prickling Counterpoints*; to **Niall McDevitt**, who introduced me to *International Times*, and **Claire Palmer**, who published me there; to **Jim Clark**, who recorded much of my material, and to **Paul Dolinsky**, who has been incredibly encouraging about my experimental work; and to all my devoted supporters at *Survivors Poetry and Music*.

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With Respect to the Whale

Oh man, so blind in spirit,
gorging beyond all need for sustenance,
gorging beyond even your body's bounds!

And is this a fixation on your prey,
a lust for prey-communion?
willing your own, final annihilation
by turning into quarry
that great, that fine, that more than any beast;
sea-mammal – in its form a synthesis of elements,
model of global harmony,
sea-mammal – its pure song of sight and touch
a blending of all sense, beyond man's symbols.

Knowing yourself so small,
are you in full immersion
lost in dental agony of harpoon barbs,
asphyxiate in quicksand blubber,

or, in false striving,
to cheat the others of fair depths,
would you burst, flounder, cast up useless bones,
sick binder for your film
of mineral perversion?

Who made of noble forms
cheap factories, demolished in a day
for pulp, for ballast in the supermarket,
without the dignity
of geriatrics' corsets?

/continued

Who pays mock homage
to rare or extinct species
behind museums' glass, in research confines,
to rare or extinct species – know your vanity.

*Know that the see-through panel
that seals rare specimens from mundane soiling
is to yourselves a mirror. There your end...*

With one proviso – when your vile exertions
at last become fulfilled among yourselves
and you mere cinder-blistered slime,

no species that survives will honour you;
in all your seeming strength your final weakness,
cutting your lifelines with your every grab
for further power and satiation.

The time to halt is now; let live and know –
abjure corrupt proliferation, grow
in numbers' confines, species' truest bounds.

Earthquake

What happened? There was a fault.

What's a fault?

It's when one piece of the earth juts above another.

Why does that happen?

Because the explosions down below
go on forever.

But did that fault lie with an individual?

It was the earth's; it is beyond us.

The seething energy-city, ever greedy to accelerate –
did its makers long to sharpen that fault,
draw on the lava,

to blow themselves to pieces: were they like lemmings,
yawning blueprints for giddy layers of highway;
did they suck in any poison? Abrasive ardour,
overstepped incisions,
thin flanges slicing
to release the primal ooze.

Eco-Thunderstorm

You turn on the gas, you squirt the sprays
to make a haze of expectancy.
with your every breath, you could tip all the scales
and uproot every tree.

You can lace the rains and breed the algae,
scum up every shore;
set the barometer of all mankind
wobbling for ever more.

*You turned us to 100 Celsius,
though you think yourself lukewarm;
you're the end of every element,
you're the Eco-Thunderstorm.*

You knocked me up, you bounced me down,
batted me like a whingeing child,
with your magic, winding, twisting dance
you can drive any statue wild.

You can blow me up like old King Kong,
you can shrink me to Tom Thumb,
blank the light of a million stars,
strike all politicians dumb.

*You turned us to 100 Celsius,
though you think yourself lukewarm;
you're the end of every element,
you're the Eco-Thunderstorm.*

you're the Greenhouse Effect I can't reject,
you strip my ozone layer;
you can break the banks, make the old Thames flood,
answer every Devil's Prayer;

I thought my sanity was sunk in a pile of solid rock;
but you're the aerial earthquake, undermining,
running all the world amok.

*You turned us to 100 Celsius,
though you think yourself lukewarm;
you're the end of every element,
you're the Eco-Thunderstorm.*

*You are the Alpha, the Omega Ray,
turning each night into a scorching day.*

Clouds

In chroniclers' minds
past wars all went full circle,
making great urban filth destroy itself
so that the finest flowers and shrubs
could sprout at random.

And birds, in exultation
or happy in their ignorance
made rills of melody
now man had passed them by.

But now, with ice and poison,
for one full year enthralled, embalmed,
and after that, growth's circle
jarred shuddering in mid-turn,

can even a worm
or an amoeba celebrate?

Disintegration

The bottom fell out
and all things gathered,
reverted to their origins,
in skips, on pavements,
fell to casual hands.
But in the pit
of all exhaustion,
at the bottom of grip's loss
are seeds and roots
of restoration,
which in their throbbing cycles
breathe out on pine and belt.
The bottom stood solid.

Scorpion

I touched a scorpion; it struck.
It was my fault; I had been warned –
but for one split second
its beauty-fascination wrenched me
from reason's ice.

I don't think anyone could find a scorpion ugly.
They shine too.

Writhing and smarting from the sting,
I lashed out, struck on something soft
I couldn't see.

Again, pure venom's shudder,
then eagles, condors,
circled, launched and swooped.

Did they fly within my slipstream, or I in theirs?
Through what was what transcended?

Who was the real predator?

Panic

A search for some trivial object
in the midst of disordered furniture
seized upon just at that moment,
giving birth to consternation.

Repulsion from travelling delayed by this selection;
travelling light, splitting energy-wholes into petty onenesses –

at one with invisibility.

Use the fuel of panic to build up heat in an overcrowded room,
breath abused, expanded, perspiration in anti-breath
and anti-river in one – quite sandwiched in decorum.

Go all around; you are a magnet;
the things you seek are tiny, chipped filings,
very little in themselves.

Grab all the particles,
herd them into a cluster for their comfort
and your comprehension; then scatter them,
restore them to their chaotic freedom.

In Transit

Unemployed's tube journey:

For those safe, definable few minutes, there is the duality of oneself and the comfort of the seat – the circle; seal; it chops perfectly, crossing the antilinear.

It induces connexity; the most complete awareness of the toil and monotony which went into making the tube, and the seat inside the train inside the tube, the toil and boredom in which the seat – pitchfork of absorption and repulsion, circulates.

One straddles directions like a novice mishandling a catamaran.

Unemployment cleans edges and puts the bending glass to the centre, breaks down the perimeters into which one's parts can blur – raises new, clear bars the other way – for the world outside is a blasted, blurring circumference.

When confronted with the bare four hours, the only certain work, one acts like a man playing with transfers.

Peel the paper off the top – sling it; it irks you.

But you still like the idea of topness and paperness as something permanent – Without it, the pretty design will truly go to pot – being merely liquid.

Space Capsule Volunteer

the final pull of severance will magnify you
the downward controls make you equal
to the general gravitation

you are higher than the air, and so you leave,
you are bigger than the air, and so you breathe

caught in a feeling circle
knowing measurements for what they are

your particles arrested
your museum absolute
until new ores from meteors transmute
their other ends that hold you

all proportions quite dependent
on the nearness of your eyes
no lies – for lies are measured
and you touch them all for what they are –
little one, bound hand and foot,
the outer ring of man to me.

Work out of Progress

Does it really all go on indefinitely—
just when I thought it had all been played out,
all become superfluous.

I am at the stage of universal discarding;
I suppose that many people see, through several decades,
what I pushed aside in a matter of months.

Discarding is basic to life: I am not dead,
so I must keep discarding ad infinitum;
it's also what keeps the others going —

writing is a sort of discarding stage
Some sense comes from putting something
out into the void, the negative black

It may after all come to something, after all —
though not necessarily —
not being really necessary
though nobody knew how to say so.

Childhood was a waterproof lining
imprinted with the patterns of crossed fibres
making jagged scratches on him
who would have the perfect inside out
after folding it tidily and putting it in a drawer —

So many repetitions formed a furrow
in the musty darkness.

Wisps of ivy demarcating what was to be the next door
levelled under a rubber cork corrugated roof –
no one could climb up there without tearing down the ivy.

Immortality

You carried your vengeance beyond decease –
slowed down the pyre's cleansing,
slowed down the soil's, the water's warmth,
left total body change open to the senses –
pursued your cause beyond its effects,
stepped out beyond all examples,
further than all reflections,
forestalled all worth –
all kindred, all common links –

seeking to frame a cleansing,
seeking a bubbling stench,
blinding off the cause, sinking the bubble,
aerating the stench.

Since you thought that such a front
would keep your footsteps light,
sidestep the quicksand's dam
so that you could token-touch a cairn –
erected but unentered,
tactile – taking an unbroken course –
blinded wholly on touching.

The given whole, from oneself all taken –
the river whole, clean-bleached,
its bed eroded;
nodding answers from the straight,
the cogged, the balanced;
pressing blinks for engulfment
from the all –

the all whole, harnessed,
blasted, made permanent:
some lichen fossilized
inside a flagstone.

sad lump beyond your strength,
your total celebration –
sunken, dreaded – an iceberg’s reality;
prismatic, pricking some seeming velvet womb
that rips the skin when touching it;
total cold, some shivering rib-case
at last replaceable, to thread and string
the lesser wonders.

Total colour, total glittering –
in nothing lacking save the power
to follow one another.

Headlong longing, and yet not in for pitching without;
a limb for pitching, unditched by gravity,
for wishing, jumping.

Mere within the drowning,
jumping mere with burning.

Dark Dream

Out came the swarms of shadow things
to make their dead messages,
to find their story-forms,
glinting chitin delighting,
reeding the pitches.

Down went the depths, encased and ethered,
numbing us to touch the greater.

Down went the coils of lit signs,
and made the questions dark and known,
and made the answers dark and known
and wisped the forests harshly blown
and came to seek and find.

Up rushed the fugitive bearer,
sheerly slithering, faces swarming,
moss-treachery to bounce –
to find the friendly start-swathes,
be one of them and stay.

Up rushed the swarms of shadow-things,
piling where they could not climb,
and moaning – in a dolphin-pitch:

*“Be one of us, for now we rim the cup of rock
so are receiving rain;
be one of us; we are the lance’s strength and goal;
be one of us – we go in peace yet never neutral;
be one of us – we are the stars above where we are not;
be one, be us, be known, begone – Belong!”*

Mid-Life

So much happened;
so much didn't –
so nice to remember;
so painful to recall

Now nothing is all,
the power to recall
is an anaesthetic –
past strength
is pathetic.

In the middle,
what's kept still here,
what was and is gone,
what never was –
all levelled.

All comes to ground, abrades,
that's nice and clear,
for retroaction blends fact
with pretence,
solid in sense – incense.

Old channels must live anew.

Love Letters of Old

My love was stifled
between the gum and the paper –
the sealed envelope was lumpy

Two-Faced Tanning

(Moral Majority S/M)

Time was – one got the slipper, cane and strap –
and now, in honest balance of corrected afterthought,
admits that one was fired by sting and weal
and thought that someone got a turn-on;

“This hurts me more than it hurts you!”

Yes: heartfelt behind the irony.
Now all of this is out of school,
all cleansed by humane laws,
but craved in gut, in newly-opened zones,
trodden furtively.

Now the broad-minded, the like-minded,
the never bossy – do it:

Now uniforms show their real double edge.

Connections

Sheen caps ground rails,
soaking harsh sleepers
to rattle mud-flounced trains.

Drizzle dusts,
grinding against itself,
sparking the tracks' sheen,
fraying all never-ends;

blinding the gravel
kicking in panic
against the basalt of its being.

The lifeline

Brine polishes ground cliffs,
moss-padded in their cavities,
the waves of muscle buffet,
abrade the penciled rocks,
cowl faces sleek stripped,
every fissure sharpens by default.

Will rises now
to override all masses;

The lifeline effects a junction.

Reflections

First there was a God
bounded by no face,
faced by no boundaries.

Yet first there was a mirror
(How can there be a first with no bounds clear?)

The mirror drew the sun,
scored with its bounds the sky
and drew the God a face –

and drew the God to Man;

so drawn, the God transgressed –
now knowing he's circumscribed.

It was his lot
to seek the sun's end;

he was absorbed

(And which was first is first with no bounds clear?)

Respiration

Can there still be irrigation
now the stem's closed, dry?
Can there still be imagination –
when the bottom's gone awry –
when everyone can see
through every ancient icon?

In spite of everything, maybe –
when light floods all opacity,

as every block of granite,
basalt, obsidian
melts into a stained-glass window;

when experience
submits to colour separation,
sparks my feed –
a phoenix out of limp exhaustion.

*When water fails,
let there be light. **

* Respiration: the process by which plants and some other organisms use light energy to convert water and carbon dioxide into oxygen and high-energy carbohydrates

Don't Touch!

“Don't touch!” they cried.
They really meant no harm,
had not intended
to make a shaking,
jibbering apoplectic
with their nagging.

“Don't touch!” for their interior décor
was indeed was fragile and expensive –
themselves and furniture alike
to them untouchable, those self-pariahs.
There are no easy stages;
somebody's lost a memory,
somebody's taking shocks;
the papers are in order.

“Don't touch!”
Then you'll keep out of trouble:
don't lead, don't show,
just jump and load.

You're only sure you're sane, ok?
when one like you is put away.
There rooted the bare, threaded nerve,
the stunted limb, enfeebled grasp,
the shake.

“Don't touch!”
Their errors paralyse them.
He only wanted to make something work,
“Don't touch! He might be dead.”

Cremation

I've always believed in cremation;
flames bleach the world, unclutter living things.

Let scum survivors, grasshoppers,
leave cemeteries a mess
of living impulses dismembered.
Not knowing fire's totality
but sickly honouring its abrasions
in tortured carbon stench.

I've always believed in cremation
ever since I read of great skull mountains;
those potash handfuls are so clean –
a powdered love of life.

I think of bones and masonry,
of skeletons and architects,
Humanity's erections.
Are we the greater polyps?
No – we are parasites.

No longer do we draw from deserts
our pride's stark affirmation
but – aimless – puncture, scar and crater
real skin, flesh, sinew, bone.

Prime tombs remain, aimed starwards,
steering earth;
for ones they were, for everyone.
Termite-wretches, harsh-bound inside one frame
with all for others.

So is this past? Are we now free –
with monuments so empty, blinded to stars,
time-choked, chasing a mercury present –
that wriggling lump we would congeal
to parry our mortality –
reassured joke, bluff, never once used
by thinking of dismantling
when Fury, justly channeled,
skims from eccentric earth?

The first was built to say
“We stand forever, cleaving heaven and earth.”

The last: “We can accept the moment only;
When all’s affirmed, we are as powder.”

I’ve always believed in cremation.

Lore

Knowledge, as a dish of elusive ice-cubes
floating in acid
touching each one, propels its elusiveness;

The mediation of the utensil cannot be avoided.

Acid me, hand me, cube me;
cuddling smudges, polychromatic pollution,
knowledge spectrum.

He must make a memory out of solid metal,
so it can't be penetrated by knowledge,
so the destructive smudge might never come,
so that there might be no death.

Death, the fruit of a sideways glance at the flock;
knowledge chopped, castrated, amputated
for better streamlining –

no glue in it: good bouncy knowledge.

Education is our life; lead out, bounce out.

Memory is a softener and a drying out.

Alchemist

Sing, earth-captured starlight,
purest light to touch the earth
purest light to flow through day and night
to flood our sense-zone.
Sing through my blinking tubes and phials,
all potions, never poured;
yet all suffused in afterthought.
My litmus-jewels, made one by burning faces,
turning suns,
that charred the fixed eye, the rooted touch.
Bodies I gel, not cruelly liquefy,
nor form from glass-defined divisions;
I move them, through their opaqueness in my eyes
to their own whole frames and shapes;
cast by a mould beyond the maker here,
the measurer
and yet exhausting first their full extent.
Fill out, oneself a phial,
fluted to slender siphoning, a line, a moving;
love-cornering the loving, clinging eye,
love cornering skins in darkness, parched and bleached;
locked in through small breedings
in clean-forgotten courses,
the moss, the earth-polluted tubes, the same.

Growth Before Buildings

Wood piles beneath
 the shallow permanent stone
firm feet upon the yielding bog
let water in – the wood’s grain will prevail right through its lines;
let water out – white softness will grow up to draw things down
The foundations could be called organic,
so people longed to analyse to scrutinize,

trade silver mercury.
Sweep and cluster
went across,
spanning the spider-grasp of two rivers

thin, gurgling on a common height
tortured the muscle of the current
in thin air
full beneath naked trees.

Underwater Ballet

In the wistful – drowning;
all dreamers hold their breath;
floating balloon
rests full in blister world before the land.

Slippery between skin and scales,
drawn throbbing from the gilled;
great tuna from crustaceans postulated;
anemones, new-boned;
in parallel concert writhe
curl double joints.

Flippers of androgyny
erected supple.

thighs hoisted angular,
lungs ultra-blown;

Last bursting thrust,
febrile diffusion;
velvet sense – soft through soaking,
impervious skin in utter life.

Its elements sliding;
gills suckling lungs.

Antarctic Depths

An ice-roofed stratosphere, clear liquid space
and nerve-legged spiders
crack fans of anchor ice
to mend all seals

Here it is coddled by the final killer,
will it be toppled by comfort's rays?

An Ever River

Prime time, swallowed whole.
Could the universe, just once,
have poured itself into a molecule
so that, thereafter,
nothing could flow?

Never to suckle a broken circuit
for sparking life;
never split by cesarean pangs
of primal punctures.

Black hole never thinned to liquid,
boiling mud, foundation pustules,
turning all to gas.

All words are now compelled to use
the speech synthesizer of the global dish.

So whence the river,
its source in rejection
generating dragging threads –
bubbling, puddling, squelching,
steaming, clouding, drizzling,
splashing process

Where would we be if nothing flowed?

*or would the truth be bared
if water found its ends without the flowing means*

* * *

/continued

Round every dam,
above all inundations, beyond all droughts
the river bubbles
 blobs it ever on

bleeding out the parched bed's cracks.

One river is in every river.
every river recycles to one river.
Let all be laminated, superimposed
rising through fired mud beds,
their crystal sheen, chemical, pure
tippling underground, mountain rill;

forked, widened through basin faults,
embracing every swelling,
feeding the clouds to give all back,

siphoned off to feed past plains,
for grains and pulses
stock, rodent, and their plague-guests;

so that the sea, long past greedy
would not devour it all,
sucked off for dams and factories,
vast barriers, shields
 for ravaging and wars,

pockets through the centuries
to save and drown –
only at rare junctures diverted.

Once laden, this river dragged its sludge
throttled by pustule settlements,
banked by insect-egg bin-liners,
scummed, frothed and sediment-clouded:
The acrid stout of a fumbling home-brewer

now cleansed, through dereliction,
readmitting life,
a happy adjunct to proclaim

the true mess swept from sight.

Once, far beyond *erectus*, *sapiens*, Neanderthal,
it fed, embraced stampedes,
massed reptilian, bird and mammal flesh
in swallowing, fossil-printing beds
suffused meanwhile with blood and effluent.

Then, in our species time,
it flanked massacres,
punctuation marks for ruthless millennia
straddled by canoes, submersibles.

Some bodies floated, bloated to clog downstream,
some helmets loosened,

inverted to build meaningless boats.

/continued

Sometimes it flanked great ceremonies,
phased into festivals,
got scummed with battered lager cans
and sodden wrappers,
mulch-brown and creamed with tack,
peppered from abandoned ashtrays.

The dredgers came and went
and, present-focused,
the contorted loop

full circle of prehistory
from monocellular poison
to strained reaches of torture growth,
perverted contents, twisted molecules.

* * *

On revisitation,
with masses under the bridge,

generic memories shrunk and muted,
I stand in a clear stretch
where there is no bridge in sight.

Such myriads transitory,
one-directional;
some can reverse into the human memory.

Old palaces, monuments
crumble into their own façades,
mirrored by brash renovation.

The cycles emulate
and modulate the tides.

Clean, dirty, overpopulated, vacant
squeaky splendor, *son et lumière*,
beams us back to what we thought things were
before the truth unbunged the drain,
emitting odour of perspective,
its trickling blended with the general stream.

David Russell — Biography

David Russell b. 1940. Resident in the UK. Writer of poetry, literary criticism, speculative fiction and romance. Main poetry collection *Prickling Counterpoints* (1998); poems published online in *International Times*. Main speculative works *High Wired On* (2002); *Rock Bottom* (2005). Translation of Spanish epic *La Araucana*, Amazon 2013. Romances: *Self's Blossom*; *Explorations*; *Further Explorations*; *Therapy Rapture*; *Darlene, An Ecstatic Rendezvous* (all pub Extasy (Devine Destinies). Self-published collection of erotic poetry and artwork, *Sensual Rhapsody*, 2015. Singer-songwriter/guitarist. Main CD albums *Bacteria Shrapnel* and *Kaleidoscope Concentrate*. Many tracks on You Tube, under 'Dave Russell.'

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