

**A key book about the Portuguese Fourteenth century:
*The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of
Edward II and Richard II* by Peter E. Russell**

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Peter Russell is not an unknown name in the *e-Journal of Portuguese History* since, at the time of his death, this journal published a small dossier devoted to his work, with studies by João Gouveia Monteiro, Maria Cristina Pimenta, and Stefan Halikowski Smith.² Nonetheless, it seemed interesting to include a paper on a book by this author in the program for this symposium. In fact, what has been written about this historian discusses his biography and work in general terms and, as far as I know, in addition to the traditional book reviews, there is no text specifically dedicated to his most important work, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward II and Richard II*, published in 1955.

Peter Edward Lionel Russell Wheeler—Sir Peter Russell—the son of a British Army officer, was born in New Zealand in 1913 and died in Oxford in 2006. Through his family connections, he was the heir of people that had been linked to distant worlds for several generations. As Ian Michael writes, Peter Russell was “a product of the outposts of the British Empire.”³ But in professional terms, as Cristina Pimenta has shown us, he belonged to a broad set of non-Portuguese historians “who, either in the pursuit of their own research interests or for some other reason, have ended up bringing a fresh approach to some important themes in [Portuguese] historical knowledge.”⁴ This group of historians, insufficiently analyzed in global terms but reasonably well studied for the British case (taking into account the works of Jorge Borges de Macedo,⁵ as well as Patrícia Obder de Baubeta and Richard Robinson⁶), represents an important historiographical core which cannot be ignored. Peter Russell is part of a significant group of illustrious British historians who have devoted themselves to Portuguese history, a group that includes Edgar

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² Monteiro, “Sir Peter E. Russell—the 20th Century in the Palm of His Hand”; Pimenta, “Sir Peter Russell and Portuguese History: The Story of a Great Passion”; Smith, “Obituary: Sir Peter E. L. Russell died 22 June 2006.”

³ Michael, “Sir Peter Russell (1913–2006),” 1133.

⁴ Pimenta, “Sir Peter Russell and Portuguese History: The Story of a Great Passion, 1.”

⁵ Macedo, “A propósito do centenário da Aliança Luso-Britânica: A historiografia britânica em Portugal.”

⁶ Baubeta and Robinson, “Lusophonia.”

Prestage (1869–1951)⁷ and Charles Ralph Boxer (1904–2000)⁸ as its best known names. But other figures can also be mentioned, such as William James Entwistle (Professor of Spanish at King’s College, London [1895–1952]⁹); Alan David Francis (the author of a major study on the Treaty of Methuen),¹⁰ or Richard Robinson (the author of *Contemporary Portugal: A History*¹¹). And yet other names could be mentioned among the living scholars.

When his parents divorced, Peter Russell moved to live with his mother in England at a relatively early age (he was 16), and attended Cheltenham College, Gloucestershire, a prestigious Victorian school. He studied at Oxford and, in the 1940s, during and after the war, he worked for the Intelligence Corps, performing missions in the Caribbean, West Africa, and Southeast Asia. These years, it seems, were crucial in the formation of his character.¹²

When Peter Russell died, different stories were published about him in the press, many of them amusing, others revealing his qualities of tremendous courage and initiative. All of them are very interesting and only a lack of space prevents me from mentioning them in their entirety. I shall therefore refer to only three of them.

I will transcribe the first just as it appeared in *The Telegraph*:

Russell was commissioned into the Intelligence Corps in 1940, having been selected before the war for intelligence work. The story goes that at the beginning of the war he was in Lisbon, charged with escorting the Duke of Windsor on board the ship that would carry him to his governorship of the Bahamas; Russell was issued with a revolver, and instructed to use it if there were any ducal reluctance to embark.¹³

But many other stories could be told about this historian and member of the Royal Security Service (MI5), who left the forces in 1946 with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. A few years earlier—this is the second story—Peter Russell had been in Lisbon, where he visited a bookstore and discovered a book on a topic that directly interested him: the sources of the Portuguese chronicler Fernão Lopes. He had indeed written a short essay on this very subject himself. *The Independent* reports that a “closer inspection revealed that he was the

⁷ Laidlar, “Edgar Prestage: Manchester's Portuguese Pioneer”; Livermore, “Edgar (1869–1951).”

⁸ Alden, *Charles R. Boxer: An uncommon life*.

⁹ Morley, “William James Entwistle (1895–1952).”

¹⁰ Francis, *The Methuens and Portugal 1691–1708*.

¹¹ Robinson, *Contemporary Portugal: a history*.

¹² Thompson, “Address Given at the Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of Professor Sir Peter Russell (24 October 1913–22 June 2006),” 263.

¹³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1523476/Professor-Sir-Peter-Russell.html#> [Accessed on 2013.05.26.]. See also Michael, “Sir Peter Russell (1913–2006),” 1135–36.

author: a Portuguese colleague who had borrowed the typescript of an expanded version of the lecture had, without telling him, translated it into Portuguese and arranged for it to be published.”¹⁴ The person who had done this was Professor Gonçalves Rodrigues, his friend and a former teacher of Portuguese at Oxford. This story was later recounted by João Gouveia Monteiro in a note published in the *e-Journal of Portuguese History*.¹⁵

The third story appeared in the Spanish newspaper *El País* and was told by Ian Michael. I quote verbatim:

In the summer of 1938, he met a group of Oxonian students in Galicia, where he was arrested in the Cies Islands photographing the Canarias, one of the few Navy ships that had been dedicated to the service of the Nationalists. Taken to the Atlantic Hotel in Vigo, he was questioned by two SS officers, who, upon learning that he had been in a summer camp of the Hitler Youth in Bavaria in 1935, invited him to dine with them. After a consultation with the government of Franco in Burgos, Russell was taken to the international bridge of Tuy to cross to Portugal, with a pair of machine guns trained on him so that he should not turn from his path. Later he commented that it was the slowest and most dangerous ride of his life.¹⁶

Between 1946 and 1953, he was a Fellow of Queen’s College, and from then until 1981 he was King Alfonso XIII’s Professor of Spanish Studies at Oxford, succeeding Salvador de Madariaga and his supervisor, William Entwistle, in that position.

Having developed an early interest in the Iberian Peninsula in the final centuries of the Middle Ages and early modern times, Peter Russell spent the 1970s and ’80s devoting significant attention to Castilian literary studies. This interest is reflected, among other texts that could be quoted, in the following titles, some of them serving as reference books: *Spain: a Companion to Spanish Studies*,¹⁷ *Cervantes*,¹⁸ or *Temas de La Celestina y otros estudios: del Cid al Quijote*.¹⁹

The work of this author clearly reveals his background in literary studies, certainly linked to the years when, at Queen’s College, Oxford, he had studied literature under the guidance of Dámaso Alonso. In his case, this training had certainly left its marks, as

¹⁴ Deyermund, “Professor Sir Peter Russell: Iconoclastic Hispanist Who Was for 28 Years King Alfonso XII Professor of Spanish Studies at Oxford.”

¹⁵ Monteiro, “Sir Peter E. Russell—the 20th Century in the Palm of His Hand.”

¹⁶ Michael, “Hispanista y espía británico.” See also Michael, “Sir Peter Russell (1913–2006),” 1134.

¹⁷ Russell, *Spain: a companion to Spanish Studies*.

¹⁸ Russell, *Cervantes*.

¹⁹ Russell, *Temas de La Celestina y otros estudios: del Cid al Quijote*.

demonstrated by the concern that he instilled in his students an appreciation for the accurate use of words. According to Colin Thompson,

Peter had many such spiritual children; many of us are here. We have lost a spiritual father. Yet the love of the truth which he instilled in us, and the virtues which he embodied, remain with us. Coming to literary studies from an intellectual formation as a historian, Peter had little time for the subjective and the impressionistic as a substitute for hard evidence and proper methodology. He taught us first to be quite sure that we understood what the words meant when they were written. He taught us to argue from evidence, not from prior, untested assumptions, and to distinguish the persuasive but specious ('bogus', he would call it) from the accurate and demonstrable.²⁰

Recognizing the quality of these efforts, a collection of studies²¹ was offered to him on his eightieth birthday (in 1993). In the prologue of another homage (published the same year in volume 17.2 of the journal *Celestinesca*), and commenting on Peter Russell's work of literary history, Julian Weiss penned some words which, although written about his literary studies, can also be considered to shed light on our author's historical works:

And the questions Peter Russell poses are central ones, of continuous relevance. As one whose research has been divided equally between history and literature, his writings have often brought to the fore the difficult relationship between the approach of the historian and that of the literary critic. The grounds of that relationship have evolved considerably since his reviews of the books by Lida de Malkiel . . . and Gilman . . . where, inspired by a skeptical empiricism, and supported by a sure yet unobtrusive command of historical documentation, he most trenchantly stakes a claim for social history. But the methodological issue that underpins his response to those scholars is still a pressing one, to which students of medieval and Renaissance Spain should urgently return in view of the various 'new historicisms' of literary scholars, and the changing practice of history itself. On another level, many of Peter's most suggestive questions have emerged through his scrupulous attention to the detail of the literary work.²²

Indeed, his *skeptical empiricism* (to use the expression of the above quotation), his continuing work in the area of documentation, his concern for social history, and his great attention to

²⁰ Thompson, "Address Given at the Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of Professor Sir Peter Russell (24 October 1913–22 June 2006)," 264.

²¹ Deyerdmond and Lawrance, *Letters and society in fifteenth-century Spain. Studies presented to P. E. Russell on his eightieth birthday*. There is a previous volume of the same tenor: Russell and Hodcroft, *Mediaeval and Renaissance studies on Spain and Portugal in honour of P. E. Russell*.

²² Weiss, "Studies in honour of Peter E. Russell on his 80th birthday," 2.

detail, are all very visible in his words, when Russell writes (in Spanish):

It can be concluded that the criticism of *Celestina* should resign itself to the fact that, at the ideological level, there can be no definitive solutions, only possibilities. Can it be that the great discovery of those authors, the heirs of a dogmatic culture, has been to realize that skepticism is not only a feasible intellectual position, but that it is also able to reveal new and fruitful perspectives and literary forms?²³

The words I just quoted were written about *Celestina*, but in his book on the British intervention, there are many lines that reveal the same methodological approach. Here is another example: In seeking to calculate the possible number of men who would have formed the contingent of English and Gascon forces that participated in the Battle of Aljubarrota, Peter Russell writes, “Any final conclusion must be purely tentative, but it seems reasonable to presume—in the absence of better evidence—that the total strength of João’s English and Gascon supporters at Aljubarrota was probably not less than 400 men and certainly not much more than 700.”²⁴ His skeptical discourse prevails in the sequence of words: “purely tentative”; it “seems reasonable to presume; absence of better evidence; probably not less; certainly not much more.”

In my view, this is not a suspension of judgment or a hypothetical or relativist discourse, but a skeptical empiricism, which does not preclude objectivity. So, in the discourse of Russell, there seems to be a firm belief in what may be called the creative power of doubt, which leads him to write the following: “In an age when it can be claimed, along with Roland Barthes, that literature is, by definition, ambiguous, one will find, of course, in the complex ambiguity of *Celestina*, at least a partial explanation of the genius of the text, and not a sign of artistic failure nor a series of puzzles that it is the duty of critics to definitively resolve.”²⁵

In fact, this was the same conviction that was present in his mind. Continuing to follow the previous quote, after mentioning 700 as the maximum number of participants in the battle, Russell writes, “Even if the larger figure is nearer the truth it is thus evident that English participation in the battle was not on such a scale as to obscure the fact that the main brunt of the action must have fallen on the Portuguese men-at-arms.”²⁶ In other words, there is great coherence in the work of this author, visible both in his texts of

²³ Quoted in Weiss, “Studies in honour of Peter E. Russell on his 80th birthday,” 3.

²⁴ Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward II and Richard II*, 385–86.

²⁵ Quoted in Weiss, “Studies in honour of Peter E. Russell on his 80th birthday,” 4.

²⁶ Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward II and Richard II*, 386.

literary criticism, which contain more theoretical formulations, and in his historical texts, closer to the sources and therefore seemingly less theoretical. In both situations, his doubts allow us to draw closer to the truth.

I have no intention of solving the problems that these statements represent in terms of literary criticism. But I dare to suggest that it would be interesting to study to what extent these claims are related to the critical methodology developed by Dámaso Alonso, mentioned above, among other influences. Anyway, let me just say that in the literary studies written by Peter Russell we can note a concern with unraveling the multiple meanings of the text (i.e., the perspective or the perspectives that are revealed through these texts),²⁷ a concern that was to prove extremely useful in his historical studies. He also devoted himself to translation.²⁸

As Julian Weiss writes, “by bringing out the richness of the play's verbal texture, Peter Russell puts us in a position to continue exploring the ways in which the work interweaves the language of official authority with a range of other, more subversive voices. (It reminds us that he himself is not interested just in history written from above, but also in life on the margins).”²⁹

But it was, above all, Portuguese history of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that had always interested him. In 1995, in its *Variorum Collected Studies Series*, Ashgate published a collection of studies by Peter Russell, entitled *Portugal, Spain and the African Atlantic, 1343–1490*.³⁰ It is a most precious book, divided into two parts, a division that immediately introduces the reader to the two topics that most interest this author: the British intervention in the Iberian Peninsula during the second half of the fourteenth century (Part 1) and the Portuguese expansion in the fifteenth century, with special attention being paid to Prince Henry the Navigator (Part 2).

This second part includes some central texts for the study of Portuguese expansion in the 15th century, such as “Castilian documentary sources for the history of the Portuguese Expansion in Guinea in the last years of the reign of Dom Afonso V,”³¹ “New

²⁷ Weiss, “Studies in honour of Peter E. Russell on his 80th birthday,” 4.

²⁸ Russell, *Traducciones y traductores en la Península Ibérica (1400–1550)*; Russell, “The Medieval Castilian Translation of Vegetius, *Epitoma de Rei Militaris*: An Introduction”; Russell “De nuevo sobre la traducción medieval castellana de Vegecio: *Epitoma de rei militaris*”; Russell, “Terá havido uma tradução medieval portuguesa do *Epitoma de Rei Militaris de Vegécio*?”

²⁹ Weiss, “Studies in honour of Peter E. Russell on his 80th birthday,” 4.

³⁰ Russell, *Spain and the African Atlantic, 1343–1490*.

³¹ First published as “Fontes documentais castelhanas para a história da expansão portuguesa na Guiné nos últimos anos de D. Afonso V,” *Do Tempo e da História* 4 (1971): 5–33.

light on the text of Eustache de la Fosse's *Voiaige à la Guinée* (1479–1480),³² “White Kings on Black Kings: Rui de Pina and the problem of Black African Sovereignty,”³³ or three papers on Prince Henry,³⁴ which are linked to the publication in 2001 of Peter Russell's excellent—and in some ways innovative—biography *Prince Henry “the Navigator.”*³⁵ Still on the subject of this second part, I draw your attention to the very important paper entitled “Some socio-linguistic problems concerning the Fifteenth-Century Portuguese Discoveries in the African Atlantic,”³⁶ mentioning only that it would have been very useful to add to this book two other papers of an identical profile and importance: “Some Portuguese paradigms for the discovery and conquest of Spanish America”³⁷ and “Veni, vidi, vici: some fifteenth-century eyewitness accounts of travel in the African Atlantic before 1492.”³⁸

But as far as this paper is concerned, the greatest interest is in the first part of the book, devoted (as I said) to the British intervention in the Iberian Peninsula during the second half of the fourteenth century. The papers gathered together here, with the exception of “Medieval Portuguese Students at Oxford University,”³⁹ all discuss this topic. Beside the studies on historiography, such as those dedicated to Fernão Lopes⁴⁰ and Froissart⁴¹ (two authors generally considered to be fundamental for understanding this century), I highlight “João Fernandes Andeiro at the Court of Lancaster (1371–1381),”⁴²

³² First published as “Novos apontamentos sobre os problemas textuais do *Voiaige à la Guinée* de Eustáquio de la Fosse (1479–1480),” *Revista Portuguesa de História* 16 (1976): 209–21.

³³ First published in Michael, Ian and Robert A. Cardwell, eds. *Medieval and Renaissance Studies in honour of Robert Brian Tate*, Oxford, Dolphin Books: 151–64. [Separata Descobrimentos 192.B].

³⁴ “Prince Henry The Navigator” (first published in *Diamente* 11 [1960]: 3–30); “Prince Henry The Navigator: The rise and fall of a culture hero” (first published in the series *Taylorian Special Lecture*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984 [B. N. Madrid]) and “Prince Henry and the Necessary End” (first published in Earle, T. F. and S. Parkinson, eds., *Studies in Portuguese Discoveries I: Proceedings of the First Colloquium of the Center for the Study of the Portuguese Discoveries*, Warminster, Ariis and Phillips, 1–15).

³⁵ Russell, *Prince Henry the Navigator: A Life*.

³⁶ First published as “Problemas socio-linguísticos relacionados com os descobrimentos portugueses no Atlântico africano,” *Anais da Academia Portuguesa da História* 26 (1980): 218–50.

³⁷ Russell, “Some Portuguese paradigms for the discovery and conquest of Spanish America.”

³⁸ Russell, “Veni, vidi, vici: some fifteenth-century eyewitness accounts of travel in the African Atlantic before 1492.”

³⁹ First published as “Medieval Portuguese Students at Oxford University,” *Aufsätze zur Portugiesischen Kulturgeschichte*, Muenster, Wesffalen (1960): 183–91.

⁴⁰ *On the Sources of Fernão Lopes*. As the author states in footnote 1 of this text, this is a reworking of Russell 1941. Other studies published about the same topic in the same volume include “Fernão Lopes and the text of the treaty of Santarém” (first published as “Fernão Lopes e o Tratado de Santarém,” *Revista Portuguesa de História* 5 [1951]: 455–73) and “Archivists as Historians: The Case of the Portuguese Fifteenth-Century Royal Chroniclers” (first published in this volume).

⁴¹ “The War in Spain and Portugal” (first published in Palmer, J. J. N., ed., *Froissart: Historian*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 83–100 and 172–74).

⁴² First published in *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra* 14 (1938): 1–15.

and “Portuguese Galleys in the Service of Richard II, 1385–1389.”⁴³

They are all important papers. If I may be allowed to make a personal consideration, I will say that the paper on Portuguese Galleys was crucial for the conceptualization of some of the problems that I encountered in 1986, when I wrote my small book on the Treaty of Windsor.⁴⁴ But, seen from a distance of more than half a century, it is clear that these texts served as preparation for his major book, published in 1955 and entitled *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward II and Richard II*.⁴⁵

I believe that this is a fundamental book for many reasons.

Cristina Pimenta points out some of these reasons for us, and I quote:

In order to realize such an important work, Russell had to become acquainted with Iberian sources, which, as far as Portugal was concerned, led him to become engaged in the main Lisbon archives (Torre do Tombo), where he opened up several important discussions about the contribution that had been made to the theme by the chroniclers. Paying major attention to Fernão Lopes, Russell understood the message left by the 15th-century royal chronicler. But, in fact, this is not the only dimension to be stressed. This most interesting book analyses [*sic*] the western political history of the first period of the Hundred Years War as a whole, with special attention being paid to the internal hostilities in Iberia arising as a direct result of the British alliance that some of the kingdoms involved had tended to accept. In relation to this subject, I believe that the genealogies that Russell includes in this work are particularly important, especially because they give the reader an idea of the personal dimensions of the above-mentioned alliances.⁴⁶

In other words, knowledge of archival sources linked to a careful reading of the chronicles and the permanent working of Peninsular history in combination with the study of the great Anglo-French conflict—all this allowed him to think of European history of that time as one united whole. In fact, it allowed him to look at the history of Portugal and Castile at that time as a decisive chapter of what is traditionally referred to as ‘The Hundred Years War.

Without wishing to tire the eyes of my readers with a succession of quotations,

⁴³ First published as “Galés portuguesas ao serviço de Ricardo de Inglaterra (1385–1389),” *Revista da Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa* 18 (1953): 1–17. Also related to this same topic are: “‘King of Castile and León, Duke of Lancaster’: John of Gaunt’s Spanish court” (an excerpt from Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward II and Richard II*, 173–85), and “Una alianza frustrada: las bodas de Pedro I de Castilla y Juana Plantagenet” (first published in *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 2 (1965): 301–32).

⁴⁴ Fonseca, *O essencial sobre o Tratado de Windsor*.

⁴⁵ Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward II and Richard II*.

⁴⁶ Pimenta, “Sir Peter Russell and Portuguese History: The Story of a Great Passion, 1.”

which would do little to convince them of the value of my arguments but would certainly subject them to the artillery of my “erudition,” I should just like to point to some examples taken from Peter Russell’s book, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward II and Richard II*.

All those who knew him and who have read his publications can attest to his profound knowledge of the English, Spanish, and Portuguese archives and libraries. It is sufficient just to read the preface to the 1955 edition of *The English Intervention* to realize the full extent of this knowledge. Undoubtedly, his extensive reading and the information that he accumulated allowed him to achieve what, in my view, constitutes his greatest contribution to the history of Portugal: the consideration of the European, English, and Portuguese history of that time as one united whole. There is a paragraph in this book dealing with the Battle of Aljubarrota. Peter Russell writes:

In terms of results achieved, the battle of Aljubarrota must rank among the most decisive engagements of medieval warfare. Had the Portuguese lost it, Portuguese independence must have disappeared within a few weeks and the unification of all Peninsular kingdoms under the Castilian crown would very likely soon have followed. A Portuguese defeat would, too, have enabled the allied kings of France and Castile to face England with so overwhelming a concentration of power that it is unlikely that she could have done more than soon make peace on France’s terms. As it was, João I, at the age of twenty-eight, was now to lead into a new age of conquest overseas and bourgeois mercantilism at home a small but virile kingdom purged by social revolution of the aristocratic provincialism which had hitherto held its development in check.⁴⁷

Not all the judgments that are made in this quote can be accepted without discussion today. But this does not matter. What is relevant is that this work by Peter Russell laid the foundation for a more accurate understanding of this key moment in Portuguese history, designated the Crisis of 1383–1385: the internal consequences of that civil war were pointed out, the channels of communication and influence between Portugal, the other Iberian kingdoms, and European countries were defined; the major problems and interests involved were identified; important information was provided about the war at sea. I believe that I am not exaggerating if I say that with this book, Peter Russell placed the Portuguese crisis of the late fourteenth century at the heart of the great political, diplomatic, and military debate about Europe at that time. The quote that I just made shows this very clearly.

⁴⁷ Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward II and Richard II*, 397.

As he writes in his preface to the 2000 Portuguese edition, it is

certain that in these early chapters [of the book] Portugal does not play the role of a first cause. But even so, there is already evidence that the tide will eventually make the western kingdom a main protagonist. Successive British governments and even John Lencaster delayed in recognizing that . . . the geography and political realities of the time made Portugal his only natural ally against Castile. It was only at this moment that it became clear that what British strategists called *Le Chemin de Portyngale* began to be seen as the most promising bet to meet the strategic ambitions and policies that his government cherished in the Peninsula⁴⁸.

As Borges de Macedo pointed out, this work by Peter Russell has, on the other hand, a methodological value that extends far beyond the concrete topic that is the subject of study. When the “author states, in particular, the connection between the diplomatic and political measures of these kings [Edward III and Richard II of England] and the conditions of the Iberian Peninsula, not together but state by state and phase by phase,” it has the greatest interest. Indeed,

the conclusions established in a process of comparative history and an analysis of simultaneous forces provide essential elements for understanding the policies of Ferdinand I and John I [the Portuguese kings that were contemporaries of the already mentioned English kings], as well as the establishment of the Luso-British alliance. And, if this work is fundamental for our knowledge of Portuguese life of that time, it is also, for the same reasons, fundamental for the history of Spain and Britain, so that the features of interest for the in-depth historical definition of each of the countries are interwoven in correlative interpretation. This is the only one that can be used to understand the political, economic, social or cultural movements, always insufficient when searching for a satisfactory explanation on its own.⁴⁹

In terms of diplomatic history, with this work the Treaty of Windsor (its background and implications) acquired a wider and deeper understandability. One might even say that the most important texts that were published later on about this period brought further developments along the path opened up by Peter Russell. To name just a few examples, I remember (among others) in Spain, Luis Suárez Fernández⁵⁰ and César

⁴⁸ Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward II and Richard II* (Portuguese edition), 19.

⁴⁹ Macedo, “A propósito do centenário da Aliança Luso-Britânica. A historiografia britânica em Portugal,” 37.

⁵⁰ Fernández, *Historia del reinado de Juan I de Castilla*.

Olivera Serrano,⁵¹ and in Portugal, Salvador Diaz Arnaut,⁵² João Gouveia Monteiro,⁵³ and myself.⁵⁴ In this sense, I suggest comparing these works with others written before 1955, which will certainly help to prove the enormous difference. Consequently, and this is the most remarkable fact, almost 60 years after it was published, *The English Intervention* continues to be quoted as an essential reference work.⁵⁵

In short, this is a book that examines a conjuncture at a given time: the British intervention in the Iberian Peninsula during the second half of the fourteenth century. For Portuguese history, that conjuncture was crucial because it coincided with the dynastic crisis in the middle of the second half of the century. In this sense, the book represents an indispensable source of information for learning about the political, military, and diplomatic intricacies of that intervention. But in my view, this book has another parallel, of equally important interest: it shows us how, both in England and in Portugal, the spatial coordinates (particularly the maritime ones) were automatically assumed, as were the strategic decisions that these ended up imposing.

When, in referring to the Treaty of Windsor, Jorge Borges de Macedo wrote that, after events as dramatic as those had been, “Portugal understood the dangers of basing its independence exclusively on Peninsular forces, dynastic combinations or ill-defined alliances. In other words, there was a glaring need to strengthen conditions for positive seaborne support, thus offsetting the pressure from the land border,”⁵⁶ he was emphasizing two very important things: first, that in those years, the Anglo-Portuguese victory was not a historical necessity, as has been advocated by some historians, and second, that this victory had represented a clear shift in the cycle of events.

Previously, I emphasized the importance that Russell attached to the ambiguity of literary texts, and now, in his historical texts, I seek to reduce the importance that he assigns to historical necessity. In doing this, I wish to acknowledge the role that human freedom has played in history. In fact, Russell's narrative is not a narrative in which events are connected by necessity. It is the opposite: it is an open narrative, in which events create possibilities. When, earlier, I spoke of the need to also unravel the multiple meanings of the

⁵¹ Serrano, *Beatriç de Portugal. La pugna dinástica Avis-Trastámara*.

⁵² Arnaut, *A crise nacional dos fins do século XIV*.

⁵³ Monteiro, *A guerra em Portugal nos finais da Idade Média*.

⁵⁴ Fonseca, *O essencial sobre o Tratado de Windsor*; Fonseca, “Significado da Batalha de Aljubarrota no contexto da conjuntura política europeia no último quartel do séc.”

⁵⁵ For example, see the recent review by Faria (“The politics of Anglo-Portuguese relations and their protagonists in the later Middle Ages [c. 1369–c. 1449]”) in an introductory chapter entitled “Anglo-Portuguese relations and political history.”

⁵⁶ Macedo, *História diplomática portuguesa: Constantes e linhas de força*, 29.

text in the narrative of the historian, I was attempting to underline that these multiple meanings point to possibilities and thus to freedom. His historical discourse is, basically, a discourse of the affirmation of freedom. That is the most important aspect that I wish to convey about Peter Russell.

In previous papers, I have had occasion to mention a comment by the Italian historian Franco Cardini which seems to me very opportune here in this paper. And so I end with this quotation:

[H]istory [he wrote] not only can, but indeed must, be written in the conditional tense, with all the “ifs” and “buts” of the case. Because, only in this sense, by seeing historical discourse in the light of an infinite number of “achievable possibilities,” which are understood to be the continuous result of any number of contributory factors and influences, although only one of them is realized, can you understand the meaning and value of the only “possibility” that becomes a reality.⁵⁷

Applying this comment to the Portuguese Crisis of 1383–1385 and, in this particular context, to the British intervention at that time, I venture to say that there were, at the beginning of the crisis, several achievable possibilities, but that military and political developments led to the only possibility that became reality. With this in mind, I have no doubt in saying that Peter Russell’s book was crucial in recognizing this change of perspective.

This is the lesson of his book.

Peter Russell was a member of the Royal Historical Society, the British Academy, the Royal Academy of Buenas Letras in Barcelona and the Portuguese Academy of History. In 1989, he was awarded the Nebrija Prize given by the University of Salamanca and was appointed Commander of the Order of Isabel the Catholic. He was also Commander of the Order of Prince Henry, in Portugal.

⁵⁷ Cardini and Valzania, *Le radici perdute dell’Europa. Da Carlo V ai conflitti mondiali*, 4.

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