YOURS FAITHFULLY

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Ray Perkins, Jr., ed. *Yours Faithfully, Bertrand Russell: a Lifelong Fight for Peace, Justice, and Truth in Letters to the Editor.* Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 2002. Pp. xii, 433. US$52.95; pb $26.95.

Although Bertrand Russell was obviously a prolific writer on numerous topics (technical philosophy, education, religion, political critique, women's rights, and nuclear disarmament), and published his views through various venues such as technical volumes, popular books, essays, scholarly articles, reviews, and pamphlets, there has been a neglect of Russell's utilization of the newspaper's "Letters to the Editor" section. In this accessible volume, Ray Perkins has collected and organized the letters to the editor published by Russell. Russell, from the first known letter in 1904 to the final public statement on the Middle East crisis published posthumously in 1970, published approximately 400 letters to the editor. Of these 292 are published in *Yours Faithfully*.

Perkins begins with a helpful introduction (pp. 1–12), placing the letters into the broader framework of Russell's life. We are introduced, in a very basic sketch, to the development of Russell's thought, encountering such major threads in Russell's life as his early political interests (indicated in 1896 with *German Social Democracy*, though pushed to the foreground with the First World War) and the developments in his philosophical theories from *Principia Mathematica* through *Our Knowledge of the External World* to *Human Knowledge*. We also meet various significant individuals in Russell's life, such as his various wives and his colleagues both in philosophy and in activist work. Although Russell scholars will find this introduction somewhat simplistic, those non-specialists encountering Russell through this book will find the introduction helpful and clearly necessary in order to contextualize the letters.

The letters themselves are organized into chronological chapters. The first eight letters, "Early Letters", are dated from 1904 to 1913. These are the earliest known published letters by Russell. Perkins then gives us those letters published during the First World War (1914–18). The remaining letters fall into: "Between the Wars" (1919–38); "World War Two and the Early Cold War" (1939–53); "The Cold War and the Nuclear Peril" (1954–62); and "The Cold War and American Militarism" (1963–69). The final document is Russell's posthumous 1970 statement to the Conference of Parliamentarians in Cairo. Each chapter has a brief overview of the period in Russell's life, further situating the letters. Perkins is also careful to offer introductions to each letter, and the occasional footnote to explain various references in the letters (names of individuals that may not be familiar to readers, major events referred to, etc.). Each letter is numbered sequentially, accompanied by the B&R number of the letter. Given Russell's diverse interests, clearly reflected in these letters, Perkins has subdivided the last four chapters into thematic subsections. Those readers who are interested in Russell's views on, e.g., religion, education, or Vietnam can find the relevant letters with ease. A comprehensive index also makes the collection accessible. The exact division of the chapters tends to reflect major shifts in Russell's thinking as much as historical developments (the latter obviously affecting the former in any case). For example, the 1938–39 break reflects both Russell's move from England to the US and his departure from the pacifist stance of *Which Way to Peace?* The 1953–54 break reflects Russia's development of nuclear weapons and Russell's shift towards mutual disarmament by both superpowers. And the 1962–63 break reflects Russell's intervention in the Cuban Missile Crisis as well as his reactions to the US involvement in Vietnam.

Perkins has supplied us with an excellent collection of letters. Although some may ask how useful such a collection may be, I would contend that the letters are vital sources of information for Russell studies. First, from an historian's perspective, the preservation and accessibility of primary material is a noble and worthwhile achievement. Perkins is to be commended for his efforts in drawing our attention to this material by blowing the dust off material that most would ignore. Second, the letters themselves are fascinating indications of shifts in Russell's thinking, pointing out the nuances of such shifts as he engages in debate with various other voices over a very long and active life. What emerges is not a lone thinker pouring out books and essays, remote from the debates of his time, but rather a witty, passionate, intellectual figure whose thinking is dynamically reacting to, and growing through, dialogue with others, both his critics and those he critiques. In a sense, walking through this book was an intriguing venue for walking through Russell's life once again. Third, the letters offer clarifications on contested issues in Russell's life, e.g., accusations that Russell was anti-American or continued to hold to his appeasement position of

1938. We are also able to read some of Russell's own reactions to his earlier thinking, noting nuances and shifts as Russell offers commentary on his own books and ideas. Among the various letters responding to critics of *Why I Am Not a Christian*, we find, e.g., a nasty reaction to Gerard Irvine's review in *Time and Tide* that comments on the CCNY case, defending not only Russell's religious views but also calling into question Christian sexual ethics. Already these letters have been used on the Russell-l electronic discussion group to clarify Russell's political views, and likely other scholars will continue to find these letters essential for reconstructing Russell's thought.

Despite the strengths of *Yours Faithfully*, there are a few drawbacks that Perkins may wish to address if he and his publisher decide to run a second edition. Minor typographical errors, of course, need to be cleaned up, but these are neither common nor overly distracting. More important, however, is the selection of letters. Perkins only publishes three quarters of the available letters. Although his decision to exclude redundancies or more trivial letters is surely justifiable, I would have preferred to have seen all 400 letters included in this volume or, perhaps for the nearly identical letters, to have a critical apparatus devised to highlight these minor variations. Another useful addition would be the occasional inclusion of letters that Russell was responding to. In most cases the other letter is not needed, and Perkins does effectively contextualize Russell's comments. However, there are a few instances when I would have liked to read the whole exchange, especially those extended exchanges over several letters. For example, the 1949 exchange with J. D. Bernal (letters 99–101) would have been more fully presented if we could have read Bernal's letters along side Russell's. Similarly, I would like to have read Desmond Donnelly's letters to Russell (letters 142, 144–6). The occasional addition of such letters would not distract from the focus on Russell. Indeed, they would likely help give even greater life to these debates and accentuate their rhetorical flavour. They would also help us to determine if Russell understood or distorted his interlocutors' positions. Finally, for those readers without a solid background in Russell's life history, Perkins' biographical sketch may not be adequate at times. For example, the brief comments on Ralph Schoenman (e.g., pp. 11, 301–2, 312–13, and especially 396) need to be fleshed out for such readers to appreciate the complicated interpretative issues involved in reading Russell's works, including his letters, during the 1960s.

These suggestions aside, Perkins has produced an excellent collection of primary material. *Yours Faithfully* not only is useful for research, it is very accessible, being clearly laid out for easy reading for both scholars engaged in Russell studies as well as students and non-specialists who are interested in reading Russell through such a lens. No serious Russell scholar can ignore this work. In effect, we are truly the beneficiaries of Perkins' labours.