

Roy Campbell: The Effect of his Political Ideas on his Poetry

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It is usual in criticism, especially if the critic disagrees with his subject's views, to dismiss a poet's politics as being those of a man with no grasp of high affairs or the intricacies of politics. This, however, is not always a valid judgement. Yeats and Eliot, for instance, had coherent views of history and very definite views as to the future order and conduct of society.

Roy Campbell nevertheless would justify the lazy critic. Both in his poetry and in his autobiography his political worldview is incoherent and rambling. Yet, however hard it might be to construct a theory from his writings, it must be noted that in his later life he regarded himself as a 'committed' poet; a poet who took a very definite stand in the controversies that aroused the English Literary World of the 1930s. In the Spanish Civil War he sided with Franco and wrote *Flowering Rifle*, a long polemic in defence of the Franco coalition. In addition, if it is remembered that he remains easily the best poet English-speaking South Africa has produced, his views are of some significance; and it is important to see how his political beliefs enter into the wider context of his general ethical view, indeed of his whole sensibility, and thus illuminate certain qualities of his verse.

Of his early life in Natal and Rhodesia the only source at the present time is his autobiography *Light on a Dark Horse*.¹ Factually

the work appears not to be completely trustworthy, as the following typical example shows:

A subconscious absenteeism, which has hypnotic power, camouflages me completely . . . it was proverbial in the army how I could stand on parade at Brecon, with faulty equipment — without a respirator, or on the day when my rifle was missing — and get away with it.²

Nevertheless the evidence of his poetry and the internal consistency of the work with regard to his moods and development suggest that it is accurate enough on his early life.

In his youth he imbibed his values largely from his society. If his values changed later the change was in accord both with his nature and the values they replaced. He grew up on what one would call, with some hesitation, the vestiges of the English Frontier. It has almost been common cause (and even a source of pride to many Anglo-Africans) that no Frontier experience, comparable with the Afrikaners' trek into the far interior, can be found in the life of the English colonists.

Recently there has been an attempt on the part of Professor Butler of Rhodes University to discover such an heritage,³ and the emphasis on the 'Pioneer Column' in teaching history in Rhodesian Schools⁴ is to the same end. Nevertheless the majority of Anglo-Africans have, in the past at any rate, declined to fabricate or

discover such origins, partly through a lack of material and partly through a fear of appearing to imitate Afrikaners. Roy Campbell's attitude towards such an attempt to create an identity, as can be seen in his ruthless contempt for contemporary South African writers, would have been the same. Of the novelists he said:

You praise the firm restraint with which they write —

I'm with you there of course:

They use the snaffle and the curb all right,
But where's the bloody Horse.⁵

Again he will attack the myth of vast open spaces, much exploited by early writers and stemming from the 1820 settler Pringle,⁶ and he frequently showed a contempt for what he regarded as a provincialism in his own background. Of this more will be said later. Nevertheless, while, as in the passage just quoted, he thought nothing to be 'there', it would never have occurred to him to question that he was of pioneer stock; for proof of his pride in the part his family played in the European settlement of Natal, the student need go no further than the introduction to his autobiography.⁷ He never called in question certain ideals which the English colonists believed to be English and adapted to a rougher environment. His autobiography reveals from his earliest days an adherence to ideals of popular British public school fiction: a concept of honour involving pride in thrashings both received and meted out, pranks played on people regarded as being unpleasant and outside the pale, and a rather naive attitude towards women. He has a definite concept of manliness, which manifests itself in the all but interminable descriptions of hunting on land and sea. The implication is always there that a man who does not hunt, shoot and (deep sea) fish is probably a Bloomsburyite, a Jew, or a communist.

On the purely political level he defined himself predictably in his attitude towards the Afrikaners and Africans with whom his people share the country. The usual English attitude towards the Afrikaner was (and to some extent still is) of his being a slightly superior version of the native and with whom intermarriage could be permissible under certain special conditions. There is no evidence that Campbell did not fully endorse this attitude. Afrikaners seldom appear in his poems and then only as figures of fun. In reply to the Afrikaans poet Toon van den Heever, he wrote:

The Land Grabber

or a poet who offered his heart

for a handful of South African soil.

The bargain is fair, the bard is no robber,

A handful of dirt for a heartful of slobber.⁸

Beneath the joke there is a deadly serious point — attachment to the South African soil is not fit sentiment for a white man. In his autobiography, when talking of international politics and colour in the post-war world of 1945, he says: 'what is really laughable is that our Afrikaners should be hauled up before U.N.O.'⁹ It is there we have it: 'our Afrikaners' speaks more than could any amount of exegesis.

In regard to Africans, Campbell's attitude has been largely misunderstood. In the period 1925-7 when he and his fellow poet William Plomer attempted to found their magazine *Voorslag*, there was an uproar mainly on account of the critical attitude it evinced towards what was then called the 'Colour Bar'. Plomer himself was outspokenly critical especially in his novel *Turbot Wolfe* where he advocated miscegenation as a panacea for South Africa's social ills.¹⁰ Roy Campbell himself never took up so definite a position and any suggestion that he did is entirely due to his association with his friend. It is his autobiography¹¹ and the volume *Adamastor*¹² that provide the evidence of his attitude, rather than the shocked gossip of his fellow Natalians.

The African makes few appearances, but they are significant. There had been in the long satirical *Wayzgoose* (1928) a note of aristocratic contempt for the behaviour of his more ignorant countrymen:

Our sturdy pioneers as farmers dwell,

And, twixt the hours of strenuous sleep,
relax

To shear the fleeces or to fleece the
blacks.¹³

In *Adamastor* in the poem 'The Pioneers, A Veld Eclogue' he ridicules two poor whites:

Sometimes with busy twigs they switched
the flies

Or paused to damn a passing nigger's
eyes.¹⁴

Colour-prejudice is seen as the prerogative of ignorant white trash, but later in the poem we find something a little startling. Campbell is writing of two rural poor whites, one English and one Afrikaner, and he is at pains to tell us:

Think not that I on racial questions
touch

For one was Durban born, the other
Dutch.

Yet an inconsistency follows:

I drawn no line between them: for the
two

Despise each other and with reason too!

But, in this case, they forgave the sin,

Each loved his other as a very twin—

One touch of tar-brush makes the whole
world kin.¹⁵

Here he has definitely changed his ground and we should know, if we did not already, that the aspersion of coloured blood was an insult often used by the prosperous Anglo-African of the poor whites. There is nothing for it (especially in the context of this utterly contemptuous poem) but to read the last line quoted as betraying the assumption that to have coloured blood is a degradation and indeed both a symptom and a cause of the degeneration of his characters. In other poems he tried a different tack. The lyrical poems of *Adamastor* are heavily influenced by Rimbaud¹⁶ and it is not surprising that Campbell assayed his apocalyptic tone in referring to the colour question. 'Rounding the Cape' is a poem of farewell to South Africa written when he left the country, more or less for good, in 1928. Personifying the African Continent as *Adamastor* he writes:

Across his back, unheeded, we have
broken

Whole forests: heedless of the blood
we've spilled,

In thunder still his prophecies are
spoken,

In silence, by the centuries fulfilled.¹⁷

This attitude arises from (and reciprocally this poem has fostered) the fear of Anglo-Africans at having the Africans subject to them and that retribution will be swift. The last two lines promise violence and horror:

The land lies dark beneath the rising
crescent,

And Night, the Negro, murmurs in his
sleep.

In a far better poem, 'The Zulu Girl',¹⁸ he describes a Zulu mother working in the fields and suckling her child. Campbell writes with a foreboding of an African Apocalypse found uncommonly in his work, either in prose or verse. Certainly there is no suggestion of it in the

boyhood memories of his autobiography. Speaking of the suckling child he writes:

... his flesh imbibes

An old unquenched unsmotherable
heat—

The curbed ferocity of beaten tribes,
The sullen dignity of their defeat.

Her body looms above him like a hill

Within whose shade a village lies at rest,

Or the first cloud so terrible and still

That bears the coming harvest on its
breast.

These are memorable lines, in itself the poem is splendidly realised and has expressed much of the thought of his contemporaries. But still we cannot avoid the impression of an attitude struck, the approach of a reporter looking for good copy rather than a man giving expression to a profoundly apprehended vision. Perhaps in its very miniature perfection the poem seems too pat and a little glib. When we turn to Campbell's autobiography, however, the suspicion becomes a certainty. Much of his youth was spent with Africans and he knew not a little comradeship with them. The relationship was however always one of master to servant, or in later life of N.C.O. to the ranks. The Africans who meant most to him were his bearers on hunting trips. His attitude towards them was one of benevolent and sometimes kindly condescension. He sees no menace whatsoever arising out of the nature of such a relationship. Nevertheless he felt that justice was not done to the African:

White rule at its worst is actually preferable to what the Zulus and Matabele suffered and inflicted on other tribes. But that is no excuse for it being as bad as it is.¹⁹

He exculpates, however, by saying that the behaviour of the Israelis towards the Arabs and the Russians towards their subject peoples is infinitely worse. He does not go far in suggesting an answer; and the answer, such as it is, is one of paternalism, a doctrine which survived in Rhodesia longer than in South Africa. By his complaint he defines, however, vaguely, his solution:

There is no doubt that the average native is socially inferior to the white man, but he should not and cannot be prevented artificially from eventually becoming his equal, for the good of all concerned. The present

disqualification of the native from so many aids to his own betterment is exactly on a par with the natives' treatment of each other. We are behaving about a quarter as badly as the Zulus and Matabeles did to their fellow Bantu, and it will do us little more good than it did them . . . ²⁰

One cannot help the questions: 'Is that all he saw the problem as being? Was it only that for him?' It is distressing that the best literary mouthpiece English-speaking South Africa should have to offer should pronounce in a manner so facile and so superficial. The offhand tone of the passage shows clearly how little the problem affected him and belies the concern expressed so briefly in *Adamastor*.²¹

Such was Roy Campbell's political background. Politics had formed little of his experience, such views as he had being those of the 'advanced thinkers' among the English colonials. Like many of them he emigrated from Philistia. He found a moral fate peculiarly similar to many of those he left behind. He was to be confronted, in another form, with the revolution he had sensed and partially sympathised with; and his revulsion was characteristic. He had rejected the seventeenth-century Calvinistic world view of the Afrikaner and was to accept that of seventeenth-century Roman Catholic Spain. That he should do so is at first sight curious and difficult to explain.

Spanish writers have had little influence on their English counterparts, perhaps because in certain ways no war has gone deeper than the English-Spanish War of 1588. Despite harrowing wars the cultures of France and Germany have seemed less remote to the English mind than the Roman Catholic, and once imperialistic ideas which dominate Spain to this day. It is necessary to suggest the reasons for this, as it was under Spanish precept that Campbell became a politically committed poet.

While enjoying the physical excitement offered by a relatively savage environment outside Durban, he felt, as a poet, the need of a more intellectually stimulating one. The Mecca for this aspiration was London and England: 'Home' as the Anglo-Africans, until recently called it. In England, as a young poet of vigour and promise he was accepted into literary circles and made important and influential friends such as William Walton, Augustus John (who painted his portrait), Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell.

He made no secret, however, of his not feeling at home in such a milieu; *The Georgiad* and the relevant chapters of his autobiography clearly reveal this.²² The great literary cliques of London with their leftist outlook and sedentary bookishness were repugnant to him although he made clear exceptions of the friends listed above. The values he had learned in his early life were conspicuous by their absence; like many colonials he discovered that the England he thought he represented had simply disappeared. He found the English riddled with 'softness', riddled with literary nepotism, obsessed with a clinical attitude towards sex and displaying a rampant homosexuality. Once Campbell's violence of expression is allowed for, there was probably much truth in his allegations. His satiric poem *The Georgiad* gives the impression of being an attack on some rather tedious people by a man who very curiously was able to mingle both cleverness and oafishness.

His disaffection with this led him to move with his family to the continent, first the Camargue and later Spain. Here he made his living as a market gardener, fisherman, bull-fighter and cowboy (*vaquero*). Here, among a largely pious agrarian people, he was able to feel himself as belonging to a community and being able to share its ideals in a way he had never known before. This contentment found its best expression in a poem written even before his conversion to Roman Catholicism, in the touching and unpolemical 'Mass at Dawn' from *Adamastor*:

I dropped my sail and dried my dripping
seines
Where the white quay is chequered by cool
planes
In those great branches, always out of
sight,
The nightingales are singing day and
night.
Though all was grey beneath the moon's
grey beam,
My boat in her new paint shone like a
bride,
And silver in my baskets shone the bream;
My arms were tired and I was heavy eyed,
But when with food and drink, at morning
light,
The children met me at the water-side,
Never was wine so red or bread so white.²³

Had this been written in free-verse it could almost be D. H. Lawrence finding the 'spontaneous life' he yearned for. The identification with a way of life and a generalised sense of coming home could not be more obvious. Here there was for Campbell a recognition, albeit by unlettered people, of his literary gift and an admiration for his physical strength and skill not to be found in Bloomsbury. It was inevitable that he should be drawn to the religion of these people and consider it to be the sacramental force that made their life so worth having. Here Roman Catholicism was the religion of the people of the soil and their naturalness confirmed an anti-intellectualism learned in the bush of Natal and Rhodesia. In his autobiography he records, with disgust, seeing a man in a Barcelona café reading Plato's *Republic*. He notes in semi-Wordsworthian doggerel:

The illiterate peasants of Spain read
Far less nonsense from their running
brooks,
Than waiters primer-proud with knowing
looks
Can mumble out of newspapers and
books.²⁴

The meaning is clear even if the metrics of the last line are deplorable. Campbell always distrusted what he thought of as too much book-learning; for him it destroyed common sense and was generally debilitating.

Book-learning was hardly without its influence at this time, however. Campbell came in contact with the literature of Spain. Spain, as has been said, has been neglected in England and its literature is less familiar than that of any other major European country with the possible exception of Poland. The writings of the Spanish Renaissance in Epic, Dramatic, and Metaphysical poetry are of an excellence which rivals the English. *Ercilla* is no Milton and the great dramatists may not quite match Shakespeare but they remain considerable men. In all there is an ardent belief in the destiny of Spain in the world, the magnificent virtues of her people and the mission of the Roman Church. English writers are diffident on matters of nationalism and England's crusading role, at least when they write well: their stance is quite alien to their counterparts in Spain. Shakespeare's history cycle reveals an ambivalent attitude towards the rise of England's power which is not to be found in the drama-

tists of Spain who wrote when their country was easily the most powerful in the world. Campbell was to side with those who looked back to the former times and when his loving translations are read it is obvious that the plays influenced his political outlook.²⁵

In the rise of the Popular Front in Spain Campbell saw a threat to the whole ethos he had come to love and had embraced. As the foregoing might suggest, no man could have been more out of sympathy with the working classes of the towns. For him they were *canaille*, boot-blacks, taxi-drivers, miners and suchlike and for all of them he had an unmitigated contempt.²⁶ His sympathies lay with what he regarded as the lowest paid workers:

Paradoxically enough it is the workers who produce the chief necessities of life: grain, meat, and leather, for food, clothing and footwear, who get the lowest pay and they are generally conservative and do not want romantic upheavals.²⁷

His dislike of the socialism opposed to him was also occasioned by the people who supported it, whom he dubbed 'vowwers'—any kind of Puritan killjoy, socialist, Fabian or pedant typified in the introduction to *Flowering Rifle*:

And whether it would better them or not,
Upon all others would impose his lot:
To figures who would subjugate our souls
And hold a meeting when the tempest rolls
By dead statistics would control a city
And run a battleship with a committee.²⁸

Some of these jeers apply only to the Spanish Anarchists but they are offered as generally applicable. Here, in his hatred of a way of life he saw as degrading, he showed his early values as much as his embrace of Spain. Socialism was plainly unmanly, preached by boobies and sissies. In explaining this phenomenon he accepted two doctrines cherished in Catholic Spain. Firstly that the Jews, Freemasons of the Grand Orient Lodge and, to a certain extent, the Protestants were by definition on the side of the godless socialists and that the very rise of the latter was due to Protestantism. Talking of his friend, the Afrikaans liberal poet Uys Krige, he says:

Uys . . . as an incurable Calvinist . . . could never understand Spain or Provence. Protestants go to these countries for spiritual fresh air, yet, with the tainted opportunism which is their chief *raison d'être*, they

ascribe the attraction, which is really that of the church and the people who have not been amputated from the Church by force of tyrants like Henry VIII or crooks like Luther and Calvin—to the climate or the landscape or to anything else except the culture and civilisation which holds them so spellbound. They also consort with the malcontents. They have not the courage to disown what is wrong in themselves. They would sooner join the atheists and diabolists, as they did in the Spanish War, than with anything straightforwardly European or Roman . . . ²⁹

They are Humanitarians and therefore perverse. We read in the preface to *Flowering Rifles*:

Humanitarianism, their [the wowers'] ruling passion, an ersatz substitute for charity, invariably sides where there is most room for sentimental indulgence in the filth or famine of others. It sides *automatically* with Dog against Man, the Jew against the Christian, the black against the white, the servant against the master, the criminal against the judge. It is a suicidal form of moral perversion due to over-domestication, protestantism gone bad, just as are all the other perversions with which our intellectuals are riddled.³⁰

Here we have the true racial feelings of Roy Campbell, those of his own people. A reading of the poem decisively shows that the collation of Jews and blacks with dogs and criminals is no mere slip of a furious pen. The anti-semitism is endemic in the poem, contempt for the blacks is occasional. An interesting sidelight on the filth and famine of others is provided in the autobiography. Talking of the attitude towards beggars in Spain he recalls his own Anglo-Saxon background and remarks, 'Coming from a land where poverty is regarded as a loathsome disease to one where it is a sacrament; . . . this . . . was a revelation to me'.³¹ Truly he saw the panacea of Spanish Catholicism in a most remarkable light.

Threatened by so many ills, how better could he defend his values than by joining the regular army of Christ, the *force majeure*. Stalin once asked, 'How many divisions has the Pope?'; Campbell would have been ready to answer him:

From the very beginning (1934-5) my wife and I understood the real issues in Spain. There could be no compromise in

the war between the East and the West . . . Up to then we had been vaguely and vacillatingly Anglo-Catholic: but now was the time to decide whether, by staying in the territorials, to remain half-apathetic to the great fight which was obviously approaching—or whether we should step into the front ranks of the Regular Army of Christ. Hitler himself had said, even by then, how much more easy the Protestants were to enslave and bamboozle than the Catholics: Stalin, Trotsky and Lenin in their writings had shown they despised the latter as being of no more hindrance to them than the agnostic intellectuals whom they all more or less laughingly contemn . . . ³²

The dogmas of Spanish Catholicism and its ideas of world-order, medieval in kind, were to suffice as an interpretation and explanation of the world to his simple and rather violent soul. The sensitive and troubled probings of Roman Catholic writers such as Greene or Bernanos were not for him, the Regular Army of Christ marched in step with the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo. Campbell had found a spiritual and physical home unknown in South Africa or in England.

These considerations serve as an introduction to his poems of the Civil War in Spain. The fascinating but not central problem of the extent and nature of his participation in it will be left on one side.³³ It is sufficient to remark, he thought of his role as combatant and propagandist. The handful of lyrical poems are excellent.³⁴ There is a power which was absent from the rather tepid other poems in *Mithraic Emblems*.³⁵ They are realised and forceful and attempt little intellectual preaching. The opening of 'Christ in Uniform' is magnificent:

Close at my side a girl and boy
Fell firing, in the doorway here,
Collapsing with a strangled cheer
As on the very couch of joy.³⁶

Another poem, 'Christ in Hospital' recaptures the fullest excellence of *Adamastor* and is the only truly adult and realised expression Campbell ever gave to his deepest religious convictions. The lyric poems are few, however, and the majority of his war poems are polemical, the most important being the long poem, 'Flowering Rifle'.

We are told on the dust jacket that this is an epic and that Campbell regarded it as his master work. Epic, by any standards, it is not.

It has no story or plot in any recognisable form; indeed in its allusions it depends so much on an external knowledge of the Spanish Civil War that it is unintelligible without reference to historical works. It is mainly taken up with invective against the Republicans and praise for the Nationalists, interspersed with descriptions of fighting (places and names usually unspecified except in Campbell's own notes), and it ends with a vision of a Christian, reconstructed and fruitful Spain. For these reasons it must be classed as a polemic. It is a long and extremely repetitive poem. Its ideology has already been sketched from another source and it is sufficient to cite two passages which should be enough to suggest its quality and, more particularly the way in which Campbell held his ideology and how it caused him to write.

The first illustration is from Canto I. Campbell has outlined the red atrocities and the indignant rising of the Spanish people. He then turns to General Franco's flight from Tenerife to lead the uprising of 18th July, 1936:

To meet her chief, his Rubicon the straits,
His country rose—but to fling wide the
gates:

The cry was not to challenge but to im-
plore,

With which she shook the desolated shore: *
A headless phantom, she, in ragged attire
Whose flying streamers flogged the winds
with fire,

Swung, like a lantern her dismembered
head

In which, like coals, the eyes were blazing
red.

Those jet-black curls that taught the grapes
to grow

Had whitened in a night to banks of
snow,

With sleety whistle from her hand they
spread

And seem'd the smoke of that suspended
head:

With which she turned to lamp him on his
way

Through scenes of madness that defied the
day—

Humanity, benighted at midnight,

Had howled the sun into a small red
moon.

*Allusion to that tremendous passage in Lucan where Rome appears to Caesar at the Rubicon, to try to stop him.

And saw, through smoke, that high and
holy light

As grey Baboons behold the moon at
night.

But with the Gorgon-Beauty of her face,
Where Medusa's would have chilled the
race

Of blood, and walled the heart with chill-
ing stone,

She turned his heart to adamant alone . . .³⁷

This is Roy Campbell's assault on the grand style and it cannot be denied power in its gory exuberance. Nevertheless in its very imagery, striving admittedly after the rhetorical fury of Lucan, it displays certain lack of focus by virtue of its very striving after the violent and the extravagant. Streamers, even with fire, cannot flog the wind even when it is shamed; without development the verb seems used purely for a not very clear effect. How hair can teach the grapes to grow, even if there is a similarity in colour, is hardly clear. The comparison of the wronged Spanish people to baboons (it is developed from the howling of the small red moon two lines earlier) may be very striking in describing their state but is hardly appropriate to their spiritual condition with which he wishes us to sympathise. It is one thing to say that people have been physically reduced to the physical state of baboons, it is another to imply baboonish behaviour (e.g. 'howl' 'as grey Baboons behold'). The uneasy use of 'lamp' as a verb is a little matter; at other times Campbell could succeed at this.³⁸

The muddle of the imagery becomes a more ideological matter in the last couplet of the passage. The implied antithesis between 'stone' and 'adamant' is just not sufficient, the substances are similar; the difference in popular or any other association of the two substances is slight, and the quality of being adamant may or may not be excellent. Certainly it makes no appreciable contrast with stone. Whatever Campbell intended, and there is enough in the passage to guess he might have meant the difference between indifference and determination, the reader is left with the impression of General Franco being a very hard-hearted man indeed. He is also left feeling that this is a quality Campbell admired.

In this last matter we have a symptom of the failing, the crass loss of an artistic opportunity—a Civil War is an occasion of high tragedy. When men enter such a war, however strongly

they may feel as to the righteousness of their causes, it is surely with a sense of grief that a people should come to such a pass. Even Lucan, a highly committed writer, felt that. The sense of moral infallibility and triumph in the face of even the most heinous suffering which typified the left-wing poets Campbell despised was also his. The taking of even an enemy's life is, and should be for a Christian, a grave and sorry matter. To Campbell the polemic is all. In the other passage for consideration we do not seem far from 'the necessary murder' of Auden. He is expressing the view that even atheists are diabolists and perverted worshippers:

Even the fiend, to reinforce his sprite,
And get the courage for his daily fight,
Though Backwards, says his rosary every
night!

And what if Garcia Lorca died for this
Caught bending over that forlorn Abyss
For some mephitic whim his soul had
spliced,

As he once boasted, with the AntiChrist?
This weary Faustian hunger for the void
An age of intellectuals has destroyed;
In him another Marsyas sang and died
The victim of the God that he defied.*
It was his fate with his own age to die—
That of the fevered sin and languid eye,
And let the new-fledged eagle take the sky,
Whose plumes, the virtues that they found
so pale,

Are light and thunder on the roaring gale
Of battle and have man times repaid
The Genius lost in him for Spain betrayed.

*The amazing amount of paper wasted over this almost unique stain on Nationalist arms is typical of the Anglo-Saxon Press. When the Nationalists entered Granada the unbelievable barbarities perpetrated by the Reds made them trigger-happy as they rounded up and shot all corrupters of children, known perverts and sexual cranks. A natural reaction considering that the week before the Reds had slaughtered and tortured anyone who was under suspicion of any sort of decency at all. Maetz, Calvo de Sotelo, Munoz Seca, Padre Eusebio (about to be canonised) and Antonio Primo de Rivera were all killed not for their vices but for their virtues. They were intellectuals on a higher scale, and died better than the cowardly Lorca. If the author of this poem, a better poet than Lorca, so Borges the leading South American critic points out, had not been resourceful, he would have died, like Lorca, but at the hands of the Reds.³⁹

The final sentence of Campbell's note can be taken as a typical piece of the author's braggodoccio, though the opinion of Borges is one to be respected. The poem itself continues in praise of de Rivera in terms verging on blasphemy which surely would have offended that pious man. Campbell in this passage is on firmer ground than when he is praising, probably wrongly, for having a heart of particularly hard stone. It attempts to represent a coherent doctrine which, in itself, is eminently defensible, although the 'two wrongs make a right' tone of the note is hardly sound ethics. It is again the facility, the lack of realisation, despite a handful of proffered images, which one objects to. The note hints that Lorca was in some way sexually disordered: that this is not discussed in the verse is of little importance. What is, is the glib adjective 'Faustian' which is asked to do far more work than should ever have been asked of it. We are asked to think of Marlowe's play and, perhaps, Goethe's, not anything Campbell's poem might be achieving. We are told Lorca was a man of genius whose soul was given to Nihilism and the Devil, but that is all. We are offered the tasteless image: 'Caught bending over that forlorn Abyss'.

There is no suggestion of the quality of the experience he is attacking, no concretely realised picture of the object of his discrimination, either in negation or affirmation. The passage that follows is hardly clearer as to why we should admire Primo de Rivera. Campbell is angry, convinced that he is right and determined to make political capital, not poetry. The blustering and bigotry lead to a loss of humanity, a simple lack of evocation and concrete detail, a failure even to explore a situation which should move us with the force of tragedy, and these failings weaken the presentation of the very position he seeks to exalt.

The final impression left by 'Flowering Rifle' is that of all Campbell's attempts at extended thinking: many of the views are in themselves defensible, though such things as the anti-semitism are not; the indefensible is symptomatic of the way in which his undigested views were held—uncritically and muddle-headedly. A forceful and sometimes lyric poet, he was incapable of the sustained thought especially in politics, which could sustain poets like Dante or Milton. His thought is often incoherent, prejudiced, and, in its finer aspects, unrealised. He was prepared to accept a few

slogans and took no responsibility for any further consideration. These failings go to the very roots of his verse, exhibiting themselves in his often faulty metrics, frequently unclear or inappropriate imagery, or a surprising obscurity as to what is actually being talked about which arises not from any inherent complexity but from a sheer failure of technique. The latter failing is disastrous in any long poem, and Campbell devoted his mature energies to the long poem.

There is a cluster of short poems grouped before *Flowering Rifle* in the second volume of the *Collected Poems* and thematically related to it. Partly polemical and partly lyrical, they deal with the Spanish Civil War and war in general. The short burst of satire and the lyrical retrospect show Campbell to better advantage than the longer poem. It will be seen that they offer little modification of the ideas displayed in *Flowering Rifle*.

In 'A Letter from the San Mateo Front' no point is made that is not more fully stated in *Flowering Rifle*. There is a good deal of fun at the expense of 'MacSpaunday' (MacNiece, Spender, Auden, Day Lewis) and how his support has led to the defeat of his own cause. There is also a great deal of semi-mystical writing as to how crops grow for Nationalists but not for Republicans, leading to the point that Nationalist methods of production were more efficient than those of the Reds.

In two other poems, 'To Mary after the Red Terror' and 'The Carmelites of Toledo', he clarifies his reasons for his religious conversion. The first poem, to his wife, praises her for the example she set him in faith. It contains a curious stanza typical in the hagiography of the pious:

You led me to the feet of Christ
Who threatened me with lifted quirt:
But by its loving fury sliced
I staggered upright from the dirt.⁴⁰

The masochism is obvious especially when we remember that, as Campbell informs us in the autobiography, a quirt is a horse's goad, made in the Spain of his day, usually from a bull's penis. In his poem on the Carmelites there are lines to compare with this. He praises the quality of their Christian witness as an inspiration to him and, speaking of the martyrdom of Padre Eusebio, he writes:

His radiant face when last I saw
Eusebio bade me take delight:
His flesh was flame, his blood its light
That sought the fire as fire the straw,
And of his agony so cruel
As ruthlessly devoured the spite
As eager flame devours the fuel.
Small wonder then as trash too earthly
The gunbuts drove me from the pin
The smashed to let such Princes in . . .
The blows acceding to the martyr
Rebuffed me for a Harlequin.⁴¹

In the autobiography (p. 149) he slates Nietzsche, along with Marx, as a mere book-worm who knew nothing of life. With what delight, however, would Nietzsche have seized upon this passage as an illustration of his theories. Here the brute beast of Campbell's manhood is shamed by the exhibition of Christian humility. When such violence is regarded with joy the consequences can indeed be dangerous. As poems of religious experience the quality of these can hardly be compared with such a poem as 'Christ in Hospital'.⁴²

In another group he deals with experience gained in the Second World War, with war and the hardships of war. He joined the British forces and saw no contradiction in taking up arms against Franco's former allies. In a 'Jungle Eclogue' a gnat taunts two British N.C.O.'s with the fact that they are fighting for a bunch of money grubbing manipulators. He lumps the Anti-Axis Allies together as abusers of mass media and brothers in corruption:

Destructive Titans . . .
With toad-like hate puffed up beyond
amaze
To rule your destinies and guide your ways,
Class against class, to their eternal loss,
To prime with hate—and all against the
Cross;
And when they wolf the income and the
cash,
To head your empire to its final crash.
As for free-speech for which you're bluffed
to fight
It's their's alone to throttle as you write.
This is the Creed you have entrenched at
home
By volunteering (fools) to cross the
foam.⁴³

The gnat concludes by returning to a theme already familiar:

Your friends hunt Christians as your foes
 the Jews
 And seeing that the former are more
 numerous—
 Why, that is what appeals to me as humor-
 ous.⁴⁴

The objection to the alliance with Russia is a common and understandable Roman Catholic one. Certainly the views of the gnat as a whole are forcefully expressed and nothing is said in reply seriously to contradict them. The first N.C.O. (in the light of this and other references presumably to Campbell himself) justifies his actions by saying that he will fight injustice wherever it occurs:

One must be deft
 When liberty's attacked from Right and
 Left.

With my left fist the Nazis though I fight
 I've banged the bloody Bolshy with my
 right...

Between the Jewish Fascism of Russia
 And the gentile Bolshevism farmed on
 Prussia,

I see no difference save in their salutes...⁴⁵
 In other poems such as 'Heartbreak Camp'⁴⁶
 and 'The Moon of Short Rations'⁴⁷ much of the
 boredom, sickness and waste of the East African
 campaign are finely expressed and Campbell
 appears in the light of a 'protest poet' both in
 his reaction to war and the hardship imposed
 by the powers-that-be on those expected to fight
 it. Certainly in the Second World War he felt
 nothing of the crusading fervour he had had in
 Spain. In 'Monologue' he expresses his greatest
 disillusion. He sees his world as run by left-
 wing profiteers who exploit the blood of soldiers.
 In terms most reminiscent of the pseudo-
 dramatically expressed views of 'Jungle
 Eclogue', he refutes the idea that he has been
 duped in any way, and continues:

I'm fighting for a funkhole-warren
 Of bureaucrats who've come to stay,
 Because I'd rather, than the foreign
 Equivalent it should be they.

And adds with a tragic vision old as Thucy-
 dides:

We all become the thing we fight...⁴⁸
 Unfortunately he had neither the ability nor
 the wish to develop this insight. He consoles
 himself that he is at least fighting in the ranks
 unlike journalistic pundits who:

feast on poor men's bones
 And cheat the worker of his bread...

Between the armchair and the bed.⁴⁹
 At the end he perceives a glimmer of hope:

Out of the red sands of the circus
 The great cathedrals climbed the skies!⁵⁰

Spain, however, was to remain his central
 experience of war; it seems indeed the climactic
 experience of his life. In 'Talking Bronco' he
 returns to the preoccupations of *Flowering
 Rifle*. In it the poet sees himself as a Pegasus
 of most modern construction:

A talking Bronco, sharked from ear to ear
 With laughter, like a running bandolier,
 With teeth like bullets fastened in their
 clips

To chew the thunder and to spit the pips,
 Ejecting from their breach, in perfect time,
 The shells of metre and the shrieks of
 rhyme...⁵¹

This rather unhappy image, a product of
 Campbell's often over exuberant invention is
 long pursued. The poem is a truculent retro-
 spect. Campbell felt that Left-Wingers had had
 supreme influence both on British intellectuals
 and international news-media and had used it
 to vilify the just religious cause of Franco. He
 sees himself as a lone but able fighter against a
 mountain of deceptions.

In the polemical note of these poems the
 early coltish satirist in Campbell seems to have
 hardened to a loud commentator hard with
 prejudice. He often exhibits the faults of his
 masters in the satiric field: he wields the sar-
 castic bludgeon of Dryden rather than the ironic
 rapier of Pope, he resembles the Byron of
 'English Bards and Scottish Reviewers' in that
 he often loses the thread of his argument, having
 been carried away by extraneous asides and the
 necessities of rhyme. In the meditative poems
 there is much good writing, but as intimated
 above some very clear and interesting percep-
 tions fail to be realised in terms of actual poetry.
 By this time the lyric impulse that had made so
 much that was fine in *Adamastor* had gone and
 only his anger could find a powerful expression.

Like many poets of our age Campbell was
 often confused and violent: this is a stricture
 which applies to poets of all colours of the
 ideological spectrum. As he grew older he
 adopted certain specific views; he attempted to
 give his verse a commitment, a moral character.
 This led to a deterioration in his verse, a failure
 of his great promise, not because some of his
 views were poor in themselves but because of
 the way in which he held them. An idea may

be entirely admirable, but if it is held with an ill-considered arrogance its appearance and effect will be deplorable. With the years Campbell acquired not wisdom but prejudice.

It is a sad spectacle: to the world he left a handful of fine lyrics, to his own people an *oeuvre* strangely prophetic of their own later political development.

REFERENCES

1. CAMPBELL, R. 1951 *Light on a Dark Horse*. London: Hollis and Carter.
2. *IBID.*, p. 179.
3. BUTLER, F. G. 1969 Proceedings of the Conference on English Writing: Grahamstown. *English Studies in Africa*, 13 (1).
1969 *When Boys were Men*. Cape Town, O.U.P.
4. PEGG, H. E. 1949 *A History of Southern Africa*. Cape Town, Longmans. This work was used until recently in Rhodesian schools.
5. CAMPBELL, R. 1949-60 *The Collected Poems*. 3 Volumes. London, Bodley Head, vol. 1, p. 198.
6. BUTLER, F. G. ed. 1953 *A Book of South African Verse*. Cape Town, O.U.P., pp. 3-10.
7. *Light on a Dark Horse*, pp. 3-5.
8. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 1, p. 199.
9. *Light on a Dark Horse*, p. 150.
10. PLOMER, W. 1928 *Turbot Wolfe*. London, Hogarth Press.
11. That Campbell would never have gone this far is proved in *Light on a Dark Horse*, p. 152: 'I think it silly to interbreed, though I have no colour prejudice. Hybrids are seldom good, except in the case of a donkey stallion and the mare of a horse. When superannuated English society-tarts take up negro lovers, it is generally a sort of perversion like the exaggerated feeling for dogs and cats.'
12. CAMPBELL, R. 1930 *Adamastor*. London, Faber. It is indicative of his attitude to Africa that he should name this volume (his best in the opinion of this critic) after that menacing and repulsive giant, the numinous spirit guarding the Cape of Storms in Canto V of Camoens' *The Lusiads*. In this poem 'Rounding the Cape' he writes:
Where Adamastor from his marble halls
Threatens the sons of Lusos as of old.
(*The Collected Poems*, vol. 1, p. 27)
It is interesting to note that Roy Campbell's love of this poet *par excellence* of colonialism and Roman Catholic destiny was life-long. In *Talking Bronco* (published in 1949 and dealing with his experiences in the African Theatre of the Second World War), he writes in his poem to Camoens:
I find a comrade where I sought a master.
And then identifies with Camoens' life of hardship and lack of material prosperity, serving an ideal in distant places:
For Daily, while the stinking crocodiles
Glide from the mangroves on the swampy shore,
He shares my awning on the dhow, he smiles,
And tells me that he lived it all before.
(*The Collected Poems*, vol. 1, p. 159)
I have ignored, in my discussion of Campbell's use of African experience, the long narrative poem *The Flaming Terrapin* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1928). It uses imagery drawn from Africa extensively but largely in the colonial manner of 'local colour' (though with a vigour and luxuriance of vocabulary alien to his predecessors) and is not germane to our theme; no essential statement with regard to Africa is made that cannot be found in 'Rounding the Cape'. *The Waygoose* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1928) is referred to in text.
13. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 1, p. 243.
14. *IBID.*, p. 22. Poor whites in the period 1920-40 had a standard of living that was little different from that of the African; they were mainly Afrikaners and held in great contempt.
15. *IBID.*, p. 23.
16. Campbell had already excellently translated Rimbaud's 'Le Bateau Ivre', and the borrowing in 'The Zulu Girl' from 'Les Chercheuses de Poux' is well known. The affinity between the two is obvious and symptomatic in Campbell's case. Both sought, or attempted to seek, the violent, the extravagant and the bizarre, vigour and movement. Both strove after the vision of the seer, Rimbaud finding it in hashish, Campbell in the Roman Catholic Church. Both sought extreme and dogmatic political solutions, Rimbaud in the Paris Commune of 1871 and Campbell among the Spanish Nationalists of 1936.
17. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 1, p. 27. Presumably a reference to Adamastor's speech to Vasco de Gama:
Listen now to me and learn what perils have been laid up against such excess of presumption, what penalties await you over the vast expanse of ocean and on the land you will eventually subdue in battle . . . Here, unless I am deceived, I count on avenging myself to the full on him who discovered me. Nor will the havoc to be visited on your too trusting company end with this . . .
(Camoens, *The Lusiads* translated by W. C. Atkinson, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1952, p. 129.)
The prophecy, of course, refers to the misfortunes of Portuguese shipping prior to Camoens' time and not to any event contemporary with Campbell. Presumably Adamastor has uttered new prophecies here sensed by the poet. In conjunction with this allusion the poem under discussion hardly, and especially in the wider context of Campbell's work, can be taken as a rejection of colonialism. His pride in the achievements of his family, already noted, is sufficient proof of this. Indeed he believed, with Camoens and his own people, in the mission of colonialism. One

- remembers his discussion of Spanish efforts in parts of *Flowering Rifle* and his tilt against the idea of the noble savage in *Light on a Dark Horse*, p. 150: 'I have always noticed . . . that the Christianised or Mahomedanised native was a better and happier man than the "Noble Savage" with his terrible haunting fear which makes him suspicious of his friends and . . . [an] abject prey to witch doctors.'
18. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 1, p. 30.
 19. *Light on a Dark Horse*, p. 150.
 20. *IBID.*, pp. 153-4.
 21. It is still possible to find English-speaking South Africans who believe Roy Campbell left South Africa for political reasons. J. Cope and U. Krige (*Penguin Book of South African Verse*, London, 1968, pp. 21-2) insinuate this by talking of a dissociation arising from a 'darkening of political horizons' leading Campbell to go into voluntary exile. Nothing, on the printed evidence, could be further from the truth. One only has to compare the heat generated in Campbell by the provincialism and philistinism of contemporary South African Society with the perfunctory remarks on political questions for this to be self-evident. *The Wayzgoose* and the punch of the epigrams show quite clearly that Campbell felt himself in a cultural desert and that politics were a side issue, related to the main ones but hardly dominant.
 22. *Light on a Dark Horse*, chapters XIV, and XVI and XVIII; CAMPBELL R. 1931 *The Georgiad*. London, Boriswood.
 23. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 1, p. 47.
 24. *Light on a Dark Horse*, p. 317.
 25. See BENTLEY, E. ed. 1959 *Six Spanish Plays*. New York, Doubleday (Volume III of *The Classic Theatre*) which contains five plays translated by Roy Campbell. The most important from the point of view of the present discussion are:
 Cervantes: *The Siege of Numantia* (1585)
 Lope de Vega: *Fuente Ovejuna* (1619)
 Calderon de la Barca: *Love after Death* (1633)
 - This feeling of Spanish destiny was of course not exclusive to one side in the Civil War: 'a very large number of people wanted a "new Spain" (which might mean a hundred different things) which would be worthy of Spain's great past and indeed of the continuing qualities of her superb people', H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (revised edition), Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1965, p. 160. In such a context the literary works of centuries before can also be interpreted to mean 'a hundred different things'. Bentley notes a Stalinist interpretation of *The Siege of Numantia* by Campbell's contemporary, the poet Rafael Alberti (b. 1902); but adds that, 'The author of the present translation was a supporter of General Franco in war and peace: what *The Siege of Numantia* meant to him can be deduced from his poem *Flowering Rifle* (*Six Spanish Plays*, pp. 482, 483). There it is in a nutshell. Campbell saw the ferocity and patriotic fervour of the play as propaganda for the Nationalist cause. Taken in its historical context by people who wished to revive that context, that was the interpretation for Campbell. If modern propaganda must be extracted from the classics it seems Campbell's view would be sounder than Alberti's.
 26. For his hardly credible views on miners, see *Flowering Rifle* (*The Collected Poems*, vol. 2, p. 224). It provides an excellent illustration of the way in which Campbell held his views and the kind of reasons that were important to him.
 27. *Light on a Dark Horse*, p. 326.
 28. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 2, p. 139.
 29. *Light on a Dark Horse*, p. 316. Uys Krige has long argued that the true European affinities of the Afrikaner lie not with Germanic but with the Latin peoples.
 30. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 2, p. 138.
 31. *Light on a Dark Horse*, p. 331.
 32. *IBID.*, p. 317.
 33. The question as to whether Roy Campbell was a combatant or not is a most vexed one. His claims to such a status are frequent, *The Collected Poems*, vol. 2 pp. 224, 235-8. On the other hand Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 301n, states categorically that he did not fight. J. Weinstaub's *The Last Great Cause* supports this, claiming he was no more than war-correspondent for *The Tablet*. It is to be hoped that Professor Gardener's posthumous work on Campbell, shortly to appear, will help on this point. Certainly if his claim cannot be substantiated Campbell will appear little different from those famous non-combatants, Auden, Spender and Day Lewis whom he despised as 'wowzers'.
 34. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 1, pp. 153-8.
 35. CAMPBELL, R. 1936 *Mithraic Emblems*. London, Boriswood.
 36. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 2, p. 154.
 37. *IBID.*, pp. 154-5: 'The sunlight zithering their flanks with fire'.
 38. See 'The Zebras' (*The Collected Poems*, vol. 1, p. 40).
 39. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 2, p. 198. It is interesting to note that of all the many English translations of the popular Lorca, Campbell's are the most substantive as English Poetry; see, *Lorca*, London, Bowes and Bowes, 1952.
 40. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 2, p. 25.
 41. *IBID.*, p. 50.
 42. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 1, p. 57.
 43. *The Collected Poems*, vol. 2, pp. 78-9.
 44. *IBID.*, p. 82.
 45. *IBID.*, p. 83.
 46. *IBID.*, pp. 70-1.
 47. *IBID.*, pp. 72-5.
 48. *IBID.*, p. 68.
 49. *IBID.*, p. 69.
 50. *IBID.*, p. 70.
 51. *IBID.*, p. 85. 'Talking Bronco' was the title piece of the last single volume of original verse published in Campbell's lifetime (London, Faber, 1946).