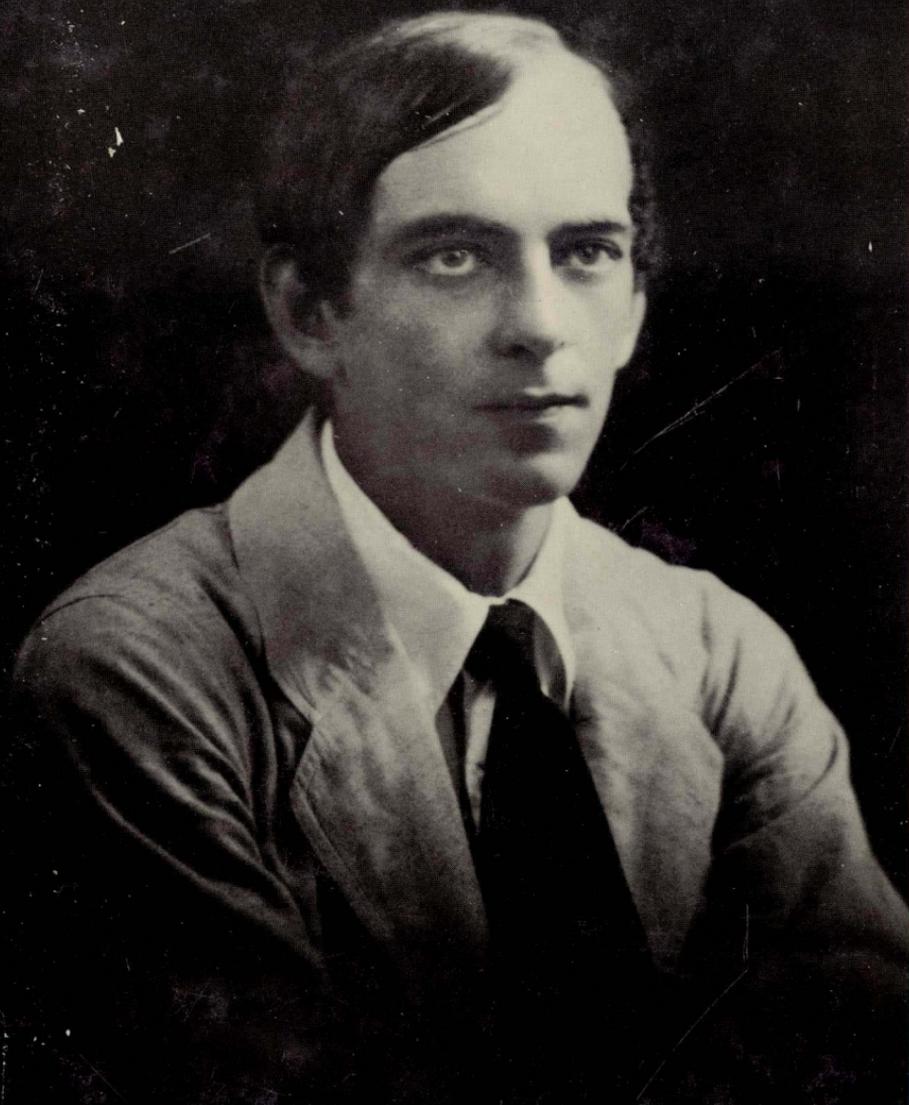


The Selected Poems of

*Roy
Campbell*



Chosen by Peter Alexander

The Selected Poems of
ROY CAMPBELL

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To Christine

INTRODUCTION

MANY prolific poets show to advantage in selections which screen out their inferior work, and Roy Campbell is certainly among them. The quality of his work was always very uneven. His major poems, *The Flaming Terrapin*, *The Wayzgoose*, *The Georgiad*, and *Flowering Rifle*, have long barren passages, and even his volumes of short lyric poems include a significant number of verses that scarcely rise above the level of doggerel. Yet at his best he produced satire deadly in its effectiveness, and lyrics of a sensuous beauty scarcely matched in the twentieth century. It is not surprising, then, that several editors have set out to present the best of his work in selected editions. Campbell himself produced three such volumes (*Sons of the Mistral*, *Collected Poems*, and *Collected Poems II*), and such distinguished editors as Uys Krige and Joseph Lalley have produced fine selections. At least one other selection is shortly to be published.

The present selection of Campbell's poems differs from all others in being arranged chronologically by the dates of the poems' composition. This arrangement has the obvious advantage of allowing the reader to study Campbell's poetic development, and it seems likely that previous editors have not adopted the chronological arrangement chiefly because of the extreme difficulty of establishing the dates of composition of Campbell's work.

His output of original poems can be divided into phases, marked by alterations, more or less distinct, in tone, style, and subject-matter. Though there is an obvious danger in seeking simple parallels between any poet's life and work, there do appear to be clear connections between major changes in Campbell's life and simultaneous developments in his poetry. For this reason it is helpful to summarize the chief events in his extraordinary career.

He was born in Durban, South Africa, on 2 October 1901, the third son of a wealthy doctor. His childhood was of the wild and free-ranging kind most children only dream about; he was provided with horses, guns, buck to shoot, fish to catch, and great areas of country in which to range freely. To this upbringing he later attributed his enthusiasm for physical pursuits, his love of energy, violence, and colour, and his dislike of modern, urban life. In fact,

however, his contemporaries remember him as a solitary book-worm, less interested in hunting than in poetry. To this period belongs the juvenile verse, written before 1919, derivative of Scott, Burns, Shelley, early Yeats, and of the Anglo-Canadian poet Robert Service.

Campbell left the Durban Boys' High School in 1917, and after a year at Natal University College in Pietermaritzburg he sailed for England at the end of the First World War, to try to enter Merton College, Oxford, intending to read English. He did very little formal work, however, concentrating instead on his own poetry, and reading voraciously such writers as Wyndham Lewis, the Sitwells, and T. S. Eliot. Abandoning his attempt to enter Oxford, he tramped around southern France during 1920, taking odd labouring jobs and returning to London at intervals. It was in London in October 1921 that he met a beautiful girl named Mary Garman, whom he married in February the next year. The couple rented a converted cowshed in Aberdaron in West Wales, where Campbell finished his first major poem, *The Flaming Terrapin*, which he published in 1924. *The Flaming Terrapin* is representative of the image-choked over-energetic verse of Campbell's early period, which lasted until 1925.

Campbell returned to South Africa in 1924 and during 1926, in collaboration with William Plomer and Laurens van der Post, edited a bilingual literary magazine, *Voorslag*. A quarrel with the financial backers of *Voorslag*, from which Campbell resigned after the second issue, combined with a growing dislike of South Africa's political climate, drove Campbell to return to Europe. The African poems which he wrote in 1926, however, mark the beginning of the mature work he produced with a cascading wealth of invention until the mid-1930s. To this mature period belong also the two major satires, *The Wayzgoose* and *The Georgiad*, a sense of persecution having been awakened in Campbell by his setbacks in South Africa and by the lesbian love-affair which Mary Campbell had during 1927 with Vita Sackville-West, whose guests the Campbells were for some months in Kent.

From 1928 until 1941 they lived in France and in Spain, and Campbell's love of southern Europe is everywhere apparent in his work during this period. His slow conversion to Catholicism between 1933 and 1935 marks another change in his writing; this change is reflected in the obscurity of the 'Mithraic Emblems' sequence, the religious commitment of many of the lyrics, and the

increasing shrillness of the satirical pieces; the uneven quality of the verse he produced from this period until the end of his life is very marked. He was not unaware of this decline, and it is significant that from the mid-1930s he wrote less original poetry, choosing instead to devote himself to translations as his creative powers slowly waned.

His emotional involvement in the Spanish Civil War is evident in many of the poems written after 1936; several reflect his direct experience of the fighting in Toledo, where he was living when the war broke out. His sympathies were with the Nationalists, though he never fought for them as he claimed to have done.

He joined the British Army in 1942, and served in East Africa, first in training with Wingate's commando force and then, after being disabled, as a coast-watcher for German submarines. After the war he worked as a clerk on the War Damage Commission in London before joining the BBC as a Talks Producer. For a short period he edited an unsuccessful magazine, *The Catacomb*. During the last years of his life, from 1952, he lived in Portugal, where he was killed in a car crash on 23 April 1957.

It would be a mistake to assert that the phases of Campbell's writing are clear-cut, for the changes in his work are neither immediate nor absolute. Shifts of tone and subject-matter are, however, evident. The course of his creative life can only be followed if a chronologically arranged edition of the poems is available, and Campbell seems to have been aware of this. He would have preferred to collect his own poems in chronological order; he disliked the first volume of *Collected Poems*, in which the work was divided into 'lyrics' and 'satires', and in *Collected Poems II*, over which he had much more control, he produced a roughly chronological arrangement, dividing the work into 'early' and 'later' poems, though he was too vague about dates to make the arrangement very accurate.

All attempts to establish dates of composition of Campbell's poems must be to some extent speculative, since except for one period of four days in March 1957 he kept no diary, he very seldom dated his letters, and he seems never to have dated the manuscripts of his poems. The dates appended to poems in this volume have been arrived at by five principal methods, and it is worth summarizing these briefly. Especially during the 1930s, there are direct references in Campbell's letters to poems as having been 'just written'; more

rarely Campbell would include the draft of a new poem in the text of his letter. More rarely still he includes a prose summary of the whole or part of a newly-written poem in his letters. In these cases, where the letter can be dated, the approximate date of composition of the poem can be established. Secondly, in 1947 an aspiring biographer wrote asking for the dates of many poems; Campbell's reply is useful in dating some of the poems he had recently produced. Thirdly, his longer poems occasionally make references to contemporary events which can be dated, as when in *Flowering Rifle* he refers to having 'today' heard of the sinking of the Nationalist warship the *Baleares*, which foundered on 6 March 1938. Fourthly there are the accounts of his contemporaries, some of whom recorded the dates of composition of his poems: William Plomer, for instance, noted the exact dates of composition of many of Campbell's African poems of 1926, and another close friend did so during Campbell's last years. Fifthly, close examination of the handwriting, paper, and ink of poem-manuscripts allows one to relate undated poems to letters, or to manuscripts of dated poems. This is of particular importance with the longer works; it was possible for instance to establish the approximate dates of various sections of *Flowering Rifle* because of the changes in paper size and in the colours of the inks Campbell used during the period of the poem's composition.*

In the case of those poems where no information on dating could be found, the date of first publication in volume-form must serve as a rough guide. It will be noticed, however, that the great bulk of these undated poems are from the volume Campbell called *Flowering Reeds* (1933); and since it is clear from Campbell's correspondence that he had published in his previous volume, *Adamastor* (1930) all the poems he then had ready, the *Flowering Reeds* poems must all have been completed during the 30-month period between the publication dates of these two volumes.

I have thought it right to depart from the chronological arrangement, so far as it can be established, in the sole instance of the 'Mithraic Emblems' sequence (from the volume of the same title) where the meaning of the poems would be obscured by disrupting the order in which Campbell finally printed them. In addition it has proved very difficult to date Campbell's many translations from Latin, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. I have distinguished transla-

* Readers interested in the dating of particular poems will find the details in Peter Alexander, *Roy Campbell: A Critical Biography* (Oxford University Press, 1982).

tions from original poems as far as possible by grouping the former in a separate section at the end of this volume.

The choice of text is a difficult one with Campbell's work, for he reprinted many of his poems several times, making textual changes. Occasionally he would recast a poem entirely, dropping several stanzas, as with 'A Jug of Water', or even breaking one poem into two, as he did with *Flowering Rifle*. When his manuscripts survive the problems are often compounded, since he produced many draft variants of poems. I have chosen to use always the most recent form of any poem published in Campbell's lifetime, on the assumption that it embodies Campbell's considered judgement. Even this course poses problems with those poems last published in the first volume of *Collected Poems*, since Campbell did not oversee its production. I have compared all such poems with the text of the volumes in which Campbell originally printed them in the hope of weeding out printer's errors, and I have also checked the text against as many of the original manuscripts as are known to be extant.

In the production of this edition I have been greatly helped by detailed biographical information provided by the poet's late widow, Mary Campbell, and by his daughter Teresa. I have been immeasurably helped by the labours of two previous scholars, the late Professor W. H. Gardner, and Mr Alan Paton. I have also profited by discussions with Mrs Marcia Leveson.

My sincere thanks are due to the staff of the following libraries, which gave me prompt and courteous assistance: The British Library; Cornell University Library; Cambridge University Library; The Johannesburg City Library; Durban City Library; The Killie Campbell Africana Library; Witwatersrand University Library; The South African National Library; The Corey Library, Rhodes University; The University of Saskatchewan Library, Saskatoon; Washington University Library; The Library of the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin; and The University of Cape Town Library.

I wish to thank the following for permission to quote copyright material: Curtis Brown Ltd. for lines from *Flowering Rifle* and poems from *Adamastor*; Jonathan Cape Ltd. and the Executors of the Roy Campbell Estate for lines from *The Wayzgoose* and *The Flaming Terrapin*; Faber & Faber Ltd. for poems from *Talking Bronco*; and Hughes Massie Ltd. and The Harvill Press for poems

from *St John of the Cross* and Baudelaire's *Poems: A Translation of Les Fleurs du Mal*.

I have been greatly aided in the gathering of information by generous financial help from the Australian Academy of the Humanities, which enabled me to undertake an extensive tour of libraries with collections of Campbell's manuscripts.

University of New South Wales
July 1981

PFA

CAMPBELL'S PRINCIPAL WORKS

POETRY

- The Flaming Terrapin* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1924)
The Wayzgoose (London, Jonathan Cape, 1928)
Poems (Paris, The Hours Press, 1930)
Adamastor (London, Faber & Faber, 1930)
The Gum Trees (London, Faber & Faber, 1930)
The Georgiad (London, Boriswood, 1931)
Nineteen Poems (London, Ernest Benn, 1931)
Choosing A Mast (London, Faber & Faber, 1931)
Pomegranates (London, Boriswood, 1932)
Flowering Reeds (London, Boriswood, 1933)
Mithraic Emblems (London, Boriswood, 1936)
Flowering Rifle, (London, Longman, 1939)
Sons of the Mistral (London, Faber & Faber, 1941)
Talking Bronco (London, Faber & Faber, 1946)
Nativity (London, Faber & Faber, 1954)
Collected Poems (3 vols., London, The Bodley Head, 1949, 1957, 1960)

TRANSLATIONS

- Helge Krog, *Three Plays* (London, Boriswood, 1934)
The Poems of St John of the Cross (London, Harvill Press, 1951)
Baudelaire, *Poems: A Translation of Les Fleurs du Mal* (London, Harvill Press, 1952)
Eça de Queirós, *Cousin Basilio* (London, Max Reinhardt, 1953)
Eça de Queirós, *The City and the Mountains* (London, Max Reinhardt, 1955)
Eric Bentley (ed.), *The Classic Theatre: Six Spanish Plays*, Vol. III (New York, Doubleday, 1959)
Paco d'Arcos, *Nostalgia, a Collection of Poems* (London, Sylvan Press, 1960)

PROSE

- Taurine Provence* (London, Desmond Harmsworth, 1932)
Broken Record (London, Boriswood, 1934)

Light on a Dark Horse (London, Hollis & Carter, 1951)
Lorca (Cambridge, Bowes & Bowes, 1952)
The Mamba's Precipice (London, Frederick Muller, 1953)
Portugal (London, Max Reinhardt, 1957)

ROY CAMPBELL 1901–1957

A Chronology

- 1901 Born in Durban, 2 October
- 1906 Zulu Rebellion
- 1910 Sent to Durban Boys' High School
- 1916 Attempts unsuccessfully to join the Army
- 1917 Matriculates with third-class pass
- 1918 Takes English, Physics, Botany at Natal University College. Sails for England late *December*
- 1919 Rents rooms in Oxford, studies for Responsions. Visits Paris, Germany *June–August*
- 1920 Abandons studies, tramps around southern Europe
- 1921 Returns to London *September*. Meets Mary Garman *October*
- 1922 Marries Mary Garman 11 *February*. Moves to Aberdaron, Wales. Daughter Teresa born *November*
- 1923 Moves back to London ?*June*
- 1924 Returns to South Africa *June*. Mary and Teresa join him *December*
- 1925 Living in Peace Cottage; to Sezela (north of Durban) *mid-April*. Meets William Plomer *June*
- 1926 Daughter Anna born *March*. Plomer joins them at Sezela *May*. *Voorslag* appears June and July. RC resigns from *Voorslag* 25 *July*. Sails for England *December*
- 1927 Settles in Sevenoaks Weald, Kent, late *April*. The Campbells meet Vita Sackville-West late *May*; move into Vita's cottage 1 *October*. Mary tells RC of her affair with Vita early *November*
- 1928 RC leaves for France *April*. Mary joins him ?*June*
- 1929 Living in Provence, occasional visits to London
- 1930 Wyndham Lewis visits RC in Provence *mid-July*
- 1931 Provence
- 1932 Uys Krige first visits RC *October*. Mary's affair with Jeanne, RC's with Lisa
- 1933 Final break with Plomer *August*. Move to Spain *November*
- 1934 Living in Barcelona; move to Valencia *March*, and to Altea *May*
- 1935 Received into Roman Catholic Church *June*. To Toledo late *June*

- 1936 Riots *March*; RC beaten and arrested by Assault Guards 16 *March*. Civil War begins 18 *July*. Fighting in Toledo from 20 *July*. Campbells flee Toledo late *July*; arrive England 11 *August*; live in Arundel, Sussex
- 1937 Sails to Portugal 29 *January*. Settles in Cezimbra early February. RC tours Spanish battlefields *July*. Settles in Estombar *September*
- 1938 To Rome *September*
- 1939 Tours Italy *January–March*; returns to Toledo *April*. Franco's Victory Parade 19 *May*. Britain at war 3 *September*
- 1940 Acting as British 'secret agent'
- 1941 To London by sea *August*; becomes Air Raid Precautions warden. Mary and daughters join him by air *December*
- 1942 Joins British Army 1 *April*; trains in Wales, Winchester, Yorkshire, Derbyshire
- 1943 Embarks for Africa, troop-ship breaks down *February*. Re-embarks 24 *March*. On leave in Durban *April*. Overland to Nairobi 18 *April–5 May*. Transferred to Wingate's force *June*; injures hip *June*. Coast-watcher from *September*
- 1944 Returns to England *June*. Joins War Damage Commission *November*
- 1945 Resigns War Damage Commission 21 *July*
- 1946 Joins BBC 1 *January*
- 1947 Living in London, working for BBC
- 1948 Working for BBC; lecturing in Spain *October*
- 1949 Resigns BBC *September*, begins editing *The Catacomb*
- 1950 Holiday in France *May–September*
- 1951 Living in London, lecturing in Spain *May and October–December*. *The Catacomb* suspends publication *December*
- 1952 Moves to Sintra, Portugal *May*
- 1953 Lecture-tour of North America *October–December*
- 1954 Awarded honorary doctorate by Natal University *March*; tours Mozambique *March*.
- 1955 Second lecture-tour of North America *October–December*
- 1956 Moves from Sintra to Linhó *April*
- 1957 Death in car crash 23 *April*

NOTE

The date of composition where known is given at the end of each poem, followed by the abbreviated title of the volume in which the poem was published. Dates of volume publication can be found in the list of Campbell's Principal Works (p. xvii).

The following abbreviations have been used:

<i>A</i>	<i>Adamastor</i>
<i>Baudelaire</i>	<i>Poems: A Translation of Les Fleurs du Mal</i>
<i>CP I, CP II, CP III</i>	<i>Collected Poems, Volumes I, II, III</i>
<i>FR</i>	<i>Flowering Reeds</i>
<i>ME</i>	<i>Mithraic Emblems</i>
<i>P</i>	<i>Poems</i>
<i>St John</i>	<i>The Poems of Saint John of the Cross</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Sons of the Mistral</i>
<i>TB</i>	<i>Talking Bronco</i>

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