

ecstasies of self-pity, to identify ourselves. It is, no doubt, properly consoling for people enduring great suffering to think of Christ as suffering with them. But even for them the full Christian use or evaluation of suffering cannot stop there. They are, all of us are, invited to go through their sufferings to meet and finally to recognize the risen stranger in a beyond, in what Paul calls newness of life. A piety that stops short at Calvary, that is concentrated exclusively on the figure of the crucifix is a piety that has refused the real challenge of Christ crucified *and risen* to share in the transformation of the world and of human social relationships. It is a piety one can

imagine being practised by a Sicilian *mafioso*, or by one of those anonymous Lebanese Catholic Christians who recently massacred the Palestinians in Beirut. But one cannot imagine such persons being devoted to Christ the risen stranger, who shows us our victim as our one hope, and remaining unconverted and unrepentant of their atrocious victimising. Belief in the resurrection, and a life-long search for and devotion to the risen Christ are necessary elements in genuine Christian maturity and humanity.

Rowan Williams' excellent book makes this very clear.

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ROY CAMPBELL by Peter Alexander. OUP. £12.50

It came as a surprise to me in 1946, when I was living in Kensington, to discover that Roy Campbell had a house a few hundred yards away. Although I had read his poetry with admiration as a schoolboy, I had imagined that he was dead. This shows, I think, how effective by the late 1930s had been the left-wing boycott of his work. Then, on 10 May 1946, there exploded on the literary world a new volume of poems by Campbell characteristically entitled *Talking Bronco*. In it he introduced 'Macspaunday' – a portmanteau name for Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden and C. Day-Lewis, all of whom, to his anger and fury, had supported the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War, and later, during World War II, found themselves "cushy jobs" on the home front or stayed put in America. In contrast Campbell had been eager to join up.

Shortly after the appearance of *Talking Bronco* I got to know Campbell. On one occasion he stopped in Kensington High Street. "Macspaunday have been getting at Eliot for publishing my poems," he began. "They say the book has made their hair stand on end. I've said to Eliot next time I'm going to scalp them." The remark was typical of one side of Campbell – brash, boastful and belligerent.

Peter Alexander, the author of this biography of *Roy Campbell*, never met the poet, and his book, though excellent on

the poetry, is less satisfactory when it comes to the life. However, he is right when he says that Campbell's antipathy to certain writers – "lefties" usually – did not hold up if he got to know them. In the 1940s he had punch-ups with both MacNeice and Spender. But subsequently he made it up with MacNeice and would defend him when others criticised him. In 1952 at the Dorchester Hotel in London, when Spender presented Campbell with the Foyle Prize for Poetry for his translation of *The Poems of St John of the Cross*, "the two men shook hands with the utmost cordiality." Incidentally, to keep the record straight, it should be added that at a previous, much less friendly meeting in 1949 Spender did not say that Campbell (as reported here) was "a great poet" but "a good poet." That, too, was Campbell's own assessment of himself, since, behind the swagger and buccaneering ways, was a shy, modest man. Referring to fellow South African writers, he would say: "Plomer and Laurens Van der Post and I are talented people. Olive Schreiner is a genius."

Campbell and his brothers and sisters were second-generation South Africans. Their father, who was a much loved doctor in Durban, treated black and white patients alike – and brought his family up to have nothing to do with the colour bar. Yet although Campbell was never a racialist, there are anti-Semitic and Fascist ele-

ments in his poems. They present the biographer with a problem – one that is not entirely answered here. To repeat, as Mr Alexander does, that Campbell was a man of contradictions is not exactly enlightening. He is nearer the mark in suggesting that Campbell's anti-Semitism and his anti-Communism fulfilled a need in him to find an enemy to oppose. Likewise, Campbell needed causes to defend – and part of the best form of defence is always attack. Naturally those attacked retaliated with the most effective means at their disposal which was, in this instance, a literary boycott. Thus in the world of English letters Campbell became an isolated figure. Only those in the late 1930s who could forget the political fray and recognise his gifts remained his champions – among them notably Desmond MacCarthy and T. S. Eliot.

All the same it has to be admitted that politically Campbell was something of a simpleton. What is to be made of this comment from one of his 1938 letters – "I find far more tolerance to Britain in Italy than I find tolerance of Fascism in England"? Did the rhythm of his words carry him away?

Just as it is necessary to sort the sense from the nonsense in some of his letters and statements, so the stories and exploits which he relates about himself in his autobiography and elsewhere have to be cut down to size. His claims that he fought in the Spanish Civil War for Franco and in World War II with a crack unit in Burma are only half-truths: in the case of the Spanish Civil War, he spent only one day in July 1937 touring the battlefield – though he did subsequently bring out a long epic called *Flowering Rifle* in support of the nationalists; and in the case of World War II, although he did train with General Wingate's forces in Tanzania in preparation for the Burma campaign, he never embarked because he had a fall, was taken to hospital in Nairobi and some weeks later declared unfit for active service. Still, being the magnificent teller of tales that he was, it is easy to see how legends grew up about him. Many of his poems tell adventure stories about the African bush, or provide accounts of historical events such

as the murder at Toledo of the Carmelite friars by the Republican troops.

The two most important events in Campbell's life were his marriage in 1922, and his reception into the Catholic Church, along with his wife and two daughters, in 1934. Both events imposed disciplines and inspired some of his finest poetry. Early on in the marriage – tempestuous but ultimately triumphantly successful – Mary Campbell took over the practical side of their life, so that he would have the necessary time to write: frequently they were penniless and she is probably right when she describes herself and her family, in retrospect, as the original hippies. He always read her first anything that he had written, and she sometimes made suggestions about what he should write next. One of her most brilliant ideas was that he should translate St John of the Cross. Up to that time a number of his poems had had religious themes; now there was an identification with the Spanish saint and the mysticism of the original poems were marvellously conveyed in his English versions. He was working at them, on and off, for over eleven years. Mr Alexander makes a good point when he remarks that Campbell's springboard for his own inspiration often came from translating other poets.

During the 1940s Campbell gave me a translation of a Zulu war song of 1906 for my quarterly *The Wind and the Rain*. He spoke Zulu fluently. I told him that I could only offer him a fee of half a guinea. "That's fine," he replied. "Let's go out and drink it. But don't tell Mary." For some reason it had never been included in his collected works. I now quote it:

*Great must be this people that, one
strong purpose binding,
Is like a great black snake along the valleys
winding,
Whose scales are shields, whose teeth
are spears, who thunders as he goes,
Whose crests of feathers flutter like the
faint hearts of his foes,
Who rises in the daybreak from the forest
dark and cool
And goes to drink at sunset from the
crimson coloured pool.*

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