**Contributor: Tony Voss**

**Entry: Campbell, Roy (1901-1957)**

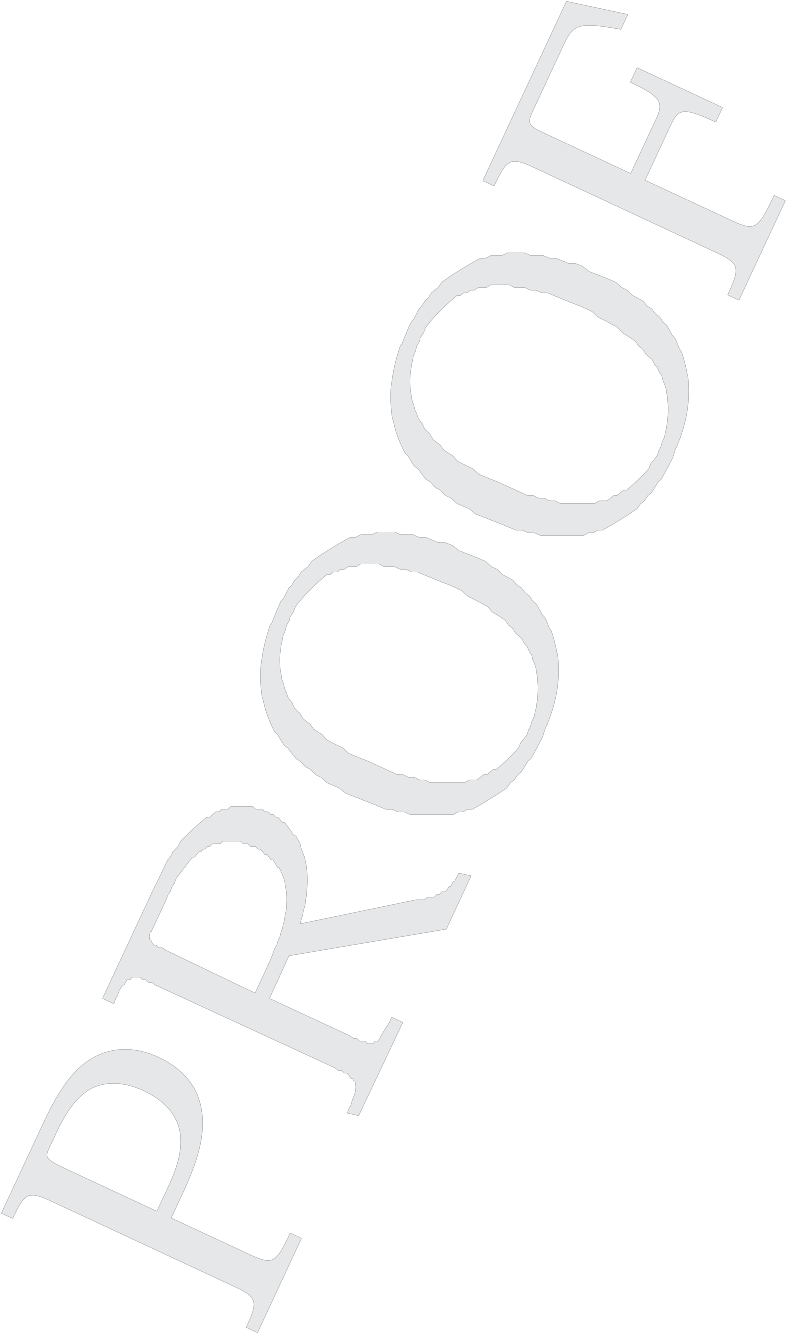
Schooled in South Africa, Campbell went in 1919 to Oxford, but never entered the university. After marriage to Mary Garman in 1922, and the success of his first major work, he returned briefly to Natal, to edit *Voorslag,* but thereafter lived most of his life in France, Spain and Portugal, apart from army service in Africa and residence in England during World War II.

*The Flaming Terrapin* (1924), an epic manifesto, established the essentials of Campbell’s poetic style: exuberant imagery, traditional versification, idiosyncratic intensity and self-projection (‘The man clear-cut, against the last horizon’). The persona is usually a romantic figure from an imagined pre-industrial world. Successive disappointments (the short life of *Voorslag* and his marriage threatened by adultery) released hilarious satire: *The Wayzgoose* (1930) is a lampoon of the pretensions of settler culture; *The Georgiad*(1931) suggests that, like Thomas Pringle (1789-1834) in his clash with the Cape Governor Somerset, Campbell suffered and baulked at the hauteur and moral indifference of the English aristocracy.

The lyric vein on which Campbell’s reputation more securely rests, also emerged early, in ‘The Porpoise’ (*Oxford Poetry*, 1920), but Campbell’s true voice was first clearly heard in the anthology pieces of 1926 and in the Provençal poems collected with them in *Adamastor* (1930). Here Campbell also fashioned poetic self-figurations as *isolato* – lyrical projections of the satirist’s stance. Inspiration and control came from French poets (Apollinaire, Baudelaire, Corbière, Valéry): their influence would last. That *Flowering Reeds* (1933) reads like pure lyric is the achievement of a mature poet, for these poems incorporate and transmute loss, compromise, and transience in their intelligence and formal precision.

Provence continued to inspire the solar and taurine mythology of *Mithraic Emblems* (1936), which, completed after the Campbells’ conversion to Roman Catholicism, includes early responses to the outbreak of the Civil War and begins to identify the Spanish landscape in South African terms. Campbell is at home in a part of Europe close to Africa and extending the demotic reach of his poetic diction.

Here Campbell almost falls off the map of the Anglophone literary establishment. His Francoist satirical epic *Flowering Rifle*: *a Poem from the Battlefield of Spain* (1939) isolated him completely. The achievements of the post-war years, Campbell’s last decade, include lyrics, from *Talking Bronco* (1946) and ‘Early and Late Poems’, acknowledging that he had found his *querencia* (a reference to a fighting bull’s preferred location in the bull-ring) in the European tradition,and translations, of San Juan de la Cruz (1951) and Baudelaire (1952).

Satire is Campbell’s occasional mode, lyric his continuum. His humanist materialism, his pre-Freudian concept of the self, and his prosody, determined by an allegiance to a tradition of the poet as craftsman and sage, set him out of tune with both modernism and modernity. Equally, he opposed any instrumental, future-directed historicist sense. His conversion may have been a vaticre-calling to his craft as the creation of a world of words, a naïve and primitive energy powering both the satirical and the lyric of his work.

**References and further reading**

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