

**AN ENGLISH POETIC RHAPSODIC VISION OF THE SPANISH CIVIL
WAR: ROY CAMPBELL'S POETIC OEUVRE**

**UNA VISIÓN POÉTICO-RAPSÓDICA DE LA GUERRA CIVIL ESPAÑOLA:
LA OBRA POÉTICA DE ROY CAMPBELL**

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Abstract

This article revisits and re-examines Roy Campbell's poems inspired by the Spanish Civil War: *Flowering Rifle*, *Talking Bronco* and "A Letter from the San Mateo Front". The studies carried out by Esteban Pujals (1959), Stephen Spender (1980) and Bernd Dietz (1985) reflect the scarcity of research about Campbell's warlike poems. This article aims to develop a better understanding of Campbell's war images and literary references to the Spanish conflict, by analysing them in the light of the poet's own political ideology. Campbell presents a paean to the 'Nationalist' leadership and this exaggerated idealising of the rebels and their deeds contrasts with the way he denigrates those in favour of the Republic. The article concludes that this exaggerated feat transforms most of these poetic works into quasi-Manichaean pamphlets resembling more a morality play than a work of modern literature.

Keywords: Roy Campbell; Spanish Civil War; war literature; war poetry; literature of the thirties.

Resumen

En este artículo, se revisa y examina la poesía de Roy Campbell inspirada en la Guerra Civil española: *Flowering Rifle*, *Talking Bronco* and "A Letter from the San Mateo Front". Los estudios llevados a cabo por Esteban Pujals (1959), Stephen Spender (1980) y Bernd Dietz (1985) reflejan la escasez investigadora que existe sobre los poemas bélicos de Campbell. Este trabajo ofrece un entendimiento más certero y fiel de las imágenes bélicas y las referencias literarias de este conflicto, empleadas por Campbell, teniendo en cuenta la perspectiva ideológica del poeta. Campbell presenta un peán al liderazgo 'Nacional' y esta representación exacerbada se opone al nivel de degradación que sufren quienes

están a favor de la República. Algunas de las conclusiones que se extraen son que la mayor parte de sus versos se transforman en un panfleto cuasi-maniqueo semejante a una dramatización de tipo doctrinal o a una alegoría medieval.

Palabras clave: Roy Campbell; Guerra Civil española; literatura de guerra; poesía inglesa; literatura de los 30.

1. Introduction

Recent and growing interest in preserving or reviving the historical memory of events surrounding the Spanish Civil War mainly focuses for obvious reasons on the combatants and victims in the country itself. It nevertheless also inevitably involves the foreign volunteers who fought in the International Brigades, especially those who lost their lives in the conflict. What is more, this interest has broadened, and has extended to those who, from the rear guard and from other countries, fought with some very different weapons, such as literature, journalism, film, photography, painting and even poster design, to support the democracy they saw under threat in Spain. Strong evidence of this renewed attention to the subject matter of the Civil War can be found in the recent proliferation of publications on the Brigades and on the literary works inspired by the war (Celada and Pastor). In fact, there has been, on the one hand, an increase in monographs and essays whose central theme has been the political role of the Brigades or the strictly military significance of the acts of war in which Brigade members took part, not to mention the many conferences and meetings to which surviving veterans have often contributed (Álvarez and López). On the other hand, there have been studies on the literature which emerged from the period, not only in Spain but especially elsewhere, as a result of the ideological commitment to this attack on the Republic (Cunningham; Díez).

An enormous body of dedicated literature emerged in the main Western countries, and more specifically in English-speaking ones, in the wake of the military uprising against the legitimate government of the Republic. The Spanish translations of this literature published so far, as well as the articles and monographs produced and distributed in the last few years, have provided ample information on the passion and fervour with which the events of this war were followed beyond Spain. Artists and intellectuals are well known to have been committed almost exclusively to the Republican cause, as many of them saw in the military coup against democratic legitimacy a prelude to and even the first battle in the war which would soon deliver the free West from Nazi totalitarianism. Nevertheless, there were also intellectual and literary voices which, from the start,

took the side of the insurgent cause. Needless to say, disregarding these latter writers would fail to do justice to this unique page in English-language writing dedicated to the fight in Spain. These authors include Roy Campbell, as his voice is, beyond all doubt, the strongest and frankly also the most strident. However, this author, who was so connected with all things Spanish and the culture of Spain, where he had lived before the outbreak of war, remains one of the least known of these writers. According to Esteban Pujals, “[in] 1933 Roy Campbell first comes into contact with Spain, [when h]e first appears in Barcelona, then at the beginning of 1935 he can be found in Altea (Alicante) with his family, [and i]n June of the same year he can be found in Toledo, in Cisneros Street, opposite the cathedral” (19-21; my translation).

Admittedly, this silence which has surrounded Campbell has much to do with his ideological disposition and political choices. From the mid-1930s, both his in-built rejection of liberalism and his frequently uncompromising religious fundamentalism were not just well-known but also rejected in intellectual circles in Britain. However, the enthusiasm with which he would defend the rebellion against the Republican state by the army headed by Franco is not surprising, if we add to his ideological predisposition an event the author experienced at very close hand in Toledo in 1936. This involved the murder of some of his friends, Carmelite friars in the city, by a group of unrestrained extremists. In fact, along with the murder of a significant number of clergymen, monks, nuns and even some bishops, and with the burning or destruction of many churches and monasteries, this massacre may contain the seed for the intensification of language in many of his verses.

In turn, this very lack of proportion in his expression may have contributed to his being forgotten, as his vitriol against the enemy often exceeds the self-imposed limits of Franco’s propaganda itself. This seems to have been the fate of this maligned poet, condemned to be forgotten and ostracised not only by democrats but also by Franco’s followers, as well as by most of the English-speaking writers of his generation who were unequivocal in their commitment to the Spanish Republic. This study proposes a review of some of the comments or ideas proposed by Esteban Pujals (1959), Stephen Spender (1980) and Bernd Dietz (1985) upon Roy Campbell’s literary value. With it, this article aims to develop a better understanding of Campbell’s war images and literary references to the Spanish conflict, by analysing them in the light of the poet’s own political ideology.

2. Roy Campbell's Poetic Imagery

2.1. Against intellectuals and the Bloomsbury circle

Writers and artists, and especially any of their works written to defend democratic ideals, were one of the first targets for Campbell's darts in his works *Flowering Rifle* (*Flowering*), *Talking Bronco* (*Talking*) and "A Letter from the San Mateo Front" ("Letter"). *Flowering Rifle* was first published in 1939; Campbell started writing *Talking Bronco* in 1945 and this poetry collection was eventually published in 1946; and "A Letter from the San Mateo Front" (or "The Letter from the San Mateo Front", as is also glossed) was finished between the years 1939 and 1941, and included in one of Campbell's poetry collections. In these intellectuals and creative minds, the South African author seems to see the root of all evil, and on a number of occasions awkwardly reduces them all in his imagination to "ghosts of the left", the "left of the salons", and especially a "salon" in Bloomsbury, which annoys him most of all. He effectively sees the Bloomsbury circle as a pack of drones:

He rides superb across the open grave
That gapes to swallow the rejected drones,
And there while they await the final chill,
Like Bloomsburies, perhaps, in envious need
They'll sit and patronize the Victor's deed
Or, as the English poets, stay forlorn
And curse their evil fortune to be born— (*Flowering* 1370-76)¹

Campbell sees in them little more than a very *sui generis* clique of inepts, who defend, or say they defend the workers "by decree", though of all those who become involved in the conflict either personally or through their art, he himself is "the only Worker", as he reminds us in "A Letter from the San Mateo Front":

To wish (quite rightly) they had not been born
Since of the English poets on your shelf
The only sort of 'Worker' is myself. ("Letter" 207-09)

To him, they seem the perfect synthesis of communism and capitalism, both of which ideologies are equally rejected in Campbell's perspective. He also portrays this with conspicuously cutting sarcasm and bizarre imagery in "A Letter from the San Mateo Front", as follows:

¹ All quotes and references used in the current article from *Flowering Rifle*, *Talking Bronco* and "A Letter from the San Mateo Front" are taken from the 1957 *Collected Poems* (Campbell). They will be referenced by indicating the lines.

As doomed anachronisms, Sire and Son,
 Capitalist and communist make one,
 The scrawny offspring and the bloated sire
 Sentenced by nature to the same hot fire. ("Letter" 44-47)

In short, the mildest adjectives and epithets Campbell ascribes to his peers in the literary world are "reds", "gangsters", "smug" and "charaders", which can be seen condensed into this significant representation in the same poem:

So in red Bloomsbury the two are tied
 gangsters to be taken for a ride
 Smug rebels to Society, the tame
 Charaders in a dreary parlour game,
 Where breaking crockery gives a lawless thrill
 And Buffaloes each smug suburban Bill. ("Letter" 48-53)

However, these are not the only adjectives he assigns to the British writers who sympathise with the Republic, whether they belong to the Bloomsbury elite, the Oxford group or are more or less independent. As he illustrates in another poem, *Talking Bronco*, this is because they all seem to him to be true "pimps", capable of prostituting a writer's most precious gift, the word:

... when the mealy mouths are heard
 Of those who prostitute the word
 And in the rearguard pimp for hire,
 It's time to imitate the bird
 Who preens his chevrons under fire! (*Talking* 112-16)

Campbell considers the ringleaders to be the main protagonists in the Oxford group, Auden and Spender, because of their radical commitment to the democratic government of Spain. He sees them and their many disciples and followers as distorting the truth, and placing their pen at the service of the enemies of what he considers the "true Spain":

Daring the rage of all who vainly think
 Against a Nation to uphold a Stink,
 In the fat snuggery of Auden, Spender,
 And others of the selfsame breed and gender,
 Who hold by guile the fort of English letters
 Against the final triumph of their betters,
 Muzzle the truth, and keep the Muse in fetters
 While our own hoary sages with white hairs
 Must cringe to them, like waiters on the stairs. (*Flowering* 155-63)

In other words, for Campbell, the enemies of the “real Spain” are a hotchpotch of militants from the different factions constituting communism: socialism, anarchism, and the democratic right and centre, between whom he makes no distinction. For example, in *Flowering Rifle*, he has no trouble lumping together writers as far removed from communist thinking as Virginia Woolf, Ralph Bates—who, like Campbell, got to know Spain prior to the war—, and Ernest Hemingway, who simply defends Spanish democracy, with no particular sympathy for any political affiliation:

Knowing these things how could I entertain
 The Charlies’ Meeting Bates mistook for Spain,
 Whose false experience of the land must yield
 To mine both in the letters as the field:
 Or take like Hemingway for ‘Spanish Earth’. (*Flowering* 412-16)

The “anarchists and borderline anarchists” come off worst of all, as Campbell seems to consider anarchism to be the epitome of Republican ideology, encoding it as crime, destruction and death. For him, the Herbert Reads and Aldous Huxleys, whom he considers “... ever in the cause of the Hyena” (*Flowering* 635), constitute “[a] sort of “Rabid Canine Friends Society” (*Flowering* 637). His objection to their attitude is as disproportionate as it is bitter:

O world gone imbecile! each way one looks
 Humanitarians slobbering over crooks!
 Each skull a box of worms before its time,
 To fish for bloaters of subhuman crime
 Prawning for larvæ where the mildews bloom!
 These in their lives, as in their prose and verse,
 Anticipate the coffin and the hearse ... (*Flowering* 623-30)

2.2. A paean to Franco

The increasing number of insults the South African poet hurls at his fellow writers is distressingly consistent with his unrestrained description of those who fight on the side of the Republic. In his Manichaean view of the world, the level of smears and insults is inversely proportional to the praise he lavishes on the nationalist side and its leaders. In this sense, just like the right-wing ‘ultramontanist’ activists and sympathisers of the 1930s, Campbell eulogises the leader as much, if not more than, the ideology. In this case, with the compliments he pays Franco, the adjectives he assigns to him, and the metaphors, analogies and imagery he uses in general to describe the “chieftain” and his “feats”, this writer sets himself up as one of the pioneers of the monotonous propaganda which will not cease until the

death of the dictator. In Campbell's text, this early cult of personality begins with a series of references and exaggerated analogies, which transform Franco and his closest and most loyal collaborators not only into heroes of epic dimensions but even into a class of anointed ones sent by God to redeem the country. In this way, the discreet, even secret flight in which an unknown English pilot carries Franco in a hired plane from the Canary Islands to Morocco, is transformed, in Campbell's overactive imagination, into the exaggerated feat he describes in the following lines from *Flowering Rifle*:

And Franco bade the epic years begin,
 Flying unarmed to dare the fiery zone
 And shouldering the Impossible alone,
 To lift three fallen centuries from the slime
 Where they had bogged the ebb and flow of time,
 Which is no one-way stream as we mischart,
 But circulates, like blood, the solar heart,
 And when the artery's stopped, to sap the vein,
 The sword must slice the ligature in twain. (*Flowering* 520-28)

When he idealises the bravery and power of the "chieftain" a few lines later, this is equally overstated. Specifically, in referring to Franco's apparent gallantry, he says:

It was not shirking danger saved his skin,
 But that he flew so boldly in her face
 It jerked her Phrygian Nightcap out of place:
 For with a buffet as he brushed her by,
 And zoomed from Teneriffe into the sky,
 It jerked the aim and force from her eye. (*Flowering* 536-41)

This cult of the leader is a constant feature of his war poems, and in "A Letter from the San Mateo Front", he identifies Franco with the uprising to such an extent that they become one and the same: "And well may they beware: far from her chain/A 'Southern Gesture' liberated Spain" ("Letter", 1010-11). Campbell identifies this "liberating" force from the south so much with Franco, and Franco, in turn, with this "liberating" force, that he seeks to reassure himself in a footnote that the cause and its "chieftain" are inseparable: "A literal fact, Franco flew from exile at Teneriffe" ("Letter" 1011).

This idealisation reaches its height when he elevates Franco's uprising to the status of divine plan or crusade. However, Campbell takes the concept of 'crusade' way beyond what Franco's propaganda machine would do during the war and post-war period. He therefore not only has no problem seeing the nationalist

fighters as ‘apostles’ and ‘disciples’, and the fallen as ‘martyrs’, he also assigns right-wing politicians and the military leaders of the coup the role of messiah or redeemer, going so far as to identify them with Jesus Christ himself.²

2.3. Against the defenders of democratic legitimacy

This almost hagiographic catalogue of exemplary deeds, and even ‘miracle-working’, by the forerunners or leading lights of the uprising, clearly only the fruit of ‘Campbellian’ madness, is juxtaposed against the demeaning imagery with which this author’s poetry depicts those who remain loyal to the Republic. Firstly, in the way he represents them in his poetry, the political leaders of the Republic do not have this spirit of rigour and self-sacrifice, nor do their military leaders possess the heroic bravery and commitment to the cause that we have seen in the ‘nationalists’. It will therefore first be useful to look at a few examples of how Campbell portrays Indalecio Prieto—one of the well-known leaders of the Spanish Socialist Workers’s Party (PSOE), minister between 1931 and 1933, and between 1936 and 1938, and the president of the party between 1948 and 1951—highlighting his so-called “lies” and his ‘views on money’:

For though with lies your hearing they belabour
Theirs is the Capital as ours the Labour—
As fat Prieto boasted with a grin
‘The Rights are penniless, and cannot win.’ (“Letter” 70-3)

Secondly, the poet wishes to convey a contrast to the reader between the generals on the nationalist side, who fall in the line of duty, and the commanders of the “Red” army who, in his opinion, up and flee to Valencia in order to escape to Italy:

Then five of our first leaders that were six
Rushed forth to seize a bridgehead on the Styx,
On duty killed, or that they scorned to fly
When for their blood was raised the wolfish cry
(Unlike the Red chiefs, who scuttle to Valencia—
And after to Genoa—peradventure!). (*Flowering* 529-34)

It therefore seems that the vehemence, the absurdity and the hyperbole in Campbell’s language reach their zenith when they refer to ‘the others’, meaning the defenders of democratic legitimacy. In this way, the poem generates a

² This detailed, well-documented and acknowledged study on Campbell’s Spanish Civil War poems, and his role in the war, constitutes one of the chapters in Bernd Dietz’s book, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on English Poetry: 1936-1939*. See pages 388-407 for the use of religion in these poems, and the way Campbell compares his verses with real history in general.

reductionist, Manichaeic dialectic which robs the imagery of any credible or convincing reference point. This dialectic reduces the poem to a kind of puppet-like horse-trading in which the elements in the trade-off, the combatants, are on the one hand a line-up of 'saints' whose miracles and exemplary lives are merely a figment of Campbell's imagination, and on the other, are subjected to a stream of smears and insults, an embryonic form of the rhetoric which would become so beloved of Franco and the regime established after his victory.

Whereas the text culminates in this ever-increasing praise for the rebels of the coup by identifying them with the divinity himself, it descends to the depths of degradation in denying that the opposing side is even human, portraying them as little more than animals. In this way, a group of Ainu volunteers, whose only crime is to belong to one of Japan's native minorities, is transformed in his poem into "[the] fauna of the steppes" (*Flowering* 847). He also calls the five hundred Senegalese who are fighting with the International Brigades "fauna" and "quadrumanes". In terms of the latter, Campbell shows signs of such abject xenophobic sentiment that it is not only incompatible with his own Catholic fervour he displays, it also insults anyone who entertains it. To be specific, he calls them mercenary "... tailless apes from Senegal", and adds that they are "... troops recruited from the tops of trees/From the less agile of the Chimpanzees" (*Flowering* 825-26). In contrast, when it comes to other Africans such as the North Africans who fought on his own side, he rushes to justify their presence in that "they proclaim the Brotherhood of Man" (*Flowering* 801). Campbell not only transforms some Africans into beasts, he also considers Spanish anarchists to be "Hyenas" (*Flowering* 635).

When the Republican fighters are not being robbed of their status as human beings, the author attaches a wide-ranging series of labels to them from "sub-men" (*Flowering* 822) to cruel savages or murderers, and even "Jews". These latter 'compliments' would seem to support the link some see between Nazism and Nietzsche's idea of the 'superman', even if in this case, by the good graces of the 'chieftain', the inferior race does not apply to the African troops Franco took to the Peninsula. In this way, Campbell tells the reader, for example, that it was a much nobler choice on the part of the Moroccans to opt for Franco than to enter into a partnership with the Republic or with "sub-men": "Rather to help the rightful heirs of Man/Than rule with sub-men on an equal plan" (*Flowering* 821-22). The Jews, in contrast, suffer a quite different fate in his poems, but only because, in his mindless reductionism, he sees them as belonging to the other side: "That moors should fight for us, small wonder, too, /Since on their side the Reds have got the Jew—" (*Flowering* 814-15).

In his labelling of this community somewhere between bestialised and degraded to the point of being sub-human, lies his untamed, criminal violence, just as he lumps together the broad spectrum of republicans. It will be useful to consider a few very representative examples of how this violence manifests itself, invariably in symbols which speak of communism, or in circles and groups of intellectuals or workers with clear humanitarian or progressive leanings.

The first involves the metaphor he assigns to “the Adversary”, the Russian or embodiment of the ‘reds’, those who defend outside interests, as opposed to “He of Spain”, the nationalist: “Go Hammer him according to your plan/And geld him with a Sickle if you can!” (*Flowering* 60-70). In the other example, as noted above, those championing progressive-leaning societies and brotherhoods are responsible for the greatest excesses:

For never yet was loafing such a passion
Or murder, rape, and arson so in fashion
As where conjoined in Brotherhood of ‘Labour’
Humanitarian Progress loves its Neighbour. (*Flowering* 197-200)

To the class of “the others”, that hive of “reds”, “idlers” and “murderers” who do not deserve to be called “real men”, Campbell adds those he considers the most undesirable beings in society, leaving in no doubt at any time that “his people”, the “nationalists”, are not like that. Firstly, making use once again of his rather convenient, stilted parallels between the recent history of Spain and Sacred History, the attitude of those on the left, just like the behaviour of the thief in the same position alongside Christ on the cross, is reduced to an irrational snarl that cannot free it from damnation. In contrast, the attitude of the one on God’s right hand, which Campbell sees as personifying his reactionary right, is one of valiant, joyful suffering, an attitude with echoes of martyrdom:

But the Good Thief was hammered to the Right
And bore the nails with valour and delight,
Unlike the snarling Comrade on the Left
Whose dole and rights all other thoughts bereft. (*Flowering* 1127-30)

Moreover, the men and women of the Republic are a collection of “good-for-nothings”, a “real sore” on the country:

Let these ...
Since loafing communists, the country’s sore,
Had made such health impossible before. (*Flowering* 509-14)

This is why they sow ruin and shortages far and wide:

Never before by earthquake, fire or tide
Were bankruptcy or famine spread so wide
As by this all-reforming modern State. (*Flowering* 222-24)

In contrast to these people, “we”, says Campbell of his own side, far from destroying, “create and produce”:

While we, worse-handicapped, without a dime,
Fought and created in the teeth of time,
Who had no programme, years before prepared,
But had to snatch the moment as it flared.
With our spare hand (which they reserve for plunder)
Fixed to the Plough, and in our Right, the thunder. (*Flowering* 228-33)

The ineffectiveness of these “drones” (*Flowering* 1371) of the left is only suspended when they are committing all types of crime, because they are very effective in their determination to kill innocent people. Compared to “us”, says Campbell, contradicting any figures or statistics furnished by history, they cause ten times as many deaths in the conflict:

Who slaughter ten times more, their love to press,
Than we for anger, vengeance, or redress,
No less when on each other’s necks they fall
And then they are most ‘comradely’ of all. (*Flowering* 205-08)

Thus, Campbell makes a clear distinction in how he represents the two opposing sides, from which they cannot even escape when they die. The author maintains this difference, as shown above, while they are alive and fighting. On the one hand, the extremes of this contrast consist of the ‘animal’ status to which Campbell reduces the defenders of the Republic, and on the other, his constant reminder that those on his own side are “men”. As a corollary to this, he presents virility as a supreme virtue.

3. Concluding remarks

The first thing that springs to mind in reading these poems by Campbell is something which makes him radically different from the other British writers who turn their literary attention to the causes and events of the Civil War in Spain. This substantial difference is not so much determined by the fact that he fully identifies with the rebels, as by his making a formal and completely different choice in terms of style. To put this in a nutshell, Campbell does not seem to feel at ease with the patterns of realism or naturalism of earlier eras chosen by these other authors of

his generation. There can be little doubt that he is much more attracted by the decidedly experimental modernist tendencies of the previous generation. The formal approach of T.S. Eliot, with whom he struck up a friendship,³ interested him more than the outmoded models. In fact, in order to reflect his rich personal experience of the war in a suitable poetic framework, Campbell seeks a literary structure or reference of a higher order, which will guarantee the harmony of the whole and reinforce his artistic coherence and lasting significance. He requires a structure which weaves together elements from such disparate sources as Sacred History (particularly the figure of the prophet and the Old Testament god of the army, but also the Redeeming Lamb of the Gospel), sun deities such as Mithras, and the harvest ritual. In short, it needs to be a type of artistic macro-structure capable of bringing unity and coherence to the multiple aspects of an experience as profound and complex as he lived through in Spain during those years. Something not too different from what Stephen Spender calls “unity of design” (441) and which he fails to find in this poem, or that “most universal and perennial valour” (66) which Pujals also finds lacking in these works of Campbell’s in an exhaustive study on the poet.

It is clear that the author fails to embed his rich personal experience or his own view of the war in these references, which might otherwise have been capable of bestowing lasting resonance on these historical events. In consequence, it is also clear that he fails to integrate his rich language, distinguished by its lexical exuberance and even a certain syntactic versatility, into a harmonious whole. Thus far, it is not difficult to agree with both Spender’s and Pujals’s assessments of the merit of Campbell’s poems. However, if the reasons these two critics suggest for his failure are taken into account, this is where the agreement ends. Thus, although Spender takes care to note from the start that a work should not be condemned for the opinions of its author, in reality this is indeed the form of reasoning he puts forward. Specifically, he declares that: “[i]n the first place, [the work] is an incoherent, biased, unobjective, highly coloured and distorted account of one man’s experiences of the Spanish war, seen through the eyes of a passionate partisan of Franco” (440-41). Later on, he adds that, apart from this it offers very little because he believes that, textually, it lacks “unity of design, ... sustained argument, ... plot, [or] single vision”. He compares this work disparagingly to a “three-decker sandwich”, which passes from one layer to another with no internal logic at all. Spender considers the layers, or “storeys of the sandwich” to be firstly an invective against the intellectuals of the left, the International Brigades and the

³ In her well-known monograph on the Spanish Civil War, Katherine Bail Hoskins says, “[Campbell] had first come to England at eighteen to attend Oxford University. During the two years of this sojourn, he made such influential friends as Eliot, the Sitwells, Augustus John, and –perhaps most important– Wyndham Lewis” (41).

army of the Republic, secondly a series of personal experiences, and thirdly a rhapsody in which he treats Franco and the other leaders of the uprising as angels (440-41).

It is clear that Spender is assessing this poem, and probably the others, on the basis of parameters more in keeping with realism, or even ‘socialist realism’, than with the new literary models Campbell was seeking. Otherwise, in evaluating this work he would not have to call on the lack of “sustained argument, ... plot, [or] single vision”, because to a great extent these new literary models specifically tend to free themselves from the shackles and restrictions imposed by single-faceted and monolithic points of view, storyline or even plot. Spender also labels these verses “incoherent”, and there is no doubt that some of them are. The doubt arises, however, in specifying the type of “coherence” to which he is referring, because both the tone of his review of the poem and the immediate context of the sentence in which the term appears (followed by the adjectives “biased”, “unobjective”, “distorted” and “partisan”) point more to coherence of a political nature, which it is difficult not to share with Spender, than to aesthetic coherence. The “three-decker sandwich” analogy only serves to corroborate all these, because there is indeed an internal logic or thread running through the three layers. What is happening is that this internal logic is in keeping with Campbell’s ideology, which is light years away from Spender’s. The same can be said of the way he denigrates the work for its apparent lack of “single vision”, because one of the greatest failings of these verses probably lies in the fanatically monolithic approach of the point of view from which they are written. In short, Spender does not identify the real reasons for Campbell’s aesthetic failure. These are not, of course, what specifically annoys him, namely the fact that it is biased and partisan. The undoing of this work, which puts paid to any epic overtones, is in fact the incoherent way in which it is articulated and the use of hyperbolic language which reduces the events and experiences to absurdity.

Pujals’s critical evaluation, on the other hand, does not suffer from the partisan touch which can be detected in Spender. Thus, even if he is not completely free of it, he is not prone to some of Spender’s worst contradictions. Pujals does, however, say that “...the poem does not seem [to him] entirely satisfactory, as it contains too much ephemeral material” (66; my translation). This assertion, taken on its own, might seem obvious, particularly if we consider that the source of the content is war, historical material in other words, and as such is subject to the limits of space and the dictates of time. Nevertheless, Pujals adds something which touches on what, in all probability, constitutes one of the keys to Campbell’s failure. He suggests specifically that “[i]t is as though the poet, dancing to the tune of prevalent political and religious emotions in his writing, was not prepared to

purge it of these to give the poems more universal or perennial value ..." (66; my translation).

This value of a more universal and lasting nature is a good description of the literary benchmark or poetic framework which Campbell is seeking, but does not achieve. Although Pujals's fairly severe criticism of the aesthetic framework which underpins, or should underpin, these poems do not prevent him from acknowledging their inherent value, or occasionally assigning value to them, he barely takes the time to clarify where the mistakes lie or what they consist of. In any case, the examples with which he illustrates this are far too erratic. While his examples of certain unsuccessful images in the first books of *Flowering Rifle* can be quite abundant, even repetitive, he could not be more frugal in citing instances of failed attempts in the last part of the poem. Pujals limits himself to the following comments: "*Flowering Rifle* is a work which is extraordinarily difficult to put in a nutshell. Instead of developing around the thread of an argument, the poem consists rather in a set of digressions in verse structured around a theme ..." (66; my translation).

In fact, the level of aesthetic contradiction in Pujals's evaluation is not far away from the critique offered by Bern Dietz. The failure of 'Campbellian' poetic endeavours is analysed in greater depth by Dietz, so that his assessment of these verses is much more considered than Pujals and particularly Spender. Dietz analyses the events of the war rigorously alongside the political ideologies that contribute to its onset, but he does it with the aim of evaluating the truth of what the 'Campbellian' verses convey. However, in contrast to Spender, he takes great care to base his literary verdict on reasoning of an ideological nature. He also differs from Pujals in that he recognises no value at all in Campbell as a poet, much less as a person.

In conclusion, it would seem beyond any doubt that it is the disproportionate hyperbole of excessive political bias, this distortion of events and experiences by simplifying them whatever the cost, and particularly the thaumaturgic perspective from which Campbell approaches the subject of his inspiration, which ultimately put paid to a promising poetic project. Saying things like the enemy's vehicles of war fall all by themselves into rebel hands by the grace and agency of the sun (*Flowering* 1038-46), that Christ's miracles, which bring abundance to the nationalists, mean the opposite for the enemy, transforming their bread into hunger and their water into thirst ("Letter" 554-71), or that wheat refuses to grow in the fields of his opponents (*Flowering* 913-21), is tantamount to such profound perversion of the subject that it becomes unrecognisable. This impinges on any epic representation of the war in Spain, as it pushes the limits of the satirical subgenre in which Campbell tends to move around with great ease. Furthermore,

the level of distortion of the images is such that it would even fail to meet the minimal poetic coherence required by the experimental models which seemed to attract this author so much.

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