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## A Poet of Passion

Peter Alexander: *Roy Campbell: A Critical Biography*; Oxford University Press; New York.

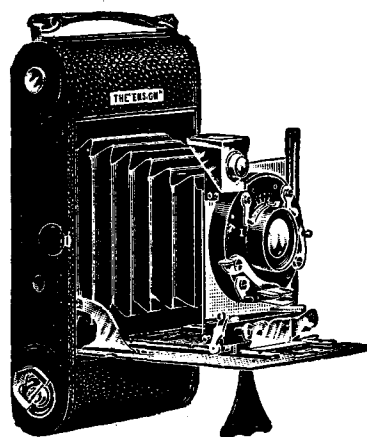
by Gregory Wolfe

South African-born poet Roy Campbell elicited two very different kinds of response during his life. Here are two representative samples. From a review of Campbell's first book of poetry, *The Flaming Terrapin*: "We have spun . . . back to an exuberant relish of the sheer sonority and clangour of words, words enjoyed for their own gust, and flung down to fit each other with an easy rapture of phrase." The other kind of reaction to Campbell may be seen in a later essay by Stephen Spender, where he calls Campbell "an infamous slanderer . . . a liar, a gross slanderer, an empty-headed boaster, a coward, a bully and a Fascist." It is a real tragedy that Spender's opinion is still the conventional wisdom about Campbell 25 years after the poet's death in a car accident. Peter Alexander's biography, because of its own half-heartedness in the face of accumulated antagonism to Campbell, won't do much to alter the status quo.

Campbell is a sort of test case, a litmus whereby a critic's attitudes toward politics and religion, and the ideological upheavals of the 20th century, can be determined. Campbell is thus like his friend Wyndham Lewis: both men spurned the armchair socialism and sexual deviance of the Bloomsbury Group, both temporarily became fascists and remained supporters of Franco's regime in Spain, and both accused the British left of having explicitly and implicitly sold out to communist totalitarianism. Campbell, however, became an even more outrageous figure by penning long, hyperbolic satires in heroic couplets against Blooms-

bury and the Auden generation, by embracing Roman Catholicism and the Catholic cultures of Provence and Spain, and by glorifying himself as a macho man-of-action in the Hemingway mold.

Like many artists, Campbell created a persona behind which he could hide his ego; in addition, he constantly added brushstrokes to the caricature others had drawn of him. But neither he nor



they were fair to the spirit and poetic sensibility of Roy Campbell. Many critics treat Campbell as a self-destructive psychiatric case who was his own enemy. They never consider that the utterly politicized and radicalized state of Europe between the world wars might have been the real enemy. By denying the disease of Western culture, the already-infected critics naturally attribute the illness solely to Campbell.

The gravamen of the charges leveled at Campbell is that his personality was divided and contradictory, capable of violence and mystical peace, insecure and deeply loving, drunken and devout. Peter Alexander, though he struggles to be fair to Campbell, takes the Freudian way out. Early on, Alexander explains that Campbell's love/hate relationship with his father is the key to the poet's "seemingly contradictory behaviour in later years."

It helps to explain . . . his natural anarchy and his attraction, during the early 1930's, to the orderliness of the European dictatorships. It explains both his early anti-clericalism, and his later adherence to the authoritative teachings of Roman Catholicism. And it explains both his hatred of 'regimented' modern life, and his happiness in the British Army.

With a poet's whole life interpreted in three sentences, one wonders why the remaining 200 pages are necessary.

Alexander's use of the phrase "seemingly contradictory" indicates that he is ambivalent about his own explanation, but he never pauses to search out an underlying unity in Campbell's life. To a certain type of mind (Chesterton's, for example), the presence of such an array of contradictions within a single personality would hint at the existence of paradox, one difficult to explicate, but no less deeply true for that. In fact, there is a unifying thread running throughout Campbell's life which no one has ever traced. Much of Campbell's sensibility can be understood in terms of his childhood and youth in turn-of-the-century South Africa. He acquired early a prowess in hunting that would lend itself later to distorted bragging. More importantly, the young Campbell developed an intense love for the bushveld and its animal inhabitants. This intimacy with nature had nothing of the deracinated Sierra Club idealization about it, but partook of the more ancient role of man as hunter and steward of nature. A healthful sensuousness pervades Campbell's poetry, not only in African and Provençal poems like "The Zebras" and "Estocade," but in the mystical language of his translation from St. John of the Cross. Whereas a writer like D. H. Lawrence, who was raised in a mining town, could idolize the thudding sexual power of a jungle he never knew, Campbell's sensuality grew out of direct

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knowledge and remained capable of much finer shades of thought and feeling.

The role Campbell's father played in his life was immense and not merely the dominant father/repressed son syndrome portrayed in textbooks. According to Alexander, Campbell's father was an industrious doctor who was available at any time, and who treated black and white alike, a trait which "earned him the undying love of the Zulu people." Roy therefore lived in an environment where the ideal of noblesse oblige on the part of the whites toward the blacks, which liberals find so impossible to appreciate, was practiced. For the rest of his life, Campbell would long for a society which was both hierarchically ordered and in which all classes would live in comity. Campbell also possessed a deep-seated admiration for the energy, self-sacrifice, and conservatism of the whites who pioneered South Africa, men and women who built schools and harbors. This work ethic prevented Campbell from having sympathy with the union-dominated welfare state in Britain, which the more leisured, imperial Britons found much more acceptable.

As so often happens, these youthful impressions were submerged in the lad who sailed north to begin his studies at Oxford University. Though he was always an "outsider" (a crucial factor in his life), Campbell very quickly became part of the circle of bright young artists in post-War England, which included his roommate William Walton, Augustus John, Wyndham Lewis, Aldous Huxley, and Jacob Epstein. The tall, lean, strikingly handsome Campbell was captured by Augustus John's brush and by Wyndham Lewis's transparent portrait of "Zulu Blades" in *The Apes of God*. During this period of anarchic creativity and lax morality Campbell married his strong-willed and sensual wife Mary, and produced the linguistically exuberant *The Flaming Terrapin*, a rambling allegorical poem that earned him instant acclaim, more because of the poem's de-

cidedly un-Georgian vitality of language than because of its somewhat muddled ideas.

Riding high on the success of *The Flaming Terrapin*, Campbell returned to South Africa, hoping to become the enfant terrible of letters and social criticism. Here Campbell entered a more serious and sadder period of his life. The short-lived journal *Voorslag* ("Whip-crack") which Campbell edited was perhaps modeled on the strident criticism of Wyndham Lewis's *Blast*, and Campbell soon lost his popularity by castigating the older generation for a tacit policy of apartheid. Many critics see a "left-wing" Campbell during these years, one who contrasts with the later conservative; but the poet's desire for a unified culture without an arrogant master class lay at the root of his intemperate lashing out at his elders. Thus it was no "contradiction" that the fine South African poems of 1926 (e.g., "The Zulu Girl" and

"Tristan da Cunha") exhibit the sensuousness and sensitivity of Campbell at his best.

It was a dejected—but not much wiser—Campbell who returned to England to seek his literary fortune anew. He and Mary were invited to stay on the estate of Harold Nicolson and Vita Sackville-West, two major figures in the Bloomsbury and Georgian circles who, though husband and wife, were contentedly homosexual. Within months, Vita had seduced Mary Campbell, whose adoration for Vita was in marked contrast to the older woman's casualness: Vita was carrying on no less than five lesbian affairs at the same time. Here again the critics' conventional wisdom sees a "contradictory" Campbell: the insecure masculinity and jealousy of Campbell, and his feelings of rejection from literary circles (they argue), caused him during Mary's affair to become paranoid and resentful, leading on to further right-wing extremism. Apparently it does not occur

## LIBERAL CULTURE

### ERA at Work

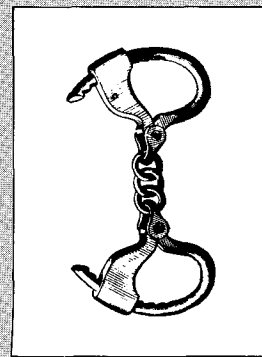
According to an article in the *Chicago Tribune*:

Inmates at San Quentin prison have no right to prevent being watched by female guards, even while taking showers, being strip-searched, or using the toilet, a federal judge ruled.

U.S. District Judge Spencer Williams dismissed a suit brought by three prisoners, saying employment of female correctional officers at the prison did not violate constitutional rights of male inmates.

California Atty. Gen. John Van de Kamp said the ruling recognizes and protects employment rights of women in correctional facilities.

Whatever privacy interests an inmate may have are, as has been recognized by Judge Williams, certainly secondary to



the employment rights and security concerns in question," Van de Kamp said.

Next, we bet, there'll be photo reportages in *Playboy* or *Penthouse* on female guards watching the shower stalls and giggling. It certainly beats the male stripper shows on ladies' night at the local pub. □



to such critics that Campbell may simply have grown up. In addition to normal jealousy, Mary's affair forced Campbell to evaluate the moral and literary health of Bloomsbury, and what he saw was smugness, hypocrisy, mutual flattery, intellectual flabbiness, and a sexual anarchy that was more perverse than Arcadian. The result was a scathing, erratic, and hilarious satire in heroic couplets called *The Georgiad*, which aimed at the same satiric targets as Wyndham Lewis's *The Apes of God*, published the same year. It is difficult to convey the humor of *The Georgiad*, where the catholic sexual tastes of Bloomsbury are mocked ("in the subtle strife of heads or tails/The latter, as by magic, prevails") in verse filled with wicked portraits, such as that of Vita and her lesbian love poetry ("straight in raptured sonnets will expose/The bunions of her gnarled iambic toes").

In spite of his biting satiric humor, Campbell was stunned, hurt, and insecure. He had now estranged himself from the literary establishment of England; some of its members vowed never to mention Campbell's name in print (what has been called Campbell's "paranoia" was usually sharp realism about his enemies). Campbell left England for Provence where, surprisingly, Mary joined him and their relationship slowly grew more solid. In southern France Campbell found a country dry and scrubby, not unlike the South African bushveld, and he threw himself into various occupations, including fishing, horse-breaking, and bullfighting. In England he had confronted a deracinated, urban literary aristocracy, utterly divided from the mass of the English people and plunged in immorality and triviality. The ancient folk culture of Provence offered Campbell something far more akin to his vision of an integrated society, where poets, aristocrats, and fishermen came together in communal feasts and games and shared a common heritage. This central fact has been obscured by the passages in his autobiographical works which take brag-

gadocio into the realm of self-gratifying fantasy. Nonetheless, only displaced urban intellectuals could miss the moving passages in the autobiography *Light on a Dark Horse* about Provençal feasts, nautical jousting, and the fisherman's life. It was here that Campbell wrote some of his finest lyric poetry, such as "Mass at Dawn" and "Horses on the Camargue," which went into the volume of poems entitled *Adamastor* and gained him another brief round of critical acclaim. In this book, and in the next, *Flowering Reeds* (possibly his best), there are poems which show that pain is necessary for a full experience of reality, poems in which final peace is hard-won and therefore more convincing.

Campbell and his family went on to live in Spain and Portugal. Both countries represented to Campbell the integrated culture that he sought in Provence. When, as an older man, Campbell lived in London and entertained guests, his parties would be a wild assortment of friends, including painters, policemen, ex-soldiers, diplomats, bullfighters, butchers and sculptors. As Peter Alexander rightly says: "The artificial or real barriers that divide men simply did not exist for Campbell." Campbell's conversion to the Roman Catholic Church is consistently compared by critics to that of Evelyn Waugh or T. S. Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism as an "escape" from personal problems. Yet Campbell's own growing sense of morality and the need for spiritual direction had been leading in that direction for a long time. His conversion was not made under the influence of the English Catholic Revival, with its witty and dynamic spokesmen Ronald Knox, Hilaire Belloc, and G. K. Chesterton, but as the result of observing the faith of French and Spanish peasants. By his own existential route, Campbell had come to defend Christendom in much the same way as the fiercely logical Chesterton. The under-rated book of poems *Mithraic Emblems* comes from this period, and incorporates Campbell's idea of suffering in a specifically Christian context. His Cath-

olicism also enabled Campbell to labor for 11 years on translating the poems of the 16th-century Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross, even though these years were heavily politicized by his defense of the nationalists in the Spanish Civil War.

The Spanish Civil War brought out the best and worst in Campbell, and has earned him continual obloquy. While he undoubtedly romanticized Franco and the Spanish nationalists, and made the serious mistake of temporarily supporting Hitler and Mussolini, Campbell's revulsion at the Soviet-directed campaign to dominate Spain has had ample historical documentation, despite the mythology maintained by liberals. In the atmosphere of hysteria which gripped most intellectuals in the late 1930's, Campbell foolishly indulged in anti-Semitism and conspiracy theories. His accusation that leftist intellectuals wrote Soviet propaganda for profit was nonsensical and negated his valid insight into their fundamental support for communist totalitarianism. After the war this led to further alienation from the English literary society he still depended on for money and an audience. Campbell's insecurity and resentment grew and aged him prematurely.

Campbell's last years were melancholy but not without their comforts. His creative poetic energy, which he termed "the sweat of other activities," dried up as age and ill health curbed these activities. He turned instead to translations of Baudelaire, Lorca, and others. Like all the best translations, there is a good deal of Campbell himself in these poems, while they remain faithful to the tone and structure of the originals. The St. John of the Cross translations, for example, have a mystical intensity that emphasizes the redemptive value of suffering and has the ring of experience, even though Campbell's liberal critics have been deaf to his spirituality. It was a long way from the "clangour" and "gust" of words in *The Flaming Terrapin* to the taut simplicity of St. John of the Cross, but the quality of his passion never changed. □

# Ideology & Realism

Irving Kristol: *Reflections of a Neoconservative*; Basic Books; New York.

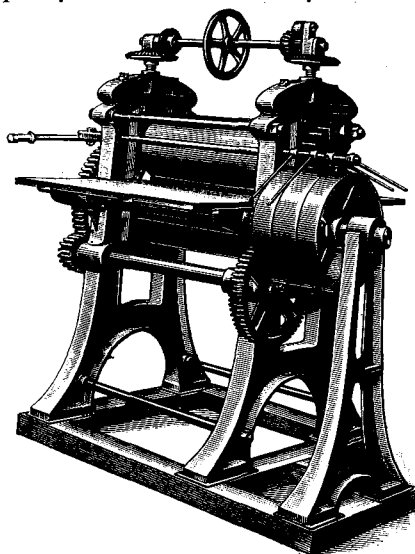
by William R. Hawkins

The term *neoconservative* is more often used by those who oppose the movement than by those who are included within its ranks. Criticism from the left has been particularly vicious because neoconservatives are reformed liberals who are consequently viewed as traitors by their former associates. On the right, the response has been marked by caution. Some neocons—Roger Starr, Norman Podhoretz, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Michael Novak, and James Q. Wilson—have found ready acceptance. Others, such as Nathan Glazer, Daniel Bell, and Seymour Martin Lipset have been met with skepticism because they have failed to break firmly with liberalism. Still, the advent of the neoconservatives provided a powerful reinforcement to the right. Their work through the *Public Interest*, *Commentary*, and the American Enterprise Institute brought forward a new wave of nonliberal thought when it was most needed in the wake of the Goldwater defeat, the Great Society, and the New Left. Foremost among the neocons is Irving Kristol, a man who fully accepts both the term and the movement to the right.

Kristol sees the pattern of past American politics as a conflict between the moderate left (liberalism) and the radical left (socialism), with only an occasional "interregnum of conservative government whose function it is to consolidate and ratify liberal reforms" (as Eisenhower did for the New Deal and Nixon did for the Great Society). In the late 1960's, the moderate left collapsed

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under the pressures from the counter-culture and the New Left. In order to stop the radicals, Kristol and others turned to a revitalized right. Kristol sees fatal flaws in the old conservatism that require correction if a lasting defense against the radicals is to be erected, thus the *neo* movement. The problem with the right is that it has no ideology, by which Kristol means a vision of the future toward which conservative policy will move the country. Without



such a vision, the right has nothing positive with which to sway the public. The right can only criticize the leftist vision or its mode of implementation. The right can win power occasionally as a backlash, but cannot maintain itself in power or win broad, dedicated support without a positive program.

What has passed for conservative ideology is simply the "free market" of classical economics. Kristol points out that this is inadequate. An economic theory cannot substitute for a comprehensive view of man and society. Economics is a part, not a whole. Of course, most conservatives do have a concept of the good society which

reaches beyond materialism, but the centerplace given to economics eclipses it. Worse, the attempt to defend "the market" in its purest form has led conservatives to defer to the libertarians. Milton Friedman advocates the legalization of hard drugs on the grounds of libertarian consistency. Try convincing any parent with teen-aged children that either conservatism or capitalism has the answers when that is part of the platform!

Kristol respects the work of F. A. Hayek and Russell Kirk concerning the importance of a moral order which has evolved over time, but feels that their perspective is too nostalgic. It looks backward to a simpler time when virtue, honor, and duty were enthroned in the popular mind and supported by institutions of authority in the family, church, and state. In today's world, constant change and the "open society" present conservatives with the difficult problems of restoring values, controlling change, and rebuilding institutions. In other words, effecting a counterrevolution. A laissez-faire attitude is insufficient to accomplish this task. The self-denial of government power or other sources of authority in behalf of conservatism is to practice unilateral disarmament in the midst of a war.

Kristol feels that the classical liberal view of man which spawned the cult of individualism is behind most of today's problems. It has motivated the counter-culture's assault on Western civilization; paralyzed the right's response to this threat; contributed to the left's preoccupation with questions of equality; and provided socialism with an issue of mass appeal. Kristol wishes to escape this crisis by drawing neoconservative strength from premodern philosophy in the manner of Leo Strauss. Classical political thought established that the proper end of politics was a good society. In this framework, society is the