



**Universidad de Almería**

**Departamento: Filología Inglesa y Alemana**

**Proyecto Fin de Master**

**Tutor: Jesús Isaías Gómez López**

**Curso 2012/13**

## **English Rhymes on the Spanish Civil War**

**TRABAJO PARA EL TÍTULO DE MÁSTER**

**Entregado en el Área de Atención Integral**

**al Estudiante (ARATIES)**

**de la Universidad de Almería**

**como requisito parcial conducente**

**a la obtención del título de**

**MÁSTER EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES**

**2013**

**Marcel Margolf**

**Wilhelmstrasse 6**

**35305 Grünberg (Alemania)**

**Teléfono: 634807927**

**E-Mail: Marcel.Margolf@t-online.de**

**Máster Oficial en Estudios Ingleses: Aplicaciones Profesionales y Comunicación Intercultural**

**Fecha: 10.09.2013**

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. The Spanish Conflict in the Western Stage: “Authors take sides”	2
3. Stephen Spender: Poems from Spain	7
3.1 <i>Ultima Ratio Regum</i>	9
3.2 <i>Port Bou</i>	12
3.2 <i>Fall of a City</i>	15
4. Roy Campbell: Openly in Favour of the Nationalists	18
4.1 Poems for Spain: <i>Toledo (July, 1936)</i> , <i>Hot Rifles</i> and <i>Christs in Uniform</i>	21
4.2 Controversy: <i>Flowering Rifle: A poem from the battlefield of Spain</i>	30
5. W.H. Auden and his “Change of Heart” on the Spanish Civil War	35
5.1 <i>Spain</i>	38
6. Final Appreciation of the Matter	51
7. Bibliography	53
8. Webliography	54

"What's your proposal? To build the just city? I will.  
I agree. Or is it the suicide pact, the romantic  
Death? Very well, I accept, for  
I am your choice, your decision. Yes, I am Spain."

## Abstract

The main objective of the thesis is to provide an overview on English poets and poems dedicated to the Spanish civil war. In doing so, the intention of the paper is to review, first of all, the perception of the Spanish conflict among English writers in general. After that, three authors, namely Stephen Spender, Roy Campbell and W.H. Auden, shall account for the main part of the paper given their lyrical devotement to the civil war in Spain.

El objetivo principal de la tesis es proporcionar una visión conjunta de poetas y poemas ingleses dedicados a la guerra civil española. En este sentido, la intención del trabajo es, en primer lugar, dar a conocer la percepción del conflicto español entre los escritores ingleses en general. En segundo lugar, tres autores, concretamente Stephen Spender, Roy Campbell y W.H. Auden, constituyen la parte principal del trabajo teniendo en cuenta su dedicación lírica a la guerra civil de España.

## 1. Introduction

There is barely any war that has produced as much national and international literature, but also as much international interest, as the Spanish Civil War; excluding the two world wars of course. This, however, does not surprise much given that the Spanish Civil War took place directly before the Second World War. Furthermore, according to many contemporaries, the outcome of the Spanish war was to influence heavily the incidents that were to come right after it on an overall European level, or, as Gerald Butler said, would “mark the end of freedom and civilization in Europe” (“Authors take sides”: 995). Also Auden was of the opinion that “it would make a European war more probable” (“Authors take sides”: 993). That is why a certain international interest in what was going on in Spain was guaranteed.

Worldwide, writers dedicated some important literature to the conflict. Many times, writers even travelled to Spain in order to gain further insight or to offer their support, mostly for the Republic. Aside from that, many poets not necessarily wrote poems about the conflict, but did give their opinions on it. This way, this paper shall have a particular look at poets from the English speaking world who wrote poems dedicated to the Spanish Civil War.

Therefore, the underlying approach of this paper is structured as follows: We shall proceed stepwise and first of all review these opinions and thus the overall perception of the conflict among English speaking writers in general. In a next step, three authors will make up the main part of this paper. These are, in order of appearance, Stephen Spender, Roy Campbell and W. H. Auden. We shall have a look at some of their major poems regarding the conflict. More importantly, all of them spent some time in Spain during the civil war and thus can be seen to provide some authentic works, ranging from Spender’s *Ultima Ratio Regum* to Auden’s *Spain*, which most probably is one of the most significant and meaningful poem ever written about the Spanish war. Aside from that, we shall also cast a glance at the lives of these authors in order to contextualize their poems on Spain within a wider framework and within their lyrical style. Many more English speaking poets wrote poems about the war, but the choice fell on the afore-mentioned three due to their having been in Spain and also on grounds of their different opinions on the war itself. As can be seen later, Spender and Auden supported the Republic whereas Campbell sympathised with Franco. Hence, it is important to explore both sides rather than focussing solely on the pro-republican literature. At the end, a short recap and appreciation of the matter shall conclude the paper.

2. The Spanish Conflict in the Western Stage: "Authors take sides"

985

not lost Review  
1132

★ George Bernard Shaw  
H. G. Wells  
Aldous Huxley  
Ethel Mannin  
Liam O'Flaherty  
Evelyn Waugh  
Ruby M. Ayres  
Havelock Ellis  
Louis Golding  
Lady Eleanor Smith  
Laurence Housman  
Sir P. Chalmers Mitchell  
A. J. Cummings  
Rose Macaulay  
C. Day Lewis  
Naomi Royde Smith  
Helen Waddell  
Stephen Spender  
A. E. Coppard  
Storm Jameson  
John Strachey  
Olaf Stapledon  
W. H. Auden  
Arthur Calder-Marshall  
Lancelot Hogben  
Rebecca West  
H. M. Tomlinson  
Hamilton Fyfe  
V. Sackville-West  
Norman Douglas  
Ezra Pound  
T. S. Eliot  
Rosamund Lehmann  
Arthur Machen  
H. W. Nevins  
J. W. Robertson-Scott  
Eric Linklater  
E. Ibbetson James  
Harold Laski  
Charles Morgan  
and over 100 others

**Authors  
take  
sides**

**on the  
Spanish  
War**

**148** CONTRIBUTIONS

**10,000** WORDS

**PRICE SIX PENCE**

In 1937, the British Magazine *The Left Review* carried out a collection of opinions about the Spanish conflict among British authors and poets. The opinions were collected and printed for the public with the headings “For the government”, “Neutral” and “Against the government”. However, according to the publisher’s note, “it has proved impossible to include all the answers received” (“Authors take sides”: 990) for mere reasons of space. Yet, it is claimed to be “representative and important” (ibid.). The questions that the magazine wanted the authors to answer were the following: Are you for, or against the legal Government and the People of Republican Spain? Are you for, or against Franco and Fascism?

We shall now briefly have a look at how some of the most important and best known authors thought about this issue and what their answers were. Obviously, the wide majority claimed their big support for the legal government whereas a minority claimed to be neutral and only three authors publicly supported the troops of General Franco. Among those who supported the government we find such outstanding poets and writers as for instance Aldous Huxley, Louis McNeice, Lascelles Abercrombie, Cecil Day Lewis and Leonard Sidney Woolf. Yet, more importantly, we can find W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender. Auden supported the government mainly because he was concerned about the future of the whole European continent. Here, we can clearly see his fear of a possible Fascist conquer of Europe and the widespread consequences that its victory in Spain may have:

I SUPPORT THE VALENCIA GOVERNMENT in Spain because its defeat by the forces of International Fascism would be a major disaster for Europe. It would make a European war more probable; and the spread of Fascist Ideology and practice to countries as yet comparatively free from them, which would inevitably follow upon a Fascist victory in Spain, would create an atmosphere in which the creative artist and all who care for justice, liberty and culture would find it impossible to work or even exist. (“Authors take sides”: 993)

Also Stephen Spender was afraid of a possible Fascist victory in Spain and feared that democracy would weaken. However, apart from that, he was also concerned about Spain herself and her historical development:

I AM OPPOSED TO FRANCO firstly because Franco and his supporters represent the attempt of the aristocracy and clergy of Spain to prevent the history of Spain developing beyond the Middle Ages. In opposing their reaction, so far from being an extremist, I support the Protestantism of intellectuals like the great Catholic writer Bergamini against the materialism of

the Catholic Church in Spain; and I support in Spain exactly such a movement of liberal and liberating nationalism as the English liberals supported in many countries still groaning under feudalism in the nineteenth century.

Secondly, I am opposed to Franco, because, supported by Hitler and Mussolini, he represents international Fascism. If Franco wins in Spain Fascism will have gained the third great victory in an international war which began in Manchuria, continued in Abyssinia, and may end in Spain. If Franco wins, the principle of democracy will have received a severe blow and the prospect of the new imperialist war, which is also a “war of ideologies” will have been brought far nearer. (“Authors take sides”: 1011 f.)

Leonard Barnes, a British anti-colonialist writer, had a rather interesting view. On the one hand, he was fully supporting the Republic, but on the other hand, he tried to give an explanation on the rise of fascism itself. The reasoning he gave is rather different from most other writers and provides an alternative standpoint:

CERTAINLY I AM wholly for the Spanish government and wholly against Franco and his allies. But I remember that Fascism in Italy and Germany is largely the outcome of policies pursued by capitalist interests and Governments in Britain, France and America. Moreover, British rule in India and Africa is a form of Fascism just as barbarous as the German or Italian. For Britons, therefore, the enemy is not merely the ambition of a Mussolini or a Hitler, but also the general structure and functioning of the British Empire itself, as now organised. (“Authors take sides”: 993)

As we have seen heretofore, most answers are rather long, though not too long. Still, some authors gave a rather brief statement, which, however, is probably equally or even more powerful, just like the one by the Irishman Samuel Beckett, who simply claimed: ¡UPTHEREPUBLIC! (“Authors take sides”: 993)

Rose Macaulay took a similar approach by stating: AGAINST FRANCO (“Authors take sides”: 1005)

Also Jack Hilton made it clear but simple: FOR THE PEOPLE of Republican Spain. Against Franco and Fascism. Yes. Yes. Yes. (“Authors take sides”: 1002)

William Forrest even wrote a poem in support of the people of Spain:



Suffering, struggling, stoic  
People of Spain,  
All your split blood heroic  
Is not in vain,  
No, spilt not in vain. (“Authors take sides”: 998)

We shall now turn to the writers who expressed a rather neutral opinion on the conflict. Among them we find Vera Brittain, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, H. G. Wells and Vita Sackville West, who did not play an unimportant role in Roy Campbell’s life given that she had an affair with his wife. Vera Brittain, a convinced pacifist, claimed that no form of war could ever be justified. In spite of hating Fascism, she was of the opinion that it should not be stopped by mere fighting. T. S. Eliot expressed his deep neutrality saying that writers should not get involved in that: “WHILE I AM NATURALLY SYMPATHETIC, I still feel convinced that it is best that at least a few man of letters should remain isolated, and take no part in these collective activities.” (“Authors take sides”: 1116)

H.G. Wells, albeit, did not see Fascism as the big enemy:

I AM NOT AN “ANTI” of any sort unless it is anti-gangster or anti-nationalist. My sympathies were all with the new liberal republic in Madrid. It has been destroyed between the Anarchist-Syndicalists on the one hand and the Franco pronunciamiento on the other. The intervention of Italy and Germany is on traditional nationalist lines; it was to be expected and it has been greatly facilitated by the stupid confusion in the British mind and will.

The real enemy of mankind is not the Fascist but the ignorant fool. (“Authors take sides”: 1117)

Finally, Vita Sackville West wrote that she equally despises Fascism and Communism since both bring oppression. Therefore, she did not want to decide on one of them. Yet, she saw this conflict not only in Spain, but on a larger European scale.

Amongst all the writers and poets asked, only three claimed to be against the government, these were Edmund Blunden, Arthur Machen and Geoffrey Moss. Regrettably, Roy Campbell was not included in the list. Whereas the Welsh author Arthur Machen simply informed “that he is, and always has been, entirely for General Franco” (“Authors take sides”: 1118), Edmund Blunden provided a more detailed viewpoint:

I KNOW TOO LITTLE about affairs in Spain to make a confident answer. To my mind (subject to that first reservation), it was necessary that somebody like Franco should arise – and although England may not profit by this victory I think Spain will. The ideas of Germany, Italy, etc., in your document do not square with those I have formed *upon the whole* of the recent history of those countries. Memories of 1914-18 perhaps do not allow me to see some incidents you mention in the isolated and flamboyant way the manifesto has them. (“Authors take sides”: 1118)

As could be seen in some of the aforementioned opinions, statements and even simple exclamations, most of the authors included in the survey had a rather clear viewpoint on what was going on. For obvious reasons, almost all of them were in favour of the Republic or at least neutral, sometimes also for reasons of reputation. This initial section is to be drawn to a close with another comment on the war by the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, whose opinion, as so often, hits the nail on the head for the neutral observer:

IN SPAIN both the Right and the Left so thoroughly disgraced themselves in the turns they took in trying to govern their country before the Right revolted, that it is impossible to say which of them is the more incompetent. Spain must choose for itself: it is really not our business, though of course our Capitalist Government has done everything it possible could to help General Franco. I as a Communist am generally on the left; but that does not commit me to support the British Party Parliament system, and its continental imitations, of which I have the lowest opinion.

At present the Capitalist powers seem to have secured a victory over the General by what they call their non-interference, meaning their very active interference on his side; but it is unlikely that the last word will be with him. Meanwhile I shall not shout about it. (“Authors take sides”: 987)

Obviously, Shaw was referring to the official international attitude of Non-intervention regarding the conflict. Still, as Preston says: “The reaction of foreign power dictated both the course and the outcome of the Civil War” (135). The disregard that Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy showed towards the non-intervention and their actually heavy intervention on the Nationalist side just like the comparatively poor actions taken by France or Great Britain can be seen to crucially have influenced the incidents in Spain.

### 3. Stephen Spender: Poems from Spain

Sir Stephen Harold Spender was born in February 1909 in Kensington, UK. He attended University College in Oxford but actually never graduated there. In spite, he preferred going to Germany (Hamburg and Berlin) to spend some time in the Weimar Republic of the 1920's before going to Vienna and Spain. Spender was, for some time, a member of the communist party. During his literary life, he met a lot of his contemporary famous fellow poets and writers such as Yeats, Isherwood, Day Lewis, T.S Elliot, Virginia Woolf, Hemingway and MacNeice. More important, however, was his friendship with W.H. Auden, who is said to have had a rather big influence on Spender and his writing style. Many of the aforesaid poets, together with Spender, belonged to the so called Oxford Poets or, as they were also referred to, the Auden Group. Interestingly enough, he also met Roy Campbell; in a rather painful incident as will be shown later. As Spender claims in his autobiography, he started to feel Jewish at a very young age and accordingly socialized with Jewish fiends; and indeed, he had some "Jewish blood" (Spender: 13).

When the Spanish Civil War broke out Spender went to Spain in order to join the International Brigades and to support the Republic against the troops of Franco by means of observing and describing the warfare for the Communist Party in Great Britain. The young poet of course responded to his overwhelmingly interesting but also dangerous experience in Spain by means of poetry. Another reason for going to Spain, though, was one of his ex-lovers, Tony Hindman, who after splitting up with Spender went to Spain in order to fight for the Brigades. That was a rather uncomfortable situation for the young poet and he went to Spain in order to get him out of the fighting (cf. Poetryfoundation.org). Spender's interest in Spain, even so, did not start with the Spanish conflict. On the contrary, he had visited Spain long before and spend some time in Barcelona, where he also met Spanish fellow poets and got acquainted with their literature, especially with the one of Federico García Lorca, whose poems Spender translated to English and afterwards introduced to the UK. Other poets whose literature he translated were Miguel Hernández and Manuel Altolaguirre (cf. Callahan: 40). Also, he took their works to the English speaking world. Indeed, Callahan considers some of Altolaguirre's poems to be "probably the best Civil War poems from a Spanish writer to be printed in England during the conflict" (44).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For a selection of some of Altolaguirre's best known and most famous poems please go to: <http://www.poemas-del-alma.com/manuel-altolaguirre.htm>

His first visit to Barcelona took place in 1933. Yet, it was not a very interesting experience since there was no one he knew in that city (cf. Callahan: 41). However, he came back in 1936 a few months before the outbreak of the war and he felt delighted. He even started learning Spanish, getting inspired by the poetry of García Lorca. Although it can be said that Spender felt attracted by Lorca's poetry, it never really influenced his own writing style to a big extent. Nevertheless, we can see that Spender had developed a true and genuine interest in Spain and its literature even before the civil war actually began.

When the Second World War broke out, Spender did not serve armed forces due to some minor illnesses which excluded him from any active participation in any warfare. Particularly during this period he several times expressed his disappointment in communism. After the war, he was engaged in co-founding and publishing several magazines, apart from writing poetry of course. He lived for several years in the USA and in the 1970's he became professor at the University College in London. Throughout his life there have were debates concerning his sexual orientation, since he had many alleged relationships with both men and women. Thus, he can be seen to be heterosexual, having been married to women twice.

As to Spender's poetic style, we can say that his poetry very often was concerned with social inequality, unfairness and protest. Moreover, he wrote much about "deaths and griefs" (Callahan: 46). Specifically his civil war poetry can be characterized by the depiction of "anonymous young men" (Callahan: 50), as can be seen later on. Many times, he tried to combine his social views with his individualism and was yet "fascinated by objects like time, fear, inhibition, weakness, war, and death" (Sastri). These attitudes translated very interestingly into the way he wrote his poems.

Amongst his most famous and outstanding works we can claim *Vienna, Collected Poems (1928-1953)*, *Citizens in War – and After*, *The Temple*, *Trial of a Judge* and of course *The God that Failed* plus his autobiography *World Within World*. Spender died in 1995 in Westminster aged 86.

Now, in the following, we shall have a look at three concrete poems he published in the anthology "Poems from Spain", namely *Ultima Ratio Regum*, *Port Bou* and *Fall of a City*.

### 3.1 *Ultima Ratio Regum*

The guns spell money's ultimate reason  
In letters of lead on the spring hillside.  
But the boy lying dead under the olive trees  
Was too young and too silly  
To have been notable to their important eye.  
He was a better target for a kiss.

When he lived, tall factory hooters never summoned him.  
Nor did restaurant plate-glass doors revolve to wave him in.  
His name never appeared in the papers.  
The world maintained its traditional wall  
Round the dead with their gold sunk deep as a well,  
Whilst his life, intangible as a Stock Exchange rumour,  
drifted outside.

O too lightly he threw down his cap  
One day when the breeze threw petals from the trees.  
The unflowering wall sprouted with guns,  
Machine-gun anger quickly scythed the grasses;  
Flags and leaves fell from hands and branches;  
The tweed cap rotted in the nettles.

Consider his life which was valueless  
In terms of employment, hotel ledgers, news files.  
Consider. One bullet in ten thousand kills a man.  
Ask. Was so much expenditure justified  
On the death of one so young and so silly  
Lying under the olive trees, O world, O death?<sup>2</sup>



---

<sup>2</sup> Taken from Sperber: 147.

*Ultima Ratio Regum* is the first poem that we shall have a look at. The poem, undeniably, addresses the conflict in Spain, although it does not do so explicitly. The title, obviously, is in Latin. *Ultima Ratio Regum* translates to “The last argument of kings”. This last argument, evidently, is supposed to be war in a monarchy. This gives a first hint to the Spanish conflict. However, before having a look at what the poem wants to express, it is convenient to first and foremost have a brief look at its structure. The poem consists of four stanzas; each one is made up of six lines. A particular rhyme scheme, albeit, is not recognizable. The language applied is also rather straightforward and simple so that the reader is not facing any difficulties at all as regards understanding the poem’s content. It is, thus, a very direct and clear poem.

Now the focus will lie on each stanza and the meanings they transmit to the reader. The poem deals, first of all, with the senselessness of war but also with social disregard, anonymity and injustice. In brief, it deals with a young man, disregarded by society, whose death, apparently in warfare, is lamented by the third-person narrator. The first stanza immediately informs us about the boy’s death, he lies dead under the olive tree. His death caused by the guns mentioned in the first line is seen as senseless insofar as he was still “too young and too silly”, an innocent victim so to speak. The most likely case is that he died fighting in action in a conflict that is not specified in the poem itself. Even so, it is accurate to assume that it happened during the Spanish Civil War, although Spender as a convinced pacifist might have alluded to any war in more general terms. Thence, it will remain speculation.

What is striking in the first stanza is that the elements of a war such as death and guns are in opposition to more peaceful elements like the “spring hillsides” and the “olive trees”. The Latin title is reflected right in the very first line: “money’s ultimate reason”. Here, however, the *ultima ratio* is connected to money and not to the kings. As it is, the money, here in more general terms of course, is responsible for the death of the young boy.

The second stanza is concerned with something totally different. Rather than the death of the young boy, it deals with his life before and in how far he was a victim of society. The boy seemed to have suffered social contempt and disdain. No one seemed to have cared about him: “When he lived, tall factory hooters never summoned him / Nor did restaurant plate-glass doors revolve to wave him in.” Thus, he apparently had no role in society. He

encountered a “traditional wall” that stopped him from entering that very society. Here, we see Spender’s criticism and protest regarding social injustice. Obviously, that must have taken place also during the Spanish conflict.

Once that social criticism has been brought into focus, the third stanza goes back to war action. Here again, elements of war such as the “guns” and the “machine-gun anger” are in marked contrast with elements of nature like the “breeze”, the “trees”, the “grasses”, the “leaves” the “branches” and the “nettles”. We could already observe this in the first stanza. The elements of nature, again, symbolize peace. Besides, the reader encounters the second time the word wall, this time as “unflowering wall” instead of “traditional wall”. Still, we are not told any particular detail about why and how and where the boy actually died aside from the fact that he lies under the olive trees. This, however, is a clear indication that the scene is set in Spain. The olive tree image is repeated in the last stanza, actually even in the last line: “Lying under the olive tree, O world, O death?”

The last stanza, one more time, makes reference to the boy’s apparently useless life in terms of his social status: “Consider this life which was valueless.” At the end of the poem the reader seems to get addressed directly. In spite of not using an exclamation mark, the reader nonetheless gets that impression: “Consider. One bullet in ten thousand kills a man. / Ask. Was so much expenditure justified.” Here, we are told that money and thus the armament industry is the responsible factor for a young man’s death, as could be seen already in the very first line of the poem.

*Ultima Ratio Regum*, hence, can be seen as a protest or even a lament for the death of innocent young people in a society that may be described as torn apart. We do not know the circumstances of the boy’s death, nor do we exactly know which side he was on. However, it is rather clear that Spender wanted this poem to be a criticism of war in general. Maybe even more than just that, the poem can be seen as criticism of the society that the boy lived in, since it obviously left him alone.

### 3.2 *Port Bou*

As a child holds a pet,  
Arms clutching but with hands that do not join,  
And the coiled animal watches the gap  
To outer freedom in animal air,  
So the earth-and-rock flesh arms of this harbour  
Embrace but do not enclose the sea  
Which, through a gap, vibrates to the open sea  
Where ships and dolphins swim and above is the sun.  
In the bright winter sunlight I sit on the stone parapet  
Of a bridge; my circling arms rest on a newspaper  
Empty in my mind as the glittering stone  
Because I search for an image  
And seeing an image I count out the coined words  
To remember the childish headlands of Port Bou.  
A lorry halts beside me with creaking brakes  
And I look up at warm waving flag-like faces  
Of militia men staring down at my French newspaper.  
'How do they write of our struggle, over the frontier?'  
I hold out the paper, but they refuse,  
They did not ask for anything so precious  
But only for friendly words and to offer me cigarettes.  
In their smiling faces the war finds peace, the famished  
    mouths  
Of the rusty carbines brush against their trousers  
Almost as fragilely as reeds;  
And wrapped in a cloth - old mother in a shawl -  
The terrible machine-gun rests.  
They shout, salute back as the truck jerks forward  
Over the vigorous hill, beyond the headland.  
An old man passes, his running mouth,  
With three teeth like bullets, spits out 'pom-pom-pom'.  
The children run after; and, more slowly, the women,  
Clutching their clothes, follow over the hill,  
Till the village is empty, for the firing practice,  
And I am left alone on the bridge at the exact centre  
Where the cleaving river trickles like saliva.  
At the exact centre, solitary as a target,  
Where nothing moves against a background of cardboard houses  
Except the disgraceful skirring dogs; and the firing begins,  
Across the harbour mouth from headland to headland.  
White flecks of foam gashed by lead in the sea;  
And the echo trails over its iron lash  
Whipping the flanks of the surrounding hills.  
My circling arms rest on the newspaper,  
My mind seems paper where dust and ink fall,  
I tell myself the shooting is only for practice,  
And my body seems a cloth which the machine-gun stitches  
Like a sewing machine, neatly, with cotton from a reel,



And the solitary, irregular, thin 'puffs' from the carbines  
Draw on long needles white threads through my navel<sup>3</sup>



The poem *Port Bou*, written during the civil war, is much longer than *Ultima Ratio Regum*. Their titles, yet, have something in common: They sound foreign. *Port Bou* is the name of a little town in the province of Girona, Catalonia. It is located right next to the Spanish-French border. The poem basically describes some fighting action taking place in the village, but also the moments of silence, happiness and freedom before the storm, recounting the experience and observations of the narrator. It is of great importance to know that Port Bou is not just a simple small town at the French border. Au contraire, it was strategically significant during the Spanish Civil War since it was considered one of the only very few locations where the republicans could receive deliveries and supplies from abroad.

In terms of style it is very obvious that there is again no fixed rhyme scheme or rhythm recognizable when reading it. It is striking in that it reverses the usual pattern owing to the fact that the narrator wants to give us his thoughts and ideas as they are occurring at the very moment of observing the scene. This way, it sounds really authentic and not artificially put

---

<sup>3</sup> Taken from Sperber: 148 f..

together to make it sound nice and poetic. Thus, we can call it free verse because the impression we get is that of a little story rather than a poem in the traditional sense.

The beginning sets the scene, which is described to be a rather peaceful and nice place notwithstanding the seriousness of the events. The narrator speaks of a child holding a pet in its hand, of some “freedom in animal air”, the “winter sunlight” and the swimming dolphins in the sea. This setting does not give the reader the impression of a war going on there. The narrator, then, introduces himself: “I sit on the stone parapet / Of a bridge.” The man is reading a French newspaper when a lorry passes and stops. The “militiamen”, which can be seen to be Spanish civilians fighting for either the Republic or the Nationalists, are described as nice, having “smiling faces”; and they are wondering how the conflict is looked at in the neighbouring country: “How do they speak of our struggle over the frontier?” Self-evidently, the narrator enjoys the scene and peaceful situation of the very moment, saying that “the war finds peace” and “the terrible machine-gun rests”. Spender gives us one of his pacifist images here.

This tranquil and apparently peaceful scene, nonetheless, changes soon. Once the lorry travels on, an old man passes, “with three teeth like bullets, spits out ‘pom-pom-pom’”. Obviously, the pom-pom-pom sound refers to shooting guns. We are described running children and women. They apparently hide behind the hill and the village is thus empty. The narrator, yet, is “left alone on the bridge at the exact centre”. The reader can grab the situation that has appeared within only a few moments; we are facing the narrator’s fear and nervousness, he literally feels like a “target”. The “firing begins” and the narrator gives us a look into his state of mind, the lines become very personal: “I tell myself the shooting is only for practice”. In spite of not directly being involved in the fighting action, he feels and hears what is going on and hopes not to get hurt. Strangely enough, he imagines the machine gun bullets to be something useful, stitching a cloth, which actually is his body. This way, he might forget about the feelings of fear and wants to overcome the strong anxiety in him.

Contrary to what we have seen in *Ultima Ratio Regum*, *Port Bou* is not a criticism of society but is primarily concerned with war and its observations. The reader is presented a peaceful scene that rapidly changes to a warfare scene although some moments before everything appeared to be normal and everybody seemed rather happy. Spender, as said before, was a true pacifist and in such a way we can see *Port Bou* once more as an outcry

against war and the harmony it destroys. The poem's title gives us a clear indication that the action takes place in Spain. In *Ultima Ratio Regum* this is not clearly visible at first sight since it is a protest poem in more general terms.

### 3.3 *Fall of a City*

All the posters on the walls  
All the leaflets in the streets  
Are mutilated, destroyed or run in rain,  
Their words blotted out with tears,  
Skins peeling from their bodies  
In the victorious hurricane.

All the names of heroes in the hall  
Where the feet thundered and the bronze throats roared,  
FOX and LORCA claimed as history on the walls,  
Are now angrily deleted  
Or to dust surrender their dust,  
From golden praise excluded.

All the badges and salutes  
Torn from lapels and hands  
Are thrown away with human sacks they wore  
Or in the deepest bed of mind  
They are washed over with a smile  
Which launches the victors when they win.

All the lessons learned, unlearned;  
The young, who learned to read, now blind  
Their eyes with an archaic film;  
The peasant relapses to a stumbling tune  
Following the donkey's bray;  
These only remember to forget.

But somewhere some word presses  
On the high door of a skull and in some corner  
Of an irrefragible eye  
Some old man's memory jumps to a child  
- Spark from the days of energy.  
And the child hoards it like a bitter toy.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Taken from Sperber: 149 f..



Spender's *Fall of a City* can be said to deal with the aftermath of a war and the downfall and deterioration of a society afterwards. Once more, the reader cannot find a particular rhyme scheme in the poem. Nevertheless, it can be said to be a poem in a more traditional sense given that in terms of structure it is very regular and not stream-of-consciousness-like as could be seen in *Port Bou*. *Fall of a City* consists of five stanzas; each one is made up of six lines.

The very first stanza gives us a brief description of what is to come in the following ones. It is a rather sad setting where the reader gets the impression of a ruined city symbolized by the posters and leaflets that were mutilated and destroyed: "Their words blotted out with tears". Here, the reader gets the image of lost hopes and sadness that flows through the lines. Referring to Spain, these posters and leaflets can be interpreted as having belonged to the Republicans since they apparently have been torn apart by "the victorious hurricane" of the Nationalists. So far, though, there is no indication that the poem has any relation with Spain and the civil war.

In the second stanza we find the first and only hint when the narrator speaks about "LORCA", which obviously refers to Federico García Lorca, who lost his life in the early stages of the civil war when he was arrested and subsequently killed by the Nationalists. The

exact circumstances of his death, just like those of so many others, have remained unclear until the present day. The narrator laments the deaths of “heroes” such as Lorca, whose “history on the walls” has been deleted. Here one can see the devastating and poor state in which the country was left, as if they had gone back in time in their now destroyed history. This, evidently, had its effects on and consequences for a deeply hurt society.

Similar to the second stanza, the third one can be said to refer to the repression, the punishment and finally the killing of the ones fighting against the Nationalists and the ones, like Lorca, who did not want to submit to the values of the victors. Indeed, “human sacks” are thrown away together with the badges from their jackets. The narrator mourns the innocent deaths of so many, and at the same time ironically criticises the victors saying that the human sacks “are washed over with a smile” as if it meant nothing to them. The following stanza, in this respect, can be claimed to be the most powerful one since it describes very strongly what happened to the society: “All the lessons learned, unlearned.” Nothing will be as it used to be and the “young, who learned to read, [are] now blind”. Everything seems to go backwards in development and they remember the good times “only to forget” what is going on right now. These people are now impotent and not able to confront the disaster they are living in. Spender most certainly criticises society in somewhat more general terms here taking into account his partiality for criticising social injustice in his poems.

The last stanza deals with the memory of what once has been there and now is not any longer available; it mourns for the lost days of freedom. The memory jumps from the older to the young people, taking it from the “days of energy”. Obviously, only the elderly can remember what it was like to live in freedom and harmony and they might be concerned about the young children being unable to experience such a life in the near future since war has destroyed everything good in society. Consequently, they want the children to experience the erstwhile freedom through them and their memories. What remains is the hope that the good days may come back at some point in time while the child hoards the memory “like a bitter toy”.

#### 4. Roy Campbell: Openly in Favour of the Nationalists

Roy Campbell and his poetry have all the while caused controversy, discussions and even a lot of disapproval among literary circles. His poems about Spain and its civil war together with the fact that he spent much time in the country during the war make him an interesting and truly indispensable subject for this study. Contrary to what we have seen with Spender and to what we shall see with Auden, Campbell was a supporter of Franco and the Nationalists. Apart from that, he had a difficult character and a provoking, strong temper (cf. Gómez López: 37), which also might have derived from his long lasting consumption of alcohol.

Campbell was born in October 1901 as Ignatius Royston Dunnachie Campbell in the South African city Durban. There, he educated at Durban High School and also learnt the Zulu language. However, at the age of 17 he was sent to Great Britain in order to enrol at Oxford University, which did not really correspond to his own ideas and plans. Hence, he went to London. However, during his brief university time he made close friends with Edith Sitwell and T. S. Eliot and in the course of time also was destined to meet “Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden, L. A. G. Strong, Robert Nichols, Wilfred Childe, Louis Golding, Hugo Dyson, C. S. Lewis, L. P. Hartley, and Aldous Huxley” (Pearce: 30). Another close friend can be said to be Dylan Thomas, but T. S. Eliot would have the biggest influence on Campbell’s poetic works.

In London he met his future wife Mary Garman, with whom he had two daughters, Tess and Anna. After their marriage they spent some time living in Wales before Campbell returned to South Africa as an editor for a magazine, *Voorslag*. Some time later, Mary joined him. Anyhow, that adventure did not last long and they moved back to England, where they did not spend much time either before going to the Provence in France. Roy went there because of Mary’s affair with Vita Sackville-West. This affair deeply disappointed him and he went to France in order to start a new life. Mary, however, soon realized that for several reasons she could not live without him and followed him in order to reconcile, which she achieved. Another consequence of Mary’s affair was Campbell’s break with the infamous Bloomsbury group and his best known member Virginia Woolf, who herself had developed an interest in Vita Sackville-West. All this resulted in many literary works by all the ones who were involved, with *The Georgiad* by Campbell being the most drastic one.

All the while Campbell had been an *aficionado* of the Mediterranean culture and countries and in France he developed a big interest in bullfighting. However, due to an unlucky but funny issue, the Campbells were forced to leave France and headed for Spain in 1933 in a spontaneously planned ad-hoc action when faced with a big monetary penalty after their goats destroyed the fence and thus several flowers of their neighbour. After initially arriving in Barcelona, where they stayed for some time, they went on for a trip to look for a more tranquil place to stay and found Altea, where they settled down and where they converted to the catholic belief. Nevertheless, they moved further towards the north with destination Madrid but in the end stayed in Toledo in 1936, a city that delighted them due to its beauty and historic district. The family felt welcome there but soon had to witness the beginnings of the civil war and the atrocities committed by both sides. What specifically shocked them was the killing through leftist anarchist of seventeen Carmelites whom they had befriended during their time in Toledo. Afterwards, Campbell would mention them and many other witnessed atrocities in several of his poems.

It was then in August 1936 that they went back to England by ship. The Campbells, though, did not spend much time there and went back towards the south, this time to Portugal. Shortly after, Campbell returned for a short time to Toledo, but they soon moved together to Italy until the civil war was over. For the victory parade of Franco in May 1939 they went back to Madrid. Contrary to what Campbell would later claim, he was never actively involved in any fighting action on the Nationalist side during the civil war. Still, he saw in Franco not a dangerous Fascist leader like Hitler or Mussolini, but rather a defender of a religion endangered by the atheist thread of communism (cf. Gómez López: 54). This is what I will seek to demonstrate later in the interpretations of his poems.

When the Second World War broke out, Campbell despised Nazi Germany and Hitler and thus returned to Great Britain in order to enlist in the British Army, even though his age and health were a big hindrance. Yet, he was accepted and after his initial training period was sent to British East Asia. However, he never saw much war action since he hurt his already injured hip again, was sent to hospital and soon afterwards declared unfit for military service.

When the war finished, Campbell worked as a commentator and presenter for the BBC, where he, ironically enough, met Stephen Spender during a poetry lecture in Bayswater.

Campbell, who did not at all agree with Spender's views, entered the stage and slapped Spender right in his face (cf. Pearce 376 f.).

Throughout his whole life Roy wrote poetry; from the very first interest he developed until his death. What makes it really difficult to pigeonhole him is the fact that his ideas, his poems, his style and topics are so dissimilar, irregular and different from each other. A lot of his works show romantic influences and have enormous tendencies towards protest but also provocation and combativeness. Apart from just writing poetry, he also dedicated much time to translating the classics of the Spanish, French and Portuguese writers to the English language, especially some poems of Federico García Lorca (cf. Gómez López: 38). All the while he had been interested in the classics of Spanish literature; and especially in the Spanish *Siglo de Oro* (cf. Gómez López: 48). However, on the strength of his sympathies for Franco and his thoroughly provocative poetry and bellicose character, he never seems to have obtained the credit he actually deserves and, regrettably, has often times been labelled as politically incorrect and not contemporary. Contributing to this image is the fact that he heavily attacked his enemies and showed neither mercy nor pardon (cf. Gómez López: 66).

In 1952 the Campbells moved to Portugal where Roy died in a car accident with their Fiat 600 near Setúbal on Easter Monday in 1957 aged 55. His wife Mary, the driver, was injured but survived the accident.

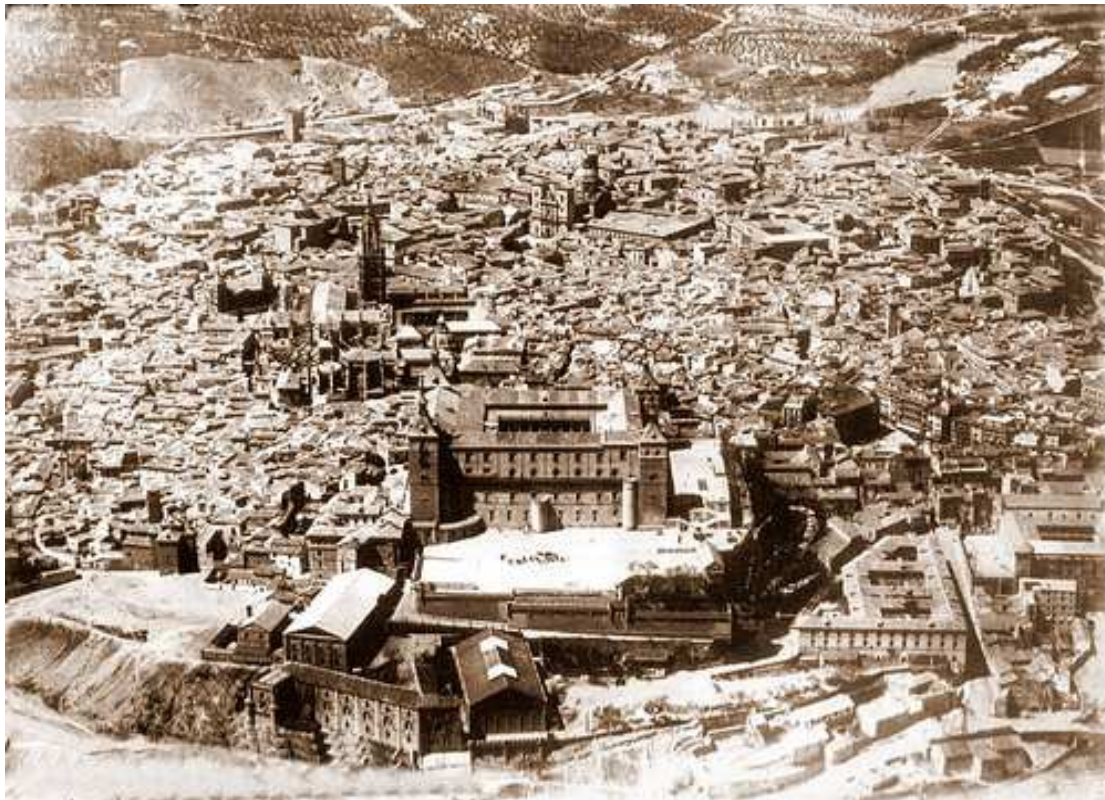
Amongst his best known and outstanding poems and literary works we can find *The Flaming Terrapin*, *The Waysgooze*, *Adamastor*, *Flowering Reeds*, *Flowering Rifle*, *Mithraic Emblems*, *Talking Bronco* or *The Zulu Girl*.



#### 4.1 Poems for Spain: *Toledo (July, 1936)*, *Hot Rifles* and *Christis in Uniform*

##### *Toledo (July, 1936)*

Toledo, when I saw you die  
And heard the roof of Carmel crash,  
A spread-winged phoenix from its ash  
The cross remained against the sky!  
With horns of flame and haggard eye  
The mountain vomited with blood,  
A thousand corpses down the flood  
Were rolled gesticulating by,  
And high above the roaring shells  
I heard the silence of your bells  
Who've left these broken stones behind  
Above the years to make your home,  
And burn with Athens and with Rome,  
A sacred city of the mind.<sup>5</sup>



*Toledo (July 1936)* is the first poem of Campbell that we shall have a look at in this study. It is one of several poems that he wrote during his time in Spain. As will be seen, unlike lots of Spender's poems, the ones Campbell wrote almost always have an explicit reference to Spain, particularly due to Campbell's passion for the country and furthermore in consequence of the

---

<sup>5</sup> Taken from Gómez López: 204 f..

bad and ugly things he had to witness during the civil war. The very name of the poem lets the reader know what it deals with: The situation of his beloved city Toledo in July 1936, the month the civil war broke out. The tensions between the fighting parties, however, had risen much earlier and found its eruption in this very July. As a matter of fact, Toledo was to be the “principal protagonist” (cf. Gómez López: 74) of more than just one poem; others are *The Alcazar mined* and *Hot Rifles*, which we shall have a look at later on. Besides, Toledo was “isolated and timeless, medieval, full of churches, monasteries, convents, and shrines” (Bolton); something that also predestines it for a poem like this. Yet, the background noise of *Toledo (July 1936)* is very bellicose.

In terms of structure, contrary to the poems by Spender seen before, we can find a rhyme scheme in the sonnet-like poem, which is not divided into different stanzas. The first eight lines display a classical embracing rhyme scheme ABBA and ACCA, whereas lines nine and ten represent a single, outstanding rhyming couplet. The last four lines, though, go back to the embracing rhyme scheme. This gives the poem a smooth and straight-forward rhythm when reading it. The language applied, though, is probably a bit more complex than the one seen in Spender’s three poems before.

The overall commitment of the poem can be said to be spiritual (cf. Voss: 4) and it contains religious elements such as the cross or the bells, deriving from Campbell’s strong catholic belief that he and his family converted to in Altea. Anyhow, to take one thing at a time, the poem begins with a very dramatic and personal outcry: “Toledo, when I saw you die”. Obviously, the reader can easily suggest what is to come after this terrible initial line. The first-person narrator, most likely Campbell himself, gives us a little insight into the images he had to witness when being in Toledo at the beginnings of the war. The mention of Carmel can be seen to be a hint to the Carmelites that the Campbells met and befriended. They were, however, brutally killed as was said before, but remained a vivid memory for Campbell for a long time, hearing “the roof of Carmel crash”. And indeed, the Carmelite’s abbey was set to fire and thus burnt down (cf. Gómez López: 329).

The city itself, for all that, seems to lie in its ashes just like the abbey, but the mention of the phoenix is supposed to give back its energy and power. A phoenix, in line with Greek mythology, is a bird that burns to ashes in order to get reborn afterwards from its own ash. Along with that, the weakening hope never fully disappears although Toledo is said to be

dead. Just two lines later the narrator mentions the “horns of flame” and “haggard eye”, which may belong to the phoenix or the Cross, but could also refer to Toledo itself as a portrayal of its destruction; its burning streets, its ablazing churches and its generally worsening condition.

The preceding line “The Cross remained against the sky!” presents a very powerful image here. It tells us that his faith does not fail in defiance of all the misery that is going on since right after that we can see the horrible killings and atrocities that the narrator must have witnessed: “The mountain vomited with blood, / A thousand corpses down the flood”. This is a very dreadful and terrifying portrayal recounting the thousands of deaths the war caused not only in Toledo, but in general. The reader is supposed to imagine the magnitude and dimension of the war and its victims. A mountain vomiting with blood is a very lively and yet abominable personification to look at. It spits the dead bodies down as if they were lava from a volcano. These corpses, then, may be turned to ashes just like the city itself.

What is far more of an issue is the fact that throughout the poem there is no accusation, criticism or despise for either side of the conflicting parties visible even though this might be standing to reason. Campbell does not seem to take sides in this poem but mainly laments the devastation of Toledo and tries to see the spiritual power lying above everything. Specifically the rhyming couplet makes that clear. In spite of hearing the “roaring shells” of warfare, he remembers “the silence of [the] bells”. Bearing in mind Campbell’s sympathies for the Nationalists and the atrocities committed by left-wing anarchist groups in the red Toledo, a poem like this could have brought forward some harsh criticism. Yet it does not do so; it does not take any “explicit political alignment” (cf. Voss: 4)

Toledo, then, is compared to Athens and Rome in terms of its possible demolition and “even if all three are threatened with destruction, they will burn as ‘sacred cities of the mind’ and *in the mind*” (cf. Voss: 4). Labelling Toledo as “sacred city of the mind” shows the status and love that Campbell felt for the city where he spent a lot of time and whose beauty had always delighted him. Indeed, it was a city “full of priests, nuns, monks, and soldiers, a combination of the religious, the military, and the traditional” (Bolton). And as a matter of fact, the image that Campbell had of Spain had mainly been influenced by Toledo, converting the city into a symbol of his strong catholic conviction (cf. Gómez López: 73). These nice, happy and beautiful memories are, regrettably, in opposition to all the tragic and sad moments the Campbells lived through in that city. Its possible destruction or at least enormous

devastation must have hurt him strongly and thus *Toledo (July, 1936)* can be said to be a very thought-provoking poem with powerful images.

### *Hot Rifles*

Our rifles were too hot to hold,  
The night was made of tearing steel,  
And down the street the volleys rolled  
Where as in prayer the snipers kneel.  
From every cranny, rift, or creek,  
I heard the fatal furies scream,  
And the moon held the river's gleam  
Like a long rifle to its cheek.  
Of all that fearful fusillade  
I reckoned not the gain or loss  
To see (her every forfeit paid)  
And grander, though her riches fade,  
Toledo, hammered on the Cross,  
And in the Master's wounds arrayed.<sup>6</sup>



---

<sup>6</sup> Taken from Gómez López: 208.

The second poem by Campbell that we shall consider is named *Hot Rifles*. Once more, a clear reference to the civil war in Spain can be found, since again we encounter a sort of homage to Campbell's city Toledo in the end. Apart from that, we find some warfare described and also the commonplace and widespread use of religious motives as so often is the case in Campbell's poems. *Hot Rifles* was written during the civil war and it provides a whole amount of considerably powerful and conspicuous images recounting the narrator's thoughts and observations.

Regarding style, we find a 14 lines long, sonnet-like stanza with a changing rhyme scheme ABAB, CDDC and EFE EFE. The mixture of alternate rhyme, embracing rhyme and another, somewhat shorter alternate one create confusion in the reader but at the same time make him / her very attentive. The reading fluency does not suffer at all. On the contrary, the poem reads very easily. The language applied, though, is full of images, symbols and personifications.

The very first line immediately provides the idea of a heavy and long-lasting fighting that must have gone on since the rifles are too hot to even hold them in the hand. The first person narrator, thus, must have been directly involved in warfare since we obviously get the perspective of his being a soldier. And indeed, words such as the very "rifle", "tearing steel", "snipers", "volleys" and "fusillade" provide an image of hostile action and a clear war background. The militiamen are experiencing a night that is as heavy as "tearing steel" whereas at the same time the volleys, which can be personified as soldiers, proceed down the street and most probably get to every corner until they reach the snipers. And yet, "the snipers kneel" as if they were saying a prayer. Here, the underlying importance of religion and faith is firstly introduced in a rather estranging depiction. The snipers, although most probably in the process of killing, are humanized.

The narrator, then, can hear the "fatal furies scream". Once again, we find a personification. The screaming furies can either be seen to be the snipers themselves in their rage or just the bullets they fire with their fatal and death bringing rifles. The Furies, as they were called in Roman mythology, correspond to the Erinyes in Greek mythology. They were born during the night and were the goddesses of vengeance, in charge of guarding the entrance door to the underworld cruelly punishing those whose crimes had remained unpunished during their lifetime. In this very line, the screams of the furious soldiers seem to

be possessed of the thirst for vengeance of the three furies Alecta, Megaera and Tisiphone (cf. Gómez López: 330).

In the following, the reader encounters another strong and meaningful portrayal in the interacting of the moon and the river. Together, they create a shadowing image of a rifle in the river itself. In respect thereof, even nature cannot refrain from the horrible images seen so far and it creates another one on its own. However, the narrator does not think about what is lost and what is won in this “fearful fusillade” since he apparently knows that much more, if not everything, is lost already or will soon be lost.

The poem, here, approaches its climax when the city of Toledo is brought into focus. In defiance of the fact that “her riches fade”, i.e. her splendour, glory and magnificence have decreased through the ongoing warfare, it is still described as “grander”. The following line, then, leads to a highlight of imagination: “Toledo, hammered on the Cross.” The city of Toledo, accordingly, has been sacrificed like Jesus and dandifies God’s wounds. Once more, as seen in *Toledo (July, 1936)*, the city is assigned a very meaningful and outstanding importance and role within Campbell’s point of view during the civil war. The “Master’s wounds”, therefore, are at the same time those of Toledo, which, in more imaginative words, is apotheosised.

In this respect, the poem displays in a very good way a whole sequence of accomplished images in which the ferocity of the fight gives in to the powerful harmony represented by the cross that Toledo is hammered on (cf. Gómez López: 74). Yet, as we could already see in *Toledo (July, 1936)*, there does not seem to be any profound or particular political message behind the poem. No explicit support for the Nationalists can be derived from its words. Instead, its religious spirituality sticks out to the readers.



## *Christs in Uniform*

Close at my side a girl and boy  
Fell firing, in the doorway here,  
Collapsing with a strangled cheer  
As on the very couch of joy,  
And onward through a wall of fire  
A thousand others rolled the surge,  
And where a dozen men expire  
A hundred myrmidons emerge -  
As if the Christ, our Solar Sire,  
Magnificent in their intent,  
Returned the bloody way he went,  
Of so much blood, of such desire,  
And so much valour proudly spent,  
To weld a single heart of fire.<sup>7</sup>



---

<sup>7</sup> Taken from Gómez López: 210.

The last poem by Campbell that shall be investigated in this study is called *Christs in Uniform*, which is most probably the most spiritual and religious one of all the three poems we looked at heretofore. Nonetheless, it deals with war again, but does not refer to Spain explicitly; neither is Toledo the protagonist here. Instead, the death of a young girl and boy are the prevailing element the poem is based on.

As to the structure, the poem resembles the ones by Campbell seen before. It is sonnet-like and consists of 14 lines having a rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme itself is regular but changing; there is an embracing rhyme ABBA, an alternate rhyme CDCD and another embracing rhyme CEEC. The final couplet EC rhymes with the preceding four lines. *Christs in Uniform* is easy to read but due to its figurative and symbolical language it requires some deeper understanding in order to draw reliable and meaningful inferences from its actual expressiveness.

*Christs in Uniform* begins with the death of a girl and a boy: “They fell firing, in the doorway here.” Thence, we may say that they are possible victims of fighting action going on during the civil war in an undefined city or place. However, it is a matter of debate whether they were actively participating in the war as soldiers or if they are innocent victims and thus represent collateral deaths. Their youth would, on a logical basis, exclude them from being actively fighting as soldiers in a war. Still, it could have been possible since we do not know their exact age.

The way they die, though, is thought-provoking and curious. They collapse with “a strangled cheer / As on the very couch of joy.” The first person narrator is observing their collapsing first hand since they are “close at my side”. Striking here is that it does not sound like a very painful or horrible death. The words “cheer” and “joy”, in a way, even provide some sort of strange but positive atmosphere to their dying.

After that, it seems their death is not over yet and they go “through a wall of fire”. This wall of fire most probably refers to hell, which to a certain degree relativises their apparently painless death. The children’s death, though, do not seem to be for nothing; everything has a purpose and so “A thousand others rolled the surge.” This very surge can be seen to be a merciless and cruel-hearted wave of “hundred myrmidons” who come once a dozen men disappear. The myrmidons, in line with Greek mythology, were obedient, brave



and skilled fighters who, under the command of Peleus' son Achilles, participated in the Trojan War, as described in Homer's *Iliad*. Here, albeit, the term can be said to be used in a more generic way referring to any sort of mercenary serving a leader not for principles but for material interests (cf. Gómez López: 330 f.).

Once the myrmidons have emerged the poem interrupts with a hyphen after line eight. The poem then turns entirely spiritual and the deaths of the young children are compared to the Christ, "our Solar Sire". This "Solar Sire" can be seen to be a simile between the Christian Messiah and the Mitras of the Mithraic religion (cf. Gómez López: 331). The children now apparently go the "bloody way" just like Christ did when walking the way of grief and suffering towards the cross; here with the final objective to "weld a single heart of fire". The two little victims are accordingly described in the plural form "Christs" in the title of the poem. However, Campbell subsequently changed it to singular in a later edition (cf. Gómez López: 330). Moreover, as they are "in Uniform", we can now definitely claim that they were indeed fighting as soldiers. The question is whom they were fighting for, but the answer is easy taking into account Campbell's support for Franco.

A relevant recurring image in the poem is the one of fire; first of all they walk through a wall of fire and later their aim is to fuse a single heart of fire and this way they have to carry out the fight for the Church, whose destiny Campbell intended to defend from the attacks of the Republicans and the left-wing anarchists. Here, we get an idea of how significant religion and church were in Campbell's life.

## 4.2 Controversy: *Flowering Rifle: A poem from the battlefield of Spain*

In a study of this character, it is inevitable to bring into play Campbell's probably most controversial and most discussed and criticised poem *Flowering Rifle*. It is a large polemical poem, consisting of six parts and about 5000 lines, all meant to defend the Nationalists and, what is more, to deeply and relentlessly criticise everything and everyone being against Campbell's ideas and own ideology. Far more than just a long poem, it reads as if it was a vast political partisanship. As such, however, it gives a rather trivial impression to its readers. Campbell, more than ever before, takes sides with this poem. Pearce describes it as a "pot-boiling satire" (279). Throughout the poem Spain is glorified and seen as the outstanding example when it comes to defending and making a stand against the ideas of Communism and Bolshevism. Gómez Lòpez says that *Flowering Rifle* tries to offer a historic vision of Spain within the conflict, separated by two irreconcilable worlds due to religious and political hostility (cf. 77).

The whole poem, as said, is utterly long and very intense. Thus, and in line with Gómez Lòpez, just a brief part of it shall be quoted here on grounds of the poems' complex stiles and voices and its rather banal character (cf. 78). For all that, the reader can get a brief but still thorough impression of what it looks like. In the following, an extract of the parts I and IV shall be illustrated:

(Extract from part I)

They bury facts as crocodiles their meat  
Returning later to "debunk" the treat  
Which most they live for: like their friends, the Reds  
Who pulled the mouldering corpses from their beds,  
Who in Huesca's graveyard raised a Bar,  
And drummed with thighbones to the shrill guitar,  
Doomed by the same sub-realistic curse  
In living bodies to forestal their hearse,  
A doomed and dying species, with their cause  
Condemned by the inexorable laws,  
Who only by inversion can exist  
As perverts, in a charnel-breathing mist,

From Death and Sin their scrawny themes to twist—  
And with such bards to trumpet them to battle  
No wonder British Reds stampede like cattle!

(Extract from part IV)

So John Bull breathes in subterrene intrigue  
And hangs around the coffin of the League,  
That sheeny club of communists and masons  
Where Pommies' ears serve for spittoons and basins  
In which to wash the grime from bloody paws  
Fresh from the massacres of human laws,  
While from all living zest he always warps  
To bind his faith to every rotten corpse—  
The League, the Soviet, his macabre dance  
With the corrupted Maffia-gangs of France,  
That shakes herself to bits at every jig—  
False teeth, glass eyes, and pestilential wig!<sup>8</sup>

In terms of style, the poem shows a very rhythmic pattern with mainly rhyming couplets and seldom rhyming triplets. It reads comparatively easy and smoothly. Still, taking into account Campbell's literary and poetic achievements by then, we can say that *Flowering Rifle* cannot keep up with his former poems and therefore lacks far behind his actual style.

*Flowering Rifle* was written within a very short time while Campbell was staying in Lisbon in the year 1938. There are, even so, some doubts as regards the exact date and timeframe (cf. Pearce: 280). It was published in Great Britain in early 1939 causing a stir and a war of words with some of his poetic opponents based on its sharp content. Gómez López claims it the largest poem written on the Spanish Civil War, but at the same time correctly claims that its literary quality lacks far behind the actual poetic skill of its author (cf. 75). Apart from that, it is highly biased, politically partial and enormously subjective. Bolton summarizes Campbell's poem in a very adequate way saying that it is "a detailed explanation of his political credo, a tribute to his Catholicism, to Spain's faith and martyrdom and also a condemnation of the British intelligentsia".

---

<sup>8</sup> Taken from Gómez López: 258-262.

It is mainly through this poem that Campbell often times has been labelled as a fascist and a sympathizer of Franco. In addition, it isolated him even more within the English-speaking literary world. Without any doubt, the poem reads as a heavy and epic criticism of the left-wing fighters, the communist ideology and the English intellectuals, all of whom where the primary enemies and the actual triggers of the problem according to Campbell. What is even more, *Flowering Rifle* gives a rather erroneous and misdirected impression of the conflict and the problem and it gives in to its own poetic suicide by ending with the words “VIVA FRANCO! ARRIBA ESPAÑA!” (cf. Gómez López: 76).

Throughout the poem we find allusions to Campbell’s right-wing views, even at the very beginning when it says: “Diestro by the Rightness of my hand, / Whose opening Palm, of Victory the Sign”. This, self-evidently, is an allusion to the fascist salute. In addition to that, Campbell sometimes even praises himself: “Since of the English poets on your shelf / The only sort of ‘Worker’ is myself”. Furthermore, the Bloomsbury Group does not go unmentioned in the poem. On the contrary, it is presented as standing between capitalism and communism:

Or, friend to every cause that rots or fails,  
Presides in Bloomsbury with tinted nails;  
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;  
So in red Bloomsbury the two are tied  
Like gangsters to be taken for a ride<sup>9</sup>

The poem itself, as can be seen, seems to offer a vast amount of different topics and issues surrounding the civil war conflict, but does not focus deeply on a single one. Instead, it remains very superficial and it lacks a certain central theme or leitmotiv. The poem, thus, incorporates many secondary themes with the only objective to demonize the adversaries and opponents (cf. Gómez López: 77): “From every communist you can unsheathe / The snug fat ‘bourgeois’ creeping underneath”. In this way, Campbell’s intention must doubtlessly have been to produce an epic political outcry in favour of the Nationalists. Still, *Flowering Rifle*

---

<sup>9</sup> Taken from Sperber: 155.

does not seem to have any plot and is rather incoherent in many ways. This is consistent with the fact that the reader sometimes may feel rather confused since Campbell mixes very different topics and styles. Von der Valkenstein even says that it is an “extremely repetitive poem” (61) and Gómez López writes that *Flowering Rifle* is far from being an epic poem; on the contrary it rather converts into a chronic of a confused poet (cf. 77). What is most tragic, though, is the fact that

Roy’s inability to show charity and restraint in dealing with his enemies had backfired, eliciting sympathy for his intended victims rather than scorn. In his desire to write propaganda rather than poetry, he had inadvertently turned the “rifle” on himself. (Pearce: 289)

The overall reactions on *Flowering Rifle* were negative, specifically among literary circles. Stephen Spender was one of the poets who heavily criticised the poem in a review called “The Talking Bronco”:

The poem, as a whole, has no unity of design, no sustained argument, no plot, no single vision. It is a kind of three-decker sandwich consisting of one layer of invective against the intellectuals of the Left, the International Brigade, The Spanish Republican Army, etc.; a second layer of autobiography concerning the exploits of Mr. Campbell and his flowering rifle; and a top layer of rhapsody about Franco and his colleagues, who are treated as nothing less than angels. The transitions from one motif to another seem to spring from no inner logic in the poem itself, and, particularly, when he is being autobiographical, the actual circumstances of the poem are often very obscure. (Pearce: 286)

Yet, what Spender criticises most is the obvious anti-Semitism in the poem. And indeed, there are quite a lot of allusions to the Jews:

When I would raise my trumpet to his head,  
Though in this cud of victory that I chew  
There’s balsam for the spittle of the Jew:  
Since in a land where everything’s called New  
That’s ready to dilapidate in two—<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Taken from Sperber: 156.

Nevertheless, Spender admittedly found some good things in it saying that it contained “passages of violent and sometimes effective satire, and occasional rhapsodic passages of a certain power, in which Mr. Campbell has always excelled” (Pearce: 287). Further replies to *Flowering Rifle* include Hugh McDiarmid’s *The Battle Continues* and C. S. Lewis’ *To the Author of Flowering Rifle*. Campbell himself, yet, had to expect this kind of criticism and controversy for his rather “undigested views (Von der Valkenstein: 62). In spite of that, the poem sold “better than anything he had written since *Adamastor*” (Pearce: 286). There were, moreover, a few critics and poets defending Campbell’s work. Particularly Edmund Blunden vindicated the poem to Campbell’s delight. Furthermore, *Flowering Rifle* was well received in Spain and also in fascist Italy, where the Campbells resided for some time. While being there, they were fortunate enough to meet the exiled Spanish King Alfonso XIII and his family. All of them had read *Flowering Rifle* and were amazed; and indeed Campbell was embraced by the King (cf. Gómez López. 76).

The question that the readers have to ask themselves is whether or not all the criticism Campbell received was justified. On the one hand, it holds true that he shows no sympathy or mercy at all when criticising his enemies and mainly the left. It was, however, not his plan to flatter the ones who did not support him and his ideologies. Beyond that, Campbell witnessed first hand the atrocities committed by left-wing groups and anarchists in Toledo and therefrom one must try to understand his views, his criticism and sometimes rude poetic behaviour. In that way, it is only comprehensible that his poems may be rather biased. However, hardly anyone of the poets and critics who despised *Flowering Rifle* shared Campbell’s experience; basically none of them lived in Spain for a long time, if at all. Hence, even though objective criticism of his poem is adequate and justified, it is important to develop a certain understanding and insight into Campbell’s true thoughts. Apart from all of that, one could simply judge *Flowering Rifle* as something merely satirical; not to be taken seriously at all. That estimation, yet, depends on every reader.

## 5. W.H. Auden and his “Change of Heart” on the Spanish Civil War

The last author that forms part of this study is Wystan Hugh Auden. He is regarded by many as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s greatest authors and he wrote one of the probably best and most profound and famous poems on the Spanish Civil War, called *Spain*. This makes him and this poem an essential and imperative part of this paper. Throughout his lifetime Auden can be said to have been a rather controversial figure. The way he wrote his poetry and changed his poetic preferences, his homosexual relationships and probably also to a high degree his leaving Britain contributed a lot to this.

Auden was born in York, England in 1907 into a comparatively well-off middle class family. Soon afterwards his family moved to Birmingham, where he grew up in a very religious environment and where his mother had the biggest effect “on his early emotional life” (Medelson 1981: xxii). He went to residential schools before joining one of Oxford’s constituent colleges, Christ Church, when he was 18. Very soon in his life he discovered his passion for words and poetry and wrote his first poems already at the age of 15. He made friends at Oxford with numerous fellow poets such as Day Lewis, MacNeice, Spender and, most importantly, Isherwood. All of them would become famous poets soon and formed part of the mystical and left-wing committed Oxford Group, or, as ironically nicknamed by Roy Campbell, “The MacSpaunday Group” (cf. Gómez López: 78).

Christopher Isherwood, albeit, became one of his closest friends and a big influencer. More than that, they even had a sexual relationship. As a matter of fact, Auden’s homosexuality was far from new and he had many affairs during his lifetime. In his early 20’s Auden travelled a lot and in 1928 he left Britain in order to live for some time in the Berlin of the Weimar Republic; Isherwood followed him soon afterwards. Upon returning to Britain he published his first book in 1930, called *Poems*. Before leaving his home country again in 1936, he worked, amongst other things, as a teacher, lecturer and reviewer. Then, Auden went to Iceland for some time and published a travel book on his Icelandic experience.

In early January 1937, however, he went to Spain on his own in order to support the Republican troops collaborating with the International Brigades during the civil war. His intention was to drive an ambulance but he actually was never actively involved in any fighting. This is due to his skills being used as a propagandist writing and broadcasting rather than being employed as a soldier (cf. Flores: 14). He stayed only for a short time in the

Republican heartland Valencia and in Barcelona, for about seven weeks until March, but the experience was something extraordinary and outstanding that was to influence him strongly.

The poem *Spain*, logically, originates from this experience. As a matter of fact, we can say that Auden had all the while been interested in politics and conflicts, which also were reflected on in many of his poems. Apart from seeing the civil war in Spain, he also visited the second Sino-Japanese War in 1938 spending some months in China and Japan together with Isherwood. Yet, unlike many of his poetic contemporaries, Auden did not join the communist party.

In early 1939, before the outburst of the Second World War later that year, the two of them went to New York in order to live in the USA. Rather soon, however, they parted company and went apart. Auden intended to remain in the USA forever whereas Isherwood was not entirely convinced of this idea. During the Second World War Auden stayed in the USA and, aside from writing poems and literature, he worked as a teacher. In the USA, he also met Chester Kallman, with whom he had a long-lasting relationship. When the war ended, he nevertheless went to Europe again, but only for a very short time before he returned to live in Manhattan, working as a lecturer. Also, he received the American citizenship in 1946.

Yet, the older Auden got the more time he spent in Europe again, usually during the summers. After spending some time in Italy he bought himself a house in a small Austrian town called Kirchstetten where he spent most summers until his death. Nonetheless, he always alternated between living in the USA and in Europe. Moreover, he started working as a professor at Oxford University in the late 1950's. There he gave lectures on Poetry every once in a while, but worked at the same time for several American magazines. Auden died in Vienna in 1973, aged 66.

As regards Auden's poetry, one must say that it shows a great variety of different styles and topics, ranging from political ones up to love, nature, religion and beyond. As a poet he very often addressed the political changes of his epoch. However, his early poetry differs enormously from his later one. The young Auden was blatantly leftwing oriented and his poetic style can be said to have been modern and also dramatic, mostly using free verse. Mendelson says that the prevailing subjects of his early poems were erotic and political tasks whereas his later poems were dominated by religious and ethical tasks (cf. 1989: ix). The

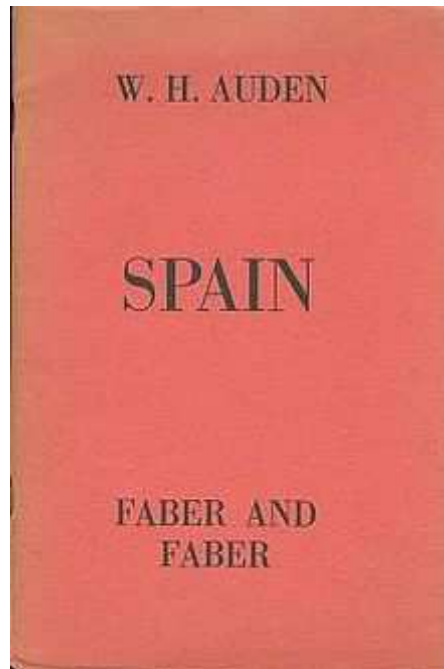


older he got the unhappier he grew with his former styles and poems, particularly when he left Europe. This resulted in the adapting of many poems towards a different style and way of thinking. As a consequence, some of them differ enormously from earlier versions. What is even more, he totally abandoned some poems with the explanation that they should not display ideologies and beliefs that he does not hold, “no matter how rhetorically effective he finds them” (Mendelson 1989: xix). Amongst them, we can find *September 1, 1939* and *Spain*. First of all, he edited the poem and changed the title to *Spain 1937* before totally declining and disowning it. Thus, he regrettably rejected the view he held when writing the poem and shrugged it off as a sin of his immaturity. This is an essential point to have in mind when reading the original version of *Spain* that will be investigated later on. It did not correspond anymore to Auden’s later views and ideas. Still, this is a fact that makes it probably even more interesting for us as readers.

His later poems still encompassed a numerous amount of different styles and topics and they “found richness of meaning in the moral complexities of fact” (Mendelson 1983: xiv). Furthermore, their tones and expressiveness were somewhat less dramatic, whereas their verses can be said to be more complex. By and large, however, one can say that his poems spoke in “the voice of a citizen who knows the obligations of his citizenship” (Mendelson 1989: xi). The fact that he used so many mixed styles and his being influenced by so many different ideologies, ideas and experiences make his poetry very varying, but also sometimes complex and even elusive. In addition to writing poems, Auden was also engaged in writing musical plays and prose, such as essays or articles for a wide variety of different magazines. In more general terms one can say that Auden matured enormously in terms of his poetic development resulting from the fact that he was “open to the full range of literature and diction, taking influences where [he] found them” (Mendelson 1983: xxi).

Amongst Auden’s most outstanding and prolific works we can find *Poems*, *The Ascent of F6*, *Letters from Iceland*, *Journey to a War*, *The Age of Anxiety*, *The Sea and the Mirror*, *For The Time Being*, *Homage to Clio* and *Look, Stranger* (American title *On this Island*). For *The Age of Anxiety* Auden received the Pulitzer Prize.

## 5.1 *Spain*



Yesterday all the past. The language of size  
Spreading to China along the trade-routes; the diffusion  
    Of the counting-frame and the cromlech;  
Yesterday the shadow-reckoning in the sunny climates.

Yesterday the assessment of insurance by cards,  
The divination of water; yesterday the invention  
    Of cartwheels and clocks, the taming of  
Horses. Yesterday the bustling world of the navigators.

Yesterday the abolition of fairies and giants,  
The fortress like a motionless eagle eyeing the valley,  
    The chapel built in the forest;  
Yesterday the carving of angels and alarming gargoyles;

The trial of heretics among the columns of stone;  
Yesterday the theological feuds in the taverns  
    And the miraculous cure at the fountain;  
Yesterday the Sabbath of witches; but to-day the struggle.

Yesterday the installation of dynamos and turbines,  
The construction of railways in the colonial desert;  
    Yesterday the classic lecture  
On the origin of Mankind. But to-day the struggle.

Yesterday the belief in the absolute value of Greek,  
The fall of the curtain upon the death of a hero;  
    Yesterday the prayer to the sunset  
And the adoration of madmen. but to-day the struggle.

As the poet whispers, startled among the pines,  
Or where the loose waterfall sings compact, or upright  
    On the crag by the leaning tower:  
"O my vision. O send me the luck of the sailor."

And the investigator peers through his instruments  
At the inhuman provinces, the virile bacillus  
    Or enormous Jupiter finished:  
"But the lives of my friends. I inquire. I inquire."

And the poor in their fireless lodgings, dropping the sheets  
Of the evening paper: "Our day is our loss. O show us  
    History the operator, the  
Organiser. Time the refreshing river."

And the nations combine each cry, invoking the life  
That shapes the individual belly and orders  
    The private nocturnal terror:  
"Did you not found the city state of the sponge,

"Raise the vast military empires of the shark  
And the tiger, establish the robin's plucky canton?  
    Intervene. O descend as a dove or  
A furious papa or a mild engineer, but descend."

And the life, if it answers at all, replied from the heart  
And the eyes and the lungs, from the shops and squares of the city  
    "O no, I am not the mover;  
Not to-day; not to you. To you, I'm the

"Yes-man, the bar-companion, the easily-duped;  
I am whatever you do. I am your vow to be  
    Good, your humorous story.  
I am your business voice. I am your marriage.

"What's your proposal? To build the just city? I will.  
I agree. Or is it the suicide pact, the romantic  
    Death? Very well, I accept, for  
I am your choice, your decision. Yes, I am Spain."

Many have heard it on remote peninsulas,  
On sleepy plains, in the aberrant fishermen's islands  
    Or the corrupt heart of the city.  
Have heard and migrated like gulls or the seeds of a flower.

They clung like burrs to the long expresses that lurch  
Through the unjust lands, through the night, through the alpine tunnel;  
    They floated over the oceans;  
They walked the passes. All presented their lives.

On that arid square, that fragment nipped off from hot  
Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe;  
On that tableland scored by rivers,  
Our thoughts have bodies; the menacing shapes of our fever

Are precise and alive. For the fears which made us respond  
To the medicine ad, and the brochure of winter cruises  
Have become invading battalions;  
And our faces, the institute-face, the chain-store, the ruin

Are projecting their greed as the firing squad and the bomb.  
Madrid is the heart. Our moments of tenderness blossom  
As the ambulance and the sandbag;  
Our hours of friendship into a people's army.

To-morrow, perhaps the future. The research on fatigue  
And the movements of packers; the gradual exploring of all the  
Octaves of radiation;  
To-morrow the enlarging of consciousness by diet and breathing.

To-morrow the rediscovery of romantic love,  
the photographing of ravens; all the fun under  
Liberty's masterful shadow;  
To-morrow the hour of the pageant-master and the musician,

The beautiful roar of the chorus under the dome;  
To-morrow the exchanging of tips on the breeding of terriers,  
The eager election of chairmen  
By the sudden forest of hands. But to-day the struggle.

To-morrow for the young the poets exploding like bombs,  
The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect communion;  
To-morrow the bicycle races  
Through the suburbs on summer evenings. But to-day the struggle.

To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death,  
The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder;  
To-day the expending of powers  
On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting.

To-day the makeshift consolations: the shared cigarette,  
The cards in the candlelit barn, and the scraping concert,  
The masculine jokes; to-day the  
Fumbled and unsatisfactory embrace before hurting.

The stars are dead. The animals will not look.  
We are left alone with our day, and the time is short, and  
History to the defeated  
May say Alas but cannot help nor pardon.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Taken from Mendelson, 1989: 51 ff.

Auden's *Spain* is a poem that can be labelled an obligatory and absolutely essential part of any study dealing with Spanish Civil War poetry. This is due to the enormous expressiveness, length and contents of this masterpiece. As a matter of fact, the poem has been labelled by many to be amongst the most beautiful and best ones ever written on the conflict, if not possibly the best one ever. Yet, apart from receiving praise, it also received some criticism as we will see later on. What makes the poem so highly interesting and controversial apart from that is the fact that Auden revised it in a later version before declining it entirely. He introduced some changes and even modified the title to *Spain 1937*.

Important to know for the reader here is that this paper shall deal primarily with the first and early version of the poem called *Spain*. Notwithstanding that, it is indispensable to also broach the subject of the introduced changes and Auden's total refusal of the poem as he poetically and politically matured in the course of time. It is beyond any doubt, though, that a very profound study of this poem may require writing hundreds of pages as it offers so much room for possible interpretations and explanations. This, however, would go beyond the scope of this study. Here, I want to point out that it will be tried to give a clear but yet for a study of this character adequate elucidation of Auden's *Spain*.

*Spain* was written in May 1937 shortly after Auden's rather disappointing experience in Spain when attempting to support the Republicans by means of driving an ambulance. He was, though, only employed as a propagandist writer and returned to Britain after only seven weeks. As a consequence, he was deeply disenchanted with the Republican government. *Spain* appeared as a pamphlet shortly after it was written with the intention to raise medical funds and aid for Spain.

To begin with, we shall have a brief and preliminary look at the poems' style and rhythm. *Spain* consists of 26 stanzas; each of them is four lines long. A particular rhyme scheme is not recognizable. This, however, was clearly not the poet's intention in this nevertheless highly rhetorical poem. A very striking observation is that the third line of each stanza is indented and is at the same time the shortest of each stanza. Still, they contain very powerful words and phrases.

*Spain* shows a clear pattern in terms of the topics and time frames that it applies. It begins with a "yesterday" pattern and goes on to a "today" pattern before going over to the

“tomorrow” pattern. At the end, it returns once more to “today”. This scheme of yesterday-today-tomorrow gives Auden the possibility to use a certain “pattern of repetitions and antitheses without departing from his telegraphic manner” (Farrell). Apart from the title itself of course, it is not explicitly identifiable as a poem on the Spanish Civil War since we cannot find a clear reference to it until the mention of “Spain” herself in the 14<sup>th</sup> stanza.

In terms of its actual content, the poem has been labelled many times as a rather untypical war poem given that it does not provide any description of dead bodies, warfare, battle or fighting scenes. It lacks all the specific characteristics and particularities that defined the preceding World War genre (cf. Farrell). And yet, Auden’s *Spain* results directly from his own Spanish Civil War experience and the observations he made during his short time in the country, serving as inspiration for the poem. In respect thereof, *Spain* can be labelled to be an astounding mixture of historical facts, some minor political ideas and possibly a call to arms rather than being a traditional war poem.

In spite of being a relatively leftist writer, the poem does not explicitly take sides for the Republicans. As a matter of fact, it has been described often as a poem that expresses rather few sympathies for the Republicans (cf. Mendelson 1983: 316). However, it logically does not support the Nationalists either in that way. Auden’s left-wing views are only subtly identifiable between the lines in the poem, whose tone remains comparatively neutral. Many claim the poem to be rather psychological and not so much political. Contrariwise, there are others who saw a “call for intervention on the part of the Western democracies in support of Spain” (Farrell) in order to fight the ambitious and rising Fascists.

The question that arises now is what the poem is actually about and how it transmits its main messages to its readers. *Spain* begins with a summation of achievements made in the world of “yesterday”, embracing a time frame ranging from “the aboriginal taming of horses to the romantic adoration of madmen” (Mendelson 1983: 316). More precisely, the first six stanzas refer exclusively and only to the past. In this way, the poem can be said to have a very melancholic but not at all sad or negative character in the beginning. Amongst the accomplishments made we can find a whole list of scientific, technological, natural and human ones such as “the diffusion of the counting-frame, the divination of water, the invention of cartwheels and clocks, the alarming gargoyles, the Sabbath of witches, the construction of railways” and “the classic lecture on the origin of mankind”. All these things

are the result of men's choices. They stand for the prolific and good past and transmit an image of freedom, whereas we have "to-day the struggle" as stanzas three to six end. Here, we have a first hint to the conflict paraphrased as "struggle". In that way, Auden sets the poem's environment in a broader historical context. However, not everything in the past is seen as something good, since we also have the "trial" and the "feuds". Still, nothing of these is as harmful and problematic as the actual struggle of today.

By putting Spain into the context of historical events, the reader can recognize the civil war's actual importance for human civilization. At the same time, the achievements of history are presented absolutely out of their actual chronology and appear to have been chosen rather randomly just in order to provide this historical setting. Farrell notes interestingly that when going from yesterday to today it seems like we do not leave behind "a history of human progress, now put in jeopardy, but access to human creativity itself". What is even more, the reader may arrive at the view that the past is somehow ripped off from the present. At the same time, the reader gets the impression that they are interlinked with and in a way inseparable from the future.

The following stanzas are what give the poem its noticeable and abstract flavour. Contrasting the nice and beautiful world of yesterday we now have the present disaster and get an impression of how Spain breaks down as a consequence of the war. We can basically see different voices and individuals speaking now. Auden here tries to "explicitly portray the consciousness of those whose conscious he is attempting to rouse" (Farrell). It begins with the poet and goes over to the investigator, the poor and the nations and ends in the voice of the life replying "from the heart".

We shall now have a more detailed look at this succession of happenings and descriptions. First we have the poet who looks for his poetic vision, in hopefulness demanding "the luck of the sailor". Then, we can hear the voice of the scientist or investigator who sees "inhuman provinces" in his search of the lives of his friends and also in search of an answer to his enquiries. Finally we have the poor who seem to appeal to a capitalized History as if it were a person. History here is seen as "the operator, the Organizer" and thus is directly linked to the first six stanzas of the poem. Still, at this stage, history is not a person but a mere hope for the poor. All the cries and demands of these voices and characters intersect and run together. It seems here that "the poet with his vision, the scientist with his inhuman research,

and the poor with their deterministic passiveness are all evading responsibility for marking the future” (Farrell) and instead somehow demand and ask for some divine power in order to support them.

Ultimately, the nations “combine each cry” here. According to Farrel, the nations do not represent governments but rather populations. As such, they form the climax of the aforementioned voices. What can be seen easily here is the fact that there is a clear emphasis on the present and it is given much more weight than the past or the future. The actual conflict is more significant than achievements from the world of yesterday. This is due to the world of today influencing the world of tomorrow. In this sense, the outcome of the struggle is of utmost importance and thus it is given the majority of stanzas in this poem.

Each stanza now seems to surpass the preceding one in its expressiveness and choice of powerful words. The eleventh stanza, thus, can be seen as the country itself speaking to the world. We can see the tiger and the shark as representing the forces of “military empires”. The poem goes on with a cry: “Intervene. O descend as a dove”. Here, Spain seems to demand help from anyone capable of saving it from the disaster going on. The following stanzas can be seen to be the deepest and most potent ones. It begins with the life, “if it answers at all”. But it replies from the “shops and squares of the city”. Here, the reader gets the impression that only the Spanish people, the civilians are the ones in charge of the Spanish future and destiny. This is also in virtue of the life denying its own power by saying “O no, I am not the mover, / Not to-day; not to you.”

The poem now turns very emotional and once more seems to speak with a poetic voice that obviously belongs to Spain herself. And again the country makes clear that it is the “Yes-man, the bar-companion, the easily-duped; / I am whatever you do [...] I am your business voice. I am your marriage.” Hence, Spain’s destiny is whatever the Republicans shall achieve; or shall not achieve during the fight for their country. Stanza fourteen then is the strongest and most remarkable one of all of them, the preliminary pinnacle of the poem:

“What's your proposal? To build the just city? I will.  
I agree. Or is it the suicide pact, the romantic  
Death? Very well, I accept, for  
I am your choice, your decision. Yes, I am Spain.”

Here, Spain is reflecting upon her destiny, asking “What’s your proposal?”. The country once more addresses its people directly here. However, it may also refer to the individual rather



than the collective. What it asks for is to either build the just city or to succumb to the suicide pact, the romantic death. Both stand opposite to each other with the just city meaning the Republican's victory whereas the suicide pact and the romantic death symbolize the Republican's defeat and thus the Nationalist's possible victory. The country, then, makes its republicans responsible for the outcome of the fighting and it submits to their destiny as well: "Very well, I accept, / for I am your choice, your decision. Yes, I am Spain". This final phrase is highly "politically charged" (Mendelson 1983: 317) and can be seen as a sort of climax of the outcry. As Farrell says, "Spain speaks here as a collective wish from the depth of a communal unconscious". Still, what is offered here are merely "choices" with an unknown result; and each human being is individually responsible for the decision that is taken. Thus, history will be created depending on the human choices and input of the people; and Spain this way is embedded in the historical processes that were described at the very beginning. In more evident words, we can say that the decisions of today will determine the world of tomorrow.

In the following, the reader is described the arrival of voluntary fighters coming from all over the world before we are provided a vision of the potential world of tomorrow and get back to the world of today's struggle. We can first of all see in stanza 15 that people coming from every possible corner of the world have heard about the struggle in Spain and feel like taking part. In more poetic words we can say that these people reply to Spain's cry for help. They are from "remote peninsulas", "sleepy plains", "the aberrant fishermen's island" but also from "the corrupt heart of the city". And from there, they "migrated like gulls" to Spain in order to offer their help and support. It may be obvious that the stanza primarily refers to the fighters and volunteers who came to Spain in order to fight for the International Brigades and thus for the Republic. Even so, in a more abstract way we might say that this part of the poem, just like the poem in its entirety, refers to everyone who takes part in the fight.

In a next step, we are described the paths they took in order to get to Spain. Some of them had to make great efforts to get there on a long way "through the unjust lands, through the night, through the alpine tunnel". Others came from even further away "over the oceans" with the final purpose to present their lives. The last sentence of this stanza "All presented their lives" is indeed a very interesting one since it is one of the things that Auden modified for the later version. There, it says "All came to present their lives". This way, Auden makes it sound less grave. As a matter of fact, we can say that in line with Auden's own experience

when staying in Spain, the country may not accept everyone as a fighter for its destiny; “some people might not measure up” (Farrell).

Right after that, the narrator dedicates one stanza to Spain’s geographical situation to frame the place where these voluntary fighters are heading to, a “fragment nipped off from hot Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe”. Here, Spain is clearly set apart from the “inventive” rest of Europe and is seen as a special case. In this very stanza and in the following two,

The speaker goes out of his way to emphasise the inhuman dimensions of the “tableland scored by rivers” upon which “our thoughts have bodies”. The process of transformation between emotion and action is “precise”, too precise, in fact, to be anticipated except by some occult logic. Fears that were once assuaged by advertisements and brochures become “live invading battalions”, the greed that motivates the “institute-face” becomes “the firing squad and the bomb” while tenderness and friendship “blossom” into the ambulance and the “peoples army”. It is significant that the feelings to which Auden appeals here are responsible for both sides of the conflict of Spain. (Farrell)

What shines out then in the 19<sup>th</sup> stanza is the phrase “Madrid is the heart”. This can be seen in a political but also more spiritual way. On the one hand, Madrid indeed was the decisive focal point in the struggle between the Republicans and the Nationalists and its defence against Franco’s troops was of primary importance. On the other hand, given all the preceding stanzas, we might hypothesize that Madrid here can also symbolize the heart of the life itself. This way we have to regard it as “both the inner heart for which our thoughts contend and the outer one for which armies fight in battle” (Mendelson 1983: 318).

We are then taken to the world of tomorrow and what it might potentially bring us in the future. Hence, stanzas twenty to twenty-three are now dealing with what is to come before we turn back to the world of today in the last three stanzas. The narrator gives an outlook at what the world of tomorrow can look like if the struggle finds a good result and solution. Obviously, “tomorrow, perhaps the future” is a direct result of what is going on today. And notwithstanding the ongoing struggle, we can see that the future is described in a very beautiful and moreover hopeful way. Again, the narrator explores potential discoveries in very different fields and wants to offer us a world free from problems and tensions; we may have “the research on fatigue” and “the exploring of all the Octaves of radiation”. More

interestingly, we might see “the rediscovery of romantic love” and “all the fun under / Liberty’s masterful sorrow”. Furthermore, the reader is provided the vision of a “beautiful roar of the chorus under the dome” and “the eager election of chairmen”.

The poet does not remain unmentioned either. Whereas he “whispers, startled among the pines” in the world of today, the young poets explode “like bombs” in the world of tomorrow. What is visible in all these stanzas referring to tomorrow is much more a desire rather than a realistic prospect. It is rather a feeling of hope that resides in the narrator, wishing to bring back the achievements of the past to the very problematic present, which is displayed in the fact that two of these stanzas end with the coined phrase “But to-day the struggle”. What we now can say is that throughout the poem there is a connection between the beautiful world of yesterday, the difficult struggle of today and its possible repercussions on the world of a hopeful and prospering tomorrow.

Having briefly considered the world of tomorrow, the three ultimate stanzas finally go back to today and the struggle. They offer quite a thrill and also some controversy, especially a phrase that is used in the third from last one where we find “The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder”. This phrase has been criticised by many, but particularly by George Orwell in his essay *Inside the Whale*:

But notice the phrase “necessary murder”. It could only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a *word*. Personally I would not speak so lightly of murder.....The Hitlers and Stalins find murder necessary, but they don’t advertise their callousness, and they don’t speak of it as murder; it is “liquidation”, “elimination”, or some other soothing phrase. (Mendelson 1983: 321)

In this way, Auden is accused of applying inappropriate language here since according to Orwell he is “the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled” (Mendelson 1983: 321). This however can barely be labelled true since it was Auden who indeed went to Spain in order to fight and in order to pull the trigger if necessary. This, luckily, never happened. And thus, Auden defended himself against such claims by saying that

I was not excusing totalitarian crimes but only trying to say what, surely, every decent person thinks if he finds himself unable to adopt the absolute pacifist position. (I) To kill another human being is always murder and should never be

called anything else. (2) In a war, the members of two rival groups try to murder their opponents. (3) If there is such a thing as a just war, then murder can be necessary for the sake of justice. (Mendelson 1983: 322)

Auden's statement is drastic since it seems difficult to justify murder in any sense. And yet, the he criticism received had its effect since Auden revised the phrase changing it to "The conscious acceptance of guilt in the **fact of** murder".

What comes before this controversial phrase, yet, is another one saying "To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death". Here, Auden once more dedicates some words to the volunteers who came deliberately in order to fight, offering their hearts for Spain knowing that they may end up dead. As a matter of fact, the ongoing stanza then puts the brotherhood and togetherness of the men into focus by means of the "shared cigarette", "the cards in the candlelit barn" and the "masculine jokes" told to each other.

Now, we shall finally turn to the last stanza of the poem. The initial line "The stars are dead. The animals will not look" is eye-catching and splendidly makes clear that the final decision one has to take is one that man take on their own without any help. There is no witness, no one who can support us, and nature does not want to look. Hence, the life "has withdrawn to its evolutionary and astronomical fastness" (Mendelson 1983: 319) and thus "we are left alone with our day". The defeated then will not be remembered by a capitalized History now reappearing as "the operator, the organizer", which "waits until the final lines of *Spain* to make its personified appearance" (Mendelson 1983: 316) and which "does not offer to remember our finest hour, only to look back upon our failure" (Farrell). Yet, in spite of being so powerful and decisive, there is one thing that History cannot do, it can neither "help nor pardon". As a case in point, here it is particularly tragic since it refers to the defeated who are the ones that specifically would need pardon and forgiveness (cf. Mendelson 1983: 320).

*Spain*, now, can be regarded as a fantastic achievement by Auden when it comes to opening peoples' eyes in order to make them face their responsibility. Still, Auden regrettably rejected the poem in later years and introduced some important changes as we could partly see before. What Auden primarily did was to change "the poem in such a way as to remove virtually all the passages that associated natural processes with acts of war" (Mendelson 1983: 322). Some phrases went out, others were modified. By ending this by far largest part of the present paper, I would now like to include all the stanzas that have been modified by Auden

in his later version published in 1940 as *Spain 1937* in order to provide a detailed vision as a matter of interest and for ease of discussion:

Yesterday the abolition of fairies and giants;  
The fortress like a motionless eagle eyeing the valley,  
The chapel built in the forest;  
Yesterday the carving of angels and **of frightening** gargoyles.<sup>12</sup>

The trial of heretics among the columns of stone;  
Yesterday the theological feuds in the taverns  
And the miraculous cure at the fountain;  
Yesterday the Sabbath of **Witches**. **But** to-day the struggle.

And the life, if it answers at all, replies from the heart  
And the eyes and the lungs, from the shops and squares of the city:  
“O no, I am not the **Mover**;  
Not to-day; not to you. To you, I’m the

“What’s your proposal? To build the **Just City**? I will.  
I agree. Or is it the suicide pact, the romantic  
Death? Very well, I accept, for  
I am your choice, your decision: **yes, I am Spain.**”

Many have heard it on remote peninsulas,  
On sleepy plains, in the aberrant fishermen’s islands,  
**In** the corrupt heart of the city;  
Have heard and migrated like gulls or the seeds of a flower.

They clung like burrs to the long expresses that lurch  
Through the unjust lands, through the night, through the alpine tunnel;  
They floated over the oceans;  
They walked the passes: **they came to present** their lives.

On that arid square, that fragment nipped off from hot  
Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe,  
On that tableland scored by rivers,  
Our **fever’s menacing shapes are precise and alive.**

To-morrow, perhaps the future: the research on fatigue  
And the movements of packers; the gradual exploring of all the  
Octaves of radiation;  
To-morrow the enlarging of consciousness by diet and breathing.

To-morrow for the young the poets exploding like bombs,  
The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect communion;  
To-morrow the bicycle races  
Through the suburbs on summer evenings: **but** to-day the struggle.

---

<sup>12</sup> Please note that all the changes are in bold print.

To-day the **inevitable** increase in the chances of death;  
The conscious acceptance of guilt in the **fact of** murder;  
To-day the expending of powers  
On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting.

The stars are dead; the animals will not look:  
We are left alone with our day, and the time is short, and  
History to the defeated  
May say Alas but cannot help **or** pardon.

## 6. Final Appreciation of the Matter

Now that we have had a look at several different poems from three different poets it is an excellent idea to recapitulate and reflect upon these interpretations and elucidations. Three poems by Spender, four poems by Campbell and the most famous one ever written on the Spanish conflict by Auden have been the subject of this study, whose objective has been to account for both a pro-republican and a pro-nationalist view. And indeed, clear differences and discrepancies have been identified amongst the poems and its authors within the scope of this study. In terms of their ideology, Spender and Auden can be pigeonholed as having had a leftist view whereas Campbell obviously sympathized with the right. This was consequently displayed in their poetry. Anyhow, given the choice of poems in the present paper, we have to say that the pacifist leftist view is more evidently visible in Spender's poems here while Auden's *Spain* remains relatively neutral but still can be claimed subtly leftist. Campbell, yet, contrasts both with his support of Franco, particularly identifiable in *Flowering Rifle*.

In terms of the actual poems, Auden's *Spain* sticks out by virtue of its beauty and expressiveness. It is also by far the most complex and imaginative one. Spender's three poems deal with criticism of society, the description of uprising war action and the lamentable destruction of a city and thus a society's hopefulness. This way, we can see a similarity to Campbell's poem about Toledo, whose destruction is also lamented. Yet, this seems to be one of the only few similarities in their poems since Campbell's poems display much more spiritual and religious motifs. This, albeit, does not come as an astonishing surprise given Campbell's devotement to religion and his strong catholic belief. As compared to Spender's poems, Campbell almost always uses a certain rhyme scheme in order to give his poems a smooth flavour.

Worthy of note is the fact that all of the poets share one common point; they all lived in or went to Spain during the civil war and thus had first hand experience available in order to get inspiration for their poems. Their reasons for being there, yet, were slightly different. While Spender had spent some time there before the civil war, he went again during the civil war, similar to Auden who went to Spain exclusively in order to participate on the Republican side. Campbell, yet, spent a lot of time in Spain and was already there when the civil war broke out. One more fact they share is that in spite of having had the intentions to do so, none of them ever fought actively as a soldier, although Campbell later claimed to have been involved in active civil war fighting, which however turned out as a lie.

A relevant and thought-provoking observation that has to be outlined here as well is the fact that even though Campbell was in favour of Franco, he despised Hitler and Mussolini and took arms fighting the Fascists during the Second World War as compared to Auden and Spender who did not actively serve the military during that conflict in spite of having criticised Fascism openly in their poems (cf. Gómez López: 54). Auden fled to the USA and Spender did not pass the military entrance exam. Thus, there is a certain discrepancy or even contradiction recognizable between the messages of their poems, their ideologies and their actual actions and deeds. Campbell, who by many leftist writers has been openly claimed a Fascist, actively fought Fascism in the Second World War whereas the majority of leftist writers did not.

One final point I would like to make at this stage is that the present paper by no means has exhausted all of the material available on this subject. In terms of future research it would certainly be worthwhile to look at further poems specifically written by Campbell around the time period of the Spanish Civil War, such as for example *The Alcazar Mined*, *Vaquero to his Wife*, *To Mary after the Red Terror*, *To my Jockey* or *The Fight*. Campbell and his poems have remained relatively unknown so far mainly due to his political views. Still, he would deserve to receive much more credit for his outstanding poetical works. By means of providing another fruitful avenue for further research, it might surely be vital to throw the spotlight on the poems and works of other writers who wrote about the conflict, such as for instance George Orwell, George Barker, Ralph Fox or Julian Bell.



## 7. Bibliography

“Authors take sides on the Spanish War.” *The Left Review* June 1937: 986-1020.

Gómez López, Jesús Isaías. *Roy Campbell: Poemas escogidos*. Almería: Editorial Universidad de Almería: 2010.

Mendelson, Edward. *W. H. Auden: Selected Poems*. Vintage Books: New York, 1989.

Mendelson, Edward. *Early Auden*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1983.

Pearce, Joseph. *Unafraid of Virginia Woolf: The friends and enemies of Roy Campbell*. Wilmington: ISI Books, 2004.

Preston, Paul. *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge*. Harper Perennial: Fulham, 2006.

Sperber, Murray. *And I remember Spain: A Spanish Civil War Anthology*. London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1974.

## 8. Webliography

Biography: Stephen Spender. 02. Sep. 2013 < <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/stephen-spender>>.

Bolton, Carry. "Roy Campbell". 02. Sep. 2013 < <http://www.counter-currents.com/2010/07/roy-campbell/>>.

Callahan, David. "Stephen Spender, the 1933s, and Spanish Writing". 02. Sep. 2013 < [http://www.academia.edu/597973/\\_Stephen\\_Spender\\_the\\_1930s\\_and\\_Spanish\\_Writing.\\_](http://www.academia.edu/597973/_Stephen_Spender_the_1930s_and_Spanish_Writing._)>.

Farrell, John. "Auden's Call to Arms: 'Spain' and Psychoanalysis". 02. Sep. 2013 < <http://the-age-of-anxiety.blogspot.de/2012/05/w-h-auden-spain-translation-and.html>>.

Flores, Tania. "Every Poet Stands Alone: The Displacement of Body in W. H. Auden's Spain/Spain 1937". 02. Sep. 2013 < <https://www.litencyc.com/prize/Essays2011/essay2.doc>>.

Sastri, P.S. "Stephen Spender and Individualism." 02. Sep. 2013 < <http://yabaluri.org/TRIVENI/CDWEB/stephenspenderandindividualismjul54.htm>>.

Spender, Stephen. *World Within World: The Autobiography of Stephen Spender*. Harmish Hamilton Limited, 1951. 02. Sep. 2013 < [http://books.google.de/books?hl=en&lr=&id=9OW3Ke7WKBMC&oi=fnd&pg=PA10&dq=stephen+spender&ots=BEK\\_hGRK4f&sig=X8UbfGXVnKDbrBih0T\\_q8\\_GNra0&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=stephen%20spender&f=false](http://books.google.de/books?hl=en&lr=&id=9OW3Ke7WKBMC&oi=fnd&pg=PA10&dq=stephen+spender&ots=BEK_hGRK4f&sig=X8UbfGXVnKDbrBih0T_q8_GNra0&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=stephen%20spender&f=false)>.

Von der Valkenstein, D.M. "Roy Campbell: The Effect of his Political Ideas on his Poetry". 02.Sep. 2013 < <http://www.counter-currents.com/2010/07/roy-campbell/>>.

Voss, Tony. "Where Roy Campbell stands". *Literator* 34(1), Art. #378. 02. Sep. 2013 < <http://www.literator.org.za/index.php/literator/article/viewFile/378/1257>>.