

“Roy Campbell’s translations of Lorca – appreciation or appropriation?”

Abstract:

In 1952, the South African poet Roy Campbell (1901–1957) published a volume at Yale University Press entitled *Lorca, an appreciation of his poetry*, a curious text which contained a collection of his partial translations of the work of Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) interspersed with a series of critical assessments which were a concerted attempt to wrest control of Lorca’s reception away from the Left, who he beloved had misrepresented Lorca’s work through translation and turned him into a martyr of the defeated Spanish Republic. The volume was also a response to the eventual refusal of the poet’s family to authorize Campbell’s English versions of Lorca’s collected works, despite the fact that their publication was actively supported by T.S. Eliot at Faber and Faber and also initially promoted by a close personal friend and literary executor of the Spanish poet, Rafael Martínez Nadal. The Lorca estate’s refusal was caused by their discovery of Campbell’s active support for the Franco regime both during and after the Spanish Civil War, a fact which made them understandably reluctant to allow his work to be misrepresented in turn by a supporter of the regime that was responsible for his murder in 1936. Campbell’s response was this curious hybrid of partial translation, ideologically oriented (mis)information and manipulative critical views, and can be seen as less of an *appreciation* of Lorca’s poetry and more of an *appropriation* of the work of a writer who had by then been adopted by the international Left as the quintessential martyr of the Spanish Republican cause. The proposed talk will attempt to elucidate this translator’s perception of his agency in rewriting the literary reputation of Lorca through translation and attempting to radically modify the prevailing reception of his work through the already quite abundant English language versions of his work.