

Introduction

The change which came to David Campbell's poetry with the 1970 publication of The Branch of Dodona was not a dramatic change, but it was one that brought a new dramatising element into his writing. He introduced the Dodona poems with a Dramatis Personae, a listing of the characters, as if the poems were in some sense a play; and in the poems themselves he makes clear who the speaker is of each individual poem. It is in the modern style of dramatic monologue, following T.S. Eliot and Robert Lowell where a character's voice is used to present the poem but in a way that is crushed together with the irony or anger (or whatever feelings) of the author. Campbell did a radio presentation of "The Branch of Dodona" for the Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1973, which in many respects points to the logical outcome of this move into dramatisation. ^{Generally} Generally, "The Branch of Dodona" poems have intrigued many readers of Campbell without being well understood. They are only partly a success. Why they matter is that they point to the direction Campbell's writing was taking in the mid to late 1960s. More than merely explore dramatic form as such, they tap into the dramatic nature of events and social experience in Australia and elsewhere at the time of the Vietnam War, of student insurrection around the world, and of deep personal change for David Campbell himself.

One way of noticing the change in Campbell is to look at the opening poem of The Branch of Dodona. It is a poem on Vietnam, and both in itself and in its place in the book expresses a kind of dramatic selfconsciousness on Campbell's part at what he feels he must now say. He begins - provocatively and riskily - by projecting the oddness of his situation:

I was milking the cow when a row of tall bamboo
 Was mowed by rifle fire
 With my wife and child in the one harvest,
 And the blue milk spilt and ruined.

The poem is called "My Lai", and the news of the American atrocity on the radio obviously stunned Campbell. It stopped him in his tracks, his country tracks. His life as a pastoralist, a successful Australian sheep farmer, was, in a manner of speaking, ended and destroyed by this news. The protected and removed lifestyle of an Australian farmer, however, became for Campbell a sign of something more general. He sensed in his own amorality towards the Vietnam War the quality and attitude of the Australian people. His poem "My Lai" became a dramatic statement of his own transformation from the world of "milking the cow" to a recognition of "One life, one field, one wife". He identifies with the agony of Vietnam, and in doing so begins to experience a new identity for himself.

Now the village burns
And the cow chews her cud
Like an old man's thoughts at evening.
Blood is sticky. I have lived too long.

It was not a question merely of external events that brought change to Campbell's way of seeing the world. In the "My Lai" poem he writes: "Somehow this happened / Here and in my head". It was a deep-seated and subjective change, happening in his imagination. When he came to address nature in other poems of The Branch of Dodona, his way of speaking was equally different from the style of his nature poetry from the previous twenty years or more:

Nodding greenhoods from the stone
Like contemplation grow:
Take care, their thought has broken free
As tigersnake and crow!

There is a sense - as here in "Orchid and Blackboy" - of a world out there and a world in here as being equally real, though distinct one from the other. Campbell gives nature its own primacy and initiative in being. In this sense he is merely there as a witness, an audience, overhearing rather than overseeing

the process of nature, chorus in his own poem. But in another sense he is also able to name "thought" and "contemplation" as distinct things, entities of a dramatic and independent kind. When these two worlds meet, the outer and the inner, when the outer world of nature takes on the qualities of thought and contemplation, it is in a curiously free and irrational way. Campbell's imagination in loosening itself up into an independence of its elements is able to make new and necessary connections between the mind and the things outside the mind.

He takes this dramatic process of awareness further in another short poem "Retiarius Spider". His concentration of attention on a spider is acute, so acute that it transforms the poet as perceiver to poet as perceived. Nature's ritual - of spider snaring moth - takes over, and dramatically turns the process of perception inside out.

Like a taut cord, death
Catches me watching. A moth
Makes me catch my breath

Moths have velvet eyes
In each wing. They fight for light,
Surprised by a sling.

Campbell's poetry comes alive with this sense of danger and threat throughout The Branch of Dodona. Whether it is the rifles of Vietnam, tigersnake or crow or spider, his ability to see and name what was actually happening in his world is the point of Campbell's dramatic breakthrough for his own life and his own poetry at the end of the 1960s. But in doing so he discovers a new identity for himself: as victim and as vulnerable as the Vietnamese family or the moth caught by the spider.

Chapter I

To look more closely at "The Branch of Dodona" sequence is to find oneself with a range of questions. Why did Campbell use the Jason and Medea story? In what way does it form "an allegoric satire ... of contemporary life and ideas?" Is there any autobiographical relevance for Campbell in these poems? How successful is the sequence as poetry? What is the tone of the poems?

The tone of "The Branch of Dodona" sequence itself is set boldly by Campbell in the opening poem "Argo Sails for Colchis". Using the persona of King Pelius, Campbell creates a sardonically smug ruler as Jason's uncle. Little of the material of Greek legend enters this poem; indeed, Campbell is as much concerned with using Shakespeare's Hamlet as his vantage point for the irony in which the poem sees the 1960s. Campbell is wanting to have it both ways in this poem. He uses the Pelius/Claudius persona to put down the young, their rebelliousness, their "flower power". The tone is dismissive in that it expresses a point of view opposed to that of youth. Only the manner of smugness makes the attitude of the speaker distinct from the attitude of the poem. It could be asked from the poem, what is Campbell's view of the 1960s and their radicalism? He seems to be enviously aware of the presence of a new generation; he shows a kind of droll humour himself in the poetry as a sign of sympathy with the drop-out tendencies. He seems to send up the smug and sententious speaker of the poem.

But the poem occupies a space, only loosely relatable to the Argonauts story or to Hamlet. The referential side of the poem is almost a distraction. What is achieved is a certain tone and pitch and rolling conversational rhythm - a voice - which is opening up the debate on the 1960s. Uncertain in its

attitude (and perhaps values) the poem expresses a satiric view which in the short term is an attack on the young, but gradually becomes its own self-indictment. The poem playfully balances age against youth, and while not deciding either way recognises which party is on the side of life. Campbell sets out to parody a point of view which he would like to think is not his own. But the tale tells more than the teller:

(St Francis and Ophelia were the first hippies.)
 Ah Polonius, let us beware of flowers!
 Arguments may limp
 But flowers are made for hearses. -

So by all means let the young men go,
 Guildencrown and Rosenthorn
 With letters of introduction,
 And the flower of our youth
 With their pot and guitars
 On the good ship Argo
 To their chosen destruction.

Campbell was clearly growing with his subject. From his Notebooks and early drafts of this poem there appears no reference to Hamlet or the Claudius-Polonius-type conversational tone. The fluidity of Campbell's mind is what is at stake here poetically. Moving between Greek legend, Shakespearean tragedy and modern social comment, Campbell is trying to locate his own centre and stance. He settles ultimately for irony at the expense of the Establishment:

As for me, I shall wait
 For the landing on Mars,
 A government sponsored programme
 In coloured TV.

There is also a general irony which might be noted in Campbell's choosing - within the context of Australian culture - to focus on the Argonauts' story. The material of this legend is part of Australian social mythology as the material for the Australian Broadcasting Commission's children's radio program. A vast network of young Argonauts comprised a club of privileged and cultured Australians between the 1930s and the 1960s. A romantic openness to adventure

in cultural and intellectual experience and values was the keystone of this cult. Campbell wryly uses the Argonauts' story to unpick this Australian myth.

His story is of a changing society, a failing marriage, the atrocities of the Vietnam War, and his own painful but mature adjustment to a life where the simplicities of a romanticised argonaut's experience no longer applied. Campbell could not have found a symbol more to his use in The Branch of Dodona for suggesting the depth of change from a childhood world which characterised Australia before roughly 1965 to the troubled but more adult world which Australia found itself to be after that time.

Campbell in "Advice from a Blind Seer" turns to a scholar for help in understanding "the more doubtful chimeras of today". But as in the Greek legend of the blind Phineas the scholar-academic is of little help. Campbell has in effect leapt wildly from Pelias to Phineas, from an inadequate social authority to an unseeing intellectual authority. He allows each man his moment of interest, but there is little warmth in the presentation.

Through the glass walls of his mind
Phineas observes the past and the future
Yet the man is blind
To the more doubtful chimeras of today.

Campbell only partly uses the legend of the Harpies from the ancient legend. There, as Zeus' messenger, they punished Phineas for his impiety in presuming to know as much as the gods, by defiling and stealing his food so that he was perpetually on the verge of starvation. Campbell's reasoning is strange here. It is as if he has a separate agenda, some contemporary subject he wished to satirise. But even then his point does not become clear. He "blames the Harpies" for Phineas' blindness to the present, but goes on to call these bird-women:

Two attractive birds
Who tease him by undressing.
Beak and claw may please,
Yet he keeps them at bay
.....

There is little unity or point in the references in these lines. What is achieved, however, in this slight, and brief, poem is a certain sense of authority in the voice which is large enough to envelop the scholar's mind and understand, as if in passing, the trials and distractions of the intellectual mind in coming to grips with contemporary life and its problems. Phineas gave Jason advice on how to sail the Argo between the Clashing Rocks of the Symplegades. But in Campbell's modern equivalent the Seer figure is relatively useless.

The move Campbell makes in pitching the modern story lower than the ancient Greek story, almost to a level of absurdity and bathos, is clear in Campbell's next poem in the Dodona sequence, "Bedtime Story for a Dragon". It is Orpheus who speaks but instead of, as in tradition, telling of "the beginning of things" and the old story of the gods and titans Campbell's Orpheus simplifies his account into a kind of Freudian explanation of things.

Once upon a time
There was a giant's penis -
Shall I tell you a story?

Aphrodite or Venus stepped from the penis, "She invented love". The audience for the story whoever it might be (children? a wife? a lover?) interacts with the seriousness of the account with banal comments that help to make fun of sex and love.

Again, a lack of resolution and argument mars the poem. Yet something in the total gesture of Campbell's writing pays off. A certain élan, a larrikin playfulness on the importance of sex. Between Aphrodite and Eve the primal urge of sex is clear, despite the modern vulgarised and liberated cult of sex and despite human inadequacy ("But I am so sleepy darling, / Love makes me sleepy"). Whether Campbell has an adult or a child situation in mind is, however, not the point since this tone is childlike in all its sophistication. "Let us go back to the sea" is the ending. It is the sole reference to the Argonauts in the poem.

The poetry is moving towards an area of male-female hurt and rivalry. Medea is not given the role in Campbell's poems which legend gave her in the capture of the Golden Fleece. It was Medea's chant which in ancient legend lulled the serpent guarding the fleece. In Campbell's poem "Theft of the Fleece" he begins:

Without the song of Orpheus, I do not know
What may have been the outcome:

Later we read:

Of course Medea put on a good show
Crying, "Climb, dear, now! We haven't much time."

as if the event was a modern piece of social climbing. Where Campbell's poetry firms itself up is in the resolution (the orgasm?) of this poem.

I remember a great joy
And a great peace, and Medea's cry;
Our lazy last embrace. It was almost day
And the dragon slept like a little boy
As we stole through the garden and away.

It feels like a deliberate ^{yet} or unconscious, confessing of the Adam and Eve story and the Jason and Medea legend. As if the "golden fleece" was the discovered "sex" of Eden and the banishment their choice and responsibility. Whether some play on illicit sex is at the back of Campbell's mind is open to conjecture.

Campbell finds himself in full blank verse stride in "Murder of a Prince". Medea's killing of her brother Absyrtus is a central part of the Jason-Medea story, and Campbell seems to be finding an especially firm base for his manner and feeling in this situation. Speaking as Jason, Campbell drily shifts the interest close to social irony, studying male and female sexuality and the social tensions of marriage. Jason is given a bluff, plain, joking manner which sets itself off against the intensity of Medea. The two styles set each other off in relief. Jason knows he has "married into . . . a barbarous people". But his

bluntness of style allows him to stand off from Medea while sharing in her behaviour:

These barbarians. For it was then that Medea
Did a terrible thing, while we all looked on
Or at one another, in unbelief and wonder.

Medea took her brother and slaughtered him
And hacked him in four quarters -
Blood to the elbows, gilding her Dior gown
That I had given her only that morning. -
And when she had thrown the pieces overboard,
The water shone with a sun-bronze stain
So that the waves were hushed as if by oil
With a red roll and all was still
As the fleet hove to.

There is a strangely inbuilt naivety in Campbell's line which allows him to range through these varying aspects of the scene with apparently contradictory tones and clashing colours being released into the verse. Jason's blunt maleness has to experience its opposite in Medea, as indeed it does in the aftermath of Absyrtus' slaying:

Yet I still hear shrilling on one string in my brain
Over the darkening waters, like some mad hawk,
The screeching of King Aetes and his curses on his daughter
And on us who stood by.

Campbell seems instinctively to know that he is not the one to explore the mysteries of temperament in Medea or the strangeness of the Argonauts' story. Yet there is an honesty and usefulness in the way he appropriates the legendary - and later on tragic - world of ancient heroes and heroines to an almost comic and social Australian situation. The force of his presence in the poetry is the poetry's ballast and buoyancy. It creates a stable centre round which a freakish set of events and characters can move, and happen. Medea can exclaim "I have done this thing for you. / There is no thing - name it - that I would not do! / And she cried, "Swab down the decks!" and went inside. / This was my bride". Rowing on "into the silence" seems the only possible response

to this bravura deed. Campbell has Heracles fracture the mood with his larrikin-type query: "I wouldn't mind, eh? some barbecued steak?"

Campbell is close to a style that suits his ranging and flexible interests in "Murder of a Prince". The surface gestures of a Jason do not exclude - indeed they reinforce by counterpointing - the facts of horror, brutality and passion in the ancient Greek legend. They create for Campbell, also, a formal front behind which his modern emotions, which will progressively concern themselves with incompatibility and marital stress, are to be found. He does this with a breadth and freedom - for all the apparent concealment - which no other Australian author has recently attempted.

Undoubtedly, Robert Lowell is his mentor here. And further back T.S. Eliot. Campbell does not wish to confront his own personal emotions directly. Yet he is creating an ambience for their indirect expression. The verse is muscular, brawny and relaxed. Like the body of a light-heavyweight (which Campbell once was as a boxer), he moves in his lines both freely and formally, risking damage to himself while holding to the process as art and as game.

"The Magic Branch" varies the blank verse line of the sequence into a shortened chant-like form as if from a Shakespearean song or masque. But the message Campbell elects to use for this central symbol in the poem is that the branch of Dodona is a kind of concerned moral judgment, directed from outside the human world at human conduct. The branch represents the interest of the goddess Athena ("the grey goddess / Of wisdom and of owls") and has been placed on the prow of the Argo.

It speaks at last to Jason and Medea. At first it censures them. Absyrtus' death has to be answered for. But as the punishment for this act is made clear, the tenor of the poetry shifts from a dramatic gesturing by a transcendent presence of some kind to a lyrical and psychological sense of reality. The curiously personal tone of this voice of judgment seems then an

engaging sympathy for the human beings it judges. Greek mythology and legend do not absolutize right and wrong. Hence the pliability of the gods and goddesses carries over in their relations with people. The human is seen as sinful. "You have sinned" the branch says. But this statement does not damn or nullify the existence of the human under some divine and absolute authority.

By that I mean
That you are ashamed,
The good light of dawn has gone
With the colours of the sun.

The judgment on Jason and Medea does not merely assert the authority of a divine presence. It registers a change in the way they are now human - having murdered another human being (for survival purposes) and one close to them, a brother. It registers also a change in the way nature presents itself to the senses. A certain decorum, a dignity is preserved. Room to be heroic is reserved for Jason and Medea in spite of their barbarous behaviour.

The punishment is peculiarly relevant to their state of being and experience.

In the cave of your skull
You will be confined
And the breast that you stroke
And the fair young head
Will not be there
But shadows on a wall
In the flickering firelight;
And the good singing,
A ringing of crickets
In the naked ear
Alone, you will know fear.

Campbell seems to relish the Greek way of seeing reality. It is both more humane and more barbaric.

The Branch of Dodona is used here (as was the blind seer Phineas earlier on) to direct the wanderers where to go in their travels. Jason and Medea are told to go to Circe (who in Campbell's view is related to Medea, aunt to niece, both enchantresses) who may make them either "mad" or "bless" them. If the

latter, then "You may go free". Lightly and swiftly imagined by Campbell, there is subtlety and moral involvement seen in the human situation by his development of this central motif of the Branch.

Campbell's sequence follows a dramatic curve rather than a narrative one, the next situation leaping across the long European wanderings of the returning Argonauts to move directly into Circe's world, and to the sharpening of the Jason-Medea difference. The verse in "Circe's Home For Sailors" has an indirectness and surface lightness to it that forestalls the point of male-female incompatibility from being made too soon.

Campbell writes with deceptive ease in this poem:

And Circe took the roots of herb and tree

 And a strange sight it must have been to see
 Haggard and bearded men walk hand in hand
 And play like children on the yellow sand -

The drugged euphoria flows easily and naturally into the verse with sexual associations and with an opening up of the power of memory and dream as parts of human consciousness. Campbell states this experience with a plain effectiveness:

So walking backwards, stumbling among weeds,
 We stumbled into nurseries and unlocked
 Rooms where the shells of monsters and of gods
 Are stored, the tears and smiles of our lost dead,
 And rooms in which we sometimes woke in dreams
 To attitudes of those in Bosch's Hell.

The tone does not change from this passive tolerance of Circe's power when Heracles shows Jason the other side of the "Home for Sailors".

Where men were fighting, changing into swine.
 With grunts of lust they dined off one another
 And few were left when to the bell of hounds
 They ran down cliffs into the sea and drowned.

The poetry has the effortless flow and lack of strain of dream itself. Yet the mind of Campbell is waiting to end off the sequence with sharp irony. When Jason blusters "Let the future come":

And we made love and she smiled up at me
 And said, "Well, we shall see."
 Women and cats retain a mystery.
 I noticed that she did not eat.

The cryptic ending is a flick of insecurity in their relationship, and it is here in "The Branch of Dodona" that we see a shift in the poem's structure. The Argonauts' story is over, and the drama of Medea (and Jason), which Euripides was to make a focus of Western imagination, begins.

Campbell chooses not to compete with this tradition. Still centering on Jason he releases a satirical emphasis into the verse which, while at times venturing into black humour and grotesquerie, generally lowers the tone and pitch of the poetry. Only 3 of the 9 poems of this latter half of "The Branch of Dodona" were chosen by Campbell for inclusion in his Selected Poems. It may mean that he was uncertain of the values and achievement of this latter half of the sequence. It may also be a sign that he had come too close to his own personal experience.

After the "And . . . and . . . then" pattern of "Circe's Home For Sailors" with its detached and narrative sequence ending in a dramatic irony that throws the whole narration itself into further irony, there follows the more directly dramatic presentation of "Homelife of a Hero". Campbell speaks in two voices here, one ostensibly that of Jason, and one the poet's own persona behind that of Jason's persona. Both personae are somewhat of a role-play for Campbell; and while there is a jocosely and bluff exterior or surface offered to the reader, and while the apparently naive obtuseness of Jason towards Medea's real feelings and growing rage makes for an ironic counterpointing of the real depth of the situation, we sense a risk in "Homelife of a Hero" of Campbell's humour not being fine or subtle enough.

There is something of Robert Lowell's "Man and Wife" in this Campbell poem. "Homelife of a Hero" skirts around the confessional situation which

underlies the dramatisation of experience through Jason and Medea. The American poet indulges in literal and actual self-dramatisation. The Australian poet jokes his way, defensively, around the facts of his case, and only gives hints to the reader of the depths and difficulties of his own personal feelings. Passages such as these may need, eventually, a biographical reading:

I'd things for which I should atone
 And was busy enough.
 Marriage is not all love and kisses
 As I told the wife and soon found out.
 But one does not expect to be despised,
 Belittled by one's dearest in the eyes
 Of half the city for a tinpot crown.

The free-ranging, gossipy, and consciously amusing tone of these lines barely staves off admissions of a more painful nature.

I spoke of a settlement with Medea
 Only to get a box on the ear.
 She went quite wild,
 Throwing the furniture about,
 What little we had.

Jason turns to another woman Glauce, princess of Corinth, and this allows Campbell to release his comic evasive manner more freely in the latter part of "The Branch of Dodona". But the seriousness of both the Medea situation - and presumably Campbell's own - keeps on surfacing, often in a coda as at the end of "Homelife of a Hero":

. . . Medea's silence is on my mind.
 Even though I hold all the cards
 She may have something up her sleeve . . .

Campbell seems to walk right away from the option which Euripides and Seneca took up of making Medea the one who finally mattered in this ancient legend. A reader, well acquainted with the Jason and Medea story, would find Campbell's transfer of the interest from Medea to Jason's superficial skirmishings with sex in "Ode to Glauce" and "Houses of Fashion" rather disconcerting, if playful. The fact that Medea gave Glauce, her rival, a wedding

gown which would in due course incinerate her and her father is handled strangely by Campbell. He makes Jason blithely accept the gift, as if offered in good faith. Then when the catastrophe happens to Glauce and her father, in "Incineration of a Bride", Medea is barely mentioned and then in an ironic coda again.

A kind of surrealist freedom is the focus of Campbell's method here. He wants neither to be consumed by the original legend of Jason and Medea, nor to be the direct and confessional about his own experience. Yet the two worlds have a lot to say to each other, and Campbell clearly wants this to happen. Nothing is more striking in this legend than the surrealist associations Campbell uses for the burning of Glauce. It presents itself as a nightmare napalm bombing as in Vietnam:

Yes, a bomber came over, a single one,
 And dropped its napalm slap down her dress
 Splashing the little page-boys.
 Her father rushed in, his face expressionless,
 Without a line, like a young man,
 And took her flaming in his arms.
 "Darling," he said, "darling, it is only a dream!
 Wake up, my little one."

But it was not a dream.
 They flared like chops in a fire.
 Grilled meat! I shall shun barbecues.
 The scream and him crying, "It is only a dream;
 It is only a dream!"
 I mean when they were nothing but blue ash. -
 I have ash on my tongue.

The poised positioning of the "I" speaker in between the traumatic events of Glauce's death and the joking evasive behaviour of Jason is Campbell's major achievement in "The Branch of Dodona". He is looking for a structure of myth parallel to his own biographical pattern of life so that the space in between the two worlds may be filled up with fantasy, fear, lust, and jealousy. A psycho-analytic space is opened up, where control is surrendered to the subconscious, and where a dark, lyrical and traumatic power emerges to excess. To link a napalm bombing in Vietnam with classical legend is to be releasing - in admitting - an intense guilt or fear through nightmare.

Campbell tries to ease his way back to normality after this climactic moment. He uses a droll and detaching irony to get himself out of "Incineration of a Bride"; and then proceeds gratuitously to attack a female gossip figure - a Mrs. Stage, somewhat like the Greek Chorus or Messenger figure. Why this poem should be called "Invocation to Circe" is mystifying. There seems to be a wish to see the "poison-pen" Mrs. Stage turned into the pig she deserves to be in the poet's eyes. The idea of her ending up as meat dished up by her husband "On his girlfriend's platter" is a grotesque one. Yet it has some bearing on the Medea story and the terrible revenge she took on her family, following on Jason's betrayal of her. Excessive and gratuitous as it seems here, going far beyond its own sardonic tone with its imagined experience, "Invocation to Circe" gives a glimpse of a candid and savage state of affairs in human relationships at the end of a marriage.

"The Branch of Dodona" ends with two poems which modify the dramatising manner of the earlier poems. There is something sombre and settled in Campbell's tone at the ending of the sequence, a catharsis and a very moving sadness.

Chastened, Jason
 Retched under the olives
 Each green dawn,
 So he acquired
 A racing chariot
 And a girl with honey-coloured hair
 To keep him from despair,
 Yet woke at four
 To tread the wind's treadmill
 With his mad wild women
 Much as before.

This is a distinct change in the presentation of Jason. The blank-verse-gamesman Jason of earlier poems - while continuing to go on with pleasures for the sake of distraction - is now spoken of in the past tense, a past tense that nevertheless invades the present with its remembered traumas. Campbell is less sure with Medea.

Medea frequented the psychiatrists of Athens,
Said "cheese" to her glass
And railed against men.

The cutting distancing manner here is symptomatic of Campbell's inability to go along with the female experience throughout "The Branch of Dodona".

When the poem as a whole ends, it does so in a remarkable way. Campbell steps into the Jason persona again but in such a personal (and personable) way as to soften or muffle the dramatic style into a kind of reflective lyricism. "The Return of a Captain" (or "The Return of Jason" in the Selected Poems) has a flow and stability to it which brings the pressures in Campbell into alignment, and smooths them into a state of hurt wisdom.

I am an old man,
I have wandered a long time
Changing under the changing moon.
I did not guess I would end
On the seashore without a friend
But I am content.

I know the ways of the wind.
It blows this way and that way
In the changeable mind
Until the will snaps like a hinge.
One time fortune made me cringe.
Reeds are wise, reeds bend.

The tone of the writing is so pliable here, so much like the bending of a reed itself that the dramatic point of this poem - the death of Jason when the Branch of Dodona falls from the ship Argo and kills him as he sits forlornly by its side - is converted and transformed into something other than itself. Life's continuity is stressed rather than the hero's death.

There is a cycle of life which is being accepted by Campbell. Age accepts its own ending; it also accepts the illusions (and errors) of the young. This is where Campbell started out in the poem. Partly envious of the young and the radicalism of the 1960s in their desire to go off after their generation's "golden fleece":

Young men laugh at death,
 Love is their golden fleece.
 Old men go back to the earth.

Jason allows Campbell to act out an adventure, a sexual fantasy, and the traumatic resolution of a powerful human relationship. Jason dies. But "The Branch of Dodona" belongs to an order of awareness and imaginative experience which is distinct from a mere dramatisation of a legend. It isolates the reflective stance of Campbell which lies at the centre of his poetic world.

Patrick White recognised the high achievement in the resolution of Campbell's poem by using the last three lines of "The Branch of Dodona".

Men and boughs break;
 Praise life while you walk and wake;
 It is only lent.

as the epigraph of his novel The Vivisector. Campbell accepts the ending of life. Men share this with nature. But the tone of the overall poem "The Return of Jason" with its accepting and smoothly-running rhythm has transcended the irony of death and life's ending. Here in the final lines it finds meaning for its creaturely, provisional and contingent existence. The poem affirms life in spite of its passing. It is a dramatic response of the drama of dying. The affirming is an answer to the ending. Life is seen as a gift, a loan, something to be made the most of.

"The Branch of Dodona" sequence organises itself around personal experience - either that of the legendary characters themselves or that, arguably, of Campbell himself. There are some other of his poems, however, that relate to the story of the Golden Fleece, which while published in the same book are not included in the same sequence. "The Bronze Bulls of Colchis" and "Talos of Crete" are two strong pieces of writing which because of their quality it seems right to ask, here, why they do not belong to "The Branch of Dodona" sequence but find themselves in a different grouping called "The

Ark". Some quite particular and personal explanation may be at issue here. But the general reader, confronted by this strange move on Campbell's part, has to reason backwards from the poems themselves as to what might have been the reasoning itself of the poet in doing it this way.

"The Ark" sequence consists of four poems, all four of which touch on radical aspects of modern living. "The Bronze Bulls of Colchis" considers the affluence which in the West has followed the Industrial Revolution - a society of technology, leisure, community and complacency. Society has settled into a bourgeois mould with only a passing hint that there are unhappy people up there on the sixth floor queuing for a window leap. Campbell in his urbanely sardonic way sees this vision of modern western society and asks:

Where have our flowers gone
And our rebellion?

The questions have the resonance of 1967-1970, the Vietnam War years, the student unrest, the drug scenes, the Beatles and Rolling Stones, new movies and theatre - the time was one of surging change and rebelliousness. "The Bronze Bulls of Colchis" was a major task for Jason on his quest for the Golden Fleece. Here, Campbell turns it quickly into the kind of musing and regret for the modern world that we have just described.

"Talos of Crete" belongs to a later phase of Jason and Medea's journeyings after capturing the Golden Fleece. Their legendary encounter with a heavily armoured monster defending Crete gave Campbell the cue for his focus on industrial technology and its fearsome presence in modern society.

Talos, a mechanical monster, is out of control
Glowing red like a furnace, he paces the Island of Crete
And has subjected its pleasure-loving people.
They stoke his fires and have poisoned their sunlit cities
With sulphurous smoke. The countryside is neglected,
The highways choke
With the stuttering syllables of mechanical toys.
The faculties no longer speak a common tongue
Yet their fact-finding factories are united in this:
To keep the flow of young technicians flowing
Who sparkle to cinders in the blue-gold of crucibles.

The image of pollution, ecology and learning so powerfully expressed here is not taken further at this point by Campbell. He reverts to the Medea story and how the monster Talos was destroyed by her sorcery. Campbell has Medea leading "a student revolt", and envisages their success in the fight against the power of the modern technocratic industrialised state:

The furnaces flared out and Talos lay dead
Among twisted steel, a skyscraper for headstone.

"But where is gratitude?" Campbell then asks. The conclusion of "Talos of Crete" shows society thrown into turmoil by this overthrow of industry, and as worse (if not worse) results follow for society from the change. Clearly, Campbell is no political radical or anarchist.

"Talos of Crete" matters both for its partial successes (each stanza in its own separate way is striking) and for the difficulties it reveals in Campbell's surrealistic associating ancient legend with modern circumstance. He cannot integrate his total concerns, and exploits the freedom and playfulness of surrealist method in a way that takes him to the edge of seriousness, then betrays him. The mood changes from beginning to end of the poem. From bold projection of Talos' presence (as if poetically confronting the world of the "mechanical monster") Campbell retreats to a fear of anarchy and disorder by the end of the poem. It is this shift in his feelings rather than the variety of scenes and images in the poem which hold it back from being what might have been one of his most important pieces of writing.

The third poem in "The Ark" steps right away, apparently, from the Jason-Medea world. It takes a strange phenomenon of the moon rising above a city and seeming to split in two. The result is panic among the citizens, as if an apocalyptic moment was upon them.

The moon rose out of the sea and over the city
When it split in two halves like the shell of an egg.

It was the strangest thing you ever saw, the late
 Sunlight slicing the city
 And the moon settling like saucers on the sea-shelf,
 Gyrating slowly, and silence over the city.

Two halves just bowling about, and suddenly everyone shrieking.

For what was presumably an optical illusion, Campbell is concerned to inspect the neuroses of modern life. Under quasi-apocalyptic conditions, people show their insecurity. The poem edges towards being a dark fable or nursery rhyme. Yet as a parable it had special point at its time of writing. There are signs that Campbell was fascinated with the moon and the moon exploration which was taking place just as he wrote. The first landing on the moon took place in 1969. Calling his poem "Operation Moonprobe" is right within the idiom of Cape Canaveral and Houston.

The point is that Campbell's mind was moving over a wide range of possibilities as he wrote The Branch of Dodona between 1967 and 1970. He had loosened up not only his style but his sensibility as well. He reached for a likeness between the Argonauts and the Astronauts. The voyage to the Moon in 1969 was for him an equivalent of Jason's search for the Golden Fleece in ancient legend.

In the Campbell papers at the Australian National Library, collected with the drafts of "The Branch of Dodona" poems, there is a page of jottings in the form of a radio dramatisation. It presents a series of voices heard over an intercom. They first seem to be police voices, reporting on a murder. It is the Medea situation: "and the wife has done in the kids and her husband's girlfriend". One of the speakers is called Chiron, the ferryman in ancient legend who took the souls of the dead across the river Styx. But this situation dissolves into a different locale. They seem to be bomber pilots, returning from a Vietnam sortie. "I just laid a trail of napalm," the Fourth voice says, "down the Main Street". Then, the presentation reverts to Chiron receiving another kind of message:

Chiron (static) Who is that calling my star, over and over?

The reply comes from someone called Shephard, presumably Commander Alan Shephard, the astronaut:

Shephard: I have just placed my foot on the moon's surface.
It holds.
Houston: Hold it, hold it. The President is coming on the line.
Shephard: The world is golden like the Golden Fleece. It's high up here.
President: This is a great step for mankind!
First: Calling Chiron. Are you receiving? Over.
Chiron: Who is that tormenting me? I gave my immortality for unbound light.
First: Tell us about Jason. Come on. Do.

The presentation tapers off with a few more exchanges with Chiron beginning to tell the story of Jason. He adopts a crude joking manner, as if impatient both with the seriousness attached to myth and legend, and also with the fact that the moonprobe seems to be repeating an ancient story. Possibly, the ironic mind of Chiron (as Death) is unimpressed with heroics, past, present and future.

Campbell seems to be playing with big subjects here, and not controlling them adequately. These are, admittedly, the merest of sketch notes, but something of his failure to be serious is present in the last two of the "Ark" poems. "Operation Moonprobe" moves from a world of social complacency across into an apocalyptic state. It is as if the moon landing was unsettling his imagination and releasing fears of the world's ending.

It was then the skyscraper began to rock like one of those
weighted kewpie dolls,
The whole city swaying to a rising rhythm
As we clung there watching the waves climb the skyline.

The climax of "Operation Moonprobe" seems to lead on to the fourth poem "The Voyage of S.S. Ark", a modern-day Noah's Ark story told in ballad form and with a jocose manner which is half-satire, half-serious. It would be easy to

dismiss "The Voyage of S.S. Ark" as poetry. But the setting and context in which it occurs, and the sense that Campbell is consciously playing at being primitive, make for a certain reservation. At moments the poem does find something of a central voice for itself:

The Captain leaned above the charts
 On fingertips of white
 His smile was quick as a mountain wren
 But his words struck like a kite.

"We're all at sea here, gentlemen,
 By act of man or devil
 But our drowned brothers on dry land
 Have suffered greater evil.

"We're all at sea and on this sea
 We have a precious duty,
 For bird and beast and humble things
 Of rarity and beauty.

Make up our cargo. They were bound
 For pastures free from slaughter. -
 Now the whole world's a ship at sea
 For all the rest is water.

The S.S. Ark is sailing high above the United States. The world is covered with water. The scene is fantastic. Campbell needs to be credited for such a bizarre moment of vision, but he is unable to take the vision very far. He proceeds to distract himself (and his reader) from any significant outcome. The poem is the merest gesture in the direction of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. There is no coherent argument or point to the poem. Yet there are isolated moments of success. The animals appear to revolt against the power of the humans:

At this from for'ard and aloft
 Like Beethoven gone mad,
 Rose up crescendoes of assent
 Would chill the nervous dead.

These came from the carnivores,
 From tiger, fox and robins,
 Who pair by pair in unison
 Bayed from the 1st Class cabins.

Campbell seems to be enjoying the fun of this surrealist stoking of the imagination, and fortunately his gamesmanship allows him to end the poem with quasi-allegorical or fable-like seriousness. The Lion and the Unicorn are pictured drinking at the bar. The Lion, who may well represent force and power in the world of a political kind, dismisses the Captain as inconsequential, and offers the Unicorn a share in the world as ruled by himself.

"I walk alone," the Unicorn
 Replied, "and for my art
 I feed on the necessities
 And wishes of the heart.

"In its black terrors I rejoice
 And tremble at its beauty,
 While the good Mole pilots us
 Whose spectacles are sooty."

It is not easy to hold these several attitudes together in any significant way. Each in itself says something for Campbell, as if he were analysing his own temperament, and finding pride, loneliness, artistic commitment and scorn as parts of his basic nature. "The Voyage of S.S. Ark" may be read as a dream, a nightmare. It has clarities of a super-real kind. It touches on fears, and jokes its way into seriousness.

A case could be made for looking at "The Ark" poems as Campbell's kind of political surrealism. They suggest his awareness of Picasso, Klee, Braque, Breton and others. Something of the "psychic automatism" rising from the unconscious, and happening to relate to major problems of modern society and culture, finds expression in the generally loosened-up manner of his writing here. There is always a detachment in the voice, a kind of irony, and a judging act of analysis waiting beyond the surface of the poetry here.

"The Ark" poems relate to "The Branch of Dodona" poems obviously. Two of "The Ark" poems in fact belong to the Argonaut world. But Campbell apparently was tempted towards social and cultural prophecy in grouping "The Ark" sequence as such. He may not have a consistent and serious enough

manner to support the engagement involved in such an undertaking. Indeed, his surreal leapings would seem to contradict such a commitment. Yet a large cultural ambience is present in both "The Branch of Dodona" and "The Ark" sequences, one which in Australia in the late 1960s was needed, and apart from Patrick White in the novel, not to be found elsewhere in Australian literature.

Chapter II

The analysis of paintings became a form of meditation and a mode of self-discovery for David Campbell in the 1970s, and nowhere is this brought into focus more sharply than in the "Red Bridge" sequence of Deaths and Pretty Cousins (1975). A dozen poems there contain a quality of achievement of a rare and challenging kind. It was as if Campbell's craft and imagination felt at ease with his subject, as if he were satisfied in sharing the world which the painter was offering to his mind and eye. Indeed, there is the quality of, to use Paul Klee's phrase, "the thinking eye" in the poems of the "Red Bridge" sequence. Something like an objective correlative for Campbell's art lay at hand for him in this late discovery of painting as a subject matter for thought and poetic commentary.

But the nature of his achievement in these poems is far from simple. The poetics of his painting poems needs careful analysis in its own right. The stance of Campbell is not that merely of a viewer, of someone who brings a gift of understanding to a particular art form. He was not a critic in the sense of explaining how a painting may have come to have such and such qualities or how to assess its achievement. Campbell had powerful empathy to bring to the paintings. But he also had an active relation with the painting. He wished to use the painting. He wanted to write a poem.

His engagement with paintings was therefore as much on his own terms as on the terms of the paintings. This is a subtle and elusive matter since his "Red Bridge" poems have a cool and objective manner to them as if he is being submissive to the painting before him. But Campbell selects what it is he sees. His poem in an important sense is radically different from the painting; indeed, his poem is a radically different thing from the painting. This is a point which Rosemary Dobson, who worked closely with Campbell and who herself has

written many poems on paintings, emphasises in her recent statement on Campbell's art in this regard:

. . . each poem should stand as a single and viable object in space without reference, or at least overt reference, to the painting from which it arose.

There will be as many occasions to prove the validity of this view as there are poems of Campbell's to discuss. But while accepting, then, the autonomy and the subjectivity and the active use and point of Campbell's engagement with paintings, there yet remains one other broad concern that needs to be stated.

The poems have an impersonality to them when in fact they are alive with personality. How to put this is not easy. It is as if the immense concentration on the detail in the painting is a kind of counterpointing to the ego, or self, of the artist, the poet. While virtually no subjective gestures or self-projection are offered to the reader, the most powerful quality communicated by the poet is a sense of his own presence - standing, as it were, outside the poem, absorbed in it, cherishing it, pursuing it. It is his compact of concentration that silently works. It is felt as a spiritual quality, intent in its interest, addressing a reality almost with devotion. It is an orientation of admiration, perhaps the most natural religious impulse that has survived into the modern world. Campbell's discovery of painting is not, therefore, private and subjective but part of a deep ritual in modern culture.

It is interesting, in this regard, to note this quality in his earlier "Kuringai-Rock Carvings" sequence. These poems appeared in The Branch of Dodona (1970), and as I have suggested above belong to a difficult and tumultuous time of change in Campbell's life and in the life of Australian society. But it was here that astute readers of his work felt a decisive shift in him as an artist. Campbell, in finding himself able to write short poems (he speaks of them as being like Japanese "haiku" or Welsh "Englyn" poems) on the

aboriginal rock carvings in the bushland close to Sydney near the Hawkesbury River, had found a subject, a new art form and a stance towards reality for himself.

I saw these rock carvings out in the bush near Kuringai, and after a while separate carvings began to turn themselves into short poems in my mind. I got a great deal of the background of the carvings from Douglas Stewart, and I also read a lot about them. Then I went round with a ladder and a camera and photographed them all. It was certainly not a conscious thing, but I began to look at these carvings and then turn from them to a comment on present day civilisation in the world and especially in Australia, and so I used them a little bit as a stalking horse you might say.

Kevin Hart, "New Directions: an interview with David Campbell", Makar XI/1 1975 p.8)

The idea of the poem as a stalking horse is important here. Not simply for the "Kuringai Rock Carvings" sequence but for the "Red Bridge" poems as well. For the painting poems offer Campbell a way of finding himself. They may provide small worlds of concentration and absorption, but the self or ego is circulating around these islands or atolls of imagination (he called some of his first versions in this form "Bikinis") like an oceanic feeling. A stalking horse is something put forward to mask one's plans or efforts; it is an ironic persona. Few readers coming to such a self-contained set of words as the following would think that anything lay beyond them:

Lizards are kin and can return to stone
 At will. Transfixing a shield
 Like a spear a lizard froze in the sun, a thing
 Of bronze, yet quick. See the dart of his tongue!

The attention is rapt in the subject. The empathy is a dramatic one at the end. Yet it would be wrong to ignore the discontinuity of the perceiver and the thing perceived. The ability to name, to know, to utter is to be different from the thing itself. Campbell's finesse encompasses this gap. He does not turn the difference into attitude, least of all ironic attitude. He wants to be as close as he can to the creature. But his poem remains its discrete self, a

separate world of its own even though a rare communion has been established between the world of the poem and that of the lizard on the rock. There is something reassuring, even, about the flatness of statement, the almost executive cadence in Campbell's words. He is not losing himself in his language in nature. He stays firmly in a social - and therefore human - style. His freedom gives him great flexibility and range.

The "Kuringai Rock Carvings" sequence was important to Campbell for the loosening-up of his stance as poet and as person. The sense of space and of space-time which hangs around each poem is of the essence in his achievement. It is as if the creativity in the writings as much depends on what is not said as in the actual saying. To endow silence with this kind of reality is a rare gift. Especially for Campbell who knew all too well his long-held commitment to "geometry"-to gettings things solved, neat and finished. The rational control over the poem was what he was prepared to surrender, to allow the poem to appear as but part of a whole, the whole being some larger and unstated stance - of meditation, contemplation, awareness of life in reverential fullness.

The aboriginal rock carvings seem to have triggered off a new capacity in Campbell's work. But the richness with which he developed this capacity needs to be seen next in the way he turned to traditional Western art, and found there that he belonged to a great tradition of imagination and spirituality. The "Red Bridge" poems, while not the only time he brought this growing capacity into play, serves as a focus for change in Campbell in the 1970s.

The "Red Bridge" sequence is named after one particular painting by Paul Klee, the German-Swiss artist of the first half of the twentieth century. Campbell's being drawn to Klee and to this particular painting is curious in itself. It could be thought of as a stroke of genius that Campbell who had found the primitive and abstract forms of aboriginal art so deeply appealing should also find at the centre of European modernism, and rising out of the

most radical and sophisticated art forms of the twentieth century, another art form that was also "primitive" and abstract. Both Klee and the Kuringai Rock Carvings answered to a need in the Australian artist in his move into the central modernism of his final years as a poet.

From Kuringai to Klee. The leap seems immense. Yet once recognised the likeness seems both natural and necessary. The non-representational rediscovery of the medium of painting itself - its processes, resources, and meaning in itself - for which Klee stands famous was grasped by Campbell as having affinity with something miraculously close at hand - and hidden - in the Australian scene. Something, too, of the original religious-cultic element flowed through the remnant of the aboriginal rock carvings, something lost to white European society in Australia and Western cultures generally. It suited Campbell who (while having a childhood immersion in and liking for the Bible and at school "divinity") was in a commonplace stand-off relation with the actual practice of religion in contemporary society. His own leanings were towards a nature poetry, at times it might be called a nature mysticism but never to the point of his surrendering the rationality of his Scottish hard-headed Enlightenment traditions of his family and social background.

Yet it is surprising that Klee's Red Bridge (Rote Brücke) should be selected by Campbell to become the title poem for his sequence of painting poems. "Red Bridge" is not a well-known Klee painting. Campbell knew of it only through an isolated print which, it appears, came into his possession as a gift from a friend. Possibly, the only example of this print in Australia is the one that hangs on the wall of Campbell's study. And nothing is more surprising than the fact that in Campbell's poem itself there is no mention of a red bridge! It all points to the painting - and to Klee generally - acting to crystallise something in Campbell himself, to release certain powers of vision and craft which he saw as sufficiently central to his mid 1970s writing to give

the name to his whole endeavour in responding to painting, both ancient and modern.

Campbell's painting poems also fall into two sections. "Rote Brücke" belongs to the second section. Here, Campbell is responding to a sense of the artist more than to the art form itself. This is strange in the case of Klee whose emphasis was in the direction of an impersonality, as distinct from the other modern artists in Part II of "Red Bridge" whose biographies - Campbell had obviously been reading the lives closely of Renoir, Degas, Cezanne, Picasso, Matisse, Modigliani and others - form the substance of the poems.

Campbell was at pains to emphasize this interest he had in the artist. When asked by Kevin Hart in the Makar interview "whether or not you used the poems in Red Bridge to explore or clarify a relation that exists for you between painting and poetry", Campbell made his position quite clear:

I don't think that I was trying to work out the sort of relation you mean. In my second book of poetry I wrote a poem "To the Poetry of Kenneth Slessor" and then I wrote a companion to that called "To the Art of Edgar Degas" which are in some sense more about art than the "Red Bridge" poems. I think that my later poems about art have another interest - the painter himself.

Hart pursued the point further by asking:

You know of course that Rosemary Dobson has written a series of poems about paintings, and in fact you use a quotation from one of them as an epigraph for your own series of poems. What sort of debt do you owe to Rosemary Dobson?

Campbell replied:

I have always loved and admired Rosemary's poems, and I think that I've been influenced by her poems on paintings, but I think that my own interest in painting has developed quite independently of her. Rosemary's poems are mystical - they are about how the painter can freeze life and then give it, in art, a life of its own. My poems go off in another direction; I am more interested in the character of the painter than the metaphysics. (pp.5-6)

The claim is clearly there, and being made. Campbell's is somehow an active use of the painting, of the world of the painter, for a personal reason. There is no loss of identity for the poet or his poem in responding to the painting. Rather the opposite. A finding of confidence and authority for voice and vision under the stimulus of a life lived in a way for which Campbell felt an empathy. His painting poems, while submitting him to an intensely disciplined form of meditation and analysis, became absorbed into a larger setting for Campbell, his responsiveness to the world of the 1970s.

Yet "Rote Brücke" stands almost at odds with this approach to Campbell. The poem is a still point, a series of still points, five haiku verses of studied concentration, almost impersonal in their declarative, unadorned, undeveloped sentences. It is as if the poem has a filter over it, as if it is being seen through some glazed medium of the mind (Klee's paintings often suggest a world as seen through a stained glass window). The poem seems to be in counterpoint with its subject. Where is the "red bridge"? where the warmth, the passion of the focal colour? where the relationships? which the relationships of the "bridge"? And why should this blue-drenched-drowned world of the Campbell poem stand alongside the Rosemary Dobson epigraph:

The bear, the wolf, the fox subdued -
 All these the painter showed, and more,
 Then overturned his pots of paint
 And threw his brushes on the floor.
 ("The Wild Wood")

The difference between the artist as artist and the artist as person is the point of the Dobson quote. In paintings the artist depicts the saint bringing order, peace and relationship into the life of the beasts portrayed. In life the artist acts (or may act) like a beast, and needs the saint's influence just as much as did the beasts.

Campbell appears to endorse the recognition of life as a "wild wood" for the artist as person. He does not, however, wish the same resolution. The saint

seems unnecessary to him. The drama of living is the place of human authenticity. There is a sense of Campbell's resisting both the Dobson resolution and the Klee quietude, yet needing both to allow for his own complex stance to clarify itself independently. Perhaps it will help to quote the poem at this point.

Rote Brücke

The moon is a cool goddess
The seas obey her
She has drenched the town in blue

A whale blows in the fountain
Dolphins wheel by windows
Fishermen
Tug at the nets of sleep

The Roman wall goes under
Bloodied with memories
Keels plough the square fields

In his violet tower
Paul Klee puts out the lighthouse
Goes back to the dead

Rippling the moon
Looks through blue water
At the fishing town.

The haiku verses occupy blocks of space-time separate from one another as do the reds and yellows and varieties of blue in Klee's painting. The avoidance of connection is part of the meaning. Each thing (or aspect of each thing) is itself. It is not to be subordinated in a relationship, or predicated of something other than itself as subject.

There is a positioning of the perceiving self at a depth and with such innerness or belongingness to the situation: a sharing in the reality of the scene. "the moon / Looks through blue water / At the fishing town". Here is the stance Campbell finds to articulate. The sensuousness of his verse in its simplification and distillation of essential phenomena creates the agency of the moon and its all-pervading presence. A luminous shining sustains the images

which float up and out of the painting and not of the dream state in which the painting is being received by the perceiver.

There is obeisance to a female power in the world. Moon and seas (a hierarchy there, too) flood human society. They implant their own creatures in the town, they transform human life into an expression of their power and special agency. "Fishermen / Tug at the nets of sleep". Human activity or work becomes a function of this power. History sinks away beneath its depth. "Bloodied", the one word left for Campbell to touch on human passion and pain, is submerged as the sea's blue world covers the land. Campbell has responded to the dominant tonality, the oceanic dreamlike basic colour of the Klee blue world.

From this depth of vision and concentration, Campbell proposes a seemingly extraneous Klee in his own painting world. No suggestion of this is in the painting itself. It is an initiative of interpretation on Campbell's part. The contrast in Klee of the "red bridge", a kind of half-rendered arch which flames just off-centre in the painting, may be the justification for this leap from the sea/moon blue communion to a distinct otherness, a personality with passion and historical experience, which lies inside Campbell's feeling for the presence of the artist as necessary to his sense of the painting's fullness and meaning.

He calls Klee's stance a "violet tower", a modification of the blue-red polarity, a holding together the significance of opposed colours, some sense that Klee in his genius (following Cezanne) could "join hands so", and from a transcendent point, a "tower", interpenetrate opposed states of experience.

To Campbell "Klee puts out the lighthouse", an appropriate closure to the sea/moon vision or dream. The artist participates in, identifies with, the darkness of the night; at depth it is a death, an eternal sleep. Klee "goes back to the dead". Campbell may mean it is sufficient that Klee has this rich

empathy with the passivity of the world which the moon and sea demand to have seen and recognised. It may mean something sharper, a sardonic denial that Campbell sees in Klee's abstract withdrawal from the objectifications of social realism; or it may be Campbell's elegiac respect to the man who lived through a great and tragic age of Germany between the Wars, and whose art was a lighthouse which survived the Nazi destruction of the Bauhaus culture only to see at its end (Klee died in 1940) another death for civilisation pending.

It is impossible not to feel the difference between the Campbell poem and the Klee painting. Campbell names the poem "Rote Brücke" or "Red Bridge" but abstracts the red from the poem. He goes with the lyrical tonality of the blues, and makes a celebration, a reverential tribute, to a female divinity flooding through life and society. Obliquely, he sees the world of passion, pain, and relationships as there, yet floating in a sea whose substance and aspect are alive with power and love. Campbell appropriates Klee while being transformed in doing so.

"If you can do away with one, then why not several?" The epigraph which cryptically introduces Part I of the "Red Bridge" sequence is from the Russian writer Nadezhda Mandelstam. It seems odd at first reading to find this epigraph at the head of poems on such widely scattered painters as the early Renaissance Italian Sassetta, Goya, the seventeenth century engraver Jacques Callot, and one other painter whom Campbell does not identify. But the Mandelstam quotation is useful in the way it alludes to one of Campbell's major preoccupations in the early 1970s i.e. reading and "translating" modern Russian poetry. Rosemary Dobson and Campbell worked together (with expert linguistic help from Russian scholars at the Australian National University) on "imitations" of such Russian poets as Osip Mendelstam, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Bella Akhmadulina and others. It was at this time that Nadezhda Mandelstam's life of her husband Hope Against Hope was translated and

published in the West, making a powerful impact in terms of the image it left of Russian writers' experience of the State.

Why the Mandelstam quotation matters to "Red Bridge" Part I is because it is a sign that Campbell means his readers to see the essential political nature of this first group of poems on paintings. "If you can do away with one, then why not several?" The sardonic taunting rhetorical question is directed at the State and in particular at the totalitarian regime of Stalin for treating the individual as expendable to begin with and then going on to wholesale purges. The experience of Russian writers obviously hit home to Campbell:

When you begin to translate a major poet like Mandelstam, you can't help but look at your own poetry and say 'Beside the work of this poet is my own poetry trivial?' Mandelstam went through such experiences of terror and persecution and wrote so movingly about these experiences that in one way the experiences helped to make him a great poet. Translating him certainly made me look at my own morals a bit, and see that the themes of life and death that he was dealing with are something that I have to take into account with my own poetry. Hart (pp.4-5)

The visits of Yevtushenko and Vozneshensky to Australia in the 1960s and early 1970s, the impact of Pasternak in poetry and prose, and the general political upheavals in relation to the Vietnam War and to student unrest around the world - all made for pressure on Campbell, by nature of a conservative or a non-political leaning, to examine where he stood. The fact that he signed a public statement against the Vietnam War, that he took part in anti-Vietnam poetry readings and that he was sympathetic to Whitlam in the Australian election of 1972 were all matters of serious concern in the Canberra and social circles to which he belonged. Campbell had also had a distinguished Air Force record in World War II. His feelings on Australian relations with the super powers were therefore of a traditional stamp but undergoing change.

The Mandelstam quotation suggests that the poems of Part I of "Red Bridge" have a political orientation. The quotation also carries a boldly personal

quality: its tone suggests a sense of humour which has elements of fatalism, despair, sarcasm, irony and a taunting at totalitarianism rule. On first appearances it would seem that Campbell belonged to an opposite world to the Mandelstams. Socially and culturally privileged, non-political by temperament but effectively conservative apart from his commitment over the Vietnam years, Campbell surprises by the way he found common ground with the Mandelstams. Something of their personal and dark humour and ranging anger flows into the political style of Part I of "Red Bridge". Without recognising the personal element in these poems we miss their point.

"The Wolf of Gubbio" takes a late Medieval, early Renaissance painting of St. Francis in his celebrated act of making friends with the wolf that had been terrorising the Gubbio region. Sassetta, the artist, has depicted what seems to a modern viewer yet another "saint" picture. The figures standing outside the city walls are stylised and formal; St. Francis holding the wolf's paw in a gesture of reconciliation; citizens crowding behind him and looking down from the walls with mixed feelings but largely uncertainty and apprehension; a flock of birds wheeling above in almost circular formation. The painting is compact and almost crushed with narrative detail. Given the idealised narrative point of the situation - the Franciscan moment of miracle - it is possible to ignore the non-ideal or anti-ideal detail in the painting - the bodies, the bones lying in the wood nearby, victims of the wolf.

Sassetta has held the two states - the ideal and the ironic - in suspension. But not Campbell. His emphasis is on the ironic. He translates the hagiographic moment of the saint's miraculous power down into a sardonic sense of how real the fear of the wolf is - and ought to be - for the people. It is as if Campbell has Osip Mandelstam's poem "The Wolf" in mind. The wolf could be a Stalin or a Hitler figure. Twentieth century fear plays actively in the poem. The irony of Peace Delegations is felt - of the Kissingers of this

world hoping to have solved the problems of power. The poem takes its stand with the sceptical little people who watch the main actors play their roles, salute their success, and continue to fear.

Campbell begins "The Wolf of Gubbio" almost surrealistically.

In perfect line astern the heron
Describe like bombers after "Bombs away"
An arc above the city

It comes at the painting obliquely, from the tangent of one of the seemingly inconsequential points of detail in Sassetta's work. But this is the point: To deny the apparent subject of the painting - the idealised saint's reconciling power - and to see the situation in a new way, a way truer to the modern world which through Hitler and Stalin and other dictators have made "the wolf" all too real in human life.

The image also belongs in a distinctive way to Campbell. To compare birds in a medieval or Renaissance painting to "bombers" is to leap out of the thought world and cultural context of the painting, and assert gratuitously a modern reality at least as real. Campbell, also, was a bomber pilot in World War II in New Guinea, and the image therefore has his personal stamp. He is putting himself into the painting by this gambit of denying the central religious import of Sassetta, and projecting a grim and sardonic modern intelligence, alert to totalitarian threats.

The birds in Sassetta do form a remarkable "arc", worthy of being noted. But to be foregrounded in this way is to be transferred from what seems a purely formal element in the painting to a rhetorical and critical function in Campbell's poem. There is a hint, too, of Robert Lowell's mockery of his father in Commander Lowell's "Anchors aweigh", a hint which uses humour to destabilize the way a modern poet addresses an ancient masterpiece of art, and to release its usefulness to a modern situation, largely by deconstructing the ideal meaning of the situation and substituting an ironic emphasis as a token of

actual human presence and modern experience.

Campbell reinforces the rhetorical gesture of his opening stanza by continuing to ignore St. Francis, and noting instead "the wood" where "dead men's bones" and "a head and naked leg" are shrewd reminders. This phrase carries weight in the poem. It is one of those phrases which seems to describe the poem itself as much as make its point within the poem's world of meaning.

Campbell drops into a slightly dramatising style in the next two stanzas. His irony enables him to appear to act out a set piece of urbane observation and advice:

Send these courtiers to a tailor and you have
Any Peace Delegation
The wolf is a reasonable fellow

St Francis ('Hold it') holds his paw
Yesterday's Kissinger.
 The airy delegates
Discuss the international weather

The point is not heavily made. But it is that "a wolf is a wolf is a wolf". A change of clothes, or substitute today's diplomat for the medieval saint, and the situation is the same. The appearance of peace, the successful negotiation, is a momentary illusion. The basic conditions continue to apply, the people fear (and have the right to fear) the marauding appetites of powers and principalities opposed to themselves.

The lessons of the Mandelstams and Solzhenitsyn of modern literature obviously run through Campbell's awareness in this poem. The poised irony of his final line:

The wolf will keep his word

carries a cool, sceptical disregard in it towards gullibility and naivety in the face of political threat.

The lightness which is there at the edges of Campbell's tone in "The Wolf of Gubbio" disappears in the next poem of "Red Bridge". Based on the famous

Goya depictions of the 1808 shooting of Spanish citizens in the Peninsula Wars, Campbell's "Deaf Man's House" has an uncertainty in its address which comes largely from its seriousness of tone. There is no comic edging to this poem as distinct from "The Wolf of Gubbio". Campbell has not taken the painting over; he has not made it his own subject. He is absorbed into Goya's world. Paradoxically this affects the authenticity of the poem. The gratuitous shifts in "The Wolf of Gubbio" are the point of Campbell's real achievement there.

It is possible to misread "Deaf Man's House". There is nothing to identify who the "deaf man" might be. The poem makes sense by allowing the "deaf man" to be everyman or anyman who does not (or cannot) fear the shooting and the agony going on round about him in times of strife and persecution. The juxtaposition of deafness and destruction is the poem's main point. A grim and sober irony fixes the opposition of human feeling and perverse destructiveness. Like the light that fixes its beam on the victims in the nighttime firing squad, like the rifles that "do not falter", there is a fatalistic and deterministic recognition of the cruelty men inflict in times of war and social upheaval. The inexorable logic of persecution is set off - counterpointed, as it were - by the naivety of the victims. "To shoot me is unthinkable". The quotation obviously does not come from the Goya painting. It sounds like a hundred similar statements from modern Russian or holocaust victims:

A functional square lantern
 Supplied by the commissariat
 It throws a plastic beam

'To shoot me is unthinkable'
 Yet the rifles do not falter
 A red plastic flows
El 3 de Mayo 1808

Words such as "commissariat" and "plastic" (repeated) make the scene modern; while the selective leaping manner of presentation, together with the dramatising effects of the lantern light, the direct quote and the actual dating

- all hold tightly and compactly the Goya world as an image of always. It is actualised and re-enacted in today's terms.

But from this point Campbell's poem falls away, and it is curious to see why this should be so. The poem in fact steps inside Goya's own consciousness, and the informed reader recognises that Campbell has been following Goya's biographical experience throughout the poem. Goya was himself deaf, and went into retreat at this time to a dwelling which he called "Deaf Man's House". The poem by having this kind of literalism loses in effect. There is ample irony in the juxtaposition of the banal with the horrific.

Now at breakfast
Saturn devouring his child

where one of Goya's most intensely imagined figures of terror and fear is opposed to the daily routine of the artistic life. But the poem does not make anything more of the point than the irony. The ending of "Deaf Man's House" lacks clarity of resolution. Introducing the artist's consciousness

The lord be praised
For my deafness

is meant obviously to deepen the irony by a use of a false irony. But Campbell has not appropriated this consciousness as his own, and the parts of his conclusion fall separately away from each other. The last lines are mystifying and moralising:

Yet in the spirit
Blue wounds and a rending of bone.

The final phrase is worth all the presentation of Goya. It could well have stood alone.

The issue is an interesting one for Campbell's work. For his "Red Bridge" sequence divides into two sections around precisely this point. Was he writing poems about paintings or about painters? Here, in "Deaf Man's House" we see

the shift taking place before our eyes. It is a shift from a political focus to a personal focus. Campbell (as already noted in the Makar interview) accepted that his interest lay mostly with "the painter himself". It is a subtle shift, and Goya's life is so dramatic and political (at this point in history) that "Deaf Man's House" almost succeeds in spite of its structural uncertainty. But the firm quality of Campbell's best lines in the "Red Bridge" poems have an objectivity to them, edged with dark comedy, and experienced for us by the poet by virtue of the stylistic transformations in point of view and phrasing. Dramatic focus is held by the tense, short lines. Yet the author's understanding is released by going deeper into events and characters rather than by standing back and reflecting.

The problem of expressing an author's sense of things when presuming to have the poem spoken from within a particular character's point of view is endemic in modern poetry and fiction since Robert Browning and Henry James popularised dramatic perception as a means of presentation. To say that Campbell succeeds in "The Wolf of Gubbio" and only half-succeeds in "Deaf Man's House" is to point to the way each poem unifies itself in terms of its meaning, tone and stance. Campbell straddles two dramatic worlds: the tight, objectifying, leaping manner; and a sententious, fulsome-voiced sonnet-manner. Two poems of "Red Bridge" Part I belong to the one mode, two to the other. Campbell was aware of the different choices he was making. He speaks of aiming for "looseness" in the sonnets of Deaths and Pretty Cousins (particularly in the title sequence). But in the "Red Bridge" sonnets, he uses the voice of the speaker as an ironic foil against which the intelligence and feeling of the poet are allowed to play.

"On An Engraving by Jacques Callot" presents a sense of grimness and horror. A hundred bodies hang from a tree, as if they were fruit. They are fruit in one sense, fruit of seventeenth century religious controversy in Europe.

To Campbell the point lies both in the distress of the scene and in the "lack of fuss" with the people are seen by Callot as going about their daily business, surrounded by such horror. Callot's irony is picked up by Campbell, and used to provide another cloak or mask. But the more the world of death is concealed by the tone in the poetry, the more it works its way free in order to shock and repel the reader. Callot (and Campbell) interest themselves in life (and love) going on in the face of death.

The sonnet is framed by a sententious voice saying:

We fruit in season, Monsieur; and life goes on.

 Here, anywhere, love seeks its consummation,
 To fruit in season, Monsieur. And life goes on.

The visual gestures of indifference in Callot are translated in verbal tone of urbane callousness in Campbell. The poem does not have to do more than make this transfer of power to be effective.

the cross
 A laddered priest thrusts up where shin to shin
 Swing the converted and shall rise again.
 What is appalling is the lack of fuss.
 When death is every day, death lives with us
 On neighbour terms.

The smoothness of tone counterpoints the poem's (and poet's) feeling of being appalled.

"Brother and Sister" (based on an as yet unrecognised painting) has a tightness of structure, cutting back analytically into a complex world to ask of the two young people:

From what temple
 In Sanchi did they steal their self-forgetful
 Sensuousness, their innocence of sin?

The subject catches both a celebrative and a critical response in Campbell.

an animal
 Looks up incurious above the kill
 As over ivory chessmen. The keen sun
 Like Donatello traces in eye and chin
 The lineaments of beauty.

Gratuitously, these "innocents" are seen by Campbell as inhabiting a place not unlike early Australia (the allusion to "parrots and the Wak Wak tree" are part of Campbell's shared world with Keith Looby in "Fairy Tale of Australia").

But the strength of this sonnet lies in its steady-eyed resolution where this innocence is seen as meeting with opposite responses of sympathy and nervous laughter, and where the innocence is exposed to the irony of the world's "masks and faces". Campbell seems able to accommodate both innocence and irony equally here. Not being able to explain "Brother and Sister" in terms of some one particular painting forces the reader back onto the recognition of the balanced response in Campbell, his sanity and sophistication not giving anything away to a Bosch-like nervous shuddering at the fears in life where

the rest
 Banter like Abraham climbing with knives the hill.

The dramatic image in this final line of the sonnet (where father leads son off to be "sacrificed") is a striking contrast to the innocent "brother and sister". Family relations, caught up in the rituals and immoralities of the world, are finely observed here by Campbell. "Brother and Sister" is a sonnet to recall when the title sequence of Deaths and Pretty Cousins is to be considered. Campbell slowly came to see his own personal relationships under classical guise without loss of Australian authenticity. The disciplined study of paintings, as here, gave him the structure for his understanding and art.

Chapter III

It was the sequence of short poems "Ku-Ring-Gai Rock Carvings" which held the attention of the first readers of The Branch of Dodona. Yet it was a strange sensation. There was a strong feeling that here was a new kind of poem and that Campbell had broken through into a new area of achievement both for himself and more generally for Australian writing. The poems, however, were short and understated. Almost, as it were, without affect. Or effect. They eluded critics then, and still do. There is a detachment to them, a finish which ignores communication. As if the poet is satisfied in carving out some random word-object as an exercise, and happy to leave it at that. A certain casual ease and unconcern isolates the poetry of the "Kuring-gai Rock Carvings"; and the reader, who obviously enjoys the world David Campbell is offering, is left tantalized, actively wanting to participate, and sensing a unique Australian ritual happening before his or her eyes.

The sequence is divided into three groups of eight four-line stanzas. The suggestion of art, and discipline, and authority is not too-far-distant from the surface of the poems. It is distant nonetheless. The carvings are offered as atoms of observation each one an isolate, gratuitously and fortuitously there, not belonging to a pattern or principle. It is more a painterly process—a kind of impressionism, almost a pointillism. The poems demand to be met at the moment of immediate perception, refusing to allow themselves to be translated into or transferred into some state or meaning other than their own being-what-they-are.

There is, however, a person - the person - present. The poet, while he has learned to surrender himself to his subject here, is essential to the condition of its being observed and experienced as a subject. The sequence has a process to it that belongs equally to the human as well as to the natural world. All the