

## ROY CAMPBELL'S TURN TO MITHRAS: MODERNISM AND THE CLASSICS

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*Abstract:* In the prose work, *Taurine Provence* (1932), and in his collection of poems, *Mithraic emblems* (1936), the South African poet Roy Campbell (1901–1957), heavily influenced by Franz Cumont's interpretation of Mithraism and its perceived influence on Christian myth and ritual, by Montherlant's novel *Les bestiaires* (1926), and by his experience of bullfighting in the south of France and in Spain, uses Greek and Roman mythology, together with Mithraic art and symbols, to explore emotional and spiritual crises in his personal life. In this article, I wish to offer an interpretation of the explicitly Mithraic poems in *Mithraic emblems* focusing on the nature of his Modernist engagement with the Classical tradition.

*Key words:* Campbell, Mithraism, Christianity, Classics, Modernism, reception

### *Introduction*

It is notoriously difficult to categorize writers and related creative artists in fields such as music, art, architecture and dance as characteristically 'Modernist', but there is one feature which seems common to Western cultural production internationally in the period between the World Wars: its relationship with Classical antiquity, which could be positive, negative or both, often shaped by a virulent rejection of Romanticism.

In *The Waste Land* (1922),<sup>1</sup> regarded by many literary theorists as quintessentially 'Modernist', T.S. Eliot opens his famous poem with a quotation from Petronius' *Satyricon*, and a dedication to Ezra Pound, which redeploys Dante's tribute to the twelfth century poet, Arnaut Daniel.<sup>2</sup> Layered intertextuality of this kind, which acknowledges famous predecessors and inserts the author,

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<sup>1</sup> James Joyce's *Ulysses* first appeared in the same year.

<sup>2</sup> 'Il miglior fabbro', 'the better craftsman', thus thanking Pound, a fellow 'Modernist', for hacking away at the poem in order to give it some kind of intellectual unity. For Modernism and Western cultural production, see, for instance, Macey 2001:257–259; Birch 2013:1–21, Goldschmidt 2024:6–10.

however obliquely, into a canon of creativity, incarnates two of the features of Modernism: the belief in the interpenetration of past and present, and the attempt by the creative artist to make sense of the texts Barthes refers to as the ‘tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.’<sup>3</sup>

Eliot introduces his own notes on *The Waste Land* by revealing that ‘the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance*’; in addition, he acknowledges his debt to ‘another work of anthropology...which has influenced our generation profoundly’, Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, in particular the two volumes *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*.<sup>4</sup> In this way, Eliot suggests how ‘vegetation’ deities in the ancient Greek (and Egyptian) religious traditions, together with the central notion of the necessary death of the divine figure for the life of the community to continue and flourish, were paralleled and transformed in later Christian myth and legend. The journey in search of the Holy Grail, like other literary journeys such as Homer’s *Odyssey* and Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, became powerful images of humankind’s oft-narrated quest: the search for emotional and spiritual meaning, on what Matthew Arnold memorably deemed our ‘darkling plain...where ignorant armies clash by night.’<sup>5</sup>

Another Modernist poet,<sup>6</sup> who knew T.S. Eliot well, corresponded with him and had a number of his works published by Eliot’s publishers Faber and Faber, was the distinguished South African poet,<sup>7</sup> Roy Campbell (1901–1957), who led in Europe, in the period between the World Wars, the kind of colourful, exuberant and painful life which merited, in his opinion, two autobiographies, *Broken record* (1934), published when he was thirty three, and *Light on a dark horse* (1951),

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<sup>3</sup> Barthes 1977:146.

<sup>4</sup> Eliot 1963:80. Sappho and Ovid (the *Metamorphoses*), and many later and more recent authors (for example, St. Augustine, Dante, Shakespeare, Webster, Milton, Baudelaire, Verlaine and Hesse), constitute the intertextual fabric of Eliot’s poem (1963:80–86).

<sup>5</sup> Extract from ‘Dover Beach’, Tyfield *et al.* 1983:183–184.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Minor’ according to Birch (2013:212). For the relationship between Eliot and Campbell, and Eliot’s influence on him, see *CW* III:293, 323; for Campbell’s review of *The collected works of T.S. Eliot* in *Voorslag* (Durban 1926), see *CW* IV:199–201. In this review, the young Campbell reveals the extent of his literary debt to Eliot: ‘To read Mr. Eliot’s poems is to realize the necessity for new values in modern life. There must be a great destruction in the human consciousness; we must gibe, sneer and ridicule our venerable reviewers into epileptic fits: we have plenty of muck to clear out of the way before we can start the great work of reconstruction’ (201). Cf. Pearce 2001:21–22, 86, 238, 248, 263. The abbreviation *CW* refers to *The collected works of Roy Campbell* (see bibliography).

<sup>7</sup> An identity interrogated by some Campbell scholars, *e.g.*, Leveson 1992:108–111, Birch 2013:220–221.

published shortly after he turned fifty.<sup>8</sup> In this article, I wish to concentrate on two significant and closely connected ‘Modernist’ crises in Campbell’s life: one emotional, the other spiritual, both of which involved passionate interest in Mithraism and what Campbell perceived as its *Nachleben* in the ritual of bullfighting in southern France and Spain.

In 1928, in response to his wife’s love affair with Vita Sackville-West, on whose estate (Long Barn) the poverty-stricken Campbells were living,<sup>9</sup> Campbell, wounded by C.S. Lewis’ sexist jibe that he had been cuckolded by a ‘woman’, fled to Provence.<sup>10</sup> When his wife, still clearly in love with Sackville-West, joined him there to save their marriage and nurse a physically ill Campbell back to health, the poet began work on a satire, *The Georgiad* (1929), in which he took revenge on his wife’s ex-lover and the Bloomsbury set.<sup>11</sup> Apart from their literary pretensions and posturings into which Campbell plunges his satirical knife with gusto, the poet sets out to expose what he considered to be the immoral promiscuity of the ‘Bloomsburys’, an immorality incarnated in the poem’s chief character, Androgyno.<sup>12</sup> A fusion of male poet and female muse, or as Campbell puts it, a ‘joint hermaphrodite of letters’, Androgyno bonks his way through the baronial hall, through the ‘tough old matriarchs of English letters’ and their ‘ageing nancy husbands’ over whom Georgiana (Sackville West) presides, ‘her gruff moustaches drooping from the mouth, one to the north, the other to the south.’ An urgent SOS is sent to Freud and Jung, and into this polysexual nest of Modernist relativism, there arrives a learned sexologist, who affords Campbell an opportunity to indulge

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<sup>8</sup> Both contain a Trumpian mixture of lies and half-truths, as Campbell himself admitted of *Broken Record* (Pearce 2001:155); he referred to *Light on a Dark Horse* as ‘my autobuggeroffery’ (Pearce 2001:300). For problems involved in writing a biography of Campbell, using these autobiographies as ‘sources’, see Alexander 1982:vii; cf. Coullie 2001:3–16; Meihuizen 2003b:196–205; Stobie 2004:44–47; Birch 2013:22–57. Meihuizen 2003b is particularly important for an interrogation of the genre of ‘autobiography’ itself.

<sup>9</sup> Campbell referred to Long Barn as ‘something between a psychiatry clinic and a posh brothel’ (Pearce 2001:101); cf. Smith 1972:67–68.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander 1982:78–86. Not his first visit, which took place in 1920–1921 (Alexander 1982:27–28), followed by a holiday in Provence in 1927. C.S. Lewis’ jibe was to haunt him further (Alexander 1982:128). Stobie (2004:83–94), in analysing ‘the stereotyped and crass representation of the significance of bisexuality in the lives of the Campbells’ (2007:94), interrogates Alexander’s depiction of the bisexual Campbell as the *victim* of his wife’s bisexuality; cf. also Stobie 2004:35–52.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander 1982:90–99, 114, 119. The poem was published in 1931 (*CW* 1:181–217).

<sup>12</sup> Alexander (1982:92), who attempts to tease out and explain the various paradoxes he sees in Campbell’s character, argues that ‘Androgyno is used by Campbell both as the embodiment of Georgian values, and as the representative of Campbell’s values: he is of Georgia and yet against it’.

his contempt for psychoanalysis. It is from this too, and his other *bêtes noires* – sexual ambiguity, socialism and Shavianism – that Campbell flees to Provence to find the energy, passion, power and stability of what another Modernist, Hemingway, dubbed ‘the old way of doing things.’<sup>13</sup> This he finds amongst the bull-rearing cattlemen and the bullfighting *gitanes* of the Camargue. It is no accident that *Taurine Provence* (1932), despite Campbell’s derogatory account of its genesis, was published soon after his satirical crucifixion of the Bloomsbury set.<sup>14</sup>

*Taurine Provence* (1932)<sup>15</sup>

‘All round this strange coast one is in touch with the pagan pre-history of Europe’, writes Campbell of the Camargue:<sup>16</sup> in his embrace of this pagan pre-history, he claims to have stumbled upon Mithras. Campbell’s turn to Mithras is not framed in a carefully structured academic argument: rather, as is typical of him, his interpretation of the antiquity of bullfighting and its modern function in Provence (especially in the Camargue and Languedoc), can be constructed from scattered and provocative comments in both *Taurine Provence* and his autobiographies, which reveal both his wide reading and his search for archaeological evidence.<sup>17</sup> I have attempted to impose some sort of Kantian order on these comments. His argument, if one can call it that, seems to be as follows.

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<sup>13</sup> Stoneback 1986:4–28, 1989:219. A perception prevalent throughout Hemingway’s well-known novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1941), set during the Spanish Civil War.

<sup>14</sup> Campbell, who had already written an article on bullfighting in 1929, referred to *Taurine Provence* as a ‘bloody pot-boiler...written like a Baedeker and copied out of a few French newspapers’, which he had to get drunk to write (Alexander 1982:121, cf. 143–144). In contrast, Campbell’s publisher, Desmond Harmsworth, advertised the work as a study of the ‘Philosophy technique and religion of the bullfighter’ (Alexander 1982:121). Taking the work seriously is certainly continued in the Alysamps Provençal Library’s edition of *Taurine Provence* with an introduction by Catherine Aldington (1994:7–8). Cf. Hemingway’s very serious *Death in the Afternoon*, also first published in 1932. Campbell offered a brief critique of it in the course of his review of Kenneth Tynan’s *Bull Fever* (1956) entitled ‘Tauromachy’ (CW IV:461–462, 581). For Hemingway’s unflattering opinion of Campbell, see Meyers 1985:xi–xii.

<sup>15</sup> The very year in which Uys Krige met Campbell for the first time in Martigues in Provence (Krige 1959:24).

<sup>16</sup> CW III:54. cf. CW IV:540: ‘The bull cult in Provence, which underlies the innovation of the Spanish Corrida, is very similar to the Oriental and Cretan cults’.

<sup>17</sup> Essential to Campbell’s poetic art, as is typical of ‘good’ Modernist verse, was to achieve a balance between scholarship and experience; cf. Campbell 1954:44 and Murray and Voss 1992:95, 99.

Campbell strongly believed that the art of bullfighting, or, as he called it, ‘taurine rites’ and the breeding of bulls for the ring, were as old as Minoan Crete and ancient Egypt: in fact he refers to the spirit of Apis himself surviving in the ‘spirit of the great bull deity of Provence.’<sup>18</sup> This is not surprising, as Campbell considered Provence to be that ‘only little bit of Africa in Europe’.<sup>19</sup> Why rites of such antiquity should have survived Campbell attributes to what he considers to be the close link between the bullfight, human life, the process of art-making and hence civilization itself; in short, ‘the attempt of the intellect to dominate the brute instincts and to impose its harmony on them’.<sup>20</sup> Hence his persistence in linking poetry and tauromachy: Apollo, after all, he reminds us, was a ‘manadier’, a cattle herder.<sup>21</sup> Highly developed amongst cattlemen and cavaliers, according to Campbell, is the kind of acute vision associated with poetry.<sup>22</sup>

Focussing on Provence itself, Campbell claims that the church of *Saintes Maries de la Mer* is the oldest Christian church in Europe,<sup>23</sup> which has a Mithraic altar ‘as its central foundation and it points to a time when Christ and Mithras may have been worshipped in the same church, perhaps in the same person...’.<sup>24</sup> Not only does Campbell link this church with Mithraism, but he also connects it to the *gitanes* of the Camargue, ‘who make excellent bullfighters and have produced some of the greatest *toreros*’.<sup>25</sup> The *gitanes*, devotees of the black Saint Sarah<sup>26</sup> who accompanied the Holy Marys of the Sea – Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the sister of Lazarus – as well as many of Christ’s ‘intimate

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<sup>18</sup> *CW* III:47, 73. For further discussion of Apis, see *Blue Bulls and Bullshine* (*CW* IV:554–555). Campbell notes that the Provençal name for the river Rhone is ‘Rouan’, meaning ‘bull’ (*CW* III:52, 600 n.33) and so refers to the river as the ‘great bull-deity of Provence’ (Alexander 1982:110), the ‘only decent thing that ever came out of Geneva’ (*CW* IV:573). Cf. Montherlant 1954:13, n.1.

<sup>19</sup> *CW* III:145 (in his autobiography *Broken Record*); cf. Alexander 1982:108.

<sup>20</sup> *CW* III:48, 69–70; one of the crises Campbell identified in modern life (Birch 2013:176).

<sup>21</sup> *CW* III:57–58. In Provençal, *une manade* refers to a herd of cattle or horses.

<sup>22</sup> *CW* III:66.

<sup>23</sup> *CW* III:48, 53. Elsewhere Campbell refers to this famous port as the ‘spiritual capital of the Camargue’ (*CW* III:317).

<sup>24</sup> *CW* III:48. In addition to Mithras, Campbell elsewhere adds Cybele and Diana of Ephesus as goddesses associated with this altar in the church’s crypt, which ‘may even be older than the crypts of Saint Peter and Saint Clement in Rome’; in addition Campbell claims to have been present at the unearthing of a Mithraeum adjoining Saint Clement’s house (*CW* III:318).

<sup>25</sup> *CW* III:54. On Nîmes (now in Occitanie) and Campbell’s claim that it has the ‘largest bullring in Europe and by far the most famous’, see *CW* IV:569–572.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. ‘To My Jockey’ in *ME*: ‘And there’s the black Saint Sarah / that lives beside the Sea / And prays for each vaquero / The same as you or me’. (*CW* I:296).

friends', including Martha, Lazarus and Joseph of Arimathea, on their voyage to France,<sup>27</sup> hold an annual festival at this church (which they call 'Ratis' meaning the 'letting of blood'), characterized by 'three or four days of coursing bulls in which there is plenty of "blood let" from rash amateurs'.<sup>28</sup>

Up until the reign of Julian (361–363 CE), Campbell states without any supporting evidence, Mithraism wrestled with Christianity for spiritual dominance in the Roman Empire. Roman soldiers called Mithras 'The Friend' and 'accused the Christians of having merely stolen Mithras, modified him, and tried to pass him off as their own'.<sup>29</sup> Campbell reproduces elements of Mithraic mythology from his own observation of Mithraic altars and bas-reliefs in Provence,<sup>30</sup> from Provençal literary sources such as Mistral's 'poem of the Rhone'<sup>31</sup> and from some dodgy raconteurs whose sobriety is questionable, and then adds interpretations of his own which forge a connection with Christian theology: for instance, Mithras sacrifices the bull with great sorrow to the Sun, 'his second self' – an identification which

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<sup>27</sup> Campbell includes the Virgin Mary in *Taurine Provence* (CW III:53). However, for a fuller list of the Marys, see CW III:317–318. This voyage supposedly took place after Christ's crucifixion in about CE 40. For the presence of various Marys at the crucifixion, see Mark 15:40 (Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of James the less and of Joses); Matthew 27:56 (the same two Marys); John 19:25 (Mary, his mother; his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene). For the problems which these Marys, Mary of Bethany and others have generated for historians of women in early Christianity, see Haskins 2005:3–32. *À propos* the arrival in Provence of the three Marys together with the resurrected Lazarus and his sister, Martha, Walter rightly observes that 'the tradition of the Marys is presented as a beautifully poetic legend that seems to be quite a tall tale with no historical basis, which, together with the cult associated with them, may well have originated in an 11<sup>th</sup> century account of the life of Mary Magdalene' (2014:154). However, the Roman people do indeed venerate Saint Sarah and hold an annual festival at this church, which is not the oldest in Europe. For possible pagan ancestresses of the Three Marys and the black Sarah, see Walter 2014:155–157.

<sup>28</sup> CW III:53, 318. See Montherlant's novel, *Les Bestiaires*, almost certainly the source of this claim: 'Avant de son nom actuel, dit le grand prêtre, en baisant la voix, le village des Saintes s'appelait Ratis, d'un mot gitan qui signifie: issu du sang...' ([1926] 1954:238). Campbell ignores the Latin *ratis* (boat), which is more prosaic etymologically, although in mediaeval legend the church's foundation was connected with the arrival of the Marys in France by boat.

<sup>29</sup> CW III:52–53.

<sup>30</sup> Cumont provides a list of Mithraic finds (*e.g.*, statues and dedicatory inscriptions) in the south of France (*MM*:69–70) with which Campbell may have been familiar; see similarly, Montherlant 1954:12–13, 237.

<sup>31</sup> *Mirèio* (CW III:600, n.34; cf. Alexander 1982:110). One of Mistral's poems deals specifically with the cult of Saint Sarah at *Saintes Maries de la Mer* (Walter 2014:156).

Campbell links to the Christian concept of the Trinity.<sup>32</sup> The notion that Mithras was ‘The Friend’ of Roman soldiers transmogrifies into the soldiers’ ‘god of comradeship’: it becomes clear as one reads comments such as this, that Campbell is determined to find links between Mithraism and Christianity, thus falling into the Herodotean error that earlier religious systems must necessarily constitute the origins of later systems.<sup>33</sup>

Defending bullfighting against criticism from the English, Campbell passionately contrasts the cowardice and hypocrisy of Anglo-Saxon hunting with the courage of the bullfighters whom he deems the ‘priests of Mithras’, ‘who are forced to put their victims to death from the most perilous position (before a trained and critical crowd) with the horns of the bull an inch off their entrails...’.<sup>34</sup> Tauromachy, he declares, is both the most ancient and the most *living* of all Aryan religions.<sup>35</sup> Not only is bullfighting in southern France and Spain a religious ritual which links the modern European to his / her pagan past, but it is an art form which happens to be a sport as well.<sup>36</sup> Campbell obliquely hints at the function of the preservation of such a ritual in a modern society with throw-away lines such as ‘it is better to have a blood-thirst against bulls than against one’s own kind’.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from the literary sources I mentioned, there is no doubt that Campbell’s understanding of Mithraism and its apparent tussle with Christianity in the last years of the Roman Empire was heavily influenced by the works of the Belgian scholar Franz Cumont (1868–1947), popularized in such translated collections as *The mysteries of Mithra* (1903; henceforth *MM*) and *The Oriental religions in Roman paganism* (1911, henceforth *ORRP*).<sup>38</sup> One of Cumont’s most important achievements was to rescue Mithraism and other ‘oriental religions’ from the righteous fervour of the early Christian apologists and imbue these religious systems with a moral respectability, thus dislodging Christianity from the moral high ground it had claimed for itself. It is not surprising that the Catholic Church prevented Cumont from being appointed to the chair of Roman History at the University of Ghent in 1910, especially in the wake of Pope Pius X’s encyclical of 1907 (*Pascendi*) which condemned ‘Modernism’ in the Church as a heresy.

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<sup>32</sup> *CW* III:53.

<sup>33</sup> Unlike Cumont: ‘...resemblances do not necessarily suppose an imitation’ (*MM*:194).

<sup>34</sup> *CW* III:48–49; Campbell seems quite confident of the claim that Julius Caesar, the founder of ‘European civilization’, was the first man in history to fight wild bulls with a lance on horseback (i.e. the first picador) (*CW* IV:521).

<sup>35</sup> *CW* III:49.

<sup>36</sup> *CW* III:48, 52.

<sup>37</sup> *CW* III:66.

<sup>38</sup> For biographical details and an assessment of Cumont’s work, which Campbell may have read, see Grant Showerman’s introduction in *ORRP*:v–xxiv.

From Cumont's popular works, which Campbell's major biographer Peter Alexander believes he had almost certainly read,<sup>39</sup> Campbell seems to derive the following ideas: that Mithraism was a form of Mazdaism which in some respects was closer to the nature worship of the Aryans,<sup>40</sup> evident, for instance, in the references to Mithras as *Sol Invictus* and in the astronomic symbolism which became part of the initiations into the mysteries; that bull sacrifice and baptism in bull's blood (the *taurobolium*) was involved at some stage in what Cumont calls the 'mythic drama performed in the grottoes of the Persian god';<sup>41</sup> that Mithraism propagated a cosmic dualism between the gods of good and evil, between the sun and the armies of demons and principalities; that Mithras was the protector of contracts and hence the guarantor of faith; that, in addition to respect for authority, important for a Roman soldier, Mithraism preached 'fraternity'. In short, Cumont believed that Mithraism 'infused a new vigour into the paganism of the Occident by introducing the imperative ethics of Persia',<sup>42</sup> precisely the kind of ethical certainty that Campbell, fleeing from what he perceived as the moral wreckage of the Bloomsburies, found attractive.

Although Cumont did not endorse Renan's much-quoted lines, 'if Christianity had been checked in its growth by some deadly disease, the world would have become Mithraic',<sup>43</sup> he was obviously interested in the hypothesis,<sup>44</sup> and so was Campbell. After all, in 308 Diocletian, not known for his Christian sympathies, dedicated a sanctuary to Mithras (at Carnuntum, capital of Upper

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<sup>39</sup> Alexander 1982:134, 261 n.8: 'Campbell's daughter Teresa recalls that her father owned "a book on Mithras" at this period' (= 1934–1935). See also Alexander 1982 n.12.

<sup>40</sup> Cumont *ORRP*:145. Cf. Cumont *MM*:2, 116–124.

<sup>41</sup> Cumont *ORRP*:151, 146, 208. Cf. Cumont *MM*:86–87. For more recent accounts of Mithraism in the Roman Empire, which critique Cumont's theories and interrogate the claim of 'Persian origins', see, for example, MacMullen 1981:118–130; Gordon 1996:VII:148–175; Beard *et al.* 1998 (henceforth BNP) 1:279–280; Gordon 2007:404: 'more than 54 Mithraic temples have been discovered since World War II, 33 of them since 1965'. Campbell is clearly indebted to a source now considered 'hopelessly outdated'.

<sup>42</sup> Cumont *ORRP*:155; for details, Cumont *ORRP*:151–155.

<sup>43</sup> Cumont *ORRP*:160. Hardly the case, if one considers the distribution and size of most *Mithraea* (BNP 1:301, 266; Burkert 1987:42). Cf. Gordon 2007:396–397 for larger *Mithraea*.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Montherlant 1954:167: 'Renan n'avait-il pas écrit que "si le christianisme eût été arrêté par quelque maladie mortelle, le monde eût été mithraïste?"' For the similarities and differences Cumont finds in the 'two rival religions' Christianity and Mithraism, see *MM*:190–199. He opines that 'many correspondences between the Mithraic doctrine and the Catholic faith are explicable by their common Oriental origin' (*MM*:194).

Pannonia on the Danube),<sup>45</sup> and proclaimed him ‘protector of the empire’ (*fautor imperii sui*) some four years before Constantine’s victory at the *pons Mulvius*; before him the emperors Commodus and Aurelian<sup>46</sup> had been initiated into the Mithraic mysteries and elevated the priests of the Invincible Sun above those of the moribund state religion of Republican and early Imperial Rome;<sup>47</sup> the apostate Julian (predictably) referred obliquely to Mithraic ‘commandments’, thus assimilating Mithras to the theodicy of Judaeo-Christianity.<sup>48</sup>

If scholars like Cumont, the veritable father of Mithraic studies, had provided the scholarly endorsement for Campbell’s ideas,<sup>49</sup> it was the world of French literature which persuasively mediated these ideas for him. In *Taurine Provence*, Campbell pays tribute to the influence of Baroncelli-Javon (1869–1943), who drew Campbell’s attention to Mithraic relics scattered throughout Provence,<sup>50</sup> and his nephew, the French novelist Henry de Montherlant (1895–1972). What attracted him to both these literary figures was the fact that they were experts in tauromachy and had, in Campbell’s words, ‘matar’-ed bulls’.<sup>51</sup> In addition, they confirmed Campbell’s notion that there really was a link between making literature and stamping human reason on brute instinct in the bullring. In 1926, Montherlant published *Les Bestiaires*, a semi-autobiographical account of his personal journey into bullfighting<sup>52</sup> which began at the age of thirteen in Bayonne (1909). The following year (1910) on an ‘illicit’ visit to Spain, Montherlant was initiated into tauromachy by a famous matador and in 1911 killed some young bulls in an amateur bullfight near Burgos – his name then appeared for the first time in French and Spanish newspapers, intrigued by a schoolboy *French* matador making a name for himself in *Spain*.<sup>53</sup> Alarmed by his ‘secret’ school holidays in Spain, his parents

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<sup>45</sup> Cumont *MM*:48, 89.

<sup>46</sup> Cumont *MM*:83, 87 (Commodus); 199–200 (Aurelian).

<sup>47</sup> Cumont *ORRP*:149, 204–205.

<sup>48</sup> Cumont *MM*:201–202.

<sup>49</sup> As well as standard works in the Modernist library, such as Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* and Frazer’s *Golden Bough*. For Campbell’s acquaintance with these, see Alexander 1982:134, 261 n.13 (Chapter X on Spain). There is no evidence that Campbell was acquainted with other Mithraic scholarship during this period, e.g., Saxl 1931, Nock 1937.

<sup>50</sup> *CW* III:57, 73–74; cf. Alexander 1982:134.

<sup>51</sup> *CW* III:57.

<sup>52</sup> Through the novel’s central character, Alban Bricoule, who uses his bullfighting career to embark on a spiritual journey from Catholicism to Mithraism, which he yearns to revive. A virile masculinity, eroticism and a very Mithraic misogyny are elements of this *rite de passage*.

<sup>53</sup> See extracts from newspapers and letters in the Gallimard edition of *Les Bestiaires* (1954:247–248). The first newspaper report about Montherlant’s bullfighting is from *Le Torero* (Nîmes, France), and dates from 1911.

banned him from returning until 1923; in the very year in which he wrote *Les Bestiaires* (1925), he was wounded by a bull's horn whilst practising his cape-work in a bull-rearing stud farm in Spain.<sup>54</sup> So well-known was the novelist in bullfighting circles in Spain that a semi-satirical *copla* (a popular ballad or lampoon) began to do the rounds about his bullfighting prowess, or perhaps lack of it.<sup>55</sup> Campbell almost certainly had read Montherlant's novel, which in my opinion is the source for much of the information about the church of *Saintes Maries de la Mer* and his extraordinary belief that the *gitanes* of the Camargue could be descendants of the lost people of Atlantis (along with the Basques, Egyptians and the American Indians).<sup>56</sup> After what he perceived as the limp-wristed masculinity of the male (and androgynous) Bloomsburies, Campbell was very attracted by the kind of masculinity Montherlant embodied – a man of action who bore the scars of his duel with death and yet had the literary sensitivity and spiritual depth to reflect on it in his novel, *Les Bestiaires*.

*Mithraic emblems* (1936)<sup>57</sup>

After *Taurine Provence*, Campbell's second (and major) turn to Mithras occurred with the publication in 1936 of a volume of verse entitled *Mithraic emblems*. By this stage the Campbell family had moved to Spain and both Campbell and his 'reformed' wife had converted to the Roman Catholic Church (1934), although the important Mithraic sonnets were composed in Provence in 1933, where Campbell was most under the spell of Mithras, some were penned in Spain and chart the path of Campbell's conversion, influenced by the lyrical works of the two most famous

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<sup>54</sup> For these details, see the publisher's introduction to Montherlant's novel (1954:7–8). Cf. Stoneback's interesting discussion of the possible influence of Montherlant on Hemingway: 'Hemingway would have been fascinated by Montherlant's treatment of Catholicism and Mithraism, profoundly engaged by Montherlant's sense of the convergencies of Catholicism and Mithraism in the bullring. He would have noted very carefully the way Montherlant dealt with the 'real old things', the 'real old' Catholicism as subsumptive of Mithraism and other pagan religions' (1999:188).

<sup>55</sup> *Les Bestiaires* 1954:8: 'Un Francés en la plaza / Toreaba un novillo. / Hizo tan bien la faena / que el bicho se maravilló'. ('A Frenchman was fighting a young bull in the arena. He did the job so well that the beast was astounded'; my translation).

<sup>56</sup> For Campbell's reference to *Les Bestiaires*, see *CW* III:57; cf. also *Les Bestiaires* 1954:237 (the thoughts of the high priest in Montherlant's novel) for similar claims about the *gitanes* of the Camargue.

<sup>57</sup> As Alexander rightly notes (1982:136), this title refers to a sequence of poems (*i.e.*, the Seven Sword-sonnets published in 1933) and then to a larger collection published in 1936. In this paper, I shall focus only on the explicitly Mithraic poems and, specifically, on the Classical allusions in them.

Spanish mystics – St. John of the Cross, of whose work Campbell is a fine translator, and St. Teresa of Avila.<sup>58</sup>

*Mithraic emblems* (henceforth *ME*) is prefaced by a citation from Mistral (mentioned above)<sup>59</sup> and by a note from Campbell himself which suggests how serious, personal and religious his turn to Mithras was:

...it is well known that many things in the Mithraic religion, even to the signing of the cross on the forehead, were as prophetic of the central and outstanding event in human history as the writings of Isaiah. Mithras has as much right therefore to Christian treatment as almost any other precursor, especially by a cowboy exercising his own profession. Mithras became the vassal of Christ, his cowboy in fact.<sup>60</sup>

As the photograph of Mithras slaying the bull on the dustcover of the first edition of *ME* reveals, Campbell was well acquainted with both the Mithraic bas-reliefs he had seen in the British Museum and on his visits to French museums, and with the narrative of the myth as devised by Cumont<sup>61</sup> and Montherlant.<sup>62</sup> In the absence of primary textual sources for Mithraic myths and liturgies, authored by

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<sup>58</sup> Alexander 1982:132–156, who offers interpretations of the more obscure sonnets in *ME*. Cf. Pearce 2001:158–161 for a more succinct appraisal. For Campbell, St. John of the Cross, and the Foyle Prize for Poetry for his translations (1952), see Pearce 2001:233, 246, 300–306, 310–311. For Mary Campbell and her devotion to St. Teresa of Avila, Pearce 201:176.

<sup>59</sup> The citation refers to a Mithraic relief at the Fontaine de Tourne depicting the following essential symbols: the bull, the scorpion, the dog, the snake, the raven, and the young man in a cape ‘crested with the bonnet of liberty’ (*CW* I:243).

<sup>60</sup> *CW* I:244. For the fusion of Mithras and Jesus Christ, see Cumont *MM*:135–138, 146, 156, 158–160; for similarities with Christianity, *MM*:190–200. The influence of Montherlant’s novel on Campbell continues in *ME*. For the survival of Mithraism and taumachy in the Catholic Church, see *Les Bestiaires* 1954:168–170; for the hero’s identification of Christ with the Sun, 170–175; for the essential Cumontian dogma of both Mithraism and Christianity, that death and blood are essential prerequisites for life, see the lyrical address to the cattleman/cowboy in Provençal (244): ‘...Fau de sang e la mort pèr coungreia la vido / Lou Creatour meme a souffert’. (Blood and death are needed to engender life; the Creator himself suffered’; my translation).

<sup>61</sup> For Campbell’s acquaintance with Mithraic iconography and, in particular, the bas-reliefs in the British Museum, see Alexander 1982:134, 261 n.11; for Cumont’s and thus Campbell’s version of the Mithras myth, Alexander 1982:134–135, 261, n.12. In *Taurine Provence*, Campbell (1932:14) excitedly tells the reader about a Mithraic altar and a statue of the emperor Julian in the British Museum (and where to find them!). Cf. Alexander 1982:261, n.11; Hilton 2007:152.

<sup>62</sup> *Les Bestiaires* 1954:71–72.

‘Mithraists’,<sup>63</sup> it is necessary here to recap the essential features of the bas-reliefs according to Cumont, which provided Campbell with a reservoir of powerful symbols for his poems in *ME*.<sup>64</sup>

In the central frame of many of these reliefs is the image of Mithras, wearing his iconic Phrygian cap, stabbing the reclining bull in what appears to be a cave.<sup>65</sup> He looks away from the bull’s death throes, as if he kills the bull reluctantly. The tail of the bull is in the process of turning into ears of corn.<sup>66</sup> At the top of the central image is a raven perched on Mithras’ cloak; as the gaze of the viewer moves downwards, one sees two similarly attired torchbearers, Kautopates and Kautes, one holding his fiery torch aloft, the other pointing his torch to the ground;<sup>67</sup> at the

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<sup>63</sup> There are now, of course, texts and inscriptions with which Campbell was not familiar, e.g., the graffiti (hymns or prayers?) from the Santa Prisca Mithraic sanctuary in Rome (BNP 2:316–319; Martin 1987:118). He died shortly after the publication of the first volume of Vermaseren and Essen’s magisterial *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae* and would, I suspect, have been alarmed by post-Cumontian interpretations of Mithraic iconography, especially those which concentrate on astronomical-astrological hypotheses which completely invalidate his Cumont-inspired thesis. For a sensible, perceptive engagement with Cumont, which endorses a version of the astronomical-astrological interpretation, see Gordon’s collection of articles (1996). Cf. Gordon 2007:393–394 for his dismissal of the Mithraic ‘literature of decipherment’ (the ‘star-map’ allegories) which haunt ‘the wackier corners of cyberspace’.

<sup>64</sup> For representations of the tauroctony in Cumont *MM*: Louvre 21; British Museum 39; Neuenheim 55; Hedderheim 117; Apulum 139; Bologna 151; for the communion 159, 176. In his novel, Montherlant even manages to refer to the Neuenheim relief in the course of Alban’s study of Mithraism and the application of details to Alban’s own (fictional) life (1954 71).

<sup>65</sup> Cumont comments on the derivative nature of this image: ‘Owing to the Phrygian cap, the resemblance of the face to that of Alexander, and the imitation of the *motif* of the Classical Greek group of Nike sacrificing a bull – all characteristics of the Diadochian epoch, – the original of all the works of this type has been attributed to an artist of Pergamon’ (*MM*:21, 81, 192 (The Dying Alexander), 210. Cf. Gordon 1996:IV:65–72 for his critique of this attempt to derive the image of the Mithraic tauroctony from Hellenistic originals, and his inference that the ‘new popularity’ of the Nike motif on public monuments of the Trajanic period in Rome itself shaped its distinctive features.

<sup>66</sup> For Cumont, not the tail but the spinal cord (*MM*:136–137); see Wagenvoort 1980:148–165 for the tail of both the bull and horse as ‘promoting fertility and strength’ in a number of rituals and associated iconographies (the Roman October Horse, the Mithraic tauroctony and the Thracian rider-god). For *cauda* as both ‘tail’ and ‘penis’, see Wagenvoort 1980:153.

<sup>67</sup> For Cumont, not partial to ‘sidereal interpretations’, which he considered ‘more ingenious than rational’, the two ‘*dadophoroi*’ possibly represented the morning (Venus) and the evening star (Hesperus) or the sun entering the constellation of Taurus and so marking the

bottom of the image, level with the feet of Mithras, is a large scorpion, its pincers around the bull's genitals; below this is a large snake stretching the full length of the image and, in the corner, a cup (a krater) with the head of a lion on top of it.<sup>68</sup> Clustered around the central frame, certainly in the Neuenheim relief, is a series of fourteen images which appear to represent elements in the narrative of a myth: on the left a Persian with a globe;<sup>69</sup> a man asleep (Kronos/Zervan?); this man gives a sceptre to another (Zeus/Ahura-Mazda?); a man (Mithras?) appears to be in the process of being born from a rock. On the top there are images linking Mithras with creation and the natural order: a wind god, Mithras making fire<sup>70</sup> and then shooting at a rock to make rain; Mithras getting into the chariot of Helios, the sun god; the Moon goddess setting; Mithras shooting at the rock, a fig-tree (?) and then another bust of a wind god. Clustered on the right are four images of the bull and its fate: the bull grazing on its own, Mithras carrying the bull; Mithras riding the bull heavenwards and, finally, Mithras dragging the bull on his back to the cave. The latter image seems to lead naturally into the dominant scene of the stabbing of the bull by Mithras at the centre of the relief (the tauroctony).<sup>71</sup> Other details present, for instance, in yet another Mithraic relief in the Louvre, include a dog licking the drops of blood as they emerge from the bull's wounds and an inscription in Latin on the carcass of the bull immediately below Mithras' knee: DEO SOLI·IN VICTO MITHR. [For the God, Sol (the Sun), Invincible Mithras]; on the left of the sword's hilt is the inscription NAMA SEBESIO [Hail, Sebesius!].<sup>72</sup> The tauroctony in this

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beginning of spring and then traversing Scorpio to announce the return of winter (*MM*:129–130).

<sup>68</sup> Perhaps for the collection of semen; see Burkert 1987:106–107.

<sup>69</sup> Cumont fervently believed that a distinctive version of Persian Mazdaism, influenced by Chaldean theology, shaped the mythology and beliefs of Mithraism, assimilating Ahura Mazda to Bel, Anahita to Ishtar, and Mithras to Shamash, the solar god. 'For that reason, Mithras was commonly called *Sol Invictus* in the Roman mysteries...' (*ORRP*:146, cf. 65, 145 – Mithras as the 'genius of light'); for the image, see *MM*:55.

<sup>70</sup> Firmicus Maternus regarded the Persians as worshippers of fire, in contrast to the Egyptians (water), Phrygians (earth), the Syrians and Carthaginians (air), which the Persians considered superior to the other elements (*ORRP*:205).

<sup>71</sup> A technical term, invented by scholars of Mithraism, which Gordon detests, but which he acknowledges is 'sometimes unavoidable' (2007:394). 'Mithraism', 'Mithraists', and 'Mithraicists' are also scholarly inventions; Burkert 1987:47.

<sup>72</sup> For Cumont the phrase was obscure and 'never yet been interpreted' (*MM*:151), but for the meaning of *nama* (Hail!) and *nabarze* (*s*) (victorious) in Old Persian, see Gordon 1996:IV:48; 2007:401; *BNP*:1:279 (the former meaning is certain; the latter probable). Outdated Greek and Latin dictionaries are misleading. *E.g.*, *LSJ* s.v. *νομα* (anything flowing; *LSJ* give examples of water, streams, rivers, tears, honey and fire); *LS* s.v. *nama*, a fluid, a liquid; the Latin equivalent of the Greek (*LS* actually cites the *Nama Sebesio* inscription).

depiction is clearly set in a cave, with Helios (Sol) in the chariot of the sun both rising and setting soars above the cave. What is striking in this relief is the relationship between Mithras and the bull: Mithras' free hand rests on the bull's muzzle and the bull's expressive eye looks directly into his. Cumont's version of the myth, which Campbell almost certainly knew, includes other symbols not in these reliefs: the vine which emerges from the blood of the bull, and the ant, sent along with the scorpion and the snake as the messengers of evil, 'to consume the body-fluids of the stricken beast'.<sup>73</sup>

From what Campbell saw in reliefs like these and read in Cumont and Montherlant, it is not difficult to see how he concluded that Mithraism foreshadowed or echoed a number of important beliefs in Christianity – a sacrificial death at its centre, and a resurrection, redemptive for humankind. From the carcass and blood of the dead bull, there springs life (the wheat, the vine) and in the Roman Catholic *sacrifice* of the Mass, there is, at the heart of the Eucharistic liturgy, the consecration of bread and wine, its 'transubstantiation' into the body and blood of Christ, and the shared communion meal in memory of the Last Supper.<sup>74</sup> For life to continue, perhaps too for winter's death to be transformed into spring's renewal, the bull has to die, just as Christ died to redeem humankind from its manifold sins and weaknesses – the destructive evil symbolized in the Mithraic reliefs by the snake, the scorpion and the lion.<sup>75</sup> As Hemingway seemed to believe that the vestiges of the pagan religious past were clearly evident in the Spanish version of Catholicism, which attracted him, so Campbell, as Alexander convincingly argues, began to approach Christianity, and especially Catholicism, through Mithraism and bullfighting, which he regarded as its 'living remnant'.<sup>76</sup>

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*Sebesio* may be cognate with the nouns/adjectives containing the 'seb/sab-' prefix, e.g., Sebazius (Sabazius, Seadius, Sabadius, used of both Bacchus and Jupiter, *LS* s.v. Sabazius I, II), Sebastos; cf. *LSJ* s.v. Σαβάζιος (and its variant spellings), 'a Phrygian deity', cf. Hebrew Sabbath, Sabaoth. See *Orphic Hymns* 48 (Sabazios), 'Phrygia's lord' (48.5), the son of Kronos, who sewed Dionysus in his thigh. For evidence of extensive syncretism in *Mithraea*, see MacMullen 1981:92–93.

<sup>73</sup> Alexander 1982:135; see *ORRP*:152–161 for Cumont's account of the conflict between the forces of good and evil in Persian Mazdaism, which he believed shaped the morality of Mithraism as the Romans practised it. See Gordon 2007:400 for the 'sense of belonging to a moral elite which fueled the process of Mithraic missionizing'.

<sup>74</sup> Chapman 1994:297–319.

<sup>75</sup> For a critique of the possibility of a suffering god myth in the mysteries of Mithras, see Burkert 1987:76.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander 1982:135–143; see Smith 1972:127, 135 for the bull in *ME* representing either 'the self-hood and earthbound interests whose sacrifice leads to newer, brighter life on a

Apart from the rich symbolism in the reliefs, Campbell, in typical Modernist vein, linked the image of Mithras' sword in the relief, to representations of the Virgin Mary and her Seven Sorrows, in which Mary's heart is pierced by Seven Swords.<sup>77</sup> The number seven is invested with mystical significance in both Mithraism and Christianity: the man being initiated into the Mithraic mysteries should go through seven initiatory grades,<sup>78</sup> each one matching up, astrologically, with one of the seven planets and their seven heavens, through which the souls of the dead initiates had to ascend [to Saturn, the highest in Mithraic cosmology], and, more prosaically, the seven days of the week.<sup>79</sup> As Mithras became identified more closely with Helios/Sol, his seven-rayed halo framed images of him;<sup>80</sup> Christ's last words on the cross (seven), and, later, in Christian theology, the seven sacraments of the church, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the seven deadly sins, suggest Cumont's version of the Mazdaist struggle between the forces of good and evil Campbell saw depicted in the various tauroctonies. Even in the ritual of Spanish bullfighting, which Campbell believed was the 'living remnant' of the Mithraic

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spiritual plane, or the sacrificial victim to the sun whose blood represents the possibility of regeneration'.

<sup>77</sup> The feast of the Seven Sorrows (Dolours) of Mary was established by the Catholic Church in 1423. The Seven Sorrows were regarded as the prophecy of Simeon ('a sword will pierce your soul', Luke 2.15), the flight into Egypt, Jesus' three days' absence, his carrying of the cross, his crucifixion, the descent from the cross and his entombment. Representations of the Virgin Mary with her heart pierced by seven swords were common in Spain when the Campbells moved there: even the village church in Altea, in which the Campbells were received into the Catholic Church in 1935, contained such a representation (Alexander 1982:155–156, 262, n.22). [cf. 'And splits in seven solar fires / All that remains of you or me' in 'The Circle' (CW 1:275)]

<sup>78</sup> According to Cumont, Corax (Raven), Cryphius/Gryphus (Occult), Miles (Soldier), Leo (Lion), Perses (Persian), Heliodromos (Runner of the Sun), Pater (Father) (MM 152). Cf. BNP 2:305 for the Ostia mosaic and its grades; the second is translated as 'Male Bride', a successor to Merkelbach's 'Embryo' (Martin 1987:117). Cf. Burkert 1987:42, 83, 98–99 (following Merkelbach, Burkert translates *Nymphus* as 'chrysalis'.) For the pairing of Raven with Mercury, *Bridegroom* with Venus, *Soldier* with Mars, *Lion* with Jupiter, *Persian* with the Moon, *Runner in the race of the Sun* (or *Messenger of the Sun*) with the Sun, *Father* with Saturn, see Gordon 1996:III:97; 2007:398–399; BNP 2:319.

<sup>79</sup> Cumont *ORRP*:126, 270 n.54; *MM*:120, 144, 154–155; for the seven planets in a bas-relief, see *MM*:151; cf. *MM*:8–9, for the Persian dedication of the seventh month to Mithras, and BNP 2:312–313 for seven-stepped staircases in some *Mithraea*, and the soul's ascent.

<sup>80</sup> Frankopan (2015:74) refers to pagan gods in a shrine in Mecca (guarded by the Quraysh, the tribe to which Muhammad belonged) in the period before the domination of Islam: the most important idol was a red agate statue of a man 'with a golden right hand with seven divinatory arrows around it'. The cross-cultural significance of the number seven in various mythologies and rituals is striking.

tauroctony, the *torero* eventually killed the tormented bull by rising to his full height and stabbing the bull in the heart by aiming at a spot behind his neck.<sup>81</sup>

As if this were not enough, Alexander<sup>82</sup> suggests another French literary influence on Campbell, that is, Apollinaire's poem *La chanson du mal-aimé* (the song of the man badly loved) which contains a section entitled *Les sept épées* (the seven swords), inspired by the poet's suffering after his beloved Annie refused to accept his proposal of marriage. What is notable about this poem is its central theme: the deep wounds of unrequited love which, in the poet's own words, can be healed.<sup>83</sup> As a translator, Campbell was familiar with the poetry of Apollinaire<sup>84</sup> and in his seven-sword sonnet sequence in *ME*, clearly borrows from Apollinaire the distinctive metals of the seven swords, as well as their specific colours, linked to the seven colours of the rainbow and refracted sunlight.<sup>85</sup> As Campbell believed that he too had been *mal-aimé*, especially when his wife was unfaithful to him, the sword could not only symbolize his emotional wounds, but also provide him with a symbol which crystallized what particularly attracted him to Spain: the role of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism, bullfighting, and the possibility of Mithraic survivals.<sup>86</sup> As Alexander perceptively comments, '[t]he "swords", then, are symbolic of suffering, the suffering of the bull, of Mithras, of the Virgin, and of

<sup>81</sup> The *estocade*. Alexander 1982:136.

<sup>82</sup> 1982:136 (following Smith 1970), but see Krige 1960:29–30. Cf. Smith 1972:103–117, for the influence of French poets on Campbell's technique, imagery and conceits, especially during his Provençal period.

<sup>83</sup> Published in 1909 (but composed in 1903–1904), the poem has an interesting note at the beginning: 'I sang of this romance in 1903 without knowing that my love resembles the lovely Phoenix – if it dies one evening, the morning sees its rebirth'. Apollinaire here referred to Annie's successor in his affections, Marie Laurencin (1987:49). Cf. Krige 1959:28 for Campbell's enthusiasm about this poem in 1932.

<sup>84</sup> For Campbell's translation of Apollinaire's *Les Bestiaires*, see *CW* II:284–285: 'Sorrow of a Star' 286; n.4 p. 481. Intriguingly, Campbell classified himself as a 'bestiary' (*CW* IV:532).

<sup>85</sup> The first sword (silver), the second (a lovely joyous rainbow), the third (a feminine blue), the fourth (green and gilded), the fifth (as green as the cypress in a cemetery which serves as a torch at night), the sixth (the metal of glory), and the seventh (the dead rose). Apollinaire (1987:58–59) links each of these swords and their colours to an emotional state and specific memory of his love affair which wounds him as he moves from sword to sword.

<sup>86</sup> Murray and Voss were perhaps right to note in the 1990s that, from a South African perspective, the 'highly personalised, militant religiosity of *Mithraic emblems* (1936) is strangely hollow in its social concerns' (1992:99), but that is not the case in 2024, in which the GNU (the Government of National Unity) includes a number of parties and members whose political and social programmes issue from a 'highly personalised militant religiosity', – Christian, Islamic and Indigenous African.

Campbell, but it is suffering that brings enrichment, creativity, forgiveness, and illumination'.<sup>87</sup>

What specifically Mithraic images, symbols, ideas and rituals surface in Campbell's *Mithraic emblems* (1936), and how does he appropriate and transform them?<sup>88</sup> Before the 'Seven Sword' sonnets (1933), are three programmatic poems which suggest how Campbell intends to appropriate Mithraism, located, both in the (inter)textual, and the visual.

Rooting Campbell's appropriation of Mithraism in the poet's biography, based on his autobiographies, results in a number of interpretative problems. Despite the dubious historicity of many of Campbell's claims about his early life,<sup>89</sup> there is no doubt that in his autobiographies he constructs a *persona* or several *personae*: when I refer in the ensuing discussion to 'Campbell' and his appropriation of Mithraism, it is to these *personae* and the ideologies shaping them. Furthermore, despite the extent of Campbell's intertextuality, which smacks of Barthes' 'tissue of quotations', Campbell is not interested in Eliot's 'extinction of personality', or its theoretical successor, the 'death of the author': like Birch, I believe that his 'egotistical gestural discourse' is simply too overwhelming for this Modernist concern.<sup>90</sup>

In the opening poem, 'The Altar', Campbell focuses on the image of a shrine wreathed by 'Mithraic symbols', on the altar of which are slain not the 'great snow-shouldered beasts', but 'my years', and these are years which are painful, the days 'squandered'.<sup>91</sup> Immediately, thus, in the sonnet at the beginning of the collection, Campbell signifies to the reader<sup>92</sup> that he presupposes acquaintance with the central image of Mithraic iconography, the tauroctony,<sup>93</sup> the depiction perhaps imagined at the very 'shrine' in the crypt of *Saintes Maries de la Mer*, in order to explore his

<sup>87</sup> Alexander 1982:136.

<sup>88</sup> *CW* I:245–252.

<sup>89</sup> The historicity of the 'facts' may not be as important or revelatory as the 'fictions' which reveal, in Meihuizen's words, 'vital and central truths about the subject' (2003b:204).

<sup>90</sup> Barthes 1977:146, Birch 2013:222.

<sup>91</sup> Campbell may well have been acquainted with the significance of 'boundless Time' (Kronos, Aeon, or Saeculum) in what Cumont calls Mithraic 'doctrine', see *MM*:105–110.

<sup>92</sup> As Mithraism and its central tauroctony were intended for men only, one presupposes that by the 'reader' Campbell has a male reader in mind, one rather like himself? Cf. Coullie 2001:11–14 on the 'implied reader'.

<sup>93</sup> The killing of bulls, which he imbues with the mythical aura of Europa's white bull: 'each great snow-shouldered beast', 'like flower-fed bulls', fed on 'lilies' (*CW* I:245). For the snowy whiteness of Europa's bull (Jupiter), whom she garlanded and fed with flowers, see *Ov. Met.* 2.852–853, 861, 867–868. Cf. Moschus's *Europa* (Ovid's Hellenistic model) for the flowers in the meadow (63–71), for the bull's whiteness and the silver circlet of the crescent moon between his horns (84–88). Campbell's bull's throne is of 'silver fire'.

emotional and spiritual suffering, his journey of despair and cathartic transformation. Aware of the ambiguity central to Cumont's interpretation of the Mithraic tauroctony, that the killing of the bull brings life and growth, Campbell exploits the imagery to suggest not only that he is both victim and agent of this suffering ('these squandered days'), but also that there will be redemption: the years of pain and wastage will 'expire' as a result of the killing of the beast.

In the second poem (1933), Campbell fuses the Mithraic image with that of the splendid colours of a Spanish bullfight – 'the red veronicas', the cape, the scarlet of its fold – as if the tauroctony were preceded by the choreographed ritualism of the *corrida* in which human skill and cunning master brute energy. This, however, is no mortal fight, but one of cosmic dimensions; the poem is entitled 'The Solar Enemy'. Campbell was well acquainted with the role of Helios (Sol) in Mithraic iconography. In *Taurine Provence* he (following Cumont) charts the career of Mithras, who sacrifices, with 'great sorrow' the bull to the Sun, his 'second self', with whom he is eventually identified, crowned by a seven-rayed halo; furthermore the torch bearers, Kautes and Kautopates, and the chariot of the Sun frame, within many representations of the dead bull, the rising and setting of the sun, the appearance and disappearance of light. In Campbell's poem, the 'red veronicas' are of light; the cape is 'a roaring gale of gold and the 'scarlet of its outward fold / is of a dawn beyond the world'.

So who or what is the Solar *enemy*? In Campbell's sonnet, the enemy is twofold: the Sun is the enemy of the poet's 'inward night' and of the stricken bull in its final agony, which may *view* through 'a sky of intellectual fire' its aspiration 'to sun the broad Aeolian blue'. As the death of the bull may result in the illumination of revelation and metamorphosis,<sup>94</sup> so the poet's heart will be lit, like the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, run through with the seven swords, 'its rays of fire'. By means of this dense and complex imagery,<sup>95</sup> Campbell struggles to articulate the effects of both Mithraism and Christianity on his years of suffering and the darkness of his inner being, exposed by the light of revelation. Christ too is conceived of as the world's light, and at the centre of Christianity there is also a redemptive sacrifice of suffering and the promise of new life. In fact, this sonnet looks forward to what was originally the final poem in *ME*, 'To the Sun', important

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. John 3:19–20, which may well be one of Campbell's intertexts: '...the light came into the world and human beings loved the darkness more than the light; for their deeds were evil. For anyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not enter into it, lest his deeds be exposed by the light'; my translation.

<sup>95</sup> For an interpretation which views both the bull and the sky as fellow victims, thus linking death and redemption 'in the multiple guises of solar light', see Birch 2013:192.

as *Sol Invictus* in later Roman versions of Mithraism.<sup>96</sup> In this less allusive sonnet, however, Campbell addresses the sun as Christ's 'mirror and shield', which the poet desires to use as a meditative conduit to Him;<sup>97</sup> in the refracted colours of sunlight, Campbell, using once more the colours of Apollinaire's swords, fuses the seven sword imagery with episodes in the life of Christ as recorded in the Gospels.<sup>98</sup> This anticipates the climax of the poet's spiritual journey and his ultimate fusion of Mithraism and Christianity.

Significantly, Campbell entitled the third of the programmatic poems in *ME* 'Illumination', the only poem in the original collection to begin with 'I', as if Campbell (or the poetic voice) is now ready to articulate his profound reaction to the revelation, which expresses all the intense emotion of a *horror religiosus*. Motionless, the poet trembles 'at the height to which you lift my dreaming gaze',<sup>99</sup> presumably to look down on the 'white abrupt sierras of my days', thus continuing the image of light revealing the futility of his 'squandered days', transformed by the metaphor into a series of jagged peaks, eroded by elemental forces. 'White' looks forward to the 'seven hues of white elision' in the following sonnet suggesting that, as the poet journeys to self-knowledge, the light of the 'hyacinthal star', the addressee in 'Illumination' exposes the jagged peaks of his 'inward night', bleached of the colours of pain and joy which he will restore in the Seven-sword sequence.<sup>100</sup>

In the introductory sonnet to the seven-sword sequence, Campbell, evoking the arcane visions of the Mithraic mysteries, imagines the swords as the 'radii of your silver gyre', perhaps an allusion to Yeats' apocalyptic 'The Second Coming'

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<sup>96</sup> *CW* 1:267; *Cumont MM*:186–188.

<sup>97</sup> 'Meditative' in the sense of *θεωρία* as the verbs 'gaze, see, behold' in this sonnet reveal.

<sup>98</sup> 'The Blue Man walking on the Sea; / The Green beneath the summer tree / Who called the children; then the Gold, / With palms; the Orange, flaring bold / With scourges; Purple in the garden / (As Greco saw): and then the Red / Torero (Him who took the toss/And rode the black horns of the cross – / But rose snow-silver from the dead!' (*CW* 1:267). For the poem's position as the last in *ME*, see n.35 (*CW* 1:644).

<sup>99</sup> Rather like the psalmist in Psalm 121 (120); 'Lift thine eyes, o lift thine eyes to the mountains', one of the songs of ascent (Psalms 120–134). cf. Baruch 5.5 ('Arise, Jerusalem, and stand on the height').

<sup>100</sup> Campbell himself notes that 'the seven colours of the rainbow, when painted on a swiftly revolving disc, combine to form the purist whiteness' (*CW* 1:643, *ME* n.4).

(1920),<sup>101</sup> the spokes of the prophet Ezekiel's wheel,<sup>102</sup> and the seven strings of the 'poet's lyre', their rainbow colours elided into the whiteness of the sun's fire, which espies in our 'heavy clods', 'the kindred seeds of fire'. This heady blend of religious and poetic symbols suggests the possibility of spiritual awakening in the 'heavy clods' and a relationship with the transcendent (Helios-Christ) through the pain inflicted by the swords, recollected by chiselling it into verse. In the final fused images of this sonnet 'the cold shell of the rock' recalls the Neuenheim relief in which Mithras shoots at the rock,<sup>103</sup> perhaps for rain, and 'the red yolk of the phoenix-cock', the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.<sup>104</sup> Campbell could not have written a more deeply personal and suggestive preface to the Seven Sword sequence, which loosely mirrors the seven stages of Mithraic initiation, overlaid with Apollinaire's seven swords and the relationship between the metals from which they were fashioned and the poet's emotional states.

As 'The First Sword' was written early in 1933, after five years in Provence, the references to a 'woman's beauty' and the fight for love immediately suggest

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<sup>101</sup> 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer... Surely some revelation is at hand... the indignant desert birds'. (Tyfield *et al.* 1983:223–224). Cf Alexander 1982:135: '[Mithraism] provided his [Campbell's] poetry with the sort of framework of personal mythology which Yeats had sought and found in the occult' – a typically Modernist move.

<sup>102</sup> In the Book of Ezekiel, the prophet's vision begins at 1.4 with the creation of the four human-animal creatures in the midst of fire; in 1.15–21 the prophet describes the four wheels on the earth besides each of the creatures; they gleamed like crystals, their construction like wheels within wheels. The four wheels had rims and spokes, and their rims were full of eyes (v. 18). Wherever the creatures went, so did the wheels, for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels (v.20); compare the eight spokes of the Buddhist wheel.

<sup>103</sup> For Mithras born from a rock, see the figure in *MM*:130. For the 'genius of light' compared to the immovable rock, 'emblem of Christ, upon which the Church was founded', *MM*:194. For a stimulating exploration of the signification of the *petra genatrix*, 'sexless generation', Mithras' hatred of women, and the birth of his son, Diorphos, from Mithras' masturbation on a rock, see Gordon 1996:V:54–64.

<sup>104</sup> For the phoenix contriving her own death to be born again and rise resplendent from the ashes of her former mortal self, see the *De Ave Phoenix* (in Latin elegiacs), attributed perhaps incorrectly to Lactantius: the *OLD* (s.v. *Phoenix*) notes that 'there are strong hints of Christian authorship' (1996:1174). The allusions to Christ's death and resurrection are obvious (see, for instance, the poem in Old English, 'The Phoenix'.) In the *De Ave Phoenix*, red, the colour of Phoebus' dawn, is associated with the bird before her death and resurrection; after this the colours of pomegranate seeds, poppy leaves, yellow metal (her tail), emerald green and rose-red (her claws) characterize her plumage. 'She dies to live' (*De Ave Phoenix*) is the theological idea which, according to both Cumont and Campbell, is central to Mithraism and Christianity.

the poet's stormy relationship with his wife, Mary, and his desperate struggle to win her back, dramatically conveyed by the image of a dying dolphin angrily fighting for its life. Campbell expresses both the strength and visceral intensity of this relationship – the first sword is made of 'lunar crystal', otherworldly but tempered in the poet's blood. That Campbell hopes that this struggle will end in new life, is perhaps suggested by the dolphin metaphor: in Classical mythology and Roman funerary art, dolphins are associated with rescue and the art of poetry, Delphic Apollo (Campbell's *manadier* par excellence), and life after death.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore the final image, 'and heroes fought upon the strand', reminds us of stage three on the journey of Mithraic initiation, *Miles* ('The Soldier'), who, according to Cumont, 'formed part of the sacred militia of the invincible god and waged war under his directions on the powers of evil'.<sup>106</sup>

This militaristic imagery is abruptly succeeded in 'The Second Sword' (1933) by images of fabled calm, halcyon days, when the sea is 'waveless' and the 'soft swell in slumber rolls'. The sword itself is 'steeped', by the spirits of the sea, in the light of a 'low blue flame' (Apollinaire's third sword colour), presumably at the winter solstice, when the sun's light is at its weakest: the only being in the poem which moves in this idyllic evening scene, with its epic allusions, is a halcyon in flight, 'swift and free', which in the sonnet's final four lines becomes a 'lonely bird', 'whose sword of air / is hilted with the evening star', traditionally Venus, the light bringer.<sup>107</sup> This bird, which should be breeding in its nest on the becalmed seas, 'has slain upon the shrine of peace / the daily slaving forms I wear'. With the free flight of the bird, Campbell (the sonnet's 'I?') contrasts his 'daily slaving

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<sup>105</sup> For a dolphin rescuing a Greek lyric poet and a Roman elegist's mistress, see Herodotus 1.24. 1–25 (Arion) and Propertius 2.26a. 17–18 (the drowning Cynthia); for Apollo taking on the shape of a dolphin to acquire priests for his oracular site and for the author's conviction that the title Apollo Delphinios and the toponym, Delphi, are both derived from δελφίς (dolphin), see the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 400–545; for the dolphin in Roman funerary art as indicative of the cult of Neptune in riverine cities, and as a symbol of the journey to the after-life, like Tritons and Nereids, see Pilopović 2003 and the *OCD* 1999:180–181, s.v. art, funerary Roman. I doubt whether Campbell was acquainted with Cumont's *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* (1942).

<sup>106</sup> *MM*:154.

<sup>107</sup> For Venus as the light-bringer, who presides over *Nymphus* (the androgynous male bride wearing a *flammeum*), the second stage of initiation into the Mithraic mysteries, symbolically associated with ambiguous states such as bisexuality, largely because of her birth myth, see Gordon 1996:V:50–57. Highly pertinent to both Campbell and his wife, but Campbell, dependent on Cumont's version of Mithraism, would have known of the Cumontian *Gryphus*, not *Nymphus*.

forms', presumably the inauthentic quotidian versions of himself.<sup>108</sup> once again, the sacrificial imagery allows him to convey the ambiguity he perceives at the heart of this experience. He may be setting himself free of his old self and perhaps his doubts about Mary, but it is a freedom which is painful and shatters the fake peace in which he has merely existed. The initiatory journey towards the reconciliation of Mithras and Christ involves a transcendence of the old self, a lonely flight away from the familiar, perhaps suggested by the bird in the first stage of the Mithraic initiation, the *Corax* ('The Raven'), and the second sword of sorrow which pierced the heart of the Virgin Mary – the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt, a fearful migration from the familiar into the unknown.

In 'The Third Sword' (1933), after the halcyon calm of the sea and the light of the 'low blue flame' at sunset, Campbell continues the imagery of the sea in the sonnet's first line with startling differences: the opening simile likens the third sword, which is 'sorrowful and pale', to moonbeams on a wintry sea. In almost every line the sword's silvery iciness is conveyed by verbs such as 'shivers' and 'glitters', by adjectives like 'frozen' and 'unthawn', by the images of the 'flame of cold' and the 'arctic dawn'. The colour blue is replaced by green (Apollinaire's fifth sword colour) – not any green, but 'a boreal streamer burning green', recalling the low blue flame now frozen by an icy north wind, and the otherworldliness of the *aurora borealis*.

Lest one imagine that this sword is as fragile as moonbeams, Campbell emphasizes its steely coldness, which prevents him *seeing* 'the grail whose glory I shall never see'. The combination of what is presumably the Holy Grail, whether the wine cup or the platter at Christ's Last Supper,<sup>109</sup> and vision, suggests a religious journey and quest, resulting in a transformative mystical vision which the poet finds impossible to achieve precisely because of the two emotions overwhelming him – his sorrow and the cause of this sorrow, his jealousy. The biblical allusion in 'it [the third sword] shivers in a land of shade / as if some wandering Cain had seen / his soul reflected in its blade' evokes conflict, jealousy

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<sup>108</sup> Or perhaps, as Birch suggests (2013:194), the poet's various *personae* and his daily effort to sustain them.

<sup>109</sup> According to Walter, the Grail is the wine-cup, which provided the central motif for a twelfth century literary work, which was shaped by 'an ancient theophagic rite of Celtic origin' and opposed 'a sumptuous profane feast to the sacred meal that consists of a single host placed in the Grail'. Chrétien de Troyes' *Story of the Grail* is 'fulfilled during the meditation of the Paschal mystery, from Good Friday to Easter Sunday' (2014:96). Cf. Wagner's opera *Parsifal* (1882) in which the Grail is the cup in which the crucified Christ's blood was caught from the wound in his side – Christendom's holiest relic for the Knights of the Grail.

and murder within a close relationship. Like the bird in 'The Second Sword', the 'wandering' Cain is an image of lonely flight and homelessness, of exile from paradise. The 'land of shade' could be an actual or metaphorical underworld – the place where the initiate goes, alone, to die to one way of life and be reborn in another. Perhaps his jealousy of Mary's loves is the most wounding of his 'daily slaving forms' which impedes his spiritual journey to the very heart of what he perceives as Mithraic Christianity and holy communion. Notably, the images of static cold in the sonnet's sestet ('frozen hold', 'hilt unthawn', 'flame of cold', 'arctic dawn', 'sorrow froze') suggest the immovability of the pain of the third sword, which paralyzes the poet's feelings – an emotional paralysis, memorably conveyed by the final image of Vulcan, who in 'forging it [the sword] grew old'.<sup>110</sup> The allusion to Virgil's Aeneas, for whom Vulcan forged a set of armour and weapons for use in his wars of colonization in Italy (*Aen.* 8. 612–731), is ironically self-deprecating. The hero of the *Aeneid* received the weapons at the instigation of his mother, the goddess of love; he used them and he killed Turnus, the Achilles-figure, with his sword. There was the necessary sacrifice for 'the Romans' to be born from the shedding of blood. No such creative process results from the pain suffered by the poet in his degraded and purposeless amatory epic. For him there is, at this stage, no catharsis – nothing but the pain of cold and pointless despair.

After the icy paralysis of the third sword, 'The Fourth Sword' (1933) blazes with the colours of Apollinaire's sixth and seventh swords (gold and rose), except that the 'rose' is an angry crimson, a glowing red, and instead of the cosmic imagery of moonbeams, the 'boreal streamer' and 'arctic dawn', Campbell focuses on the world in miniature, perhaps in a vineyard in Provence: a red, gold and black tiger-fly which 'rifles a sombre grape, whose heart, / red-glowing to the hilted dart, / seems a lit furnace that he fans'.<sup>111</sup> The angry colours, the furnace, and the military imagery ('rifles', 'hilted dart') prepare the reader for the poet's emotional state, revealed in the sestet – the sword of anger. Using the metaphorical fluidity which structures these sonnets, Campbell echoes the tiger-fly's 'black and melancholy breast' in his 'sourred and black despairs'; the octet's 'sombre grape' transmutes into the sestet's 'blasted vine' in the autumn of his black depression. The noise of the octet becomes deafening, as the fly's 'whirring vans' are transformed into the sestet's 'horneted with strident wings / to his own trumpet peal and drum', as if the

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. Cumont's comments (*MM*:114) on the exalted role of fire in the Mithraic mysteries, 'personified in the name of Vulcan' and 'worshipped in all its manifestations'.

<sup>111</sup> For the role of the vine, which sprang from the slain bull's blood and produced 'the sacred drink of the Mysteries', see Cumont *MM*:137, 146; for Mithras holding the grape, see *MM*:131, Fig. 31, and for wine as the substitute for the Mazdaean Haoma, unknown in the West, *MM*:158–160.

fly were a triumphant toreador entering the bullring. Clearly, the emotional paralysis expressed in 'The Third Sword' has achieved cathartic release in rage: as this is the *sword* of anger, the poet is deeply pained by it. Campbell possibly alludes here to the fourth stage of Mithraic initiation – *Leo*, the lion – and with the lion we associate the kind of ferocity and aggression required by the Roman soldier-initiates, except that in this poem the poet's rage is directed against himself, not some unknown enemy.<sup>112</sup>

After the vibrant colour, movement and noise of 'The Fourth Sword', Campbell returns to the frost, silence, shade and silver of the third (Apollinaire's first sword colour) in 'The Fifth Sword' (1933). In this sonnet, the shape of the sword sparks off a chain of metaphors and similes associated with death, funerary rites and burial – the 'lunar flambeau of a prayer' silently rising upwards 'like a funeral candle', and 'by day a cypress on a tomb'. Campbell often exploits the imagery generated by yoking together opposites such as ice and fire: 'lunar flambeau', 'candle', 'burn' and 'flame' are all used of the silvery sword, silent and vertical, 'thawing the night'.

What is striking about this sonnet is that Campbell envisions the sword as if it were a memorial on an ancient tomb, keeping eternal 'vigilance': the sestet reveals that the 'tomb' is the poet himself and his innermost feelings, for the sword 'guards a grief that is my shame', prefigured in the octet by the funereal candle, which burns the 'fuel of regret'. Furthermore these feelings are associated with the darkness of the night in which the sword is a flame. Grief, shame, regret, perhaps in his relationship both with his dead father<sup>113</sup> and with Mary, which torture the poet at night. Like the sword of anger, 'The Fifth Sword' reveals how Campbell uses the sword imagery not to deflect the responsibility for his psychological and emotional pain on to someone else (his wife, Mary?) or some event, like the events in Christ's life and death which became the Virgin Mary's 'swords', but to suggest that he himself entombs and so represses his shame.

Mithraic initiatory rituals, held in the cave-like Mithraea, were shrouded in darkness and secrecy: we have no record of what an initiate experienced psychologically and emotionally as he progressed through the various stages.<sup>114</sup> As

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<sup>112</sup> For the importance of the stage of *Leo*, 'mentioned more frequently in the inscriptions than any other', see Cumont *MM*:155; for the association of this stage with fire, *MM*:157. cf. Gordon 1996:III. 99; BNP 1:288; BNP 2:309–310; for Lions under the protection of Jupiter, BNP 2:317.

<sup>113</sup> Alexander notes that 'The Fifth Sword' is subtitled 'In memory of my father' in the original volume of *ME* (1982:140). Campbell's father died in 1926 (Alexander 1982:53).

<sup>114</sup> Although Cumont indulges, with the help of Apuleius, in some speculative initiatory psychology in *MM*:162–164.

we have seen, Kautes and Kautopates, the ‘flambeau’ bearers, are associated in Cumontian interpretations of Mithraic iconography with the rising and setting of the morning star, or with the sun’s annual trajectory and the appearance and disappearance of light and heat: the flaming sword-torch in the darkness is precisely the metaphor Campbell uses to express his mental anguish. Perhaps the recognition in this sonnet of how he has processed his ‘squandered days’ and can name his feelings (regret and shame) is the next stage of his initiation and personal growth.

Originally published in 1933, ‘The Sixth Sword’ was recast in 1948, after both the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, and the rise to power of the Falangist dictator, Francisco Franco, whom Campbell greatly admired.<sup>115</sup> Consequently, this sonnet is the most overtly political. The angry colours (red and gold) of ‘The Third Sword’ return, but here they are the colours of the monarchist flag, adopted by the ‘Nationalist rebels’,<sup>116</sup> in keeping with Franco’s aggressive nationalism which aimed to keep the disparate regions of Spain united after the bloody divisions of the Spanish Civil War. During the civil war, the Campbell family had spent some time in Toledo, the old capital of Spain, and had witnessed first-hand some appalling atrocities committed by the anti-nationalist forces (such as Communists and Anarchists), especially against members of the Catholic Church, perceived as devoted supporters of fascism.<sup>117</sup> In addition, the Campbells deeply respected the cultural, artistic and religious heritage of this city, which like Córdoba, preserved fine examples of the places of worship of Christians, Jews and Muslims. Included in this heritage were notable examples of metalworking, swords in particular. In view of this background, it is no surprise that ‘The Sixth Sword’ (1948) opens with a description of the weapon which pays homage to Toledo’s (and Spain’s) cultural heritage and its metalworking tradition – ‘From that Toledo of the brain / where none but perfect steel is wrought’.

A possible allusion to El Greco’s painting of the city rising from the Castilian plain sets the scene for the striking image of a cherub holding the

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<sup>115</sup> CW 1:249, 643 n.10. Smith is especially good on Campbell’s support of Franco’s fascism and the strong links between Campbell’s political and religious convictions, strikingly evident in *Flowering Rifle* (1972:149–187).

<sup>116</sup> Smith 1972:131–132. Now, of course, the colours of the national flag of Spain.

<sup>117</sup> For the Campbells in Toledo (1936), their dramatic escape from the city during the eruption of the Spanish Civil War, and the rescue of personal papers of St John of the Cross from a Carmelite monastery in which all the monks were murdered, see Alexander 1982:157–170; Pearce 2001:174–189; Hilton 2007:153.

sparkling sword with its 'sheath of gold' and 'scarlet tassel at the hilt':<sup>118</sup> Campbell's image of military triumph, validated by the divine (in Franco's case, the Catholic Church), would have delighted *El Caudillo* and reflects nationalist and fascist propaganda.<sup>119</sup> After this extraordinary vision, which is redolent of Spanish Catholic kitsch, Campbell clarifies his political message in the sestet. This sword does not pierce his heart, but it 'salutes the last Crusade' – here military imagery fuses perfectly with a religious quest blessed by the church – and Spain, believed by Campbell to have been betrayed by 'all the world'. Not if you fought for the International Brigade, of course, which vehemently opposed Franco and his nationalist forces, and was composed of the very socialists, communists, republicans and liberal democrats, whom Campbell seemed to think now characterized the 'mad West' in the post-war period. The sonnet concludes with an image of Spain both triumphalist and uniquely blessed, her flag here transformed as if the sonnet were a heroic mediaeval epic into a 'red and gold streamer' on the ramparts of Castile – Spain, 'the sole redeemer / and rainbow of the Storms of Steel'. So with this rhetorical ring-structure, Campbell returns to Toledo and (perhaps) El Greco's vision with which the sonnet began.

This recasting of the sonnet seems to have little to do with either the Blessed Virgin's heart and the seven swords (her dolours), or with any specific stage in the process of Mithraic initiation. The final rainbow image, however, fuses all the colours of the swords and certainly reflects one of the primary aims of Mithraism itself – religious validation of the kind of military aggression and its version of masculinity considered essential for the soldiers of the Roman Empire, some clad in red and gold, as they repelled the barbarians and raised their 'streamers' on the ramparts of their forts or captured strongholds.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *Vista de Toledo*, 1596–1600, with a dark, stormy sky; *Vista y plano de Toledo*, 1600–1610 (attributed to El Greco) features religious figures in the sky above the city – the Virgin Mary bringing a priestly chasuble to St. Ildefonso.

<sup>119</sup> Whether Campbell was a fascist supporter of both Franco and Hitler has certainly preoccupied many of his critics. Campbell referred to himself in his honorary graduand's speech at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) as a 'right-wing reactionary' (1954:37); cf. Alan Paton's obituary in which he states that Campbell was certainly not a fascist, that he did not understand the true nature of Nazism or Fascism, and that the swagger of two ranting bullies (presumably Hitler and Franco) 'blinded him [Campbell] to their wickedness' (1957:28–29); for a more critical opinion of Campbell's fascist ideology, see Leveson 1992:109–110.

<sup>120</sup> For further sonnets in *ME* reflecting Campbell's experiences in Toledo ('A sacred city of the mind') during the Spanish Civil War (1936), see 'Toledo, July 1936', 'Hot Rifles', 'Christ in Uniform', 'The Alcazar Mined', *CW* 1:288–291; for other poems in *ME* set in Toledo, see 'To My Jockey', 'After the Riots, Toledo, March 1936' (dedicated to Mary, his

Written in 1933, 'The Seventh Sword' returns to the emotional world of the first, includes 'red images of ire' from the fourth, once again yokes together the opposites of ice and fire (as in the third and fifth) and, most significantly, reuses crystal, not this time for the sword itself, but for the sonnet's concluding image of a woman whose 'breasts are lighted, and their globes / each to a vase of crystal wrought'. In 'The First Sword' the poet-lover refers, with the use of dramatic imagery, to a fight for love which includes 'volted ecstasy' and a sword 'tempered' in his blood, thus expressing the visceral intensity of his reaction to the 'woman's beauty' and his unrequited love and passion.

'The Seventh Sword' opens with an allusion to Greek mythology, narrated by a drunken old woman in a Roman novel by Apuleius (*Metamorphoses* 4.28–6.24) – the lust and desire of the immortal god of erotic desire, Cupid/Eros, for the mortal woman, Psyche.<sup>121</sup> In Apuleius' text, Cupid is armed with his traditional flaming torch, and bow and arrows,<sup>122</sup> the former to scorch his victim with the flame of desire, the latter to wound his victim with the prick of an arrow, and so make her/him fall in love. Furthermore in Apuleius' narration of the tale, Psyche's wicked sisters, jealous of her good fortune, concoct the tale that her unseen lover (Cupid) is in fact a giant serpent: they, in fact, arm her with a sword to kill the serpent when he arrives for his nocturnal pleasures.<sup>123</sup> In his version of the myth, Campbell has obviously altered the details. The god's 'desire' is armed with a sword; he lusts to 'possess', not 'love' her; in contrast to Psyche, the woman in the sonnet is 'reluctant' and the 'pythoness', which identifies her with Psyche's fictive lover, according to the evil sisters in Apuleius' version of the myth, or the Pytho herself, the priestess of Apollo at Delphi.<sup>124</sup>

What does Campbell achieve by these changes? How do these relate to 'The first sword'? If, as we have suggested, the references to a 'woman's beauty' in 'The

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wife), 'To Mary after the Red Terror' (*CW* 1:296–298, 311). Also included in *ME* are 'San Anton's Day' (dedicated to his horse), 'To my Daughters in the Bullring', and 'To my Horses' (*CW* 1:334–335, 337).

<sup>121</sup> The myth is linked to Mithraism in the iconography: Cumont reproduces an image of a green jasper Mithraic gem which features a tauroctony on the obverse and Cupid and Psyche on the reverse (*MM*:183).

<sup>122</sup> *flammis et sagittis armatus* (*Met.* 4.30.15); cf. *arcus et pharetra et sagittae magni dei propitia tela* (*Met.* 5.22.25) and *istas pinnas et flammam et arcum et ipsas sagittas et omnem meam supellectilem* ('where Venus claims these weapons, which she has given to her son, as her own').

<sup>123</sup> *Met.* 5. 17. 10–11 (*immanem...serpentem*); 5.20.19 (*ancipiti telo*). For the image of the python twining itself around Mithraic images of 'boundless Time' or Kronos, see Cumont's *MM*:105–106.

<sup>124</sup> As Smith (1972:132) suggests.

first sword' and the fight for love suggest the poet's stormy relationship with his wife Mary and his desperate struggle to win her back, and the intervening sword sonnets have explored feelings of anger, pain, regret and shame, on a quasi-Mithraic journey of initiation into self-awareness on a spiritual, emotional and intellectual level, then 'The Seventh Sword' suggests that his journey has been a complete failure. The lover-poet now openly acknowledges his physical desire for her, but her reluctant iciness, together with the image of a 'pythoness', convey a powerful, cold-blooded, threatening creature, virginal and spiritual. She has expelled him from the paradise of reciprocity, he seems to say, and he needs the armed intervention of the divine to 'possess' her. Even though she is *his* 'white reluctant Pythoness', the image implies that he is the victim who could be crushed by her, as the serpent was crushed underfoot by the Virgin Mary, the new Eve in Catholic theology. He burns with lust; she is 'white' and 'pale ice', the 'fugitive of fire', but the 'sworded flame', the fiery weapon of Cupid, is rendered useless, as is his burning rage ('the red images of ire') by the 'pure person of a thought' – either her icy, intellectualized aloofness from him, her increasingly intense spirituality,<sup>125</sup> or his own realization that he cannot express, let alone satisfy, the intensity of his desire for her. 'Psyche', after all, means 'soul'; in the poet-lover's case, there will be no pleasure (*voluptas*) issuing from the eventual marriage of body and soul, the carnal and the spiritual, Cupid and Psyche.<sup>126</sup>

The return of the crystal imagery in 'The Seventh Sword' is especially interesting. The first sword was hewn from crystal. In Apuleius' version of the Cupid and Psyche myth, Venus nastily sets her prospective daughter-in-law a number of impossibly demanding tasks, one of which involves collecting water from the mountain spring which flows into the Styx and Cocytus, in a crystal urn or vase.<sup>127</sup> Here crystal is clearly associated with the underworld and death: in this impossible task, Psyche had to be helped by Jupiter's mighty eagle, which had

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<sup>125</sup> Significantly, Mary Campbell was to become a Carmelite Tertiary in 1935, destroyed all Vita Sackville-West's love letters to her (on the advice of her 'spiritual director'), chose Mary Magdalene (the penitent *par excellence*) as her patron saint when she became a Catholic, and became a devout convert who attended Mass every day for the rest of her life (Pearce 2001:170, 176–177). In 'To Mary after the Red Terror' in *ME* (1936), Campbell acknowledges the role of his wife in his own conversion: 'You led me to the feet of Christ / Who threatened me with lifted quirt: / But by its loving fury sliced / I staggered upright from the dirt' (*CW* 1:311).

<sup>126</sup> Apul. *Met.* 6.24.15.

<sup>127</sup> Apul. *Met.* 6.13.15 (...*crystallo dedolatum vasculum...*); cf. *plenam urnulam* in 6.16.1. Cf. Campbell's link between Psyche and crystal in 'Pomegranates' (*CW* 1:277): '...when Psyche, in a sister's praise, / Would carve her crystals in their shape'.

carried off Ganymede for the king of the gods in a famous example of erotic desire for a boy's beauty, fulfilled by forced abduction.

In the sestet of 'The Seventh Sword', Campbell's use of 'arctic crystals' and the climactic images of his beloved's breasts 'each to a vase of crystal wrought' comment suggestively on his sexual dilemma. The first gives the poet another opportunity for the development of an ambiguous zeugma in a simile which recalls the second-last stage of Mithraic initiation (Heliodromos; 'runner of the sun): the lines 'as the arctic crystals that would shun / but each become the living sun / where best his image may be sought' seem to express the contradictions in his sexual desire for Mary. Immersed in Catholic spirituality, she coldly repels his lust, but the more she does so, the more inflamed his physical desire becomes, and the more intense his realization that she is the one for him. The final image begins with the phallic, 'so to the shining sword he probes', reflecting the fiery sun of his desire,<sup>128</sup> but ends with the image of her breasts, no longer living and erotically charged, but dead works of crystalline art, cold, beautiful and impossible to probe, despite the weapon of his desire.<sup>129</sup>

After the sword sequence in *ME*, Campbell devotes the following three sonnets (1934) to another image found in some of the tauroctonies in close proximity to Mithras himself: the Raven, which was also the title of the first of the stages of initiation into the Mithraic mysteries, presumably because, according to Cumont, the Raven as messenger of the Sun brought Mithras the primary order to kill the captured bull.<sup>130</sup> In this triptych, with its striking visual content reminiscent of looking at a series of stained-glass windows, Campbell develops the Mithraic image (and myth) of the raven as the messenger of Helios/Sol into an immortal phoenix and personalizes this imagery to express the joyous renewal of his relationship with his beloved and its associated burst of fresh creativity, as if he were being initiated into a new phase of his life<sup>131</sup> after the sacrifices and pain expressed in the sword sequence.

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<sup>128</sup> Apuleius (*Met.* 5.23. 17–18) refers to Cupid as the 'very god of universal fire' (*ipsum ignis totius deum*).

<sup>129</sup> For similar crystal and fire imagery, see 'The Crystal' (*CW* 1:259).

<sup>130</sup> See, for instance, the Bologna bas-relief and, most strikingly, the Bosnian fragment in which four initiatory stages are represented at a 'Mithraic Communion' (The Raven, the Persian, the Soldier and the Lion) in Cumont *MM*:151; 159. For the initiatory stages, *MM*:152; for the Raven as the Sun's messenger, *MM*:135.

<sup>131</sup> In Greco-Roman mythology, ravens were birds of omen associated with Apollo, god of prophecy. As messenger birds, ravens were believed to speak and so occupy the liminal spaces between gods and humans, humans and animals, and, by association, one way of life and another. Furthermore, the constellation *Corvus* (Raven) associates the ravens on earth with the catasterismic myth of Apollo and the cunning raven, which accounts for the origins

In ‘The Raven 1’, the poet-lover associates the ‘flesh-devouring bird of time’ with the ephemeral nature of life’s joys and with the remembrance of things past: his lover’s hair (associated with Apollinaire’s blue), the ‘red flame’ of the circling wine that ‘swivels around these somber walls / when friendship is the most divine’. The final couplet reveals that these human joys, which pass ‘far too soon’, fuel the raven’s flight and adorn its immortality. In contrast to ‘The Raven 1’, in which the bird ‘sails overhead’, ‘The Raven 2’ opens with the startling image of the bird slowly building its massive nest with ancient, prehistoric and extra-terrestrial materials ‘on the red crag’ of the poet’s heart: in the sestet, the ‘faggots’ of the raven’s nest become a ‘pyre’ which lightning might transform into a fiery beacon, to which ‘answering beacons shall attest / that fire is in the Raven’s nest / and resurrection in the tomb’. The last of the Raven sonnets, ‘The Raven’s Nest’, reveals the function of this nest – to build a home which reclaims the fire ‘a bride to house’: the fire has been purifying and transformative, like the creative powers of the sun in the very beginning of time itself. The sestet explodes in sensuous imagery of birth, rejoicing and new life (‘to bud’, ‘to bear’), conveyed by ‘singing hearts’, ‘one crop of nightingales and fruits’, and the final image of ‘birds flowering from the roots’.

The religious imagery in ‘The Raven 2’, especially ‘the answering beacons shall attest / that fire is in the Raven’s nest / and resurrection in the tomb’, which recall images of the Christian appropriation of Celtic religious symbols, suggest that the poet is undergoing spiritual renewal as well.<sup>132</sup> That this renewal involves not only the healing of his relationship with Mary, but also the marriage of Cumont’s version of Mithraism and Campbell’s Catholicism, particularly after the Campbells moved to Spain and converted together in 1934, is evident in the only sonnet to focus on the essence of the Mithraic tauroctony itself, ‘Death of the Bull’ (1936). In this sonnet, Campbell explicitly links the death of the Mithraic bull with the Provençal bull-god, the river Rhone, and the fertility and new life which springs from this ever-recurring death and flow of blood. Phrases such as ‘a Wound that never heals’ and the ‘lily-scented blood’ recall the death of Apollo’s Hyacinth,

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of this constellation. *Corax* is thus an ideal choice for the naming of the first grade in the journey of initiation into the Mithraic mysteries, as it marks the first steps the soul must take in withdrawing from the material world and embarking on its ascent (its flight?) away from it. In initiation rituals, liminal spaces are marked by ambiguities; thus, the ravens, as boundary markers, are connected with sexual ambiguity (bisexuality) as well. See Gordon 1996:V:25–32 for a detailed and perceptive account of the significance of the raven in the Mithraic mysteries.

<sup>132</sup> For Campbell’s ‘total commitment to a redemptive religion’ in these sonnets, see Smith 1982:133–134.

whose blood literally ‘lily-flowered’,<sup>133</sup> and the death of Christ, ever-recurring in the Catholic sacrifice of the bread and wine at Mass. Whilst the ‘lily-scented blood’ also evokes traditional Catholic images of St. Joseph, the Christ child and the lily of purity, this could be an intertextual reference to the fragrant image of a soul at peace, freed from anguish, in the final stanza of St John of the Cross’ beautiful poem *Noche Oscura Del Alma* (Dark Night of the Soul).<sup>134</sup> In the ‘Death of the Bull’ sonnet, the poet himself loses the memory of pain as he knelt and drank, as if in the very moment of communion itself, besides the bank of the bull-god’s river.<sup>135</sup>

In the ‘Snake, the Scorpion and the Dog’, Campbell uses the traditional iconography of the Mithraic tauroctony to embody the parasitic forces of evil he gleaned from Cumont’s account of Persian dualism; Campbell suggests that, like Christ, the bull will rise again, cleansed of his cloying mortal matter; in addition, ‘his soul its base alloy to shun / casts forth the parasites it fed’. These parasites, the bull’s ‘earthly emanations’, Campbell associates with destructive evils he has identified in himself in *ME*: venomous guile (the serpent), envy (the scorpion, its pincers fixed on the bull’s testicles), and the ingratitude of the most indulged (the dog gorging on the slain bull’s blood).

For there to be new life and a cleansing of the old, these ‘parasites’ must be cast forth like demons; whether there is actually a resurrection Campbell does not concede. The ‘slain victim’ *would* rise, but can he? Are these forces of evil ever completely shed? The serpent is ‘at his side’; the scorpion’s forceps ‘fix his dangled stones’; the dog ‘tugs’ at the fallen bull’s shoulder, the present tenses suggesting that the process of atonement, Cumont’s very Mazdean close encounter and struggle with evil is ongoing.

In the final explicitly Mithraic sonnets, Campbell, perhaps inspired by Mistral’s ‘let him divine the mystery who can’, imagines Mithras speaking to him

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<sup>133</sup> For the myth of Apollo and Hyacinth, see *Ov. Met.* 10.155–219. From Hyacinth’s blood, a flower grew up in the shape of a lily, but, unlike lilies, purple in colour (212–213).

<sup>134</sup> *Quedéme y olvidéme, / el rostro recliné sobre el Amado; / cesó todo, y dejéme, / dejando mi cuidado / entre las azucenas olvidado* (Tusón 1987:225). Campbell translated these lines as follows: ‘Lost to myself I stayed / My face upon my lover having laid / From all endeavour ceasing: And all my cares releasing / Threw them amongst the lilies there to fade’ (*CW* II:21–22). See Meihuizen’s nuanced interpretation of Campbell’s intertextuality here (2007:233–238).

<sup>135</sup> For the communion meal in Mithraic iconography, see Cumont *MM*:139 (the banquet of Mithras and the Sun, 151, 159); also Cumont’s explicit Christianizing of this meal in his references to the Mithraic ‘Eucharist’ and the ‘sacramental collation’, (*MM*:124, 160). For sheaves of wheat growing from the wound and the vine growing from the animal’s spinal cord and blood, *MM*:39.

in verse, as if in an oracular response to the poet's questions about the nature of human existence, masculinity, work and ethical values.

In 'Mithras Speaks 1', Campbell depicts the bull-slayer, now clearly divinized as a 'star',<sup>136</sup> reminding the poet/reader that his mortal life is as ephemeral as a 'flitting rainbow' or a 'passing cloud'. Although here Mithras differentiates between the terrestrial poet/reader and his celestial self, he includes the poet in 'We work for the same Boss', presumably Helios/Sol, in the sense that both are 'herdsmen'. Here Campbell draws together the idealized world of *Taurine Provence* where *real* work and masculinity are associated with the simple lifestyle of the cowboys of the Camarque, riding their horses on the plains, their guitars strung across their backs, rearing bulls for the ring and then singing, like Mistral himself, epic and pastoral songs around the fire.<sup>137</sup> In fact, in this poem, in keeping with Campbell's interpretation of Mithraism and reinforced by Montherlant and Mistral, Mithras identifies as a cosmic cowboy, his guitar 'strung to strum the world across'. The words 'as if you'd known me all your life / go with good luck as with a wife' suggest the possibility of a close relationship with Mithras, the Sun's intercessor, whose nature is as generous and compassionate as that of St. John of the Cross' *Amado* (his Beloved Christ).

Mithras ends his speech by reminding the poet / reader that there is a 'line' he may not cross which he will not find 'in this land', presumably Spain. The use of 'kaross' in the final couplet perhaps anticipates allusions to South Africa in 'Mithras Speaks 2'. The final twin images of the cowboy sleeping on the animal skin in the open air and of Mithras stroking 'the meadow with his hand' validate the kind of relationship that pastoralists have with their natural environment and their animals. Hence the significance of Mithras' sacrifice of the bull he loved. In fact, as Campbell believed, the 'star' became man and Mithras became the vassal of Christ, the cowboy of the 'Good Shepherd'.

In the accompanying sonnet, 'Mithras Speaks 2', Campbell uses the octet to let Mithras comment on the process of colonization (of South Africa?) presumably by the poet's British ancestors ('your fathers'). Animalizing the 'World' with its 'lovely mane', Mithras depicts the process of colonization as

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<sup>136</sup> See Cumont *MM*: 118–124, for Cumont's beliefs about Mithraism, the stars, the planets and the signs of the Zodiac; cf. Gordon 1996:IV:50–60; VI:119–165. For a more extreme version of the hypothesis that Mithraic iconography conceals an astronomical code, see Ulansey 1989.

<sup>137</sup> The herdsman-poet-musician is, of course, central to the Greek and Roman bucolic tradition, see Gutzwiller 2006:380–405. I owe this reference to one of the anonymous reviewers.

violent subjugation of primal innocence with ships, guns and whips in order to win for the poet 'the huge hosanna of the plain'.<sup>138</sup>

The biblical connotations of the Hebrew 'hosanna', with its allusion to Christ's entry into Jerusalem on a donkey and the word's function in the *Sanctus* of the Catholic Mass, suggest the colonizers' momentary triumph, like Christ's on Palm Sunday with the sacrifice of the crucifixion a mere week away. Mithras continues by referring to the poet as colonizer crashing through 'the lush lilies', thus destroying primal purity and subjugating the landscape: the metaphor 'and rein horizons in your hold' is especially appropriate for the cowboy/*vaquero* and Campbell himself, especially fond of horses, horse riding, capes and cowboy hats!<sup>139</sup> In response to this subjugation and destruction of the environment, the animalized plants themselves retaliate violently: 'while, baying fire, the aloes slash / your stirrups with their fangs of gold'. We have already seen how Campbell uses the colours of fiery red and gold to convey anger and resentment: that they are aloes confirms that the poet has a South African landscape in mind. In the sestet, there is a dramatic change of tone as Mithras addresses the cowboy directly and urges him to sing and string his strong guitar: Campbell seems to take the reader back from the South African plains to the image of the cowboy in the Camargue in Provence, 'that little bit of Africa in Europe'. Notably, in 'Mithras Speaks 1', Mithras dissolves the distinction between the earth-bound herdsman and the star – now 'each Vaquero is a star' and the line not to be crossed will be crossed by 'Abel's sons'.

The image of 'some wandering Cain' has been effectively used in 'The Third Sword:' who are 'Abel's sons'? In contrast to Cain who tilled the ground, Abel, the second son of the primal biblical couple, became a shepherd<sup>140</sup> and offered God not the fruits of the soil, but the first-born of his flock with their fat,

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<sup>138</sup> Cf. 'It was the psalm and incense of the plain' in 'A Jug of Water' (*CW* 1:261).

<sup>139</sup> A feature of his 'dandyism' and 'self-styling', which Birch interprets as suggestive of Campbell's 'conservative mode of rebellion', perhaps against the institutionalized colonial masculinity of his youth (2013:220–222). Cf. Birch 2016:31–56.

<sup>140</sup> *Genesis* 4.2; for shepherds in Mithraic mythology and art, see Cumont *MM*:132, 139 fig. 35.

which delighted the Lord more.<sup>141</sup> Hence Cain's murderous jealousy.<sup>142</sup> Campbell thus imagines that the herdsmen/*vaqueros* have an ancient and distinguished lineage in another religious tradition, which Mithras acknowledges in the poem:<sup>143</sup> the pastoralists and their close relationships to the animal world make the very notion of animal sacrifice more meaningful and sacred to both sacrificer and the divine being, the Solar Christ. Abel, however, had no sons: according to *Genesis*, to replace Abel, Eve gave birth to Seth, who fathered Enos, who established a religious and cultural tradition.<sup>144</sup> It is this tradition which Campbell's *vaqueros* validate. The killing of his bull draws Mithras closer to Helios/Sol as he sacrifices the bull to him: so Campbell's 'sons of Abel' can cross the line between 'earth' and 'star', mortal and divine.

The final image of the crucified Christ in the sonnet is extraordinary: Mithras imagines Abel's sons 'under the stretched terrific wings, / the outspread arms (our soaring King's) / the man they made an Albatross!'<sup>145</sup> As Mithraism is so rooted in its iconography, so Campbell closes this sonnet with the Christian image of the crucified Christ on the hill of Calvary: the fact that Mithras refers to 'our soaring King' conveys Campbell's syncretistic notion of Mithraic Christianity or Christianized Mithraism.

The final line, 'the man they made an Albatross', is in keeping with Mithras' animalizing of the world in the poem's first line, except that the change in subject

<sup>141</sup> The Hebrew 'Abel' has the following range of meaning: 'breath, vapour, vanity (as in fruitlessness)', all of which convey the short-lived life of Adam's son, murdered before he could bear fruit (i.e., children). See *BDB* 210–211. Campbell cites the *Genesis* passage at the opening of 'To the Red Indian, Michawago' in *ME* ('And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering'), in which he clearly contrasts the race of Abel with that of Cain: 'Brother, our race was withered quite away. Father! Our race is coming, and to stay – / With Four Great Horsemen clearing up the way. / We, that were scarce, are many now, and strong / Charlie, the son of Cain, has reigned too long...' (*CW* 1:321–322). For Campbell, Charlie Chaplin is emblematic of a race of 'Charlies', mired in the humdrum daily grind of, inter alia, commerce, business, teaching, the law and the post office! The scourge of Campbell's satire is often inflicted on the 'Charlies': for anti-Charlie poems in *ME*, see *CW* 1:327–329, 331, 341–342, 344–345. For Campbell's attacks on bourgeois, urban civilization, and his passionate belief in aristocratic, 'equestrian' forms of civilization, see Smith 1972:6, 22, 121, 141.

<sup>142</sup> *Gen.* 4:3–15.

<sup>143</sup> Campbell envisages a syncretism of sorts in 'To the Red Indian, Michawago': 'This Bull by which we call each other 'friend' / Shall link us round the earth from end to end / Wherever out of Abel we descend' (*CW* 1:322).

<sup>144</sup> *Gen.* 4:25–26.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. 'The Albatross' in *Adamastor* (1930), a collection dedicated to Mary Campbell (*CW* 1:132–135); 'The Albatross' (after Baudelaire) in Krigé 1960:75 and Smith 1972:52.

from 'the world put down its lovely mane' in line 1 to 'the man they made an Albatross' is intriguing: to whom does Mithras' 'they' refer? The Jews, the Romans? The colonizers in the octet? The 'they' seems to me to be the threatening other, expressed as a generalization about difference or diversity, of race, sex, gender or religion: what have 'they' done to the crucified Solar Christ?<sup>146</sup>

The albatross may well be a link with the southern hemisphere (as is the aloe), but I suspect that Campbell has Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' in mind. In that poem, the mariner confesses to a wedding-guest that, as he and his shipmates sailed southwards, the crew established a relationship with a giant albatross whose company and guidance they enjoyed. Breaking the laws of hospitality and reciprocity, the mariner killed the albatross and, as conditions worsened and the ship drifted into the doldrums, the crew made the offending mariner hang the albatross around his neck: 'instead of the Cross, the Albatross / around my neck was hung'. Once he had atoned for the wanton killing, because 'he loved the bird that loved the man / who shot him with his bow', the dead albatross was removed from his neck.<sup>147</sup> The mariner's relationship with the albatross, Mithras' relationship with the bull, Christ's relationship with those who crucified him: for Campbell, all three relationships involved murder, atonement, forgiveness, and the possibility of new life arising from a sacrificial and redemptive death,<sup>148</sup> new life revealed in a closer, more intensely spiritual relationship with Helios/Sol, God, or the Solar Christ.<sup>149</sup>

For Campbell, it is clearly the concept of the 'Solar Christ' which represents the ultimate fusion of Mithraism and Christianity, a concept which also reveals the considerable influence of Cumont's *Mithraic Mysteries* on him. That the 'votaries

<sup>146</sup> Smith interprets the 'they' as the 'vague forces of destruction': 'the implied comparison between pious peasants and the anti-clerical forces of the revolution is strongly suggested' (1972:134).

<sup>147</sup> For further links between the crucified Christ and the 'Great Albatross, of every storm the Birth!', see 'Christ in the Hospital' in *ME* (*CW* 1:294). Cumont maintained that devotion to the crucifix during the Christian period was introduced into the Occident by the Oriental Syrians (*ORRP*:109).

<sup>148</sup> Cf. 'Your spirit sings (and to its sister sprite) / that love is God, that dying is renewal...' in 'A Jug of Water' (*CW* 1:263).

<sup>149</sup> Cf. 'This gift of our protecting Sire, / The Solar Christ, to purge the lands - / Is like the good Promethean fire / At which to warm our scatheless hands' in 'To the Survivors', dedicated to the Marquis of Baroncelli-Javon, Montherlant's nephew (*CW* 1:264); for 'The Solar Christ', the 'captain of my days' identified with the Sun and the 'white Cross', see 'The Fight' in *ME* (*CW* 1:293). 'Our Solar Saviour' in 'Vaquero's Hearth' (*CW* 1:346). For the distinction between Christ and Mithras, see Campbell's poem in *ME*, 'Dedication to Mary Campbell' (*CW* 1: 300): 'Luck on our side, we play at pitch and toss / Christ for our king and Mithras for our boss'.

of Mithra, like the ancient Persians, adored the Sun', associated with boundless creativity and, above all, *light*, is a common assumption throughout MM.<sup>150</sup> In the final section of this work, in which Cumont enumerates the many similarities and the important differences between Mithraism and its chief competitor, Christianity, Cumont's links between the Christian feast of Christmas, the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere, the death of light, and then the birth of the Mithraic Sun (*Natalis invicti*) on the 25<sup>th</sup> December are especially significant.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, in the early Christian church, Cumont adds that ecclesiastical writers, inspired by the prophet Malachi, 'contrasted the "Sun of justice" with the "invincible Sun", and consented to see in the dazzling orb which illuminated men a symbol of Christ, "the light of the world."'"<sup>152</sup>

That Campbell missed the African sun and its light in Britain and rediscovered it in Provence, is well attested.<sup>153</sup> In one of the final sonnets in *ME*, Campbell is explicit about the South African sun, to which he refers in Mithraic-Christian terms as 'our absent Sire'. In this sonnet, entitled 'To the Springboks in England, 1932', which hovers playfully between the comic and the serious,<sup>154</sup> Campbell fuses the imagery of Mithraism and rugby, the elemental forces, the 'sacred things' of Cumont's 'Aryan religion' (the sun, the fire, the hurricane), and the structure of the game, which, like bullfighting, may well express 'the attempt of the intellect to dominate the brute instincts and impose its harmony on them', although one only has to watch Supersport on a Saturday afternoon on South African television to appreciate that brute instincts occasionally triumph and deserve the Sin Bin (surely another Persian Mazdean image) to which they are relegated!

'Real' men play rugby and only 'real' men were initiated into the mysteries of Mithras: the fact that Cumont is critical of the exclusion of women in the Mysteries is ignored by Campbell. Rather ponderously (in translation), Cumont notes that 'whilst the majority of the Oriental cults accorded to women a

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<sup>150</sup> *MM*:118, 127 (Mithras as 'the god of light' for the ancient Magi), 132 (Mithras rendering homage to the Sun from whom he received his radiant crown), 186 ('the official religion of the Sun' as later imperial policy), 187 (the Sun as the catalyst for a syncretistic monotheism), 188 ('solar pantheism').

<sup>151</sup> *MM*:167 (the 'new birth' of the Sun, as it began to 'wax great again on the termination of the winter solstice'), 191, 196. cf. Chadwick 1993:126–127 for Constantine's populist conflation of Christ and *Sol Invictus*; MacMullen 1981:84–85 for an analysis of the intersection of religious and political history.

<sup>152</sup> *MM*:193. cf. 195–196 for the putative influence of Mithraism on some early Christian liturgies, both 'orthodox and heretical'.

<sup>153</sup> Hilton 2007:152.

<sup>154</sup> *CW* 1:333. The same year as the publication of *Taurine Provence*.

considerable role in their churches, and sometimes even a preponderating one, finding in them ardent supporters of the faith, Mithra forbade their participation in his Mysteries and so deprived himself of the incalculable assistance of these propagandists'.<sup>155</sup> He adds that none of the inscriptions pertaining to Mithraism mentions 'either a priestess, a woman initiate, or even a donatress', and that Mithraism would never had been as successful as it was in 'the Occident' without contriving alliances with other religions which welcomed women, especially with that of Cybele or *Mater Magna*, already well-established at Rome.<sup>156</sup> In Campbell's opinion, however, as we have seen both in *Taurine Provence* and *Mithraic emblems*, Mithraism and initiation into the Mysteries, favoured by Roman soldiers serving on the frontiers of the Roman Empire,<sup>157</sup> valorised the heroic, epic masculinity he so admired in bullfighters, the cattlemen of the Camargue, soldiers and sportsmen (rugby players), but not in the 'Charlies', nor the 'nancy husbands' of the Bloomsburies.

### Conclusion

In the poems analysed in Campbell's *Mithraic emblems*, there is obviously a rich and provocative intertextual relationship with Roman authors Campbell knew well (such as Vergil, Ovid and Apuleius) and some of the Greco-Roman mythology, pertinent to Mithraism, he found in them (Apollo, Hyacinth, Helios-Sol, Vulcan, Cupid and Psyche).<sup>158</sup> It is tempting to ascribe some of this background in Greco-Roman mythology and Latin literature, especially in authors such as Vergil and Ovid, to Campbell's youthful study of Latin at Durban High School in Natal (South Africa), but there is evidence that his response to the Classics at high school was largely negative, and the Latin he acquired not quite up to Oxford's standards.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> *MM*:173.

<sup>156</sup> *MM*:173–183. For the taurobolium in the rites of the *Mater Magna* and the Persian origins of this rite, see *MM*:180–182. Cumont's work predates the discoveries of women's dedications in Mithraic sanctuaries, and the solitary example of a woman's Mithraic prayer inscribed on a stone (BNP 1:298).

<sup>157</sup> Gordon is especially good on the ways in which Mithraism confirmed the social structure and values of the Roman army (1996:III:109–112); cf. Vermaseren (1956–1960) for the fact that one third of dedications to Mithras in Africa were made by commanders of legions or governors of consular rank (2:92–98).

<sup>158</sup> For a fuller list of Campbell's Classical influences, see Hilton 2007:149–154.

<sup>159</sup> Hilton 2007:136–137. For another Modernist poet educated at Durban High School (Fernando Pessoa), see Jackson 2017:123–141. Durban's connection with international Modernism extends further: Wyndham Lewis's portrait of T.S. Eliot (1938) is in the Durban Art Gallery.

Campbell's knowledge of Latin, however, and his ability to translate texts as sophisticated as Horace's *Ars Poetica* improved with the passing years, even though he could never quite acquire the Greek he needed for Oxford entrance.<sup>160</sup>

In addition, it seems unlikely that he encountered Mithras or Mithraism at school in South Africa. In *Snooty Baronet*, Wyndham Lewis, to whom Campbell was introduced by William Walton at Oxford, implies that he introduced Campbell to Mithraism, but Alexander claims that 'it seems much more likely that it was Campbell who first interested Lewis in the subject' on one of Lewis' visits to the Campbells in Provence.<sup>161</sup> This claim is debatable. In the dedication copy of *Mithraic emblems* (1936), Campbell pays tribute to 'Wyndham Lewis and Mrs. Lewis' with a lyrical translation of a fragment of Leonidas, which prefigures some of the important images in *ME*; furthermore, Campbell elsewhere heaps praise on Lewis as a 'champion of Romanity'. Lewis' influence on Campbell's engagement with Mithraism may well have been more profound than Alexander imagined.<sup>162</sup>

Hilton ascribes much of Campbell's knowledge of Classical literature to 'his love for and wide reading of English literature' – the kind of English literature laced with Classical allusions – when he was preparing himself for Oxford entrance examinations, after he had left Natal for England in 1919.<sup>163</sup> In addition, Campbell obviously used translations of Greek and Latin texts into English; many of these were outdated, inaccurate and suffused with a romantic preciosity, which inspired many Modernist poets, such as Ezra Pound, Robert Aldington, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), T.S. Eliot, Robert Graves and Laura Riding to attempt their own translations.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> For his struggles with Greek at Oxford, see Alexander 1982:19, 20, 26; for his translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica* into rhyming couplets, *CW* II:261–276.

<sup>161</sup> Alexander 1982:134. For Campbell's introduction to Lewis, whose satirical *The Apes of God* (1930) he greatly admired, even though Campbell as 'Zulu Blades' was one of the objects of this satire, see Alexander 1982:21, 22, 97–98, 117–121.

<sup>162</sup> For the dedication copy of *ME*, Meyers 1985:xi; for Lewis's 'Romanity', *CW* IV:398. cf. Hilton 2007:145–146.

<sup>163</sup> Hilton 2007:136–139; cf. Alexander 1982:19–35. To English literature, I would add French literature as well (Valéry, Laforgue, Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Mallarmé). See Campbell's letter to his father from Oxford: 'We read the French symbolists, modern futurists, the Elizabethans, modern scientists, the Roman poets and as much as we can of the Greeks' (Alexander 1982:25).

<sup>164</sup> See Hickman and Kozak 2019 *passim*.

Furthermore, Campbell's interaction with Classical antiquity in *ME* extends as well to art of the Roman Imperial period (the Mithraic reliefs),<sup>165</sup> and the panoply of symbols contained in it, mediated through the available archaeological evidence in Provence, Spain and Portugal, and the one 'academic' secondary source he consulted in the 1930s (Cumont). This he supplemented with Montherlant's semi-autobiographical fiction.

In addition to these Classical allusions, there are references in *ME* to both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible, and to extra-biblical Christian mythology, such as the myths of the journey of the Marys to France and the search for the Holy Grail. Evident too in *ME* is knowledge of both Roman Catholic theology and Catholic popular art Campbell saw in both southern France and Spain – for instance, representations of the sufferings of the Virgin Mary.

Campbell further enriches the texture of these poems with his knowledge of French and Spanish literature, particularly evident in his impressive corpus of translations after the publication of *ME*. This ranges from Modernist French authors such as Montherlant and Apollinaire to Provençal poets such as Mistral, and the mystical lyricism of poets of the Spanish Renaissance, of whom St. John of the Cross is the finest example. Echoes of English literature may well be evident in the apparent references in *ME* to Coleridge and Yeats.<sup>166</sup>

As I implied at the beginning of this article, in reference to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Campbell's layered intertextuality in *Mithraic emblems* is as impressive as Eliot's and clearly inserts the author's *personae* into a Modernist canon of creativity, incarnating the belief in the interpenetration of past and present, perhaps originally inspired by the reactionary Classicism of Wyndham Lewis,<sup>167</sup> and confirmed later, in a number of public lectures, by T.S. Eliot himself.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Goldschmidt's work (2024) on Modernism and its complex relationship with Classical 'fragments' (literary, visual and archaeological) is especially relevant here. I owe this reference to one of the anonymous readers.

<sup>166</sup> For Campbell's knowledge of English, French, Spanish and Portuguese literatures, see CW II, Alexander 1982: *passim*; Hilton 2007:137, 150. For Modernism and translation, see Hickman and Kozak 2019; Richard Aldington was one of the poets and translators Campbell befriended, as was Robert Graves, after some initial tensions, cf. Alexander 1982:97, 165–166, 218–219, 233.

<sup>167</sup> Meihuizen 2003a:15–18; Hilton 2007:142–146. For Lewis's Vorticism as a 'mass of excited thinking, engrossed in a whirling centre', or an 'intellectual eruption' in art and, by implication, literature, see Michel and Fox 1969:454–458. Campbell's youthful responses to T.S. Eliot's poems could be described as essentially vorticist (see note 6), as could his Mithraic poems in *ME*.

<sup>168</sup> See the texts of Eliot's Presidential Address to the Virgil Society (1944) and his BBC broadcast 'Virgil and the Christian World' (1951) (Eliot 1965:53–71, 121–131). Positively Campbellian is Eliot's 'the bloodstream of European literature is Latin and Greek – not as

In my opinion, however, Campbell differs not in the ‘extinction of personality’ or the ‘death’ of the author,<sup>169</sup> but in his intertextual engagement with the myths, art and religious systems of Classical antiquity, by which he develops in *ME* and in his autobiographies the *persona* of the heroic, hypermasculine, but sensitive, complex and *learned* colonial outsider (and cowboy).<sup>170</sup>

The bullfighting cattlemen of the Camargue are also ‘priests of Mithras’, tending the solar Christ: the ‘old way of doing things’ may well represent a *positive* regression from the grim cities of industrialized Europe, from the philosophical pretension and political posturing of the Bloomsburies, away from urban sophistication and the cloying excesses of romanticism, to an earlier time when emotional and spiritual crises were, in the tradition of Homer and Mistral, sung in verse round the fires in that only bit of Africa in Europe. Reforging Golden Age mythology, in the service of cultural renewal, seems to characterize the work of Modernist authors in perceived periods of ‘world decline’.

Campbell’s heavy South African English accent (noted with astonishment, even by Uys Krige) and his inability to get into Oxford marked him, especially to the Bloomsburies, as inferior, gauche and ill-educated.<sup>171</sup> His ferocious private reading programme at Oxford and his cultivation of the Ovidian image of the ‘poet in exile’ nicknamed ‘Zulu’, reveal the ambiguities in his identity construction, centred around metropole, empire and colony, belonging and exclusion.<sup>172</sup> That Campbell was a product of the white, colonial British ruling class in the former British colony of Natal and its ‘aristocratic’ obsession with hierarchies and Classical tradition, connected him to the very apostles of Empire, but his perceived South African gaucherie, his criticism of the ruling colonial class, and his attendant heroization of, and identification with, the very people who had defeated the British at Isandlwana, marked him out as a suspect colonized ‘other’.<sup>173</sup>

Furthermore, he did not have the Oxbridge qualifications to be taken seriously as an intellectual, let alone as the kind of politically engaged poet

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two systems of circulation, but as one, for it is through Rome that our parentage in Greece must be traced’ (1965:70). Cf. also Eliot’s earlier presidential address to the Classical Association, ‘The Classics and the man of letters’ (1942:5–27).

<sup>169</sup> One of the significant features of some Modernist authors, notably poets such as Eliot and the French poets Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarmé, admired by both Eliot and Campbell, is to subvert the centrality of the author, thus anticipating American New Criticism and Barthes’ seminal article on the death of the author (1968).

<sup>170</sup> Meihuizen 2003b:196–205.

<sup>171</sup> Krige 1959:24–28.

<sup>172</sup> For many of these ambiguities, see Hilton 2007:135–136.

<sup>173</sup> Meihuizen 2003a; 17; 2007:164–165, 191–192. For Campbell’s attack in satirical verse on the white South African colonial ruling classes, see Alexander 1982:69–73.

represented by the conglomerate MacSpaunday,<sup>174</sup> but he was determined to be accepted by the literary establishment on his own terms, as an old-fashioned, English-speaking South African colonial poet, and in so doing used his wide reading in European literature to forge the *personae* we encounter in *ME*.

This included deeply conservative moves: conversion to Roman Catholicism, flirtation with fascism,<sup>175</sup> and the belief that Mithraism, the *very* 'old way of doing things', shaped Christian (and especially Catholic) theology. That 'Modernism' could be, *pace* Pope Pius X, reactionary, conservative, fascist and 'Classicizing', is indicative of the anti-modern Modernism Meihuizen (following Jameson) identifies in Campbell's work, which, in Meihuizen's words, 'best accommodates the Campbellian aristocratic trajectories of traditionalism, equestrianism, a melding of liberal and conservative tendencies, and simple existential enthusiasm totally at odds with Modernist *angst* and satiety'.<sup>176</sup>

Furthermore, in addition to the *persona* of the gung-ho, anti-establishment man's man, there are moments in the autobiographies in which Campbell reveals another *persona*: vulnerable, sensitive and at odds with the masculinity of the neo-epic hero.<sup>177</sup> In the course of my analysis of the explicitly Mithraic poems in *Mithraic emblems*, I have suggested that these poems explore the vulnerable interiority of this 'other' Campbell – his painful journey back to Mary, his spiritual initiation, the intensity of his Catullan conflict between the head and the heart, his shame, regret and critical judgment of his various 'selves', and perhaps his nascent Catholic guilt. Mary Campbell was fully aware of the ambiguities in her husband's *personae*. Shortly after the death of her husband in 1957, she wrote that 'the tough soldier, the crack shot, the jousting, the convivial storyteller were all so many masks covering the retiring, gentle, creative spirit from a too brutal contact with everyday life'.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Campbell's invention to refer to the four poets (MacNeice, Spender, Auden and Day-Lewis) whose left-wing political views he despised (Alexander 1982:199).

<sup>175</sup> For the MacSpaundays, definitely the 'wrong side' in the Spanish Civil War; Alexander 1982:199, 205, 213–214; cf. Meihuizen 2007:224–233.

<sup>176</sup> Meihuizen 2003a:14–15; 2007:162, 167. Cf. Goldwyn and Nikopoulos 2017:1–18. Goldschmidt 2024 prefers to interpret the links between the fragmentary in Modernism and Classical antiquity as indicative of the continued reception of the Classics, and Classical scholarship, rather than the conventionally assumed rupture with this tradition, as more and more fragments of the past, such as the Mithraic reliefs, were brought to light in the Modernist period c. 1896–1936. Campbell's publication of the sonnets in *ME* extended over the last years of this period.

<sup>177</sup> Meihuizen 2003b:198–204.

<sup>178</sup> Pearce 2001:333.

Finally, it is indeed striking that three male Modernist writers, Campbell, Hemingway and Montherlant, more or less contemporaries, should find in bullfighting suggestive links with a Romanized Mithraic past, which they embraced, precisely because they believed it gave the present a sense of continuity and stability – a present fractured by brutal wars, and by what they perceived as moral and sexual ambiguities, emblematic of what Campbell believed was the decline of Western civilization.<sup>179</sup>

The tragic irony, about the actual lives of all three, was that where gender and sexuality were concerned, the kind of heroic masculinity they emulated in the *vaquero* and the bullfighter was, like all genders, inherently unstable: the male bullfighter may well exude hypermasculine courage, but his choreographed, ritualistic movements convey the androgynous grace of the ballet dancer, enhanced by the pink tights and ornate, body-hugging costume, which incarnate sexual ambiguity.<sup>180</sup>

The three apostles of ‘real’ old-style masculinity were themselves deeply riven by their own sexualities, which threatened to destabilize the heterosexual and hegemonic masculinities they emulated. Montherlant was homosexual, profoundly misogynistic, and committed suicide.<sup>181</sup> Hemingway’s struggles with sexuality and gender categories are reflected in his final novel – he too committed suicide.<sup>182</sup> Campbell’s flight from the Bloomsburys was, in some ways, a flight from his sensitivity, ambiguous sexuality and unstable masculinity.<sup>183</sup> Suspicious of his

<sup>179</sup> The Spanish Civil War and the Second World War; cf. Hilton 2007:146–147.

<sup>180</sup> Coullie’s analysis (2001:3–16) of how Campbell’s construction of hegemonic white masculinity in his autobiography *Light on a dark horse* is mired in racist, sexist and homophobic discourses of the period is insightful. Cf. Stobie 2007:92–93.

<sup>181</sup> Although, according to the Gallimard biographical note introducing Montherlant’s plays, *Fils de personne* and *Un incompris*, sunstroke in 1959 caused an accident which made Montherlant lose his left eye. Threatened with blindness, he committed suicide in 1972, ‘faithful to his customary Stoic morality, which underpins all his work’ (1944:7–8; my translation).

<sup>182</sup> *The Garden of Eden*, first published posthumously in 1986, in a version censored by the editor (Jenks) in order to maintain the ‘huntin’ shootin’ fishin’ version of Hemingway’s masculinity. In her study of representations of bisexuality in South African literature, Stobie comments on the references to the garden of Eden in Campbell’s *Georgiad* – ‘a significantly recurring fictional site for the production of bisexuality’ (2007:88). For psychoanalytical accounts of Hemingway’s sexuality, see Eby 1999, 2005; cf. Coullie 2001:12–14 (on Campbell).

<sup>183</sup> For Campbell’s masculinity, see Alexander 1982:44, 102 (the man of action), 100 (the accommodation of the feminine elements in Campbell’s personality and the masculine in Mary’s). Precisely the theme of Hemingway’s last novel, reflecting his own relationships

wife's relationship with the English poet, Rob Lyle, and his (Campbell's) attraction to another woman, he is believed to have castrated himself.<sup>184</sup> Campbell's final turn was not only to Mithras, but also to Cybele.

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with his wife, also named Mary. For Campbell's bisexuality, Alexander 1982:21, 78, 192. Cf. Meihuizen 2003b:205 n.8; Stobie 2007:87–94; Birch 2013:21–22, 215–216.

<sup>184</sup> Meihuizen 2003b:205 n.8; Stobie 2007:91–92. Campbell may well have been jealous of both his wife and Rob Lyle, but Meihuizen is right: 'one remains at the mercy of speculation'.

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