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Roy Campbell and the Inklings

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Abstract
Traces the history of poet Roy Campbell’s contacts with the Inklings, particularly Tolkien and Lewis.

Additional Keywords
Campbell, Roy—Biography; Lewis, C.S.—Relation to Roy Campbell; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Relation to Roy Campbell
In 1966, three years after his brother's death, W. H. Lewis published C. S. Lewis's letters. In the "Memoir of C. S. Lewis," which was the introduction, W. H. Lewis mentions the Inklings, their literary society at Oxford; describes the general practices of the group; and then, from his diary, relates some details of the meetings of 1946, including this passage: "in November, . . . 'Roy Campbell read us his translations of a couple of Spanish poems'" (14, rev. ed. 34). He mentions Campbell's attendance so casually that the first person to write an essay on the Inklings as a group included Roy Campbell as a member (Christopher 10); more recently, D. S. J. Parsons, in his primary and secondary bibliography on Campbell, has made the same mistake (JII.108, p. 169). But two years after that first essay, Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper in their biography of Lewis correctly called Campbell a visitor, not a member (156).

Still, there are some contradictory details about the acquaintance of Campbell, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien that are worth discussing, there are the basic facts to record, and there are two poems by Lewis — really, one poem and one fragment directed to Campbell. Included also shall be a discussion of a poem by Campbell that predates by a couple of years his meeting with Lewis and Tolkien but that catches his mixed attitude toward Oxford dons.

I. A Year in Oxford

When did Campbell and Lewis first meet? In Peter Alexander's basic biography of Campbell, it is recorded that Campbell originally knew Lewis "only slightly," based on Campbell's year at Oxford, from early 1919 to early 1920 (83). On the other hand, Lewis, in a published letter, comments that he did not know Campbell when he showed up in Oxford in 1944. More exactly, this is what Lewis writes:

I got to know him before I knew who he was. He was for some weeks a mysterious stranger in a pub whose skyscraping and hair-raising stories made me feel as if I had blundered into a picaresque novel. . . . at last the stranger let out that his name was Campbell, and I (at a long shot) said, "Not Roy Campbell?" ("Wain's Oxford")

Since Campbell had a great tendency to enlarge or change his past — Alexander calls him "a great myth-maker" about his own life (vii) — and since the information about Campbell's early acquaintance with Lewis comes from what Campbell told a friend (257.n26), it is almost certain that Lewis's account is the truth.

Nevertheless, it is possible that Campbell knew of Lewis in 1919, during that year in Oxford, so a consideration of the period is in order. Roy Campbell, a South African, was very rebellious against the society he grew up in and against his father. He arrived at Oxford intending to study Greek and apply for admittance. Instead of applying himself to language, he got involved in the sophisticated literary circle of the school, particularly through T. W. Earp, "the son of a wealthy brewer," who was "then president of the Oxford Union" (Alexander 21). Earp introduced Campbell to Robert Graves, Louis Golding, Russell Green, and Aldous Huxley — all then at Oxford and a number of others (22). Campbell also met, through another friend, Wyndham Lewis, the Sitwells, and T. S. Eliot (21). Campbell published a poem — "The Porpoise" — in Oxford Poetry, 1920; it presumably was accepted during 1919. (On the contents page, Campbell is identified as being a member of Merton College, but that does not seem to be accurate. Another poem by Campbell, "Bongwi's Theology," is reprinted in the volume.) All of this sounds very unlike Lewis, but there is a more likely connection. Campbell's ancestors were Scottish, but some of them had moved to Ireland before going on to South Africa. Campbell at least once referred to his "family of ex-Irish bogtrotters" (17) and, while at Oxford, Campbell was attracted to the Sinn Fein, the Irish rebels (23).

Lewis, in December of 1918, was demobilized from the Army. The fullest account of this year is found in C. S. Lewis's letters to Arthur Greeves. The first letter of 1919 — on 26 January — was written by Lewis from University College (They Stand Together, No. 91, p. 240). The references to anything related to what Campbell was doing are very sparse because Lewis was working hard at his studies. He does mention learning that some of the extreme literary set at Balliol and Exeter, the writers of 'verse libre' etc, who run the yearly Books of Oxford Poetry had got the book [that is, Lewis's volume of poetry Spirits in Bondage, published under the pseudonym of Clive Hamilton] and asked [Cyril] Hartman [a fellow member of the Marlets Society with Lewis] if he knew a Lewis at Univer[ersity College] and if that was the man. The result is that several people are going to buy it who might not have otherwise done so. On Wednesday I am to meet at Hartman's room a man called Childre who edits these books of Oxford Poetry & tho' I am sure I shall disapprove of him and his views it will possibly be useful. (No. 96, pp. 253-54)

Two things need to be added to this passage. First, the news that "Clive Hamilton" was a pseudonym would have been obvious to early purchasers of Spirits in Bondage, for there was a listing of the book in the back of the volume as by George Lewis — obviously a different pseudonym that was considered. But the information that this George Lewis was a student at University College could only have come from Lewis or his close friends talking freely. It is notable that Lewis does not seem bothered by the infor-
Something happened during the war to temper this Irishness. Probably it was no more than Ireland staying out of World War I and avoiding most of the shortages that affected England, while Lewis fought. Possibly Lewis' increasing difficulties with his father in Belfast had something to do with it. Certainly Lewis could not have considered using the pseudonym of George Lewis for his poems without realizing the English nature of its echo of St. George. Still, the volume contains several Irish poems, so Lewis was not denying his background. The change was a matter of degree, not of nature.

How does this tie to Campbell? As a man with Irish ties, if he heard of Lewis's Irish poems or simply of the poet's Irish background, it should have stuck with him. So there is no proof positive in this matter, but it is possible that, during his year at Oxford, Campbell knew of Lewis and that he later told it as a matter of a slight acquaintance.

What about Tolkien? Is there any reason why Campbell would hear of him in 1919? After World War I, Tolkien had moved to Oxford late in 1918, already married and with a child; he worked on the Oxford English Dictionary in 1919 and most of 1920. So Tolkien was not much involved in the undergraduate society.

There is certainly one connection. Before the war, Tolkien published a poem in Oxford Poetry 1915. That volume was co-edited by the ubiquitous T. W. Earp -- indeed, he was not only a co-editor but also a contributor that year, and he was also in Exeter College with Tolkien (Hammond B1, pp. 279-280). Further, Tolkien's poem was reprinted in Oxford Poetry 1914-1916, which was published in 1917 (279). So there is a slim chance that Campbell would have looked at it. But Tolkien's "Goblin Feet" was so unlike Campbell's goals that, one would surmise, it could have only made a negative impression if Campbell did.

On the other hand, Tolkien certainly knew Earp fairly well and refers to him twice in the volume of his letters. In 1914 -- Tolkien's final year as an undergraduate -- he writes to his fiancé, "...I... had an interesting talk with that quaint man Earp I have told you of and introduced him (to his great delight) to the 'Kalevala' the Finnish ballads" (Letters No. 1, p. 7). That was the year before Tolkien's poem was published. More striking is a comment by Tolkien to his son in a letter telling of Campbell's 1944 appearance:

we [that is, Campbell and himself] probably met when he was a lad, as he lived in Oxford at the time when we lived in Pusey Street[.] [He was] rooming with [William] Walton the composer, and going about with T. W. Earp, the original twerp, and with Wilfred Childe your godfather -- whose works [poems] he much prizes[.] (Letters No. 83, p. 95)

Childe, as was said above concerning his brief connection with Lewis, is not mentioned in Alexander's biography, although Walton is, as a close friend of Campbell in the Oxford period. Indeed, it was Walton who introduced Campbell to Wyndham Lewis, the Sitwells, and T. S. Eliot (Alexander 20-21), although the biography does not men-
he was 'cuckolded by a woman'” (126). And later in that
Lesbian affair, Alexander writes of Roy Campbell, “Again
chapters on, when Mary Campbell was having another
into Campbell’s mind” by alluding to it twice later. Three
Peter Alexander shows how Lewis’s “remark seared itself
became a passionate affair over a period of months. In
Sackville-West and Mary Campbell began a love affair.
search of an inexpensive place to live, they moved to a
Campbell and Tolkien met, but, if so, the meeting at that
time had no consequences.

II. The Apocryphal Meeting

Alexander’s biography of Campbell records a meeting
between Lewis and Campbell in 1927. As has been indi-
cated, Lewis did not know Campbell until 1944 in his own
account. Therefore, this meeting must be taken as a story
Campbell told — its importance is not that it happened but
that Campbell told of it happening.

This is the background. Campbell and his wife, Mary,
had returned to England from a stay in South Africa. In
search of an inexpensive place to live, they moved to a
village in Kent. There, after about a month, they met Vita
Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson.
Sackville-West, a Lesbian, minor writer, and gardener of
the period, is best known because one of her lovers was
Virginia Woolf. What happened in this case is that
Sackville-West and Mary Campbell began a love affair.
The details do not matter for this essay, except to say it
became a passionate affair over a period of months. In
early November — perhaps in an attempt to establish an
open, recognized relationship (Alexander 83) — Mary
Campbell told her husband about the affair. After ques-
tioning her and Sackville-West, Campbell left.

Bewildered and hurt, Campbell took the train up to London,
intending perhaps to drink himself into a stupor. There, in
a pub, he met the author and scholar C. S. Lewis. . . . To him
[one remembers Campbell claimed acquaintanceship] Campbell, unable to contain himself, poured out the whole
story. Lewis, at first surprised, listened in fascinated silence,
and then sat back ruminatively. ‘Fancy being cuckolded by
a woman!’ he mused. The uncharacteristically tactless re-
mark seared itself into Campbell’s mind. He was an intensely
proud man; the thought of being the butt of innumerable
Bloomsbury jokes was unbearable to him. (83)

Peter Alexander shows how Lewis’s “remark seared itself
into Campbell’s mind” by alluding to it twice later. Three
chapters on, when Mary Campbell was having another
Lesbian affair, Alexander writes of Roy Campbell, “Again
he was ‘cuckolded by a woman’” (126). And later in that
chapter, about a poem Campbell wrote, “The Road to
Arles,” “C. S. Lewis’s thoughtlessly cruel words lie behind
this throttled, thrilling cry of pain” (128).

No doubt Campbell was greatly hurt by his wife’s
unfaithfulness — but, as has been said, it was not rein-
forced by any comment by Lewis.

Why did Campbell invent this story? A full answer
may be impossible, but one thing can be eliminated. It was
not that Campbell knew of Lewis from his college days and
so, when the cuckolding occurred, he used the eminent
scholar and moralist in a type of mental drama to express
his own feelings. What is wrong with this is the clause
“When the cuckolding occurred.” In 1927, when the affair
was revealed to Campbell, Lewis had published only two
books of poems under a pseudonym. He was not yet
returned to Christian belief, and he was not eminent at all.
There was no reason for him to occur to Campbell at the
time. This is reinforced by checking Alexander’s source for
the story: he says it comes from Rob Lyle, a man who was
“Campbell’s closest friend and confidant in later years”
(257.n26). According to the biography, Campbell met Lyle
in 1947 (212). So the earliest this story could have been told
to Lyle was twenty years after Mary Campbell’s affair with
Vita Sackville-West; more significantly, this was after the
1944 and 1946 meetings of Campbell with Lewis.

Of course, this does not mean that the comment “Fancy
being cuckolded by a woman” was not said to Campbell. It
may have been said by a bartender; it may have been said by
a stranger in a pub to whom he poured out his story. It may
not have been said in a pub at all, but by some friend or
acquaintance Campbell went to after being told of the affair.
All one can actually say is that it was not said by Lewis.

Even in the unlikely circumstance that Campbell met
Lewis, if one assumes he knew of Lewis from Oxford, and
under the unlikely circumstance that Lewis would have
been in a London pub early in November of 1927 (83),
during a term at Oxford, it does not seem possible that
Lewis would have completely forgotten — even seventeen
years later — the meeting with a man whose wife was
having a Lesbian affair. Again, Lewis’s statement of not
knowing Campbell seems authoritative.

Why then did Campbell tell this story? Obviously to
introduce someone famous into an anecdote and to have
him or her do or say something unexpected makes for a
more interesting story. Even when telling of his own mar-
tal problems, Campbell’s myth-making about his own life
seems to have not flagged.

But, more specifically, why did Campbell pick Lewis
for the person? By the time that Campbell told this story
to Rob Lyle, Lewis had a reputation as a Christian apolo-
gist. To have him not make a moral statement about sin
but to just “muse” about the situation is the type of mild
surprise that makes for an interesting tale. (Of course, this
assumes that the way Campbell told the story has been
repeated correctly by Lyle to Alexander and again by Alexander in the biography. There is certainly a possibility for distortion in the process.) Further, by the time Campbell told this story, he had met Lewis in Oxford -- in a pub. So he would have had reason to associate Lewis with pubs. Third, there is the fact that Lewis had attacked Campbell's poetry in a poem and, fourth, as will become clear later, he did not seem to believe Campbell's stories in their 1944 meetings. Fifth, both Campbell and Lewis had Ulster ties - and differences in their churchly destinations. These would give added reasons for Campbell to keep Lewis in mind and use him anecdotally. These five reasons may not be the full explanation, but they do suggest some possibilities.

III. Lewis's Poem

Twelve years after this apocryphal meeting, an odd thing happened: C. S. Lewis wrote a poem addressed to Campbell. "To Mr. Roy Campbell" appeared in The Cherwell on May 6th, 1939. A revised version appears in Lewis's Poems under the title of "To the Author of Flowering Rifle" (65; bibliographic information by Walter Hooper, 142).

This poem to Campbell does not indicate that Lewis knew Campbell, however, for on February 6th Campbell published "The Flowering Rifle," a poem in heroic couplets in praise of General Franco and the Nationalist forces (Parsons A12, 25; Alexander 174). There were several reasons for Campbell's attitude in the Spanish Civil War, one of them being that he and his wife had become Catholics in June 1935 (155). The other side -- the Left -- was defacing the churches in Spain as the war approached (159); after the Civil War started, priests and other churchmen were killed, including the Carmelite monks who were Roy and Mary Campbell's confessors (164). More details could be given, but this suggests part of the cause of Campbell's poem.

That being said, Alexander considers it a poor, repetitive, and strident poem. Campbell wrote most of its approximately 5000 lines in two weeks (174). Alexander writes, "The poem is easily the most undisciplined [Campbell] ever wrote, linked as it is by nothing except the violence of his invective against the Left" (175). Alexander also comments that, at the time, "Campbell was ... incapable of perceiving the true nature of Fascism" (177), being extremely naïve politically (178). The English reviews of Campbell's book split according to political and theistic lines, with almost no attempts to discuss it as poetry (176-77; five reviews are quoted in Parsons 193-94). It is in this situation that Lewis writes a nineteen-line reply to Campbell's poem. He uses Campbell's verse form, writing eight heroic couplets and one heroic triplet. His poem begins,

Rifles may flower and terrapins may flame
But truth and reason will be still the same.

The first line alludes to not only The Flowering Rifle but to Campbell's first book The Burning Terrapin (Parsons A1, p. 3). But nothing in the rest of Lewis's poem refers to that volume's content, so only its impossible title is of importance for Lewis's purpose. He sets the concepts of the two titles against the changelessness of truth and reason. For Lewis, the changeless truth is a religious truth -- both of God and of mankind's relation to God -- and the changeless reason is a guide towards God and a guide to morality. In the poem, this is implicit at the end when Lewis writes, "Some feet of sacred ground . . . can yet be found." The religious note appears in the word sacred and in Lewis's identifying this ground as the place where "stood your father's house" -- you, for he is addressing Campbell. The phrase "father's house" is Biblical, referring to Heaven; here it seems to have both political and religious meanings. Politically, Lewis is saying that Campbell's tradition is neither Fascist nor Communist, but rather Democratic (or that of a limited monarchy) -- there he should be. Religiously, he seems to imply that neither the anti-Christian Communists, obviously, nor the nationalist Fascists, less obviously, serve the Christian faith and God.

Taken out of context, Lewis's final phrasing about the "sacred ground" where "stood your father's house" and where "you should stand," could be read as being anti-Catholic: that Campbell, of a Calvinistic background from his name (even if Lewis did not know anything of his history and Ulster connections), should not be involved in the Catholic, Fascist side of the Spanish Civil War. But this is not what Lewis says:

Some feet of sacred ground,
A target to both gangs [that is, to both the Communists and the Fascists], can yet be found,
Sacred because, though now it's no-man's-land,
There stood your father's house; there you should stand.

Obviously, no such place in an anti-Catholic sense stood in Spain. Lewis is thinking of a place of peace, morality, love; as suggested above, of democracy or a limited monarchy, of true (rather than political) Christianity.

Other than this frame, Lewis spends four lines objecting to Campbell trying to dismiss the merciful by calling them Humanitarians, and he spends nine lines on Campbell's quarrel with those on the Left, suggesting the two sides are much alike: "who cares / Which kind of shirt the murdering party wears?" The one piece of praise of Campbell is Lewis's description of his verse outsoaring [with eagle pride] the "nerveless rhythms" of the Leftist poets -- presumably referring to W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, and C. Day Lewis.

But the tone of the poem is suggested more clearly by a nominative of address to Campbell -- "Loud fool!" -- and two command forms addressed to him -- "Repent! Recant!"

Why did Lewis write this poem? As has been said, the literary furor over The Flowering Rifle may well have been enough to draw Campbell's book to Lewis's attention. But his impulse to write is probably suggested by his comment in his 1963 letter about meeting Campbell. "I loathed and loathe Roy Campbell's particular blend of Catholicism and Fascism, and told him so" ("Wain's Oxford"). It may well be that Lewis wrote his reaction to Campbell's poem because he saw the dangers of Fascism and because he
disliked the suggestion that Christians would or should support such a system.

At any rate, according to the 1944 letter from Tolkien to his son Christopher, Campbell's "press-cutters miss nothing" (95) -- so Campbell saw this poem before he visited the Inkings. (At least he did if he told the truth about having press-cutters; in Alexander's book, he seems on the edge of poverty most of the time. Perhaps all that Campbell meant was that his publishers forwarded all the notices of the book they saw -- including Lewis's poem.) It is true that Tolkien, in his letter, got wrong both when Lewis's "lampoan" appeared and where -- he said "not long ago," when it was five years earlier, and he said in the Oxford Magazine, whereas it was The Cherwell. But the basic point, that Campbell probably had his attention drawn to Lewis in 1939, is what is significant. If he knew of Lewis during his one year at Oxford, this should have been a reinforcement. If not, still Lewis as the author of The Allegory of Love and The Screwtape Letters would have been familiar -- and, unlike most of the split in the reviews over The Flowering Rifle, here was a Christian objection to the poem. Campbell need not be convinced by Lewis's poem to be -- despite the tone -- intrigued. But, even if so, a war intervened.

IV. Campbell's Poem

Lewis's poem appeared, as has been said, in 1939 -- the year World War II started for Britain. Of course, it appeared in a May 6th issue and war was declared on September 3rd. But the year is significant. Campbell was living in Spain: when he heard of the declaration, he took a train to Madrid and volunteered at the British Consulate. He was turned down -- probably a combination of his age, his children, and his South African nationality (Alexander 184). Later, with World War II under way, Campbell, his wife, and daughters left Spain for Britain in 1941. Eventually Campbell, "concealing his age," got into the Army (190) -- more specifically, into the Army Intelligence Corps because of his knowledge of languages (192). He was forty at the time. In 1943, he was sent to Africa (195). A year later, he was transferred from the Nairobi area to a camp near Mount Kilimanjaro. On the trip there he went through "a huge game park, the Athi Reserve" (198). In 1945, over the BBC, he describe this trip (266.n29):

It seemed that the whole of Noah's ark had been let loose: and I am afraid that it rather upset our sense of military dignity, for we were tempted to go after the animals on our motorbikes, and to show off what we had learned in the rough-riding school. We would stand on the footrests and race after a troop of zebras, or a lion, or a bunch of wildebeeste, with our claxons hooting. ... But when we suddenly ran into the first herd of giraffes -- I really thought they were exaggerating! Talk about 'dreaming spires'? It was like shunting in Oxford on a Sunday afternoon. (198)

Of course, that was written after his 1944 visit to Oxford; but his reaction at the time may have been much like it, for in a poem -- "Dreaming Spires" -- written in March 1944 (266.n30), while he was in a hospital in Mombasa, suffering from malaria, he makes the same comparison of the giraffes to the spires of Oxford. The phrase "the dreaming spires" is a traditional one for Oxford, as Campbell's English listeners and readers would have known, first used by Matthew Arnold in his poem "Thyrsis" in 1866.

Given Campbell's myth-making, he may have invented the comparison for the poem and then re-used it in his later talk, without it being his first reaction at all. But, whether in the experience of 1943 or the writing of the poem in 1944, he was thinking of Oxford.

"Dreaming Spires" is written in iambic tetrameter lines in quatrains rhyming ABAB. Of the twenty-eight stanzas, sixteen have feminine rhymes in the A lines only, one has them in the B lines only, and the remaining eleven stanzas have only masculine rhymes. But, more than the form, what is of interest is the tone of Campbell's thoughts in the poem. Here are three stanzas from near the first of the poem:

We roared into the open country,
Scattering vultures, kites, and crows;
All Nature scolding our effrontery
In raucous agitation arose.

Zoology went raving stark
To meet us in the open track --
The whole riff raff of Noah's Ark
With which the wilderness was black.

With kicks and whinnies, buck and snorts,
Their circuses stampeded by;
A herd of wildebeest cavorts,
And somersaults against the sky [...] (Selected Poems 91)

The language here is very colloquial: "raving stark" as a variant on "stark raving mad," for example, or the use of "riff raff" in "The whole riff raff of Noah's Ark." "Roared" is a standard metonymy for "drove our motorcycles" -- the sound of the engine substituted for the use of the engine. All of this nervous imagery captures the speed and the lively attitudes of soldiers.

Sixteen quatrains are spent on the giraffes. When these animals appear, the soldiers are "visited with a sudden awe"; they are "Abashed and fearful to disturb / The City of Giraffes! -- a People / Who live between the earth and skies, / Each in his lone religious steeple, / Keeping a light-house with his eyes:

Each his own stairway, tower, and styliate,
The poem develops in several ways the idea that the giraffes “live between the earth and skies” — and by implication the Oxford dons do also. (A don living in an Oxford college would be on a “stairway” certainly.) When Campbell uses religious language of the giraffes — each long-necked animal is a “lone religious steeple” and each “Ascend[s] on his saintly way / Up rungs of gold” — he is, at the simplest level, identifying the skies with heaven and saying that the giraffes’ heads seem to approach the spiritual realm. Of course, this is hyperbole; but what Campbell is conveying is the effect, the suggestion, on the soldiers of seeing this herd. At the level in which this poem discusses Oxford, one must remember that originally the colleges were religious schools, with monks for teachers; indeed, Oxford dons were not allowed to marry and retain their positions until the latter part of the nineteenth century. So the suggestion of saintly dons is idealized but related to Oxford historically.

As will have been apparent to the reader, there are touches of humor in these two quatrains. The description of each giraffe “keeping a light-house with his eyes,” as the fourth line and climax of a quatrain, switches the image from one of a religious tower to a lighthouse; but it does capture in a slightly grotesque way a realistic detail of giraffes: the large eyes here implicitly compared to lighthouses’ spotlights. Another grotesque touch is the comparison of a giraffe’s neck to a styliite: its neck to a stone pillar on which some early Christian saint isolated himself from the world (except for necessary baskets of food and bottles of drink — and, one assumes, a chamber pot or its equivalent). So far as this writer knows, none of the monks at Oxford went in for living on columns, but as an extreme form of asceticism it both reinforces the religious emphasis on Oxford and makes it slightly ridiculous (in modern eyes). Simply as a visual comparison, of course, a stone column and a giraffe’s neck are similar.

The last two lines of the above quatrains-tracing the ascent “Up rungs . . . into the twilight / And [up] leafy ladders to the day” — do, in their rhyme words of twilight and day show a progression. The giraffes’ necks take the heads up through the shadowy area beneath the leaves to the sunlight on top of the leaves. And the sun or light itself often has positive connotations in Christian symbolism, so this ties to the religious references also.

As the description of and meditation on the giraffes continue, the allusions to Oxford seem (at least to this reader) to be dropped. For example, two quatrains comment on the effects of their diet — the giraffes “fast on greens,” which allows them to control their “baser passions”; “Their blood-stream” has “a yeasty leaven [which] / Exalts them to the stars above.” Neither of these ideas about diet or its effect on the blood seems to be applicable to Oxford dons, who are hardly as a group vegetarians. But one touch is interesting: the last group of three quatrains develops the idea that the speaker and his “Beloved . . . may come” to this area, buy stills and a periscope, and “vegetate in towering sloth / Out here amongst these chosen few.” It is striking that when Campbell got back to England, after a series of bouts of malaria had made him unfit to continue his last position in Africa, he and his wife went to Oxford for two weeks (Alexander 201-02). Perhaps this comical desire to join the giraffes predicts his impulse to visit Oxford, “The City of the Dreaming Spires — / The City of Giraffes!”

On the other hand, Alexander’s biography records that after the two weeks in Oxford with his wife, Campbell “spent several more weeks in a hospital near Oxford” (204). If he were assigned to that hospital when he first arrived in England, it may be that the whole stay in Oxford with Mary was caused by the Army, not by some feelings that first found expression in the poem. Still, no doubt if he had wanted to avoid Oxford, he and his wife could have found some place else nearby to visit. And he used his stay in Oxford well — or, as will be made clear, perhaps a later stay.

V. The Tuesday Meeting

Thanks to Tolkien’s letter to his son that records the first meeting of Campbell with Lewis, the exact day can be noted. Tolkien writes on October 6th, 1944, that the previous night was Thursday and the first meeting occurred on Tuesday in the Eagle and Child pub (No. 83, p. 95). So that makes the meeting on the 3rd.

However, this seems to contradict the account in Peter Alexander’s biography. He writes that Campbell “seems to have arrived [on a hospital ship] in Liverpool late in June 1944” (202). He was sent to the Stepping Hill hospital in Stockport; he wrote his wife from there, and Alexander implies that they both very soon after journeyed to Oxford, and stayed for two weeks (202-03). He also says that both Roy and Mary Campbell met Lewis briefly (203), but that does not seem to be right, for Tolkien mentions nothing about Mary Campbell.

If one assumes that Campbell got back to England at the very end of June and that he and his wife were in Oxford in July, that still leaves a gap. Alexander says that Campbell, after his wife left, “spent several more weeks in a hospital near Oxford” before being allowed to go to London. It seems unlikely that a hospital would allow a patient out on a Tuesday morning and then on a Thursday night. The next two dates that are fixed in Alexander’s biography are Campbell’s military discharge on September 24th and his going to work as a Temporary Assistant on the War Damage Commission on November 13th (204-05).

What seems likeliest is that Campbell was in Oxford with his wife in July and returned by himself in October. One reason, possibly, for his second visit is mentioned by Alexander: he notes that the Campbells’ daughter Tess was having a nervous breakdown; she was in three different facilities — no dates are given for her stays, but the second is described as “a home near Oxford” (204). Campbell may well have been visiting her.
One final complication to the background of the meeting needs to be mentioned -- or, rather, mentioned again, for it was quoted above. Lewis writes,

I got to know [Campbell] before I knew who he was. He was for some weeks a mysterious stranger in a pub whose sky-scraping and hair-raising stories made me feel as if I had blundered into a picaresque novel. (“Wain’s Oxford”)

The significant term this time is “for some weeks.” If Lewis’s memory is correct -- and he is writing a little over eighteen years after the event -- Campbell was in Oxford for several weeks. Of course, that is possible, even though Alexander’s biography sounds as if Campbell was searching for a job during this period to pay for his daughter’s care (204). But it also must be admitted that Tolkien’s letter to his son does not sound as if he, at least, had noticed Campbell or his stories before.

This is the way Tolkien describes that first meeting:

On Tuesday at noon I looked in at the Bird and B[aby -- the nickname of the Eagle and Child pub] with C[harles] Williams. There to my surprise I found Jack [C. S. Lewis] and Warnie [W. H. Lewis] already ensconced. (For the present the beer shortage is over, and the inns are almost habitable again). The conversation was pretty lively -- though I cannot remember any of it now, except C.S.L.’s story of an elderly lady he knows.

Tolkien recounts the anecdote for his son, and then continues:

... & I noticed a strange tall gaunt man half in khaki half in mufﬁ with a large wide-awake hat, bright eyes and a hooked nose sitting in the corner. The others had their backs to him, but I could see in his eye that he was taking an interest in the conversation quite unlike the ordinary pained astonishment of the British (and American) public at the presence of the Lewises (and myself) in a pub. It was rather like Trotter [an early name for Strider in The Lord of the Rings] at the Prancing Pony, in fact v[ery] like. All of a sudden he butted in, in a strange unplaceable accent, taking up some point about Wordsworth. In a few second he was revealed as Roy Campbell (of Flowering Rifle and Flaming Terrapi). Tableau! Especially as C.S.L. had not long ago violently lampooned him in the Oxford Magazine, and his press-cutters miss nothing. There is a good deal of Ulster still left in C.S.L. if hidden from himself. After that things became fast and furious and I was late for lunch. It was (perhaps) gratifying to find that this powerful poet and soldier desired in Oxford chiefly to see Lewis (and myself). We made an appointment for Thursday (that is last) night. (95)

The reason for the comment about “a good deal of Ulster left in C.S.L.” is explained by Tolkien believing as did Campbell that Franco was “the defender of the Catholic Church against Communist persecution” (Carpenter 192). This will be discussed in the next section.

Lewis describes only a small part of that first meeting:

... when at last the stranger [in the pub] let out that his name was Campbell, and 1 (at a long shot) said “Not Roy Campbell!” I thought it right, before taking his hand, to ask whether he knew that I had already lampooned him in print. He said he did. (“Wain’s Oxford”)

Neither Lewis nor Tolkien develop some of the details one would have liked to read -- such as the response of W. H. Lewis and Charles Williams to Campbell. Williams especially, as a poet responding to a poet, would have been interesting. But W. H. Lewis made no diary entry and Charles Williams did not write about the matter to his wife, so neither their friends nor they presented their reactions to the meeting. Certainly Tolkien’s sentence “It was (perhaps) gratifying to find that this powerful poet and soldier desired in Oxford chiefly to see Lewis (and myself)” excludes Williams as a center of Campbell’s concern.

However, even if W. H. Lewis and Charles Williams did not record this meeting, there is one more account by an Inkling, by Dr. Robert E. Havard, which seems to be a description of this first meeting, although some details may be misremembered. (It was written in 1972, for the collection at the Wade Center: about twenty-seven years after this meeting.) He says:

There was a morning of brilliant conversation with Roy Campbell in The Eagle and Child. Campbell, a colourful figure, had not long before achieved some notoriety in the press by horsewhipping a critic of a friend on the step of the Athenaeum in London. We were all in some dread of this fiery poet, who had fought in the Spanish Civil War and also, I believe, in the bullring. But Lewis, in no way disconcerted, was on the top of his form and drew Campbell out so that he was soon rather shyly describing some of his experiences and defending his views expressed in The Flowering Rifle. (Havard 226-27)

The bullfighting and the fighting in the Spanish Civil War will be mentioned again in the next section, by Tolkien, and will be discussed there. The horsewhipping episode is not mentioned by Alexander’s biography. Since this meeting was in 1944, soon after Campbell got back to England from Africa and when Campbell had been ill with malaria, probably Havard is confusing times (unless he is recounting some myth that Campbell invented). Probably he is thinking of something that happened five years later: Campbell approached, with his walking stick raised, Geoffrey Grigson, who had critically attacked two of Campbell’s friends, Edith Sitwell and Desmond McCarthy. According to Alexander, this encounter took place “in the Aldwych one morning at the end of 1949”; as Campbell told the story, Grigson fled into a cake shop (215). Likewise, as Lewis and Tolkien tell of this Oxford meeting, there could not have been any “dread of this fiery poet” because he was not expected. But the detail about Campbell “defending his views expressed in The Flowering Rifle” sounds right, since Lewis had attacked those views in print.

Dr. Havard may be confusing, slightly, some of the subsequent meetings of Campbell and the Inklings with this first one. However, the next meeting was in the evening, not on a morning as Havard remembers.

VI. The Thursday Meeting

In his October 6th, 1944, letter to his son Christopher, J. R. R. Tolkien writes at the end of his account of meeting Roy Campbell at the Eagle and Child that the Inklings --
Tolkien goes on about Campbell:

What he has done since [Oxford] beggars description. Here is a son of a Ulster-pro[estan]t family resident in [South] Africa, most of whom fought in both wars, who became a Catholic after sheltering the Carmelite fathers in Barcelona - in vain, they were caught & butchered, and R.C. nearly lost his life. (95)

The part about Campbell’s family background is accurate enough, although the Ulster ties seem not to have been as deep as the Scottish ones. The latter part, about Campbell’s life during the first of the Spanish Civil War, is slightly reshaped. Roy and Mary Campbell’s decision to become Catholics took place in 1934, before the war; they received instruction from the priest in Altea, Spain, where they were living (150); they were received into the Catholic Church, re-baptised, and remarried in 1935 (155). However, it is true that the Campbells, having moved to Toledo, during riots in 1936 preceding the actual war sheltered some Carmelite friars, dressed in lay clothing, in their home (160); for their help of the friars, “the Campbells were confirmed [soon after] in a secret ceremony . . . by Cardinal Góma, the white-haired old Archbishop of Toledo and Primate of Spain” (161). All of this was before the outbreak of the actual war in July of 1936, and it is true that the seventeen Carmelite monks in Toledo were all killed on the fifth day of the actual war and the Campbells’ home was searched the same day. Most of the people in Toledo who had a servant in their homes or more than two workers in their businesses, were shot. The Campbells, living on a small allowance from his family in South Africa, had two maids. According to Alexander, Roy and Mary Campbell, after the militia had searched their home, “believed that their lives had been saved miraculously” (164-65). Thus what Tolkien writes to his son is more or less accurate if “became a Catholic” is taken to be “confirmed a Catholic,” etc. It sounds as if Campbell were condensing -- for dramatic effect -- what happened about the time the war started, although this may just be the result of Tolkien’s condensing material on the airletter.

But Tolkien’s next summary of Campbell’s activities is clearly not historically accurate. Tolkien writes that Campbell got the Carmelite archives from the burning library [of their monastery in Toledo] and took them through the Red [that is, Communist-controlled] country. (95-96)

According to Alexander, what actually happened was that the Carmelites, on the fourth day of the war, asked the Campbells to store a trunk of documents from their archives, including “the personal papers of St John of the Cross” (163); the Campbells had the trunk in their hall when the militia searched their house, but -- although some of the militia leaned their rifles against the trunk -- they never opened it. The library that was left in the friary “burned for days” (164). After perhaps a week, the Campbells were able to bribe some militiamen into giving them a lift out of the city in the back of a lorry used for conveying corpses. (165)
Campbell not only did not take the archives with him, his family took almost only the clothing they were wearing; Campbell’s own manuscripts were left behind, for example (166). In 1937, with a press pass, Campbell got back to Toledo, with the intention of checking on the trunk of Carmelite archives (172); but Alexander does not say what happened to it -- perhaps it is not known if Campbell located it or not. Overall, what actually happened is interesting, and exciting, enough. It seems a pity Campbell had a compulsion to exaggerate these matters.

Tolkien’s next sentence gives some background on Campbell: “He speaks Spanish fluently (he has been a professional bullfighter)” (96). Alexander notes about Campbell’s Spanish that, when he and his family moved to Spain in 1934, “they picked up the language with ease, though Campbell never learned to speak it faultlessly” (133). But the matter about bullfighting is more interesting. In 1929, while he was living in southern France, he had considerable success at the Provençal game of cocarde -- snatching [-] in which amateurs attempt to pluck a piece of ribbon from between the horns of a bull. . . . (115)

Campbell tried training to be a regular matador:

However, his ambitions were dashed when on two successive occasions . . . he was caught by a bull, which trod on his foot and then tossed him. (115)

Thus, despite what Tolkien thought, Campbell was never a professional bullfighter.

Tolkien continues:

As you know he then fought through the [Spanish Civil] war on Franco’s side, and among other things was in the van of the company that chased the Reds out of Malaga in such haste that their general (Villalba I believe) could not carry off his loot--and left on his table St. Teresa’s hand with all its jewels. (96)

Why Christopher Tolkien should have known Campbell fought for Franco is uncertain. Perhaps his father was referring to the furor about Campbell’s book Flowering Rifle in 1939, which gave Campbell’s legend some currency in Roman Catholic circles; there is a first-person passage in that book about Franco’s cavalry charging the troops of the Republic; one part of this passage describes the use of a saber against an enemy. Alexander thinks this attack is the best passage in the whole poem, although he suggests the Nationalists were using tanks rather than horses (175-76). But the basic point that Alexander makes is that the only time Campbell got to the front lines in the war was when he was there as a journalist. Alexander writes:

For the rest of his life Campbell was to claim he fought for Franco. So he did, with his pen. But his actual experience of the battlefield was confined to this tour by car on the single day of 1 July 1937. (173)

Thus, if Christopher Tolkien knew that Campbell fought for Franco, he was believing some of Campbell’s claims made to one journalist or another. And whatever happened to some Communist general in the war when Franco’s troops approached, Campbell was not there -- despite what J. R. R. Tolkien believed.

The next couple of comments by Tolkien do not take this type of heavy annotation:

He had most interesting things to say about the situation at Gibraltar, since the war (in Spain). But he is a patriotic man, and has fought for the British Army since. (96)

Campbell was at Gibraltar in 1938, on the way to see a doctor in Italy; Alexander records his tour of one of Italy’s luxury liners (built by Mussolin’s government) and his seeing a British battleship (179). Campbell was there again in 1941, when he was leaving Spain; he saw one of Britain’s war-damaged ships come into harbor (187-88). Perhaps Campbell was describing his own experience and the latter visit is referred to, since it followed the Spanish Civil War. But Tolkien’s report is so general that Campbell simply may have been telling things he had heard about Gibraltar in Spain and Portugal. As has been indicated above, Campbell never saw battle while he was in the British army.

Tolkien’s next comment about Campbell, after a “Well, well,” is “Martin D’Arcy vouches for him, and told him to seek us out” (96). Alexander mentions that, during their two weeks in Oxford, the Campbells met the brilliant and cultured Father D’Arcy, around whom so many Catholic artists gathered; he and Campbell became very good friends. (203)

Indeed, Father D’Arcy was one of the many visitors to the Campbells’ London home, when they lived there from 1944 to 1952 (221). Certainly Father D’Arcy was also familiar with a number of the Inklings. In Carpenter’s book on the group, he refers to a meeting of the Dante Society in Oxford at which Colin Hardie read a paper and to which Charles Williams was invited because of his The Figure of Beatrice -- which meeting Father D’Arcy chaired (188). This presumably was in 1943, soon after the publication of Williams’ book. Green and Hooper, in their biography of Lewis, mention that Father D’Arcy was involved in the Socratic Club -- a religious debate club for undergraduates -- of which Lewis was president (217).

Tolkien next turns to Campbell’s stories about artists of various sorts:

But I wish I could remember half his picaresque stories, about poets and musicians etc. from Peter Warlock to Aldous Huxley. The one I most enjoyed was the tale of greedy Epstein (the sculptor) and how he fought him and put him in [a] hospital for a week. (96)

Campbell had met both Peter Warlock (pseudonym of Philip Heseltine) and Aldous Huxley when he spent his youthful year at Oxford, and both he had seen occasionally afterwards -- no doubt he had a number of stories about both of them (Alexander’s index lists four references to Heseltine and six to Huxley, with an omission of the reference to Huxley on p. 232). One of Campbell’s poems, “Dedication of a Tree,” is dedicated to Warlock. However, in contrast with these generalities, the fight with Sir Jacob
Epstein is described by Alexander. The background is that, in 1921, Campbell met and soon moved in with Mary Garman, whom he married the next year. But she was sharing a studio with her sister Kathleen, and Jacob Epstein was then pursuing Kathleen. An unfounded rumor got around that Campbell was the lover of both women (28-29). Epstein was trying to get evidence on Campbell; finally, Campbell, who (now married) was renting a room above the Harlequin Restaurant, sent a message to Epstein who was dining with Kathleen: “Mr Campbell would like a word upstairs with Mr Epstein” (32). This is the way Alexander tells it:

With a set face Epstein rose and went up to the stairs to the Campbells’ room, while the diners in the small restaurant fell silent. There was a foreboding pause, and then suddenly thunderous sounds of two men fighting above. All eyes turned to where Kathleen sat alone. Feeling that she must do something, she rose from her table, rushed upstairs and flung open the door to find Campbell and Epstein rolling about among upturned furniture. ‘Stop it. Stop it! You’re behaving like animals -- you can’t behave like that here,’ cried Kathleen, and the two men rather sheepishly got to their feet. (32)

Later that night Campbell told his wife about his victory, and still later -- indeed, seven years after this meeting with the Inklings -- in his fictionalized autobiography Light on a Dark Horse, according to Alexander, “Campbell inflates this fight into an epic battle” (33). Thus Lewis, Tolkien, and any other Inklings who were there got one of Campbell’s well-polished stories. (Why Tolkien calls Epstein “greasy” is not known: a reader can only hope there was some reason besides anti-Semitism, although Campbell was anti-Semitic [Alexander 125n] and may have momentarily influenced Tolkien.)

The letter to Christopher Tolkien continues:

... it is not possible to convey an impression of such a rare character, both a soldier and a poet, and a Christian convert. How unlike the Left -- the ‘corduroy panzers’ who fled to America (Auden among them who with his friends got R.C.’s works ‘banned’ by the Birmingham T[own] C[ouncil]). (96)

This complaint that Auden and others did not fight in World War II was widespread at the time; Auden did move to America just before the war began. On the other hand, some of the writers on the Left were shocked out of their social beliefs by the Spanish Civil War, finding the Communists to unheroic. And Stephen Spender admitted his cowardice, for example. (The last two chapters in Cunningham’s British Writers of the Thirties discuss reactions to the Spanish Civil War.) The term “corduroy panzers” seems odd and may be a Campbellite coinage. It seems to refer to those on the Left who claimed to sympathize with the workers (and hence wore corduroy, at least figuratively) and who praised the coming class war (and hence were war-monsters or “panzers”). The oddity is the use of the German word panzer to refer to those on the Left. Probably there is a pun on pansy in the last half of the phrase. (Campbell, as Cunningham shows, attacked the homosexuality of some British Leftist poets in Flowering Rifle [441].)

The reference to Auden and his friends getting Campbell’s works banned in Birmingham, England, does not appear in Alexander’s biography and, whatever Campbell had in mind, does not seem to be an official act of a governmental body. (A check of The Official Index to the Times for the most likely years -- the publication year of Flowering Rifle and the three years thereafter -- shows no reference to Roy Campbell.) However, it is certainly true that Campbell disliked Auden and his circle. In Talking Bronco (1946), for both the book title and for a poem in it, he uses the name that Stephen Spender bestowed on him in a negative review, and he wrote some satiric poems referring to Auden, Spender, Cecil Day-Lewis, and Louis MacNeice under the composite name of “MacSpaunday” (Alexander 199). T. S. Eliot had to gently convince Campbell to drop a preface to Talking Bronco that attacked them (205-06). As has been said, Campbell was thinking, in part at least, of the fact that none of them were in active service during World War II (199). All of this is Campbell’s side of the antipathy; on the other side, Spender, in a 1958 letter, commented that the main reason he did not write, with praise, on some of Campbell’s poems of the 1930s was due to “Auden’s very critical view of him as a poet” (168, 264.n.36). So there was some artistic dislike early. Spender later wrote two very negative reviews of Campbell’s ideas in Flowering Rifle (Parsons No. II.1.4, p. 194) and Talking Bronco (Alexander 209 -- this review is not listed in Parsons). Other details about Campbell and the Auden group can be traced in Alexander’s biography, such as Campbell’s interrupting one of Spender’s public readings and giving him a bloody nose (213-15) -- although Spender has denied Campbell landed anything more than “a slight body blow like a tap” (Spender) -- and his fight with MacNeice in a pub in which MacNeice gave Campbell a bloody nose (Alexander 211). But Alexander does make one point which may tie to the story of Campbell’s books being banned. Alexander comments on the lack of reviews of Mithraic Emblems (1936) and the previous two books -- and Alexander wonders if the biases of the newspaper publishers were not involved (167-68), adding, “Campbell himself believed that he was the victim of a continuing literary boycott, and he may well have been right” (168). A reviewing boycott is not the same thing as a banning in Birmingham, but it seems likely Campbell developed his story out of something less defined, such as this possible boycott.

Two more passages will complete what Tolkien says about the Inklings’ meeting. But they will here be quoted in reverse order. The following passage concerns Lewis’s reactions to Campbell:

C.S.L.’s reactions were odd. Nothing is a greater tribute to Red propaganda than the fact that he (who knows they are in all other subjects liars and traducers) believes all that is said against Franco, and nothing that is said for him. Even Churchill’s open speech in Parliament left him unshaken. But hatred of our church [that is, the Roman Catholic Church] is after all the real only final foundation of the Church of England -- so deep laid that it remains even when all the superstructure seems removed (C.S.L. for instance reveres
the Blessed Sacrament, and admires nuns!). Yet if a Lutheran is put in jail he is up in arms; but if Catholic priests are slaughtered -- he disbelieves it (and I daresay really thinks they asked for it). But Roy [Campbell] shook him a bit... (96; ellipse in the original)

Against this passage should be put the fact that Tolkien seems to have accepted all that Campbell told the Inklings as being factual. Lewis seems to have been more sceptical. He hints at this when he writes in his letter about meeting Campbell:

He was for some weeks a mysterious stranger in a pub whose skyscraping and hair-raising stories made me feel as if I had blundered into a picaresque novel. My appreciation of a human flavour quite new to my social palate had nothing to do with approval or agreement or even belief. Mr. [John] Wain [whose Sprightly Running was the cause for Lewis's letter] might as well think [as that Campbell was an ally of the Communists] that Alcinous and his court were inspired by diplomatic considerations when they listed with delight to the amazing yarn that Odysseus spun them. ("Wain's Oxford")

What seems to have been going on in the meeting of the Inklings that Tolkien describes is that Tolkien's acceptance of his Church out of direct political ties.)

Unfortunately, Carpenter's statement is not a direct quotation, so he gives, in his style of annotation, no source for his information. At least, this implies that Tolkien did get to see the Church out of direct political ties.)

Thus, neither Inking was at his best with Campbell. Tolkien was too credulous; Lewis, too doubtful. After all, the Communists did massacre priests and monks in Spain. (This, of course, was in pre-Liberation Theology days when the Roman Church tended to side with the conservatives. Pope John Paul II seems today to be trying to keep the Church out of direct political ties.)

Two more sentences will complete Tolkien's letter:

I hope to see this man again next week. We did not leave Magdalen [College] until midnight, and I walked up to Beaumont Street with him. (96)

Did Tolkien see Campbell at the next Thursday evening Inklings? Humphrey Carpenter says, "Roy Campbell reappeared at the Bird and Baby once or twice" (192), which may imply no further Thursday-evening meetings in 1944. Unfortunately, Carpenter's statement is not a direct quotation, so he gives, in his style of annotation, no source for his information. At least, this implies that Tolkien did get to see Campbell again, if only for the shorter Tuesday meetings.

Carpenter's statement may explain a contradiction that was noted earlier. Tolkien described the October 3rd meeting in the pub as a first meeting, but Lewis in his published letter said that he heard stories told by Campbell in the pub "for some weeks" before learning who the teller was. As was stated before, Lewis wrote his letter about eighteen years after the event. Perhaps his memory played him false, turning some subsequent meetings in the Eagle and Child into preceding meetings. Of course, if Tolkien had missed the one or two meetings previous to the one he describes, Lewis's memory could be correct.

Whatever the truth of this matter, it does not exhaust the relationship between Lewis and Campbell.

VII. Lewis's Fragment

At some time, Lewis began a second poem to Campbell. This was collected by Walter Hooper in his edition of Lewis's Poems (66-67), under the title (possibly but not certainly given by Lewis) of "To Roy Campbell." This poem, in heroic couplets again, clearly is a fragment. It begins with a couplet setting up a thesis and then discusses Sir Walter Scott, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth. But it stops abruptly with the third verse paragraph, and it offers no conclusion -- not even a general restatement of the thesis.

When was it written? The first couplet begins "Dear Roy, so it has to be after Lewis had become friends with Campbell. Indeed, from Tolkien's accounts of the first two 1944 meetings, it does not sound as if they were close enough then. But it is possible the subsequent Tuesday meetings, with or without a Thursday meeting, would have done it. Or it could have been written after the 1946 meeting. The discussion of the fragment is placed at this point, subsequent to the 1944 meetings, simply on the assumption that there were more hours of discussion at this point, and so there is more of a chance that the topic Lewis raises came up at this point. It is striking that, in Tolkien's account of the first meeting, when Campbell intervened, he was "taking up some point about Wordsworth" (95); thus, it is even possible -- despite what was said above -- that this poem grows out of that first meeting. (It is also possible that, instead of any of these meetings, something Campbell said in one of his talks to Oxford students in the early 1950s [Alexander 220], or in some one of his writings, called this forth.)

Lewis begins,

Dear Roy -- Why should each wowzer on the list
Of those you damn be dubbed Romanticist?

Wowzer sounds like Campbell's diction. Presumably Campbell was denouncing various writers -- Scott, Wordsworth, and Coleridge -- by calling them Romantic.

Lewis's poem continues for the rest of the first verse paragraph:

In England the romantic stream flows not
From waterish Rousseau but from manly Scott,
A right branch on the old European tree
Of valour, truth, freedom, and courtesy,
A man (though often slap-dash in his art)
Civilized to the centre of his heart,
A man who, old and cheated and in pain,
Instead of snivelling, got to work again,
Work without end and without joy, to save
His honour, and go solvent to the grave;
Yet even so, wrung from his failing powers,
One book of his would furnish ten of ours
With characters and scenes. The very play
Of mind, I think, is birth-controlled today.

Much of this statement about Scott has the same ideas as
in Lewis’s “Sir Walter Scott” (read, 1956; pub. 1962). But as a statement to Campbell, Lewis has used some terms
Campbell would respond to: “valour . . . freedom,” and especially “honour.” (“Truth” may not have been Campbell’s forte, and his “courtesy” varied.) The metaphor in
the last line of the paragraph should have appealed to
Campbell as a Roman Catholic, and the idea of the last two lines was one that both Lewis and Campbell as conservatives
would have agreed with, although they might have interpreted it differently. For Campbell, the limited imagination
of modern literature might well be suggested by the lack of heroic figures treated positively in the poetry of the
1930s -- the lack of bullfighters and soldiers. For Lewis, it
might well be novels tied down to a type of limited realism
-- not just realism of setting and presentation but more specifically of middle class and lower class urban settings.
They do not have the scope, for example, of the major
Russian novels, nor obviously the Romantic qualities and
the fecundity of Scott’s novels.

What else can be said about the above lines by Lewis?
First, they are good heroic couplets -- all but one of the
couplets end-stopped. (Campbell tends to have slightly
fewer end-stopped couplets in Flowering Rifle, and his sentences tend to run slightly longer.) Lewis’s couplets are not
as epigrammatical as Pope’s, lacking the balance and the use of such tropes as zeugmatae. But they are rather like Dryden’s.

The first couplet in the above passage (the third and
fourth lines of the poem) has three water images, and the
following line has two arboreal images. The appositives of
Scott (“A right branch... A man ... A man...”), beginning
sequential couplets, gives a firm structure to part of the
passage. The possible allusion to Coleridge’s “Work without
Hope” in “Work without end and without joy” prepares for the next paragraph.

One way in which Lewis has shaped the second and
third verse paragraphs to appeal to Campbell is by citing
a Roman Catholic cleric -- Cardinal Newman -- as an
authority. Admitting Coleridge’s flaws, Lewis adds,

Yet Newman in that ruinous master saw
One who restored our faculty for awe... .
The next couplet begins each line with Who, parallel to the
who above, as Lewis suggests -- through Newman -- Coleridge’s importance. He sets in contrast to Coleridge the
scientist Paley, the philosopher Bentham, and the economi­
mist Malthus; this contrast is supported by light imagery
connected to Coleridge and winter imagery with his oppo­

For this [Coleridge’s religious message] the reigning
Leftist cell may be
His enemies, no doubt. But why should we?

The third paragraph begins with the next citation of New­
man: “Newman said much the same of Wordsworth too”
-- that is, that he “restored our faculty for awe,” he “re-dis­
covered the soul’s depth and height,” etc.

The rest of the third paragraph indicates the incom­
plete nature of the whole poem:

Now certain critics, far from dear to you,
May also fondle Wordsworth. But who cares?
Look at the facts. He’s far more ours than theirs;
Or, if we carve him up, then all that’s best
Falls to our share -- we’ll let them take the rest.
By rights the only half they should enjoy
Is the rude, raw, unlicked, North Country boy.

Given ordinary rhetorical shaping, a reader expects this
paragraph to go on to suggest what half of Wordsworth,
Campbell and Lewis “should enjoy” -- and then (or after
some discussion of other authors) the poem should reach
a conclusion in some sort of memorable way. But, instead,
the poem abruptly stops. Presumably Lewis got distracted
by some obligations or some other interests and never got
back to its composition.

What is the importance of this fragment? Obviously Le­
wis is still arguing with Campbell, although the topic is now
Romanticism, not Campbell’s combination of Christianity
and Fascism. But, then, Lewis likes to argue. More significant
is the shift in tone, from righteous anger to friendship.

VIII. The Last Meeting

So Roy Campbell met with the Inklings in 1944, C. S.
Lewis started a poem to Campbell sometime, and then,
about two years after the first meetings, Campbell came
back for a Thursday evening meeting. This was on Novem­
ber 28th, 1946. W. H. Lewis, in his diary, gives the meeting
four sentences:

A pretty full meeting of the Inklings to meet Roy Campbell,
now with the B.B.C., whom I was very glad to see again; he
is fatter and tamer than he used to be I think. He read us
nothing of his own, except translations of a couple of Spanish
poems -- none of us understood either of them. [John] Wain
won an outstanding bet by reading a chapter of Irene Id­
desleigh [a notoriously poor novel by Amanda M’Kitrick Ros]
without a smile. Humphrey [nickname of Dr. Havard] car­
ried me home early, but the others I heard did not break up
until one. (Brothers and Friends 197)

The original Spanish author of “the translations” that
Campbell read is not certain, but the two probably were
poems of St. John of the Cross. Campbell’s translation of
all of his poems appeared in 1951, and Campbell had
actually started his work on them about 1941 (Alexander
The language of mysticism often works by analogy and often by paradox; the result does not lend itself to reading aloud for immediate comprehension. (If Charles Williams had still been alive and if mystical poems were indeed what Campbell read, the reception of the poems might well have been more positive.)

After this meeting, Campbell lived on in London until 1952, and then he, his wife, and their two daughters moved to Portugal. There do not seem to have been any further meetings between Campbell and any Inklings — and, indeed, the Inklings’ meetings in W. H. Lewis’s sense, the Thursday evening meetings, died out in 1949 (Carpenter 226). Campbell, of course, did not forget about the meetings, for it was to Rob Lyle whom he met in 1947 that he told the story about meeting Lewis in a London pub in 1927 and telling Lewis about his wife’s affair with Sackville-West. Campbell and Lyle met regularly until 1953 (Alexander 228), and anytime in that six year period Campbell could have invented the tale. It seems an odd way to repay the hospitality of the Inklings; but, then, it did make a good story.

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Works Cited


