

**'A JOURNEY FROM DESPAIR': ALISTAIR TE ARIKI CAMPBELL'S 'THE  
DARK LORD OF SAVAIKI'**

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Forgiveness is a journey I must take  
Alone into my childish fears, and there  
Confront my fathers for my children's sake.

I must go back before I cease to care,  
And the world darkens and I cannot move.  
Forgiveness is a journey from despair

Along a path my ancestors approve.  
I must go back and with them make my peace:  
Forgiveness is a journey into love.<sup>1</sup>

In 1979 Alistair Te Ariki Campbell returned to Tongareva (or Penrhyn) Island in the northern Cook group after an absence of almost fifty years. 'The Dark Lord of Savaiki' is a sequence of ten short poems written after Campbell's 'pilgrimage to Penrhyn' (*Island to Island*, 16, 29).<sup>2</sup> One of Campbell's first poetic works to explore his Tongarevan heritage, the sequence records the multiple journeys taken as part of this

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<sup>1</sup> A poem entitled 'Forgiveness' by Alistair Te Ariki Campbell. *The Dark Lord of Savaiki: Collected Poems*. (2005) p.39. In Campbell's *Pocket Collected Poems* (1996) the poem is dated 1960.

<sup>2</sup> *The Dark Lord of Savaiki* was originally published as a separate volume by Te Kotare Press in 1980. The sequence appears, with minor variations, in Campbell's: *Collected Poems 1947 - 1981* (1981); *Stone Rain: The Polynesian Strain* (1992); *Pocket Collected Poems* (1996), and, most recently, in *The Dark Lord of Savaiki: Collected Poems* (2005) pp. 107-112. All references to Campbell's poetry in this essay are from the 2005 volume. Further page references to poems in this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text.



his soul eaten away  
by five years  
in the trenches.  
You followed him  
from island to island,  
bore his children

Campbell's parents were married in Rarotonga, in August 1925, 'four years and three children after they first met' (*Island to Island*, 59). According to the account in *Island to Island*, Campbell's memories of his early childhood in the Cook Islands are happy ones. His parents were comparatively well off and he and his brothers and sister grew up in a large house in Rarotonga surrounded by a loving family. Holidays were spent with his maternal grandfather, Bosini, and his extended family in Tongareva. All this was to change, however. In 1932 Teu died, aged 28. Within a year, Campbell's father was also dead. As a result Campbell and his brothers and sister were sent to New Zealand to be looked after by his father's family. The responsibility fell largely to Jock Campbell's mother.<sup>3</sup> As she was elderly and could not cope with the children within a short space of time they were to end up living in an orphanage in Dunedin.

It was not until the late 1970s that Campbell sighted, for the first time, a letter that his grandfather, Bosini, had written to his grandchildren in New Zealand in 1933 expressing his love for them and asking them not to forget him or the people of Tongareva - a letter which Campbell says was to inspire his pilgrimage to Tongareva (*Island to Island*, 16). While in Rarotonga in 1979 waiting for the boat to Tongareva Campbell also found a letter that his grandfather had written to the Resident Commissioner in Rarotonga, after his father's death, arguing that, as Campbell's elder brother and sister had been sent to New Zealand, Campbell and his younger brother Bill should be sent to live with him in Tongareva - a request which was denied (*Island to Island*, 17). After he left the Cook Islands in 1933, Campbell never saw his

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<sup>3</sup> Campbell's elder brother, Stuart, and his sister, Margaret, were sent to New Zealand after his mother's death. Campbell and his younger brother, Bill, followed on the death of their father.

maternal grandfather again. Given this background, it is little wonder that the dominant tone of the sequence is elegiac.

Campbell is now recognised as a pioneer of Pacific literature written in English (Wendt, 397). Yet by his own admission, for the first part of his life in New Zealand he denied his Polynesian heritage and recognised only his European side (Campbell interviewed by Sarti, 14). In an interview in 1994 Campbell explained this denial in the following terms:

I did it because I thought it necessary for my survival.  
Racism was rife in New Zealand in those days before  
the war, and as a small boy in a mainly white  
community I felt vulnerable (Campbell interviewed  
by Sarti, 16).

With, perhaps, the notable exception of 'The Return' (25-26), which was written in the late 1940s, this denial is reflected in the subject matter of Campbell's early poetry. After a breakdown in 1960 Campbell 'forgave his parents for dying young and abandoning him' and began to acknowledge his Polynesian heritage (Campbell interviewed by Sarti, 14). In a recent article in the *Listener*, Campbell is quoted as saying, 'I must have been in my thirties before I acknowledged the fact that I was Polynesian. But I still wasn't proud of being Polynesian until much later' (Welch, 45). From 1960 onwards Campbell has explored Polynesian subject matter in a variety of different genres. In the 1960s he wrote both poems and plays which focused on Maori characters, in particular, the famous warrior and chief, Te Rauparaha. In the 1970s contact with Campbell's Cook Island family was re-established and he returned to both Rarotonga and Tongareva. In *The Dark Lord of Savaiki: Collected Poems* (2005), the sequence appears under the heading 'Tongareva 1980 - 1994' alongside the sequence 'Soul Traps' (113 - 129)<sup>4</sup> and poems such as 'Elegy for Anzac Day' (130 -

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<sup>4</sup> *Soul Traps* was originally published as a separate volume by Te Kotare Press in 1985.

142), and 'Tongareva' (143-146) and can be seen as part of what critic Frank McKay called the 'search for origins' embarked on by the poet in this period (84).<sup>5</sup>

In an interview in 1994 Campbell stated:

a lot of my recent writing...has been an attempt to go back and communicate with my ancestors. It was they who fashioned the ancestral line, the *whakapapa*... (Sarti, 14).

As Andrew Campbell notes in his book, *Social Relations in Ancient Tongareva*,

'[o]ne of the most striking characteristics of Polynesian culture is the importance attached to genealogies. Not only do they explain the existing human order by describing its evolution from a natural or divine order, but they also determine mundane rights to land, political office and group membership' (Andrew Campbell, 58).

The concept of whakapapa or genealogy is key to both the structure and meaning of 'The Dark Lord of Savaiki'. The sequence begins with an epigraph from what is, presumably, a genealogical chant: 'Te Ara o Tumu'. An *ara* is a pathway or line of descent - part of a whakapapa (in Penrhyn Maori *haka-papa or tupuhanga*) or genealogy (Andrew Campbell, 58-9). The word *Tumu* can be translated as the source, or place of origin (*Cook Islands Maori Dictionary*, 524). 'Te Ara o Tumu' can therefore be translated as 'the pathway from Tumu' or 'the pathway from the source'.<sup>6</sup> This phrase neatly encapsulates the *haka-papa* but also suggests the pathway travelled

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<sup>5</sup> This might also be seen to include Campbell's autobiographical volume *Island to Island* (1984) and his trilogy of novels: *The Frigate Bird* (1989), *Sidewinder* (1991) and *Tia* (1993).

<sup>6</sup> In his book, *Ethnology of Tongareva*, Sir Peter Buck notes that the Tongarevans use the possessive o (of), which in English would be expressed by 'from' (25).

in the course of the sequence.<sup>7</sup> In Tongareva the recital of a person's genealogy was often prefaced by chants termed *tau* or *tauranga* (Andrew Campbell, 58). As well as telling us something of the nature of the 'dark Lord', the epigraph can be seen as representative of a *tau* – signalling to the reader that what is to follow is, at least in part, a *hakaapa* or genealogy.

In his discussion of the tradition of *hakaapa* on the island of Tongareva, Sir Peter Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa) notes:

The chronological sequence of events is maintained in family pedigrees, and the learned historian is also an expert genealogist. The preservation of traditional narratives is in the hands of respected experts of priestly or chiefly rank, the recipients of previous knowledge instructing suitable members of the new generation in order to preserve the family records (Buck,15).

*Ara* go back many generations and, in the most complete examples, trace the line of descent back to the primary parents – the sky father and the earth mother (Andrew Campbell, 59). A person's *hakaapa* is composed of many *ara*: 'so many names to remember,/so many names to honour!' as the speaker says in the final poem of the sequence, 'Bosini's Tomb'. The genealogy contained in the sequence is but a small part of one of Campbell's own *ara*.<sup>8</sup> In turn, 'The Dark Lord of Savaiki' is a sequence of poems rather than a genealogy. In recording the names and some of the exploits of five generations of one of his own *ara*, Campbell can be seen as continuing in the traditions of his chiefly forebears, preserving the *hakaapa* for members of the next generation. He is also adapting this tradition so that it forms part of a poetic

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<sup>7</sup> In '*Kia Pu'era*', a Rarotongan chant about origins recorded and translated by Bobby Turua, the word 'Tumu' is translated as the sky, or sky father (Crocombe, 69). Alternatively, Tumu could be a proper name - one of Campbell's Tongarevan ancestors perhaps.

<sup>8</sup> In *Social Relations in Ancient Tongareva*, Andrew Campbell sets out the *ara* referred to by Campbell in 'The Dark Lord of Savaiki'. The complete *ara* goes back 24 generations and is one of 77 *ara* that comprise the *hakaapa* of Campbell's grandfather, Bosini (Andrew Campbell, 59).

meditation on mortality, loss and recovery, written in English, and published for a general audience.<sup>9</sup> The act of articulating the *haka* is, one presumes, like the physical act of pilgrimage to the ancestors' graves, part of the process of re-connection with the poet's Tongarevan family which enables the poet to reach the state of peace expressed in the final poem in the sequence, 'Bosini's Tomb'.

The exact nature of the poet's relationship with the ancestors named in the various poems in the sequence - Kavatai, Puatama, Paroa, Paetou and Maringakura - is not made explicit. This may be deliberate suggesting both a freedom from Western linear conceptions of time, and also the freedom from time which the ancestors enjoy in memory. In the spirit of a *haka*, (and with the exception of references to Campbell's mother, Teu), the sequence progresses from reference to the most distant ancestors Kavatai and Puatama (Campbell's great-great-great-grandparents) in the second poem, through to his grandfather, Bosini, in the final poem. A sense of the remoteness of the preceding generations is also conveyed through the state of the graves referred to in the poems. In 'The Witch of Hanoa' we are told that Kavatai and Puatama lie: 'in an unmarked grave', while in 'Tapu' we learn that: 'the sea gnaws at Paroa's bones', and that Campbell's great-grandparents, Paetou and Maringikura, lie: 'under an untidy heap of stones'. The final poem in the sequence refers to his grandfather Bosini's tomb.

The first poem in the sequence, 'Under the Tamanu Tree', begins by asking: 'Who, who and who?/ Who is the dark Lord of Savaiki?' Given the nature of the pilgrimage, it is little wonder that the sequence opens by asking a question about identity. The way in which the question is framed suggests that it may be answered in more than one way. 'Savaiki' is the Tongarevan name for what the Maori call Hawaiki - the homeland or place of origin and the place where spirits return after death. It is the source of both human ills and all that is good, a paradox which finds its way into the figure of the dark Lord (Craig, 259-260). In his book, *Introducing Alistair Campbell*, Smart notes:

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<sup>9</sup> Campbell's sequence of poems 'Soul Traps' can be seen as a continuation of this process.

The islands did indeed have a very real 'dark Lord', a powerful presence which, although part of the wholeness of life, could sometimes be frightening and destructive (Smart, 8).

Smart does not name the dark Lord. He is, presumably, '*the one in your dreams, /master of passion, /favourite child /of Tumu and Papauri*' (italics in original). Tumu and Papauri are, in this context, perhaps, the primary parents, the sky father and the earth mother - the equivalent of Rangi and Papa in Maori mythology - and the dark Lord, perhaps, one of their many children.<sup>10</sup>

Another dimension of the dark Lord is clearly death itself - something which is also 'part of the wholeness of life' but, nevertheless, 'frightening and destructive'. It is, indeed, the theme of death (and the Tongarevan beliefs and practices associated with it) which dominates the sequence, uniting its constituent poems. The sequence can be read, at least in part, as an attempt to come to terms with the dark Lord - with the fact of mortality. The fact that Campbell's recent Collected Poems is entitled *The Dark Lord of Savaiki* points to the importance of death and loss as enduring themes in his poetry. The title may also point to the importance of this sequence as a kind of turning point in his career. From this point on, while death and loss remain important themes in his work (as in 'Elegy for Anzac Day' and the 'Gallipoli' (155-165) and '28 (Maori Battalion)' (182-237) sequences<sup>11</sup>), there is, in his later poetry, a greater sense of celebration, of both his Tongarevan heritage, and the simple joys of life - such as love and friendship.

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<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to be definitive on this point as there is little published information regarding Tongarevan mythology. Andrew Campbell names *Atea* and *Hakahotu* as the primary parents (Andrew Campbell, 59), as does Buck whose informants indicated that they represented the same conception as the Maori primary parents, Rangi and Papa (Buck, 85). Campbell also uses a slight variation of these names in Poem III of the 'Soul Traps' sequence, 'Akaotu' (131). As the word Tumu appears in a chant from the Cook Islands translated as the sky, or sky father (Croccombe, 69), and the word *papa* means mother in Penrhyn Maori (Andrew Campbell, 56) it seems possible that Tumu and Papauri are alternative names for *Atea* and *Hakahotu*. Buck notes that the union of the primary parents resulted in the *aoanga* (coming into the *ao* or world) of eleven offspring though no indication is given in either Buck or Andrew Campbell's work as to which, if any, of these was considered to be Lord of Savaiki.

<sup>11</sup> 'Gallipoli' was originally published as part of *Gallipoli & Other Poems* in 1999. '28 (Maori Battalion)' was originally published as part of *Maori Battalion: A Poetic Sequence* in 2001.

The dark Lord can also be read as the dark side of oneself - one's own personal demons which must be overcome if one is to be at peace.<sup>12</sup> The dark Lord can even be read as incorporating something of the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca's concept of *duende*. In his 1933 lecture 'Play and Theory of the Duende', Lorca uses the term not in the sense of the traditional Spanish household spirit, but to describe what he terms 'black sounds', or 'the spirit of the earth' or, to quote, as Lorca does, Goethe's definition, 'the mysterious power which everyone senses and no philosopher explains' (Lorca, 43).<sup>13</sup> This is a spirit which, as Christopher Maurer notes, has three important traits: irrationality, demonism and fascination with death (Maurer, xi).<sup>14</sup> In *Introducing Alistair Campbell*, Campbell is quoted as acknowledging having read and been influenced by Lorca and sees the dark force as something he inherited from his mother (Smart, 35). This image of a dark force is, as Smart notes, 'common in literature...[being] present in nursery rhymes, in fairy stories, in myths...' (Smart, 35)

'Under the Tamanu Tree' plunges the reader into the Tongarevan cosmos and the mythological beliefs of Campbell's Tongarevan forebears. In this first poem and throughout the sequence, Campbell evokes the environment of the remote Pacific atoll with its palm trees, pounding surf, fragrant flowers and warm water. Nature is animated and the behaviour of the island's flora and fauna help to create a mood of emotional turbulence in the poem:

### Crab castings,

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<sup>12</sup> The figure of Te Rauparaha in the 'Sanctuary of Spirits' sequence (42-55) can be seen as representing a similar aspect of the psyche. In an interview quoted in Frank McKay's essay 'Alistair Campbell's Sanctuary of Spirits' Campbell said:

"Te Rauparaha came to be not only a presence, but identified with a feeling of unease, a symbol of mental disorder. Both a spirit and a state of mind. He almost seemed about to possess me. One makes a terrific effort to exorcise this. You've got to come to terms with Te Rauparaha. He's a symbol of terrible forces in yourself which tend towards self destruction."(280)

<sup>13</sup> As Christopher Maurer notes: 'the *duende* (from *duen de casa*, "lord of the house"), is a Spanish household spirit fond of hiding things, breaking dishes, causing noise and making a general nuisance of himself...[I]n Andalusia the term is also used to describe the ineffable mysterious charm of certain gifted people, especially flamenco singers. The Andalusians say that a cantaor *has duende*' (Maurer, xi). As Smart notes, Professor James Bertram was the first to identify this element in Campbell's writing and to find similarities with the work of Lorca (Smart, 35).

<sup>14</sup> In 'Play and Theory of the Duende', Lorca states 'Every man and every artist...climbs each step in the tower of his perfection by fighting his duende, not his angel, as has been said, nor his muse' (Lorca, 44). If the dark Lord is, in part, a personification of the duende, this may provide another clue as to why Campbell's recent volume of collected poems is entitled: *The Dark Lord of Savaiki*.

convulsions under the house  
where the land crabs  
tell their grievances  
to the roots of the tamanu tree.  
Agitation of the leaves,  
the palm trees clash  
their fronds

Many ancient Polynesian cultures relied on meteorological omens. In some cultures the wind blowing the leaves of certain trees indicated that a particular spirit was present and wished to communicate with the living (Craig, 192). The wind blowing the trees in this first poem could be read as an indication of the presence of the dark Lord, or, alternatively, the poet's ancestors.

While the mood of 'Under the Tamanu Tree' is dark, it is enlivened a little by Campbell's word play. 'Who, who and who?' suggests haunting noises made by the spirits referred to in the poem. 'Agitation of the leaves' refers to the rubbing together of the leaves in the storm but also suggests the leaves themselves are upset. The reference to the land crabs aptly describes the way in which these creatures scramble about beneath houses shaking tree stumps. It can also be seen as symbolic of Campbell himself, shaking his own roots by his return to Tongareva.

In the second part of the poem, the reason for the agitation becomes clear - the dark Lord or death has been in attendance:

and the wind hurries past  
clutching in its fingers  
the leaf-wrapped souls  
of children torn

from the eyelids  
of despairing mothers.

The image of 'the leaf-wrapped souls/ of children' may be a reference to the *ere vaerua* or 'soul traps' which were used in some islands in the northern Cooks. The introductory note to Campbell's 1985 volume of poems, *Soul Traps*, states: 'Soul traps were nooses suspended from a tree to catch the spirits of the newly dead and prevent them from doing harm before they descended to the underworld.'<sup>15</sup> Another, perhaps more likely, explanation of this passage is that it is an allusion to the darker side of the mythology regarding Savaiki. There is a belief that, on arrival in Savaiki, the souls of the dead could be trapped by the Goddess Miru, and her assistants, stupefied by kava and hung from trees before being devoured (Craig, 260; Gill, 152-174). The reference in Poem XII of Campbell's 'Soul Traps' sequence 'Maia' (122) to 'the giant tamanu tree/in whose decaying branches/the spirits hang like bats/in a fetid cave' would also appear to refer to this belief.

The reference to children torn from despairing mothers is also suggestive of Campbell's own life story, although in his case the children were torn from their mother and their 'motherland' by the death of the mother (and their father). Indeed the mood of emotional turbulence in 'Under the Tamanu Tree' can be read both as reflective of the poet's own mood on approaching Tongareva, and also, as intending to convey the mood of the ancestors whose 'children' (Campbell and his brothers and sister) were 'torn away' and sent to New Zealand.

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<sup>15</sup> The illustration of the soul traps on the front of Campbell's volume is similar to an illustration which appears in a work by the Reverend William Wyatt Gill (*Cook Islands Custom*, 21). Gill was a missionary who spent most of his adult life in the Cook Islands. In his book, *Myths and Songs of the South Pacific*, Gill explains that soul traps were devices made of looped snares of cinet which were hung in trees outside the dwelling places of those who were ill or who had given offence and notes: '[i]f the spirit of the sick man, in the shape of an insect or a small bird, did *not* enter the snare, the patient recovered; but if...the wretched ghost became entangled in one of the meshes there was no hope. The demon "Vaerua" or "Spirit" presiding over [the] spirit world, hurried off the unlucky ghost to the shades to feast upon...' (Gill, 171). As Briar Wood notes there is now some doubt as to whether what Gill saw was a soul trap, or a bird trap (Wood, 76). The reference in Gill's book to the belief that the spirit presiding over the spirit world would hurry the unlucky ghost to the shades to be eaten does have resonance with the last section of 'Under the Tamanu Tree'.

The image of a dark lord of the underworld tearing children away from despairing mothers also recalls the Greek myth of Persephone.<sup>16</sup> Indeed the same connections between mother/mother earth, wild weather in the child's absence and calm weather on the child's return, which are found in this myth, can also be located in the poems in this sequence.<sup>17</sup> This myth is, on one level, about the acceptance of death and decay as part of the cycle of life - a theme which resonates with 'The Dark Lord of Savaiki'.

The hanging indents, and the metre used in this poem, and throughout the sequence, help to give the poem the pace of rhythmic speech. This pace is appropriate to the different dimensions of the sequence - story telling, genealogy and elegy. Alliteration and assonance also feature strongly, enhancing the aural qualities of the poetry. Like a genealogy or *haka*, this poetry is meant to be recited aloud.

Images of wild weather, death and dangling corpses continue in the second poem in the sequence: 'The Witch of Hanoa'. The witch of the poem's title is Campbell's great-great-great grandmother, Puatama - 'a famous soothsayer, widely respected and feared for her powers' who lived at Hanoa, one of the islands or *motu* that make up Tongareva (*Island to Island*, 35). The first part of the poem refers to ancient Tongarevan practice regarding the disposal of the body after death: the wrapping of the corpse in mats and its suspension in the *hare pehu* or house of mourning while it decomposes.<sup>18</sup> As in 'Under the Tamanu Tree' nature is animated and reflects the

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<sup>16</sup> Campbell's familiarity with this myth is clear from his interview with Howard McNaughton in 1974 (McNaughton, 65).

<sup>17</sup> There are numerous classical versions of the story of Persephone and Demeter. The most well known is probably the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. See for example: Foley, Helene. P. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. New Jersey. Princeton University Press. 1993. The blending of Polynesian and other mythologies, particularly Greek mythology, occurs elsewhere in Campbell's work, for example, 'The Return' and poem XV of 'Elegy for Anzac Day' (136).

<sup>18</sup> In *Social Relations in Ancient Tongareva*, Andrew Campbell describes this process: 'After a death, the most immediate task was preparation of the body. This was carried out in the *hare pehu* or "house of mourning", by relatives of the same sex as the deceased, while others gathered outside. Having been washed and anointed with coconut oil, the body was wrapped up and suspended from the roof in a mat (*paakererei*), along with a living companion - usually a spouse or parent. The other mourners then left to perform a series of chants and dances, during which they lacerated their skin with sharpened shells. When they had exhausted themselves, the bundle in the house was lowered to the ground and a ritual specialist approached it carrying a coconut leaflet in the form of a human body. He drew this over the corpse from head to foot, 'as if extracting something', shaking off the 'imaginary contents' with the words *e hano ra*, 'go away' (Lamont 1867: 209). Soon afterwards, a new mat was brought in, and the corpse was sewn up in it, together with various personal possessions. This was again hung from the roof, the chief mourner sitting underneath it. He was expected to remain in the house by himself for as long as six months, and could not leave except at night. When he did venture outside he had to wear a special basket from which only his legs protruded. Once the body had fully decomposed the period of mourning

feelings and sounds of the mourners. The 'grieving' wind (and, perhaps, the corpse itself) groans and whistles, while Kavatai's spirit, fed by Puatama's grief, causes:

a monstrous storm  
that tore up trees  
and levelled villages,  
rampaging  
to the west as far as Manihiki.

It is a storm so fierce 'it burst apart the ribcage/ of the house', a vivid metaphor for a heart bursting with grief and a reference to traditional beliefs regarding the structure of the house. Peter Simpson has noted the correspondence between inner and outer weather, especially between grief and anguish on the one hand and wind and rain on the other, which is recurrent throughout Campbell's work and this is true of this poem and others in the sequence (Simpson, 42-43). Like the mourning process, the storm is cathartic, and peace returns at the end of the poem:

Her grief assuaged,  
she called his spirit home,  
as she would a dangerous child,  
and, chastened,  
he returned  
upon a mango's back<sup>19</sup>  
and beached at Hanoa,  
where he lies in peace

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(*noho i roto i te hare pehu*) could be terminated. The house was opened up (*suaki te mate*) and brought back to life by noisily beating it with sticks. *Te tanuhanga*, the final burial of the bones, then took place, at the conclusion of which there was a ceremonial feast' (Andrew Campbell, 55).

<sup>19</sup> A *mango* is a shark. This is the first of a number of references to sharks which appear throughout the sequence.

with Puatama

in an unmarked grave.

Alongside the story of Kavatai and Puatama it is tempting to read the poem as expressive of the grief experienced by the poet himself at the early deaths of his parents and his separation from the Cook Islands and his extended family. He is, perhaps, the 'dangerous child' whose spirit has been called home and it is he who returns, chastened, in the next poem in the sequence, 'Teu'.

'Teu' is an apostrophe to Campbell's mother who is portrayed in the poem as watching over the poet's return to Tongareva: 'Mother, you were there/at the passage/when our ship arrived'. The actual moment of Campbell's return to Tongareva after an absence of almost 50 years, and the possible inspiration for 'Teu' and the eighth poem in the sequence, 'Omoka', is recorded in *Island to Island*:

We stood off the passage just after 8 p.m. on the following evening, our engine stilled and everyone silent and expectant. A beautiful evening, the moon nearly at full, the sea unruffled. Directly above was the Southern Cross....

For a while nothing happened and nothing was explained, but it soon became clear that the skipper wasn't going to risk taking his ship through the passage that evening. Signals were exchanged by flashlight between the ship and the shore. Time passed, and the weather changed. It became overcast and quite dark, and a light rain started to fall. Then out of the darkness of the lagoon came a boat flashing a light, and it was soon followed by others. They were coming to take the passengers ashore.

Bill and I were undecided at first what to do, but we finally piled into a boat with eighteen others. I sat on the gunnel near the stern, which was so low in the water that the waves kept washing against my backside. All the time I was conscious that we were overloaded and that one big wave could swamp us, and I was worried there would be nobody on shore to meet us. Soon Omoka loomed up and the bow crunched onto the beach, where a small crowd was waiting. We had to wade the last 15 feet to shore.

In some ways, for me, this was the most moving moment of our entire visit, because it brought back the past more vividly than anything else. The warm water up to my thighs, the soft coral sand underfoot, the friendly voices of people in the darkness – how many times had I experienced these things when I was a small boy? (*Island to Island*, 29)

As Smart notes (in the context of the poem 'Omoka'), 'the poem uses the same material, but is able to focus more on the emotional truths revealed by the event' (Smart, 7). Comparison of the passage with the poems 'Teu' and 'Omoka' also reveals the power of poetry to capture, in relatively few words, the emotional intensity of such a moment.

In 'Teu' the return to Tongareva is portrayed as a return to the mother whose untimely death, together with that of Campbell's father, led to the poet's departure from the Cook Islands and his separation from his Tongaravan family. As Briar Wood notes, '[p]assing through the channel, with the spiritual presence of the Mother, marks a moment of rebirth into the island world from which Campbell had long been absent' (Wood, 75).

The passage referred to in the poem 'Teu' is named, in the tenth poem in the sequence, 'Bosini's Tomb', as Taruia Passage. According to Tongarevan oral tradition, Taruia was one of the earliest Polynesian explorers to visit Tongareva (Andrew Campbell, 15). The sea which: 'heaved unbroken/on the reef' in 'Teu' is a symbol of the passage of time or eternity. The description of the stars in the poem vividly evokes their reflection in the sea, while the rain which fell on the poet as he waited to enter the lagoon is transformed in the poem into his mother's tears:

and you wept  
when you laid  
the Southern Cross  
upon our eyes.

The reference to tears being shed on arrival may be an allusion to the *pehu* ceremony which, as Buck notes, was performed in Tongareva on the reception of visitors and as part of mourning ritual:

When a kinsman returns to his family or local group his reappearance awakens various sentiments. As he is not merely an individual, but a member of a closely related group, all the members of the group must assemble to express their feelings....His arrival awakens the memory of his relatives who have passed away during his absence, and the sorrow connected with their loss to the community is reawakened. The visitor must pay his tribute of tears to the departed and the whole community shares in the sorrow....Appropriate laments and dirges are chanted, and the mournful words, the tune and the whole association of ideas finds physiological expression in tears (Buck, 75-6).

With its hanging indents, lines of three or four words and its triplet structure, the rhythm of the poem 'Teu' may be intended to replicate the chanting of laments for the dead. The appearance of the poem on the page also calls to mind the rhythmic surge of the ocean. This rhythmic rise and fall is a feature of all the poems in the sequence. As Ken Arvidson points out, in relation to poems of a similar structure in the 'Soul Traps' sequence, each triplet recalls in its total length the hexameter of classical epic (Arvidson, 82). This metre is appropriate for the recitation of the exploits of the ancestors. It is also an elegiac metre, befitting the subject matter of 'Teu'.

The scene of the fourth poem in the sequence is *Nahe*, an uninhabited *motu* near Te Tautua village. In *Island to Island*, Campbell notes 'Nahe and the neighbouring *motu* of Hanoa, are regarded by the family as our true homeland' (35). In the first part of the poem Campbell conveys something of the beauty of the *motu* and the sense of peace and happiness engendered by wading in its clear waters 'attended by a sandshark'. Any sense of serenity is shown to be short-lived or illusory even - the shallows only seemed 'as white and pure/ as happiness. The lines, 'I was happy being a child again,/and, careless, as a child/in a treasure house,' may be an allusion to the fairy tale, 'Hansel and Gretel' where two children, abandoned by their parents, also enjoy a short lived or illusory sense of happiness when they discover a house made of gingerbread, and break off chunks to eat, only to be trapped by the witch who lives therein. 'The poem ends with the lines:

Horrid amputation!  
The living creatures seemed  
to shriek,  
and bled a kind of ichor.

The 'living creatures' are, of course, the coral (which bleeds when ripped) - but also, perhaps, the sandshark who emerges as guardian over the actions of the speaker of the poem. The word 'ichor' means both a watery fetid discharge from a wound and the fluid said to flow like blood in the veins of Gods (*Concise Oxford*, 703). Sharks were

worshipped as Gods in the traditional beliefs of some Polynesian cultures. It is not known if this was the case in Tongareva, but the use of the word 'ichor' hints at this.

It is, once again, tempting to attach a biographical explanation to the poem. The ripping up of the coral symbolises another 'horrid amputation', the removal of the Campbell children from the Cook Islands and the seeping wound left by this act. The use of the word 'amputation' also signals, perhaps, the loss of identity suffered by the poet as a result of his removal from the Islands. The aesthetic features of the poem reinforce its meaning with the easy rhythm and occasional rhyme in the first part of the poem giving way to the harsher sounds (the onomatopoeic 'shriek', and 'ichor') at the end of the poem.

A similar reversal also occurs at the end of the next poem in the sequence: 'The Doves of Pauma'. Pauma is the site of another passage in the reef surrounding Tongareva, near the village of Te Tautua. The poem appears to involve a comparison of Pauma at the time of the speaker's visit, with a childhood memory. Roadways which were once, presumably, busy and well-cared for are 'now overgrown and sunk in ruin'. The reference to the roadways in the penultimate line of the poem is the only reference to human habitation. It is as if even the flora and fauna - the doves, crickets, grasshoppers and flowers - which once populated the roadways have abandoned the village. Now that the crickets and grasshoppers are silent there is nothing to drown out the murmur of the sea, an image, as in 'Teu' of the passage of time – or eternity.

The poem conveys the sense of desolation created by the depopulation of villages such as Te Tautua. The reference to the passage in the reef being a reminder, in this instance perhaps, of the departure of people. While conveying a sense of nostalgia for the speaker's youth, the poem is also a reminder that nothing stands still - that the island has also changed in the speaker's absence. The structure of the poem helps to emphasise the sense of pathos. The rhyme and rhythm of the first ten lines give way to the long vowel sounds and slower rhythm of the poem's final line.



regarding sharks – instead of something evil, the shark is seen in its Tongarevan context as something sacred.

Tongareva is renowned in the Cook Islands for the number of its marae (Henry, 72). These marae were built of coral and, in the great majority of cases, were located close to the water on either the lagoon or ocean side of the *motu* (Yamaguchi, 71). The shark which glides around the coral in its undersea world is a reflection of the priest in his marae above the ground, an image of unity between the human and natural worlds. The title of the poem, the reference to the shark as a priest and the fact that shark is black, all suggest the image of a Catholic priest - one who is, given the mythological beliefs alluded to in the poem, administering the last rites.

The shark presides over 'Ataranga's sunken house'. This could be a reference to the traditional belief recorded in some islands in the Cook group that the spirits of the dead were lured to the underworld by houses on long poles which rose above the reef. As soon as a spirit placed a hand upon the ladder up to the house, the house descended to the underworld (Gill, 165-66). Alternatively, Ataranga is another name for Maui – and the reference to his sunken house could be a reference to the myth related by Campbell in poem VIII of the 'Soul Traps' sequence: 'Maui's Whare' (119). This poem describes how Maui hauled up a whare, which was askew, from the sea. He shook the whare and a family fell from it to their deaths. Maui tried to breathe life into the family but their spirits had already fled. He then attempted to straighten the whare but was unsuccessful. In either case it is a reference to death. Ataranga's sunken house 'tilts/ towards Savaiki/ and the setting sun'. In many Cook Islands cultures sunset was considered to be the time of the final departure of the spirits for Savaiki and in some islands it was traditionally believed that spirits entered Savaiki by the aperture through which the sun descends into the earth (Gill, 135,158).

Tongarevan mythology surrounding death also pervades the next poem in the sequence 'Omoka':

It will be like this one day

when I sail home to die –  
the boat crunching up on to the sand,  
then wading through warm water  
to the beach,  
the friendly voices  
round me in the darkness,  
the sky dying out  
behind the trees of Omoka,  
and reaching out of hands.

Death is described as sailing home - an image derived from the belief that the spirits of the dead journey to Savaiki by canoe. As in 'Brother Shark', the natural world is presented as being in harmony with the speaker: 'The sky dying out' as the speaker contemplates his own death. Unlike 'Under the Tamanu Tree', where death seemed a frightening prospect, the poem 'Omoka' expresses peace with the notion of mortality, and, even something of a longing to join those who have already passed away.<sup>20</sup> There is in 'Omoka' a strong sense of belonging - conveyed in the reference to the 'friendly voices' and the 'reaching out of hands'.

In the next poem in the sequence, 'Trade Winds', death is also referred to in mythological terms as 'the hidden reef/ of Savaiki'. This phrase encapsulates mythological beliefs which view the reef as the entrance way to Savaiki but also evokes the nasty surprise which is an untimely death. In this poem Campbell mourns the death of his mother who is portrayed as being patient, not only in life, but also in death, waiting fifty years for her children to return to Tongareva. The title to this poem refers to the winds which blow around Tongareva, but also suggests Campbell's father's occupation and the winds of chance which blew Jock Campbell to Tongareva in the first place. A number of the images employed in 'Trade Winds' echo earlier poems creating a sense of unity in the sequence. The reference to Campbell's father's soul being 'eaten away/by five years in the trenches' recalls the devouring of souls in

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<sup>20</sup> This is an impulse which Campbell explores more fully in his later poem 'Death and the *Tagua*' (148-152). *Death and the Tagua* was originally published as a separate volume by Wai-te-ata Press in 1995.

'Under the Tamanu Tree'. As in 'Teu' the return to Tongareva is figured as a return to the mother as the natural features of the island stand in for the mother who was lost:

The moon comes out,  
lovely  
as a mother's face  
over a sleeping child.  
The trade winds  
are your fingers  
on my eyelids.

The final image brings to mind a mother putting a child to sleep, but also eyelids being closed after death.

The final poem, 'Bosini's Tomb', begins on the beach, the place of arrival and departure of people, in both the actual and the spiritual realm.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the '[a]ncestral shapes/on the beach' could be either fishermen waiting to go out in their boats or spirits gathering to sail home to Savaiki. If they are fisherman then they are 'ancestral shapes' in the sense that they have, presumably, been gathering here for centuries. If they are fishermen then they are also the first reference to the living in the poem. 'This island is alive with ghosts' as Campbell says in an earlier poem.<sup>22</sup>

The poet returns to his *haka* – to his Grandfather Bosini who memorised it and recorded it for future generations. The poet describes his grandfather as beckoning to him - welcoming him back to the family or inviting him to join him in death? The poem ends with the image of:

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<sup>21</sup> Poem XV, 'Bosini' (124), in the 'Soul Traps' sequence can be read alongside this poem.

<sup>22</sup> The poem 'Kapiti'(42) from the 'Sanctuary of Spirits' sequence begins with this line.

Father and Mother  
walking hand in hand  
across the swirling waters  
of Taruia passage,  
where the leaping dolphins  
celebrate the dawn.

It is as if, with the poet's return, the spirits of his parents need no longer wander the earth. They are leaving, for Savaiki presumably, secure in the knowledge that the ancestral connection has been restored. The final image of the leaping dolphins is one of cross-cultural resonance. In some Polynesian cultures dolphins were considered to be half-human, half-divine. In Greek mythology dolphins were believed to guide souls to the underworld. The reference to dawn also suggests new beginnings.

In 'Bosini's Tomb' the poet envisages his Tongarevan family joining hands, across the generations perhaps:

The children of Marata.<sup>23</sup>  
join hands  
with the children of Tumu  
and have peaceful dreams

The dreams of Campbell's Tongarevan family are peaceful because they are secure in the knowledge that they are part of the ancestral line. Implicit in the concept of the *haka-papa* is the belief that our ancestors flow through us. It is this belief which appears to allow the poet to come to terms with the early deaths of his parents, and, his own mortality, in the course of the sequence. The dark Lord has not gone away but through the *haka-papa*, through the poet's re-integration with his Tongarevan family, the dark Lord no longer commands the fear he did in 'Under the Tamanu

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<sup>23</sup> Marata is the poet's cousin (*Island to Island*, 30).

Tree'. The poet's journey 'along a path my ancestors approve' is, indeed, 'a journey from despair....into love'.

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