

## AN ENDLESS FLOW: D.C. SCOTT'S INDIAN POEMS

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In *The Bush Garden*, Northrop Frye remarks on the "complicated cultural tension [that] arises from the impact of the sophisticated on the primitive, and vice-versa," the "most dramatic example" of which, Frye offers, is "Duncan Campbell Scott, working in the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa. He writes of a starving squaw baiting a fish-hook with her own flesh, and writes of the music of Debussy and the poetry of Henry Vaughan."<sup>1</sup> With the exception of a few recent studies of individual poems,<sup>2</sup> critical appraisals of Scott's Indian poems have failed to give full value for the "cultural tension" inherent in this controversial aspect of the Scott canon, let alone the complexity of the issues raised. Depending upon which poems and prose writings the critics draw, they have demonstrated a somewhat polarized range of 'attitudes' on Scott's part toward the Indians: he understood and loved the Indians;<sup>3</sup> he was indifferent, a social Darwinist who coldly acquiesced to the inevitability of the Indians' assimilation into the dominant white culture—their disappearance; and at the most negative, Scott deceived the Indians in his official capacity, disparaged

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<sup>1</sup>Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), p. 219.

<sup>2</sup>I am thinking particularly of such rewarding studies as Fred Cogswell's "No Heavenly Harmony: A Reading of 'Powassan's Drum,'" *Studies in Canadian Literature*, Vol. I, No. 2 (1976), 233-37; D.M.R. Bentley's "The Onondaga Madonna: A Sonnet of Rare Beauty," *CVII*, Vol. III, No. 2 (1977), 28-29; Lee B. Meckler's "Rabbit-Skin Robes and Mink-Traps: Indian and European in 'The Forsaken,'" *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews*, no. 1 (Fall/Winter, 1977), 60-65; and Leon Slonim's "A Source for Duncan Campbell Scott's 'On the Way to the Mission,'" *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews*, no. 3 (Fall/Winter, 1978), 62-64.

<sup>3</sup>See Pelham Edgar's "Travelling With a Poet," in *Across My Path*, ed. Northrop Frye (Toronto: Ryerson, 1952), pp. 58-74; and the following essays in *Duncan Campbell Scott*, ed. S.L. Dragland (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1974): Raymond Knister's "Duncan Campbell Scott," pp. 66-77; E.K. Brown's "Duncan Campbell Scott," pp. 74-93; and A.J.M. Smith's "The Poetry of Duncan Campbell Scott," pp. 115-34.

them in his poems.<sup>4</sup> This disparity in critical assessment is not wholly an effect of convenient selectiveness; a more pertinent cause is the assumption that on the one hand there is Scott, on the other the Indians, and between the two hangs some hazy, begging-to-be-defined entity called 'attitude,' which when defined remains a handy fixed referent regardless of the poems under consideration. The critical questions to which such a venture gives rise are few but basic: do the Indian poems reveal a *fixed* attitude on Scott's part? Is it the literary critic's province to reconcile or to emphasize discrepancies between Scott the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Scott the wilderness traveller negotiating treaties, and Scott the poet? And finally, what does an examination of the Indian poems tell us about their success or failure on their own terms?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I will briefly consider a few of Scott's official and popular prose writings (not the short fiction), and examine some of the more pertinent poems contained in *Selected Poetry of Duncan Campbell Scott*,<sup>5</sup> poems composed in the period from the early 1890's to 1934.<sup>6</sup> As this paper will demonstrate, Scott's understanding of and compassion for the Indians, and of what was being done to them in the process of assimilation, grew from poem to poem—was itself a process of sorts—a result no doubt of his lifelong exposure to Indians and their culture. An answer to the problematic question of the critic's province in relation to apparent discrepancies in Scott's various functions will be suggested in terms of author and audience. In short, this paper is concerned with the "vice-versa" of Frye's comment—the impact of the primitive on the

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<sup>4</sup>Thus far, the most scholarly attempt to discredit Scott's dealings with and attitude towards the Indians is John Flood's "The Duplicity of D.C. Scott and the James Bay Treaty," *Black Moss*, ser. 2, no. 2 (1976), 50-63; two earlier efforts that include attacks on Scott, and are as obviously socio-politically biased as Flood's article, are Keiichi Hirano's "The Aborigine in Canadian Literature," *Canadian Literature*, XIV (1962), 44-47, and Chipman Hall's *A Survey of the Indian's Role in English Canadian Literature to 1900*: M.A. Thesis: Dalhousie University, 1969, pp. 47-61. These last two studies are dealt with in Melvin H. Dagg's "Scott and the Indians," in *Duncan Campbell Scott*, ed. Dragland, pp. 181-82.

<sup>5</sup>Duncan Campbell Scott, *Selected Poetry*, ed. Glenn Clever (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1974). Page and line references (which for convenience I have added) hereafter cited in text.

<sup>6</sup>For the dating of the poems, without which the chronological aspects of this paper would not be possible, I am grateful to Robert L. McDougall's "D.C. Scott: The Dating of the Poems," *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews*, no. 4 (Spring/Summer, 1978), 13-27.

sophisticated—though it will, I trust, demonstrate that Scott's 'attitude' in the Indian poems is consistent with his larger poetic vision.<sup>7</sup>

The evidence most readily available to those who choose to make a case for the "duplicity"—to use John Flood's term—in Scott's dealings with the Indians as government official is his *The Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada*<sup>8</sup> and *The James Bay Treaty: Treaty No. 9*, which treaty Scott negotiated, and to which he was the first of three co-signers.<sup>9</sup> Scott's attitude in *The Administration* emerges as primarily assimilationist, if not culturally genocidal. Some paradoxes do persist, though, even in this stringent official attitude, suggesting what we will see in the other prose and later in the poetry: Scott's belief that much of what appears as suffering in particular instances is a casualty of the violent transitional time of which he writes. Nevertheless, in *The Administration*, seemingly oblivious to what the Prairie Indians were before the advent of the white man, Scott writes: "The Department has made these Indians self-supporting in two generations; a remarkable transition" (p. 10). And the reader cannot help but regret the colonist's/conqueror's stance—the lack of respect bordering on callous disregard for the indigenous culture—when Scott envisions the reservoir of potentially "good British citizens" waiting to be absorbed in British Columbia:

The outlook in British Columbia is certainly encouraging;  
there is fine material among the natives to make good  
British citizens, and in two or three decades we may expect that  
a large number of Indians will have been absorbed into the  
ordinary life of the Province. (p. 11)

Without pretending to excuse such utterances, I would at this point like to draw attention to the word "transition" in the first pronouncement, and the reference to "two or three decades" in the second.

Again and again in *The Administration*, the reader's eye snags on apologetic assurances that "the future of the race is fairly assured" (p. 25), assimilationist-minded proddings to the Department that it

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<sup>7</sup>The author wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the advice of D.M.R. Bentley and Stan Dragland.

<sup>8</sup>Duncan Campbell Scott, *The Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Toronto: The Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1931). Page references hereafter cited in text.

<sup>9</sup>Duncan Campbell Scott et al., *The James Bay Treaty: Treaty No. 9 (Made in 1905 and 1906) and Adhesions Made in 1929 and 1930* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1931, rpt. 1964). Page references hereafter cited in text.

should "transfer his [the Indian's] native energy to the channels of modern life" (p. 25), and phrases such as "the weaning process" (p. 34). It is not however until the end of this treatise that the reader feels most taxed when trying to comprehend the glaring contradictions in the following statements, the first being a justification of the reserve system, the second *The Administration's* concluding paragraph:

It is intended to ensure the continuation of the tribal life and that of the individual as an Indian, and as well to render possible a continuous and consistent administrative policy directed toward civilization. (p. 26)

It is the opinion of the writer, however, that by policies and activities such as have been outlined, the Government will in time reach the end of its responsibility as the Indians progress into civilization and finally disappear as a separate and distinct people, not by race extinction but by a gradual assimilation with their fellow citizens. (p. 27)

Unadulterated bureaucratic double-talk, pure though hardly simple.<sup>10</sup> By this point, the bewildered reader of *The Administration* might justifiably wonder whether Scott was confused in his own feelings or purposefully trying to confuse his superiors. In either case, when these concluding remarks have been read the most unseemly side of Scott's attitude toward the Indians has been viewed, though there are other, less unsightly facets to his official writings. For instance, he claims earlier in *The Administration* that the reserve land "affords the Indians ample opportunity for agriculture and industrial pursuits" (p. 13), and remarks pragmatically (if not tongue-in-cheek) that the Prairie Indians' sun-dance festival "obviously plays havoc with summer ploughing" (p. 25). In the conclusion of the official *The James Bay Treaty*, we find the following:

While it is doubtful whether the Indians will ever engage in agriculture, these reserves, being of a reasonable size, will give a secure and permanent interest in the land which the indeterminate possession of a large tract could never carry. (p. 11)

How are we to reconcile this justification and rationalization—"reasonable size"—of government land-grabbing with A.J.M. Smith's portrayal of Scott as our first poet of the north and, to quote E.K. Brown,

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<sup>10</sup>Dragland has also noted the obvious contradictions in these two statements, commenting: "The climate no longer exists in which these lines can be read with equanimity." *Duncan Campbell Scott*, p. 180.

"such distinctly Canadian material as our aborigines supply."<sup>11</sup> As S.L. Dragland has written: "Hindsight or no it is hard to reconcile the official Scott with the poet we know from the Indian poems."<sup>12</sup> "Hard," yes, and perhaps unnecessary.

For however contradictory Scott's remarks appear at times, it must be emphasized that the passages cited above are from official documents, that in them Scott is not only a white man writing for other white men, but that his audience is the official, white, government bureaucracy. In *The James Bay Treaty*, it becomes apparent that an attempt is being made throughout to predispose that bureaucracy to the Indians favourably. Scenes such as the following recur with each signing of the treaty; after the local chief is ceremoniously presented with a Union Jack, he inevitably rises to pronounce a variation of Missabay's speech:

Missabay received it [the flag] and made an eloquent speech, in which he extolled the manner in which the Indians had been treated by the government; advised the young men to listen well to what the white man had to say, and to follow their advice and not to exalt their own opinions above those of men who knew the world and had brought them such benefits. (p. 5)

But consider the contrast provided by the following excerpt from Scott's forward to the *Catalogue of the Manoir-Richelieu Collection of North American Indians*:

When they [the Indians of the Collection] lived, contact with the debasing influences of our race and civilization had not yet wholly destroyed their native culture, nor quite dimmed their inherent primitive feeling for nature.<sup>13</sup>

Apparently, a different audience evoked a Scott quite different from the man we discovered in the official writings. His more popular account of the James Bay treaty, published in *Scribner's Magazine*<sup>14</sup> (1906, an account written, it would seem concomitantly with the

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<sup>11</sup>A.J.M. Smith, "The Poetry of Duncan Campbell Scott," in *Duncan Campbell Scott*, ed. Dragland, p. 110; E.K. Brown, "Duncan Campbell Scott," in *Duncan Campbell Scott*, p. 83.

<sup>12</sup>*Duncan Campbell Scott*, p. 180.

<sup>13</sup>D.C. Scott, "Forward" to *Catalogue of the Manoir-Richelieu Collection of North American Indians (1830-1840)* (Montreal: Canada Steamship Lines, 1932), p. 11.

<sup>14</sup>D.C. Scott, "The Last of the Indian Treaties," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 40 (1906), 573-83. Page references hereafter cited in text.

official *The James Bay Treaty*), supports this critical notion of the requisites of audience. Here, he writes of the Indian's plight in a way that clearly demonstrates where his sympathies rest:

He is but a slave, used by all traders alike as a tool to provide wealth, and therefore to be kept in good condition as cheaply as possible. (p. 577)

Language this strong, revealing as it is of equally powerful sentiments of disdain, is not to be found in the official writings. Scott was no doubt in a position rife with the tension of conflicting loyalties: he was a negotiator of treaties which in hindsight appear unfair to the Indians; he writes confusedly as official apologist for his government's treatment of the Indians; yet obviously he knew their inherent worth and understood to some extent the greatness of spirit the Indians once possessed; and just as obviously he regretted the negative features of what was being done to them by the white man. Treaties, the reserve system, traders, missionaries and teachers were the means to the ultimate assimilation for which Scott opted. It is, however, an assimilationist policy to be understood within an extensive temporal context. In the following passage from the popular *Scribner's* article, Scott has extended that time frame from the "two or three decades" of *The Administration* to "four centuries."

Any forecast of Indian civilization which looks for final results in one generation or two is doomed to disappointment. Final results may be obtained, say, in four centuries by the merging of the Indian race with the white, and all these four things—treaties, teachers, missionaries, and traders—with whatever benefits or injuries they bring in their train, aid in making an end. (p. 582)

In terms of his assimilationist policy, Scott's tone—his attitude—is, finally, one of wearied resignation to an inevitability.

As can be seen from these representative passages from the prose writings, both official and popular, there is no need to compare Scott the official to Scott the poet to force a case for duplicitous dealings or attitudes. But as has also been seen, it is not so much a matter of devious duplicity as it is the requisites of the audience being addressed: government bureaucracies—experts at expediency—seldom think in terms of "four centuries." The Scott of the popular prose is very much like the Scott of the later Indian poems: compassionate, concerned with the larger perspective, and aware that the

Indians with whom he is dealing and about whom he writes are being whirled through violent transitional times. The following excerpt from the *Scribner's* article provides a final instance of these perceptions and serves as a bridge to the discussion of the Indian poems. Here, Scott is describing an incident just after the payment of treaty money to a young Indian:

When he felt the new crisp notes he took a crucifix from his breast, kissed it swiftly, and made a fugitive sign of the cross. "From my heart I thank you," he said. There was the Indian at the best point of a transitional state, still wild as a lynx with all the lore and instinct of his race undimmed, and possessed wholly by the simplest rule of Christian life, as yet unspoiled by the arts of sly lying, paltry cunning, and the lower vices which come from contact with such of our debased manners and customs as come to him in the wilderness. (p. 583)

It should come as no surprise that the poems deal with Indians in a period of violent transition. Reflecting this theme of transition, half-breeds are often the subjects of Scott's Indian poems, half-breeds in situations that illustrate the ensuing friction when two cultures are moving uneasily towards a condition of the one's subsuming dominance and the other's assimilation. In the later Indian poems, this friction leads more often than not to tragedy, temporal human tragedy.<sup>15</sup> The poems seldom attempt to capture their subjects "at the best point of a transitional state"—that is not their intention. Still, there are moments of triumph, and, as in the prose, Scott often withdraws from his painful subject and the dramatic situation to place the events depicted in the context of the macrocosm, the greater time frame. This is the movement of "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris" (pp. 58-65); though not an Indian poem proper, this poem is critical to an appreciation of the Indian theme in Scott's work and to our understanding of his beliefs concerning time, transitoriness, and his personal philosophy of consolation.

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<sup>15</sup>A.J.M. Smith has written that Scott's "knowledge and sympathy saw [the Indians], and his art presented them, as human beings, as *man*, capable of dramatic and, indeed, tragic action." *Duncan Campbell Scott*, ed. Dragland, p. 110.

## II

"Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris," composed in 1915, stands in the tradition of the verse epistle and the pastoral elegy; it is both a belated reply to an unanswered letter and Scott's memoriam to his dead friend, the artist Edmund Morris. Pelham Edgar tells us in his "Travelling with a Poet" that Morris was one with the party that journeyed in 1906 to treat with the James Bay Indians:

Eddie Morris joined us at Chapeleau. He fitted in with our party to perfection, and his artist eye served to sharpen our own perceptions of significant aspects of things we might never have noted. The now familiar appearance of an Indian encampment took on a quite novel aspect for us when seen in the company of an artist whose eye was alert to seize every nuance of new suggestion.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout "Edmund Morris," the artist is associated with Indians. Perhaps Scott's greatest poetic tribute to the Indians is these associations and his having recourse to native mythology to bless his friend. Furthermore, Scott finds within Indian legends illustrations for the philosophical consolation with which he appeases his sense of loss at Morris' death.

The Indian theme first manifests itself when Scott reminisces about a day on the prairie with Morris when he watched the artist commemorate the Indian chief Crowfoot:

Where in the sun for a pastime  
 You marked the site of his tepee  
 With a circle of stones, Old Napiw  
 Gave you credit for that day.  
 (11. 94-97)

As Melvin Dagg has indicated, here Scott is giving his dead friend the blessing of the Indian god Napiw, not the Christian blessing we might expect.<sup>17</sup> Scott is also, with his poem—as poet—remembering

<sup>16</sup>Pelham Edgar, "Travelling With a Poet," p. 66.

<sup>17</sup>Melvin H. Dagg, "Scott and the Indians," in *Duncan Campbell Scott*, ed. Dragland, pp. 184-85. Dagg's article would belong with the best of the criticism of Scott's Indian poems if it were not for the regrettable, and unavoidable, fact that he completely misinterprets the end of "At Gull Lake: August 1810." After refuting the misinformed readings of Hirano and Hall, and demonstrating the need for an appreciation of Prairie Indian mythology to a complete understanding of "At Gull Lake," Dagg reads the line, "She rose changing her dusky shade for the glow / Of the prairie lily" (p. 98, ll. 123-24), as referring to Keejigo, when in fact it refers to the rising moon.



Morris and Crowfoot in a manner complementary to Morris' commemorative to Crowfoot. But the relationship between Indian, Morris, and poet is even more complex than this. The next mention of an Indian concerns "old Sakimay," who "showed us his painted robe / Where in primitive pigments / He had drawn his feats and his forays" (11. 106-08). Sakimay also told Scott and Morris the legend of the "hated Blackfoot" and "How he lured the warriors, / The young men, to the foray / And they never returned" (11. 111-14). In Sakimay, then, Scott finds a fusion of artist and poet—Morris and Scott. Scott then remembers another day when he watched Morris paint a portrait of Ne-Pah-Pee-Ness (11. 131-48). This fusion (and confusion) of Indian chief, Morris, Indian artist and legend bearer (poet?), Morris-as-artist, and Scott the poet, is not simply for the sake of displaying the poet's unqualified respect for the Indians' culture, though it does accomplish that. It implies further that the task and accomplishment of the artist—whether white or red, sophisticated or primitive, whether painter, legend bearer, or poet—is in the remembering, the preservation and passing on of the worthwhile, the capturing of the transitory: "Art grows and time lingers" (1. 149). Scott is artfully suggesting that both Indian and white artist perform essentially similar functions. What Morris accomplished with his circle of stones and in his portraits of Indians, Sakimay carried painted on his robe and in his stories: the former's art is contingent upon the latter's; Scott's poem is contingent upon both. And remembering is what Scott accomplishes in "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris." He is also seeking consolation. Again he recalls an Indian legend to illustrate and embody his philosophic consolation.

This consolation is boldly and beautifully presented in the following lines:

We of the sunrise,  
 Joined in the breast of God, feel deep the power  
 That urges all things onward, not to an end,  
 But in an endless flow, mounting and mounting,  
 Claiming not overmuch for human life,  
 Sharing with our brothers of nerve and leaf  
 The urgency of the one creative breath.

(11. 200-06)

Here is the essence of what Dragland has termed Scott's "aesthetic of process,"<sup>18</sup> what I prefer to term with reference to the Indian

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<sup>18</sup>Dragland, "Introduction" to *Duncan Campbell Scott*, p. 3.

poems, his poetry of transition: "Not to an end, / But in an endless flow." To lay too great an emphasis on death is to violate the poet's belief in "Claiming not overmuch for human life." All is "Joined in the breast of God," as the old Indian woman of "The Forsaken" (pp. 37-39) comes to rest finally "in His breast" (l. 92), and all are "brothers of nerve and leaf." There is an urgency to life—"The urgency of the one creative breath"—as there is an urgency to many of the Indian poems; and Scott feels, like the Tennyson of *In Memoriam* and the poets of the great pastoral elegies, a restrained urgency for consolation. But we should keep in mind that Scott's is an urgency "in an endless flow." This is the characteristic of Scott's poetry that many critics have noted, the tone of "restrained intensity."<sup>19</sup> However solacing such a philosophy of consolation is, Scott then turns to the story of Akoose to flesh out the skeleton, to illustrate with an example of life's urgent energy this disembodied philosophy. Interestingly, though no longer surprisingly, he finds this flesh and energy in the story of an old Indian's valiant death.

It is fitting that the story of Akoose should bring about the close of "Edmund Morris;" throughout the poem Scott has associated Morris with Indians. Akoose is initially pictured "in his prime," when on foot he could drive "a herd of antelope / From sunrise, without rest, a hundred miles" (ll. 226-27). He is then described "in his old age, blind from the smoke / Of tepees and the sharp snow light, alone" (ll. 230-31). Near death,

He caught a pony on a quick return  
Of prowess and, all his instincts cleared and quickened,  
He mounted, sensed the north and bore away  
To the Last Mountain Lake where in his youth  
He shot the sand-hill-cranes with his flint arrows.

(ll. 236-40)

It is, of course, a return of "the power / That urges all things onward." Akoose "mounted," affirming his connection to "the power" that was envisioned as "mounting and mounting" (l. 203). It is a triumph in death effected by "the power / That urges all things onward," available to all "brothers of nerve and leaf." Having presented in the story of Akoose the embodiment of his philosophy of consolation,

<sup>19</sup>E.K. Brown, in his "Duncan Campbell Scott," is the first to give this phrase authority (*Duncan Campbell Scott*, p. 79), a phrase, as Dragland notes in his introduction to Brown's article, that "Scott particularly liked" (p. 73).

Scott returns to thoughts of time and relativity. He considers Akoose lying dead, "silent amid the braken":

Who shall count the time that lies between  
The sleep of Akoose and the dinosaurs?  
Innumerable time, that yet is like the breath  
Of the long wind that creeps upon the prairie  
And dies away with the shadows at sundown.  
(11. 259-63)

As E.K. Brown has concluded: "Akoose enters into the process of the centuries and his life and death fall into place as parts of a great and ultimately satisfying panorama, which is suddenly given a focus."<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Scott applies to the world itself his faith in the life energy that returned to Akoose in old age. He suggests that

What we may think, who brood upon the theme,  
Is, when the old world, tired of spinning, has fallen  
Asleep, and all the forms, that carried the fire  
Of life, are cold upon her marble heart—  
Like ashes on the altar—just as she stops,  
That something will escape of soul or essence,—  
The sum of life, to kindle elsewhere.

(11. 264-70)

Belief in such consolation requires an act of faith—"What we may think" (my emphasis). I would posit, though, that the image of the dead world's "soul or essence" escaping to "kindle elsewhere"—introduced as it is by the story of Akoose's death—reaffirms the notion that Scott's assimilationist policy is not synonymous with the particular death of the Indian people: in the death of a white man (Morris), and Indian (Akoose), or the world itself, "something will escape of soul or essence— / The sum of life, to kindle elsewhere." And all share an ultimate destiny.

We can turn now to examine some of Scott's other Indian poems, keeping in mind the contexts of transition and time we discovered in "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris." For in many of the other Indian poems this context is not stated but implied, implicit in each poem's depiction of a specific moment in the process. In certain poems Indians are trapped in situations that leave no alternative but death. The pain and suffering are immediate, an effect of the violent

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<sup>20</sup>Brown, pp. 87-88.

period of transition through which Scott witnessed the Indians suffering. If anything, his reluctance to offer overt sympathy in the poetry is a measure of his respect both for the Indians and the reader: the patronizing tone that colored much of the prose is refreshingly absent from these Indian poems. And we must remember Scott's admonition in "Edmund Morris" not to claim "overmuch for human life;" that is, "human," not merely Indian, life. Nowhere, though, will we find Scott's admiration for the Indians expressed more sincerely than it is in "Edmund Morris," in his use of Crowfoot, Sakimay, Ne-Paw-Pee-Ness and Akoose to commemorate a dead friend. His purpose in the other Indian poems is often to depict an Indian caught at the point of transition, with all the pointed suffering that such times entail. Even so, Watkwenies of "Watkwenies" (p. 13) achieves a kind of triumph (her name means "The Woman who Conquers") in old age that is a temporal complement to Akoose's eternal conquering of death.

"Watkwenies" and "The Onondaga Madonna" (p. 14) are Scott's earliest Indian poems, published in his *Labour and the Angel* volume of 1898. Both poems are Petrarchan sonnets, the octaves dealing with the past, the sestet with the present and with possible repercussions for the future. Both poems are exact in their rhyme schemes, with sestets rhyming cdeedc. D.M.R. Bentley's astute analysis of this form, as it applies to "The Onondaga Madonna," demonstrates the ways in which the sonnet form conveys a sense of its subject's imprisonment within alien conventions, that, in effect, the form of "The Onondaga Madonna" reflects, or is rather, content.<sup>21</sup> Although I have stated that the rhyme schemes of these two sonnets are identical, this is not exactly the case. The third and fourth lines of the sestet in "Watkwenies" do not have exact end-rhymes ("palm" and "name"), as do the corresponding lines in "The Onondaga Madonna" ("lies" and "eyes"). In light of Bentley's argument—that the third and fourth lines of the sestet in "The Onondaga Madonna" form a couplet, a couplet bracketed, enclosed by the rhyming second and fifth, first and last lines of the sestet, thereby increasing the sense of imprisonment for the Madonna's "paler" child<sup>22</sup>—the corresponding inexact rhymes of the third and fourth lines of the sestet in "Watkwenies," is significant. It is significant because "Watkwenies," unlike the other sonnet, deals not with imprisonment but with a kind of triumph achieved in old age.

<sup>21</sup>D.M.R. Bentley, "The Onondaga Madonna: A Sonnet of Rare Beauty," 28.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

Although the date of composition of "Watkwenies" has not been fixed, it is fairly safe to assume that it was composed in the mid-1890's, sometime after the publication of *The Magic House and Other Poems* in 1893 but before 1898.<sup>23</sup> This period coincides with Scott's being "made Secretary to the Department of Indian Affairs" in 1896, in which capacity he "subsequently travelled extensively on inspection tours into the Canadian hinterland."<sup>24</sup> If "Watkwenies" and "The Onondaga Madonna" can be viewed as Scott's first attempts to give poetic expression to his initial experiences of Indians, it would appear that his early impressions were ones of a debt owed to the Indians from the white man, and an understanding of this unredeemable debt as the Indians' vengeance. To this understanding can be added a fear on Scott's part of the price of assimilation, both in terms of monetary reimbursement and in terms of violence.

The octave of "Watkwenies" begins: "Vengeance was once her nations lore and law." The following seven lines concern the murder of a white sentry while "through the dreaming hamlet on the hill" the Iroquois massacre a settlement of whites. This graphic description of the Indians' vital blood vengeance is contrasted to the sentry's white hand which is "pale as death." The sestet begins with the word "Now," signaling the shift from past (the octave's "once") to present. "Watkwenies" is "now" an old woman collecting and weighing the government "interest-money" paid to Indians. The term "interest-money" is problematic. Dagg has suggested the following interpretation: "She knows what is owed her, 'she weighs it,' it is only 'the interest-money,' and as head of Indian Affairs Scott also knew what was owing—the principal."<sup>25</sup> Dagg's point is well taken, and I have little trouble accepting that this is perhaps what Scott intended. However, Scott was not "head of Indian Affairs" at this time; he was but recently appointed secretary to the Department. Moreover, the government did not buy land from the Indians; it recognized their aboriginal claim to tracts, treated with them for their claim, and paid an annual annuity of from four to five dollars per Indian.<sup>26</sup> This said, Dagg's interpretation remains the only one that makes sense of the

<sup>23</sup>McDougall writes that "it was not [Scott's] practice, moreover, to allow a manuscript poem to 'sleep' through one publication and be resurrected in the next." "D.C. Scott: The Dating of the Poems," 15.

<sup>24</sup>Glenn Clever's "Biographical Note," in *Selected Poetry of Duncan Campbell Scott*, p. vi.

<sup>25</sup>Dagg, "Scott and the Indians," p. 186.

<sup>26</sup>See *The Administration*, p. 1, and *The James Bay Treaty*, pp. 4-5.

term "interest-money"; the term is employed perhaps as a metaphor to focus Scott's earliest impressions of the nature of the relationship between government and Indian: interest paid on an unredeemable principal.

It is also a problematic "vengeance" exacted by Watkwenies, for her conquering signals her dependence and degradation, and by extension her people's. What sort of triumph is there in subsisting forever at the expense and whimsy of an alien government? And yet, Scott at this time apparently considered such servile subsistence as a triumph, an ironic one to be sure, but a triumph nonetheless. In the sestet, Watkwenies is described as being "wrinkled like an apple kept till May," an image that initially connotes old age, functional uselessness, impending death. But if we compare this image to the concluding image of "Edmund Morris"—of the old world about to be transformed—we must consider that "the woman who conquers" does indeed triumph. In "Edmund Morris" the old world is

the fruit of a high sunny garden,  
Grown mellow with autumnal sun and rain,  
Shrivelled with ripeness, [that] splits to the rich heart,  
And looses a gold kernel to the mould.

(11. 271-74)

Cross-referencing images may be at best a questionable practice, but here the similarity is too close to be dismissed as coincidental. We can only conclude that Scott in "Watkwenies" does not view the ascendancy of the white man's civilization as costing the Indians too dearly. We might speculate that Scott at this time (say, 1896) had not yet experienced the close contact with Indians that the ensuing years would bring, and with them a deepening understanding of what the Indians were losing in the movement toward assimilation. "The Onondaga Madonna" reflects a similar state in the early development of Scott's understanding of the Indians, with this difference: here Scott is also concerned with the possibility of violence. "The Onondaga Madonna" also introduces two themes that Scott will explore in his subsequent Indian poems: the mother and child, and the half-breed.

As Bentley has pointed out, "The Onondaga Madonna" was originally entitled "An Onondaga Mother and Child."<sup>27</sup> Besides emphasizing the European-Christian/Indian-pagan cultural clash (as Bentley has also indicated<sup>28</sup>), the change in article, from the indefinite

<sup>27</sup>Bentley, 28.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

"An" to the definite "The," suggests that we are dealing here with a typical case rather than an isolated, idiosyncratic instance. The octave of this sonnet, like the octave of "Watkwenies," is concerned with the past, with what the Indian mother has been and is now. The major differences between the two poems are that the "Madonna" is a half-breed ("Her blood is mingled with her ancient foes"), and her violent past is stated rather than described in a particular act, whereas in "Watkwenies" it is dramatically depicted in the knifing of the sentry. The last two lines of the octave to "The Onondaga Madonna" inform us that

Her rebel lips are dabbled with the stains  
Of feuds and forays and her father's woes.

She has tasted violence. Her blood "thrills with war and wildness in her veins." Her lips are "rebel;" she has not complacently accepted the white culture thrust upon her. Unlike the Virgin Mary's submissive acceptance of passionate suffering, this madonna's "pagan passion burns and glows" for, and from, vengeance.

The sestet deals with her child, and through the child, with the present and projected future of the Indians. The child is described as "The latest promise of her nation's doom." Why, we must ask, is her nation doomed? And why is the "savage" of the octave coupled with the epithet "tragic?" The child is further described as "paler" than his mother (therefore my assumption that he is a quarter-breed). As we saw in "Watkwenies," paler implied "pale as death." But in this instance, paler signifies the death of the Indians' racial purity, because the child's blood is diluted even more than its mother's. We can posit also that the savage is "tragic" because "savage," because the savage is doomed to be civilized-Christianized, and because the savage will not complacently accept this assimilation, therefore "the latest promise of her nation's doom." Although the baby is obviously too young to have tasted violence, as his mother has, we are told that "The primal warrior [is] gleaming from his eyes." "From his eyes": in his soul burns the "primal warrior"—the "tragic savage."

He sulks, and burdened with his infant gloom,  
He draws his heavy brows and will not rest.

We can almost feel the weight of the "doom" carried by and in this "burdened," heavy-browed child. The "heavy brows" suggest an

almost Neanderthal (primitive certainly) aspect. He is the last faded remnant of a paled and paling people, "a weird and waning race." Yet in the last words of the poem there is an intimation of further violence to come. The phrase, "will not rest," is not meant simply to convey a sense of the child's psychic uneasiness with his diluted blood; it is meant surely to suggest that the child may, as his mother has, *taste* violence. He and his nation are doomed because they "will not rest," they will actively seek vengeance. It may only be a vengeance of the kind exacted by Watkwenies—economic—but the threat of further, future, physical violence is there throughout "The Onondaga Madonna," bequeathed from mother to child; as was a more subtle intimation of future violence suggested by the last image of "Watkwenies," where "the lads" with "war-whoops" play "snow-snake in the stinging cold."

"Watkwenies" and "The Onondaga Madonna" are poems that reveal Scott's belief in the inevitability of assimilation. They also convey his feeling that assimilation may bring with it a vengeful disposition on the part of the Indians. But assimilation is assured. At this early point in his experience of Indians, Scott does not consider that they are losing anything of great value (at least in terms of what we can glean about Scott's attitude from these two poems). The Indians, apparently, have everything to gain (treaty annuities, Christian civilization) and little of value to lose (material poverty, pagan savagery). It is not by chance that the critics who choose to condemn Scott's attitude toward the Indians harp constantly on "The Onondaga Madonna" with its "weird and waning race." "The Forsaken" (1902, pp. 37-39), however, reveals a more mature conception of what the Indians were, what they are, and what is being done to them—that is, an appreciation of what they have to lose and are losing. I am not contending that Scott, prior to "The Forsaken," was grossly insensitive to the inherent worth of the Indians; only that the two early sonnets do not reveal such an appreciation. I agree with Bentley that the use of the sonnet form conveys a sense of the Madonna's discomfort at being posed for alien eyes and imprisoned within the foreign conventions of the sonnet. Scott certainly understood the pain bred in a period of transition, but there is simply no evidence in these two poems that he appreciates the real cost to the Indians of assimilation. The sonnets do however present their subjects as vengeful and potentially violent, implying an awareness on the Indians' part—and no doubt on Scott's part—that something is going wrong.



In "The Forsaken" the Indian theme is again explored in a mother-child relationship, explored and, to some extent, celebrated. The first part of the poem deals with an Indian mother who, to preserve her son's life, chooses to bait a hook with a piece of her own flesh. The second part concerns the same woman, now old and near death, being left by her son and his children to die, so that they will not have to bear the burden of feeding her throughout the approaching winter—again her sacrifice is for the sake of her progeny and, by extension, her people. As she chooses to bait the hook with her own flesh, she chooses to accept her fate when called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice. And sacrifice it is: although an Indian custom of necessity, the symbolic associations of such a practice are not far removed from those surrounding the origins of Christianity. For the present discussion, the more pertinent aspects of this poem are what can be inferred of the poet's attitude towards the changes from parts one to two, and the striking resemblance between the old woman's death and the death of Akoose in "Edmund Morris." To this can be added the theme of transition: the poem presents a moment in the past; there is a transition within the poem to the immediate past; and one of the minor concerns of the poem is with the effects of transition upon the son and his children in the second part. In this sense, the treatment of time in "The Forsaken" is reminiscent of the octave-sestet division within the sonnets.

Lee B. Meckler's helpful study of "The Forsaken" has shown the ways in which the two parts of the poem reflect each other, inviting comparison. For example: the repetition in both parts of the phrases "Valiant, unshaken" and "Then she had rest;" the sick baby in the first part, the sick mother in the second; and the return in the second part to the northern island of the first. Meckler has further suggested that the poem concerns the movement of the Indians towards Europeanization, that this is evidenced in the poem by the "technical and cultural, religious and linguistic changes wrought upon the Indians by the two generations of contact with Europeans that the poem subsumes."<sup>29</sup> Meckler cites evidence of authentic Indian life in part one ("the line of the twisted / Bark of the cedar," the "rabbit-bone hone," the "*tikanagan*") and hints of encroaching Europeanization in part two (the "kettles" and "mink-traps," the word "tour") to support his thesis that European contagion is what causes

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<sup>29</sup>Lee B. Meckler, 64.

the children to deposit their mother in the snow and "[slink] away" (l. 63). Meckler's reading is reminiscent of E.K. Brown's accusatory assessment of the bothersome verb "slunk": "The rest of the group sneak off across the lake, leaving the old woman behind."<sup>30</sup> Although I am mostly in agreement with, and am grateful for, Meckler's close analysis of "The Forsaken," and agree further that Scott has in his poetry come to view the transitory effects of assimilation with some reserve (no pun intended), I cannot help but feel that there is too great an emphasis placed on the word "slunk," which Meckler has gone so far as to call "the most controversial word in the corpus of Canadian poetry."<sup>31</sup> In any case, I would like to shift the emphasis to the obvious admiration that the poet feels for the mother, and the context within which the poem should be read, a context provided by the later "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris."

The key passage in the first part of the poem is the baiting of the hook and the catching of the fish:

Valiant, unshaken,  
She took of her own flesh,  
Baited the fish-hook,  
Drew in the grey-trout,  
Drew in his fellows,  
Heaped them beside her,  
Dead in the snow.

(ll. 32-38)

As Meckler has suggested, there is a latent Christian symbolism at work even in the first part of "The Forsaken."<sup>32</sup> Here, we could safely interpret the phrase "her own flesh" (take ye and eat), the fishing (the apostles, fishers of men), and the fish (the high sign of the early Christian community) as insinuating that the valiant sacrifice of the Indian mother is emblematically Christian. Surely it is not putting too fine a point to suggest that the title's "Forsaken" calls to mind the despairing Christ's *lama sabactani*. I think, though, that Scott intends a broader, baser physical interpretation, which finds its spiritual counterpart in the conclusion to part two. For what is enacted in this passage is the natural cycle of life feeding on death. The death of the fish gives life to the child, whose life requires a smaller, symbolic death from the mother, who in turn, like the fish in part one, lies

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<sup>30</sup>E.K. Brown, p. 81.

<sup>31</sup>Meckler, 60.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

"Dead in the snow" at the end of the poem, though spiritual life arises from her physical death. The mother willingly accepts the cost to herself, in the short and the long run, in maintaining her son's—and by extension her community's—life. She knows: she is "Sure of her goal / And the life of her dear one" (11. 42-43) when she turns toward the white man's fort at the end of part one. The turning towards the fort prefigures the movement towards the Europeanization of part two, though the emphasis remains on the mother and her acceptance of a death which, like the death of the fish, ensures life.

It would appear to be a tendency to sentimentalize the plight of the mother in part two that causes many critics to pounce like the "ravenous huskies" of part one on the word "slunk" as indicative either of Scott's insensitivity to Indian custom and ethics or his criticism of Europeanization. The rationale for the latter position usually proceeds thus: the children have been corrupted by Christian morality, have lost the savage resolve of former times, therefore they cannot abandon the old squaw and bravely walk away, but must guiltily (and what could be more Christian?) "[slink] away." Surely there are more natural reasons for this 'slinking' than Christian-Europeanization. Are we to presume that before the arrival of the white man Indian children performed such a necessary, customary task without emotion—with the stony stoicism characteristic of the stereotype? I think not. Consider Samuel Hearne's description of this practice in his *A Journey From Prince of Wales's Fort In Hudson's Bay To The Northern Ocean*:

Though this was the first instance of the kind I had seen, it is the common, and indeed the constant practice of those Indians; . . . they say it is better to leave one who is past recovery than for the whole family to sit down by them and starve . . . On these occasions, therefore, the friends or relations of the sick generally leave them some victuals and water; and, if the situation of the place will afford it, a little firing. When those articles are provided, the person to be left is acquainted with the road which the others intend to go; and then, after covering them well up with deer skins &c. they take their leave, and walk away crying.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup>My emphasis. Samuel Hearne, *A Journey From Prince of Wales's Fort In Hudson's Bay To The Northern Ocean*, ed. Richard Glover (Toronto: MacMillan, 1958), p. 131. See also Susan Beckman's "A Note on Duncan Campbell Scott's 'The Forsaken'," a source study that finds in Wordsworth's "The complaint (of a Forsaken Indian Woman)" and Hearne's account (p. 221) a "literary germ" for "The Forsaken." *Humanities Association Review*, 25:1 (1974), 32-37.

We are intended to temper our response to the children's abandonment in the spirit that the mother accepts her trial:

Valiant, unshaken,  
She smoothed her dark locks under her kerchief,  
Composed her shawl in state,  
Then folded her hands ridged with sinews and corded  
with veins,  
Folded them across her breasts spent with the nourishing  
of children.

(11. 70-74)

She herself is "spent," "old and withered" (1. 55), as Akoose is described as "withered and spent" (1. 232) in the scene of his taking leave of his community. The forsaken mother would know she was "old and useless" (1. 66), and know also the expected and traditional response. So, appropriately, she considers the broader perspective. She

Gazed at the sky past the tops of the cedars,  
Saw two spangled nights arise out of the twilight,  
Saw two days go by filled with the tranquil sunshine,  
Saw, without pain, or dread, or even a moment of longing.

(11. 75-79)

In essence, and in some particulars, the mother's death in "The Forsaken" echoes forward to the death of Akoose: a sacrificial lying down to die in the northland where the greatest triumph of youth was achieved. In more general terms, her death is a particular instance of the cosmological ending to "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris." As the mother lay dying, covered with snow,

Up from the life below,  
Rose a column of breath  
Through a tiny cleft in the snow,  
Fragile, delicately drawn,  
Wavering with its own weakness,  
In the wilderness a sign of the spirit.

(11. 84-89)

Compare these lines to the image of the dying old world that concludes "Edmund Morris":

So the old world, hanging long in the sun,  
 And deep enriched with effort and with love,  
 Shall, in the motions of maturity,  
 Wither and part, and the kernel of it all  
 Escape, a lovely wraith of spirit, to latitudes  
 Where the appearance, throated like a bird,  
 Winged with fire and bodied all with passion,  
 Shall flame with presage, not of tears, but joy.

(11. 275-82)

Surely, the mother's death in "The Forsaken" is to be understood as having given birth to her essential spirit; moreover, her actual death, like her symbolic death in part one, increases the probability of life for her children. The conclusion to "Edmund Morris" postulated that the death of the "old world" might also give birth to "a lovely wraith of spirit," and presented the world's physical death in terms of a sacrifice: "Like ashes on the altar" (1. 268).

"The Forsaken" concludes:

Then all light was gathered up by the hand of God  
 and hid in His breast,  
 Then there was born a silence deeper than silence,  
 Then she had rest.

(11. 92-94)

She is gathered into life "in His breast," as her son received life from her breasts in part one, breasts that in part two are described as "spent with the nourishing of children" (1. 74). Like her death, the breast image echoes forward to "Edmund Morris": "We of the sunrise, / Joined in the breast of God" (11. 200-01). Gary Geddes has concluded about the poetry in general that "life, in Scott's poetry, is a movement towards eternal rest, a rest which is common to all men."<sup>34</sup> This movement—this transition—in "The Forsaken" is from death (the fish and, symbolically, the mother) to life (the child) to death (the mother) to the life of her people and her own spiritual continuation in "eternal rest."

In "The Forsaken" both mother and child are full-blooded Indians, a reason no doubt for their maintenance of integrity. Neither the evidence of Europeanization in part two nor the verb "slunk" substantiate the argument for Scott's insensitivity to Indian culture or his extreme discomfort at the effects of assimilation. Rather, this poem conveys Scott's admiration for the mother's acceptance of her sacrifice

<sup>34</sup>Gary Geddes, "Piper of Many Tunes," in *Duncan Campbell Scott*, ed. Dragland, p. 175.

and presents her death in a context similar to that provided for the deaths of Akoose and Edmund Morris. The poet synthesizes experience, critics distinguish attitudes. However, in the melodramatic "On the Way to the Mission" (1901, pp. 39-40), there is ample evidence that at least one facet of European civilization, the fur trade, caused Scott concern for the Indians. And later in "The Half-Breed Girl" (1906, pp. 43-44), there is further evidence of an Indian suffering as a result of contact with the white man, the cause being the limbo-like existence of living between two worlds and belonging fully to neither. In short, the half-breed girl suffers because caught in a transitional state. In the much later "At Gull Lake: August 1810" (1934, pp. 96-99), the problem of the half-breed is more fully explored. Here again, the half-breed girl, Keejigo, is frustrated because she is caught between white and red world, literally stranded in the no-man's land between an Indian encampment and a white man's tents. The tension within the poem and Keejigo mounts inexorably as she feels herself torn between two equally attractive worlds, both of which refuse her. She is an embodiment (albeit poetic) of the "cultural tension" of which Frye wrote, a tension similar to that which suffuses the best of Scott's poems: "The Height of Land," "Spring on Mattagami," "The Piper of Arll," to mention but the best known. Keejigo offers herself to "Nairne of the Orkneys," "a trader" (11. 16-17), but is repulsed because of Nairne's concern for his life and his trade: "Twice had the Chief fired at his tents" (1. 79). She is spurned by Nairne—"Drive this bitch to her master" (1. 84—and treated like a dog (a "bitch," a mongrel?) by the Indians: they throw "her over the bank / Like a dead dog" (11. 107-08). There is reason to believe that Keejigo enters into a union with "the power" of the universe similar to that attained by the mother in "The Forsaken" and Akoose—the philosophy of consolation implicit in the conclusion to "Edmund Morris." The line near the end of "Gull Lake," "After the beauty of terror the beauty of peace" (1. 127), best expresses the context of time, transition, eternity, and "Edmund Morris" "the power / That urges all things onward" (11. 201-02). Although Keejigo's end is not explicitly imaged, the last lines strongly imply that she has attained assimilation not with white man or Indian but with nature:

Only the midnight moon knew where she felt her way,  
 Only the leaves of autumn, the snows of winter  
 Knew where she lay.

(11. 129-31)

We could safely conclude the same for Akoose and "the forsaken" mother. I suspect that we are intended to read "On the Way to the Mission," "The Half-Breed Girl," and "At Gull Lake: August 1810" in this context. Though invariably painful to read, whether by white man or Indian, the reader should continually ponder the question posed in "Edmund Morris":

Why are there tears for failure, or sighs for weakness,  
While life's rhythm beats on?

(11. 216-17)

The Indian poems deal primarily with "the beauty of terror," the plight of the half-breed, the white man's greed-motivated excesses—frozen transitory moments. Still, "the beauty of peace" is there and is frequently imaged in the poems' conclusion, or formally suggested as in the shift to the more lyrical stanzas that conclude "On the Way to the Mission" (11. 43-58), a poem whose content and title concern transition from pagan to Christian.

The last Indian poem I will consider at length is "A Scene at Lake Manitou" (1923, pp. 102-06). This poem powerfully portrays the plight of an Indian as an effect of civilization and Christianity, though here, as in the other Indian poems, the suffering remains a result of the transitional times in which two cultures clash. It is also a result of death. In this sense, white men are of course as vulnerable as Indians. Once again, the subject of the poem is a mother and son, a half-breed son. But in this poem the mother lives and the son dies, a significant variation in the mother-son theme in terms of the future of the Indians. Furthermore, it is of interest to note that Scott wrote this poem only a year after his retirement from the civil service in 1932.<sup>35</sup>

The opening twenty-two lines of the poem are insistently pictorial, fulfilling the title's "A Scene":

In front of the fur-trader's house at Lake Manitou  
Indian girls were gathering the hay,

.....  
The Lake was all shimmer and tremble  
To the bronze-green islands of cedars and pines;  
In the channel between the water shone  
Like an inset of polished stone;  
Beyond them a shadowy trace

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<sup>35</sup>Clever's "Biographical Note," p. vii.

Of the shore of the lake  
 Was lost in the veil of haze.  
 Above the field on the rocky point  
 Was a cluster of canvas tents,  
 Nearly deserted, for the women had gone  
 Berry-picking at dawn  
 With most of the children.

The distant view presents a pleasant enough picture: hay-gathering that is "Half labour and half play" (1.3), the women and children off "Berry-picking," all under the paternal protection of the "fur-trader's house." However, at line twenty-three the view suddenly focuses on "The Widow Frederick / Whose Indian name means Stormy Sky" (11. 25-26), and who is sitting vigil at her son's approaching death. The pleasant picture dissipates, a pleasant day ruined by a stormy sky. From this point onwards the poem's—the scene's—coloring fades to desperate black and then resolves in apathetic grey. To the Widow Frederick the scene looks quite different: "the far-off islands" seem "in a mirage to float / Moored in the sultry air" (11. 31-33). It is a time of suspension, a waiting for the transitory moment to decide the issue—her issue, her son.

Like the mother of "The Forsaken," the Widow Frederick had sacrificed for her son in

the difficult past  
 When her husband had faded away;  
 How she had struggled to live  
 For Matanack four years old.  
 (11. 42-45)

Here, for the first time in an Indian poem, we find mention of a husband (the one other reference to a father being "The Onondaga Madonna's" allusion to "her father's woes"). But the husband/father has died, "faded away," presumably the victim of a wasting disease such as tuberculosis. The poem then recounts what the Widow Frederick had taught her son: "To his inherited store / She had added all her lore" (11. 54-55); and though this had made Matanack at "sixteen years old / A hunter crafty and bold" (11. 56-57), all is considered finally to have been "useless cunning" (1. 59). Significantly, the mother's teaching centres on the hunt, whereas the Indians of the pleasant scene with which the poem began are involved in decidedly agrarian pursuits, hay-gathering and berry-picking, "With



most of the children" (1. 22). Perhaps this difference concerns the inevitability of assimilation, that those who hold exclusively to the old Indian ways—the hunt—do not subsist as well as those who adapt to the new economic order of the fur-trader's house. I believe that this suggestion is there in the contrast, though the poem is hardly propaganda. As we will see, if Scott is making such a suggestion, he does so with a deep-seated understanding of the pain and suffering that this adaptation entails. And the irony is that the economy of the fur-trader's house, with all that it entails, is probably responsible for the father's death, the son's death, and all that the Widow Frederick suffers as a result.

The Widow Frederick had been told that Jesus "raised a man from the dead" (1. 75), and

She had prayed to their Jesus,  
She had called on Mary His mother  
To save him, to keep him forever!  
(11. 79-81)

Mistaking quantity for quality, uncomprehending, she "had used all the Holy Water / Father Pacifique had given her" (11. 83-84), and had hung two Scapulars on Matanack. But her version of Christianity fails her: "There was nothing more to be done / That Christians could do" (11. 87-88). In her growing panic at her son's impending death, she resorts to her Indian gods, to Manitou, thinking that an offering of "her treasured possessions" (1. 93) will effect her son's resurrection. Fittingly, she feels she must offer the products of civilization's technology: "her blankets," "her gramophone," and "hand-sewing-machine" (11. 97-106).<sup>36</sup> Needless to say, there is no revitalization of her son. The fur-trader pronounces Matanack dead (11. 112-13). This is the nadir of the Widow's grief. Her confusion is, admittedly, an effect of her grief at the death of an only son; but surely it is also a most striking illustration of the pain and frustration resulting from the clash of two cultures, the admixture of two faiths: the Christian-European she does not properly understand, the Indian has been diluted and rendered ineffectual. Nevertheless, the Widow Frederick does ultimately achieve a kind of consolation and, like Akoose, a reinvigoration of spirit in the face of death.

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<sup>36</sup>One of the photographs in the *National Photographic Collection* of the 1905, 1906 journey to treat with the James Bay Indians is a strikingly incongruous shot of three rather drab-looking Indian women sitting in a tepee, and just visible to their left sits a "hand-sewing-machine."

She resolves herself to the fact of her son's death, believing though that "He was slain by the foe / That had slain his father" (11. 123-24). As Scott reported in *The Administration*, the Indians suffered a high mortality rate from tuberculosis in the early twentieth century, a result of their contact with white civilization (pp. 20-21). If we can assume that both father and son died of tuberculosis, the word "foe" carries ominous implications. It is appropriate, then, that the fur-trader be the one to pronounce the boy dead, since it was by his agency that the boy contracted the disease. There is no need to state what this, by extension, signifies. And yet, the father, a white man, died of the same disease. Scott's is not a red and white vision. Perhaps in this Indian poem, as in "Edmund Morris," the fact of death takes precedence over a limited reading of the poem for its Indian theme. For, like the mother in "The Forsaken," the Widow Frederick, following her resolution, composes herself to face the inevitable alone:

She put up her hair that had fallen over her eyes,  
And with movements, weary and listless,  
Tidied her dress.

(11. 125-27)

Moreover, she achieves a kind of religious consolation that is intrinsic to what has gone before and what will come, a transitory marriage of Indian and Christian beliefs:

He had gone to his father  
To hunt in the Spirit Land  
And to be with Jesus and Mary.

(11. 128-30)

She resolutely decides to return to her old way of life, to trapping and hunting. Like Akoose, she experiences a resurgence of strength and spirit: "Resolute as of old, / Her strength and her spirit came back" (11. 142-43). Yet the conclusion of the poem is not suffused with the powerfully positive imagery—"After the beauty of terror the beauty of peace"—that redeemed Akoose's death and the mother's death in "The Forsaken." Perhaps this is due to the fact that Akoose and the mother of "The Forsaken" died with their Indian beliefs intact, and were viewed in that light by the poet; perhaps it is because they did die, whereas the Widow Frederick must live on, her husband and son dead, her religion an odd mixture of Christian and Indian, neither of which carries the force of one unadulterated belief.

"A Scene at Lake Manitou" concludes with a picture quite in contrast to the scene of its opening:

The islands had lost  
Their mirage-mooring in air  
And lay dark on the burnished water  
Against the sunset flare—  
Standing ruins of blackened spires  
Charred by the fury of fires  
That had passed that way,  
That were smouldering and dying out in the West  
At the end of the day.

(11. 147-55)

The transitory moment has passed; the islands no longer seem suspended in air; the landscape is blackened by the fires that have passed. The landscape has become, in fact, a waste-landscape. The Widow Frederick may be "Resolute as of old," but we are left to wonder how she is to traverse such a landscape without a son to live for and with a religion that is a mixed bag of Christian and Indian—spiritless Christianity, weak medicine. Although she achieved a questionable consolation with the thought that Matanack "had gone to his father / To hunt in the Spirit Land / And to be with Jesus and Mary," what value can such a religion retain in the shadow of the burnt-out image of the oines as "ruins of blackened spires" (1. 151, my emphasis)? In this sense, the landscape with which the Indian is left to contend is both exterior and interior. That the poem is generally concerned with the Indians' future is suggested in the image of the fire that has passed, now "dying out in the west;" east-to-west is not only the physical direction taken by this fire that is "smouldering and dying away in ashes,"<sup>37</sup> it is also the direction in which civilization moved, subsuming Indian culture.

In summary, I would only like to add to this rather bleak picture the suggestion that Scott's vision of the waste land, though here applied to the Widow Frederick and the Indians, is inclusive of the white man. After all, the Widow draws some consolation from Christianity as taught by Father Pacifique (1. 76). More importantly, we must always keep in mind the context of time and transition that was established from the analysis of Scott's prose writing and "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris" with its concluding optimistic teleology. But philosophies of consolation, however reassuring, never apply very well to particular instances of loss and suffering. I think Scott knew

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<sup>37</sup>In "The Last of the Indian Treaties," Scott remarks that "the Indian nature now seems like a fire that is waning, that is smouldering and dying away in ashes." *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 40 (1906), 573.

this: perhaps the reason why some of the Indian poems dealing with particular instances either do not provide this context or only implicitly suggest it at the end of the poem. Still, we have seen Scott's appreciation of what the Indians were, are, and of what they were losing, grow from the sonnets to "A Scene at Lake Manitou." He was capable of celebrating Indian life and, in a poem such as "Indian Place-Names" (p. 36), of joyous luxuriating in what he prematurely considered the remnants of Indian culture—Indian names of Canadian cities and rivers. His respect for that culture is evident in the powerfully incantatory rhythms of "Powassan's Drum" (pp. 83-86), and his doubt with regard to the success of assimilation revealed in the question: "Will it [the throbbing of the drum] last till the world's end / As the pulse of Being?" (11. 27-28).

In this analysis, Scott emerges in the best of the Indian poems as an elegiac poet, at once recording and recognizing the loss of a people and a way of life worthy of preservation, if only in the poetry (an endeavour reminiscent of Emily Carr's work on the totem cultures of British Columbia). It was probably with such an understanding of Scott in mind that A.J.M. Smith concluded about the poetry in general that "Duncan Campbell Scott has always in a sense been an elegiac poet. His intense and scholarly poetry everywhere show a consciousness of the limitations, if not of vanity, of human wishes."<sup>38</sup> Finally, I do not doubt that Scott was, in the poems as well as the prose writings, resigned to the inevitability of assimilation, though certainly not the cold-hearted assimilation that critics of the socio-political school of Scott criticism read into the Indian poems. Poets, even when bureaucrats, are not the legislators of the world. To persist—this is the victory of Scott's most celebrated Indians. And in its broadest sense, assimilation is but the inescapable reality of death. To persist: as Akoose persisted in death, as the mother in "The Forsaken" persisted in death, and as the Widow Frederick persisted beyond a death of sorts. As Scott wrote in "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris," when he himself was searching for a faith to give life meaning in the face of death's final assimilation:

Catch up the sands of the sea and count and count  
 The failures hidden in our sum of conquest.  
 Persistence is the master of this life;  
 The master of these little lives of ours;  
 To the end—effort—even beyond the end. (11. 219-23)

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<sup>38</sup>A.J.M. Smith, p. 113 *University of Western Ontario*.