TREMOURED WITH FIRE: DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT'S LOVE POETRY

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I

In a previous article, "In the Listening World: The Poetry of Duncan Campbell Scott,"[1] I argued that the initiator of the compelling experience of "The Height of Land" is the loving person / principle of transcendence which is also immanent in all creation. This is "the other" toward whom or toward which the speaker inclines, responds, yearns in all facets of human life, including that of human love. In the present article I wish to show how Scott's love poetry is also a transcendental recreation of human experience. The outstanding example of such an encounter is "The Water Lily."[2]

In this gleaming poem the importance of the environment is stressed from the first: although the lily, "the Peerless one," is raised above even the other unmentioned lilies, nevertheless the surrounding garden is equally important. True, the lily is singled out, but she is set in a "granite pool" (1. 1) with the others, the real relationship being shown in the compound structure of the opening sentence. Here the elements of the second and equally emphasized clause are markedly part of the light-filled setting: *all* the garden blossoms "shine," are "rich" in the sun, "throb" in their necessary formation as circles when the water lily is taken arbitrarily to be the centre of interest. Thus, while it is true that the lily is the focal point of the experience of the poem, we have to be alive to its position as one among surrounding circles of similarly favoured blossoms if we are to appreciate the inclusive nature of the work.

This irregular balance between the lily and the garden is borne out by the disposition and balance of the seven sections into which the

1. *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 4, No. 1 (Winter, 1979), 71-94.
2. "The Water Lily," *The Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott* (Toronto: MacLelland and Stewart, 1926), p. 197. Unless otherwise noted, all poems quoted from are from this edition.

poem is distinctly marked. These seven sections present: (1) the general setting in bright sunlight where the excellent lily is surrounded by vibrant garden blossoms—eight lines, (2) the lily and its attendants, petals from garden roses—ten lines, (3) the virginal lily—ten lines, (4) the environment's testing of the lily, which remains free and inviolate—nine lines, (5) the lily's initial experience of attraction by the sun—twelve lines, (6) the expression of its ecstasy by another part of the surroundings—seven lines, (7) the experience of recreation in union, its soaring ecstasy which is shared by the garden, and the return of the lily to its former disposition but changed by the experience—twenty-one lines. The emphatic length of the final section suggests that the surface divisions indicated in the poem's outer framework mask a more pertinent division into parts based on the number of lines. So the divisions become: (1) twenty-eight lines (11. 1-28)—the lily and its environment before its attraction by the sun; (2) twenty-eight lines (11. 29-56)—the pure lily's ecstatic experience of the sun's action, which ecstasy is expressed by the goldfinch; (3) twenty-nine lines (11. 57-85)—the experience of union and recreation, the resulting spontaneous joy being shared again by the garden, and finally the new-but-same disposition of the lily. In the final section we again have three sections based on sentence structure: (a) thirteen lines—inspired descent to the depths, (b) four lines—recreation, (c) twelve lines—ecstatic response and return to normal. From this grouping we see that the lines central to this section and by virtue of the preceding discussion central to the poem are:

> O banishment to cloistral water,
> The pause in the limpid hush,
> There to recreate
> The form, the odour, the flush.
> (11. 70-73)

The rough structural pattern is noteworthy: the lily is again presented in relation to its milieu even in this final section of the poem.

Besides emphasizing uniqueness within a general, equally favoured context, the final section of the poem also brings the reader's attention back to the beginning, suggesting eventual recurrence of the same happening. This circling pattern is seen as follows: the first three lines of the final section deal with the environment:

> A shadow dreams upon the rounded mere,
> A gold dust swims upon the crystal,
> Maturity broods in water and air;
> (11. 57-60),

while the last lines integrate the lily with the surrounding garden. This happens in an equality of response which simultaneously, yet subordinately through repetition of "starry wonder" (11. 17; 60), brings the poem back to the first section:

> Then the lyrical impulse,
> The stem goes rocketing
> To kiss spring light,
> The pointed bud parts,
> The garden lies in ecstasy
> Conscious of the starry wonder
> That opens—opens—opens—
> The odour overflows—
> Comes the under-flush—
> The stately lily lolls again,
> Pale water-lily,
> Langourously floating by the lotus leaves.
> (11. 74-85)

In this last quotation both punctuation and diction support the sharing of response between the lily and its small world. Preceded by a mere comma and containing no punctuation, the two lines—

> The garden lies in ecstasy
> Conscious of the starry wonder

—assisted by liquid "s's," seem to melt into the whole action. The diction "spring light" instead of "sunlight" expands the context from the sun itself to the whole environment which it bathes, while the substitution of "lotus" for "water lily" in the final line (and also in lines 18, 28, 47, 56) has the same effect.

We have seen that from the beginning of this poem the communal relationship between the lily and surrounding nature has been emphasized. The sections into which the poem is divided, as well as the suggested grouping of sections, support this fundamental relationship, as does the structure of the final section. Thus, "The Water Lily" emphasizes the identity of the individual with all nature even while it clearly describes the experience of the individual. This is important to notice, for it reflects the basic deep inter-relationship perceived by Scott among all elements of nature, including man, even while the personal experience of the individual is the main focus of attention. This is the same tension observable in "The Height of Land" brought to bear on an individual other than the speaker.

The personal experience of the individual to which we have just been referring is depicted in "The Water Lily" as the lily's attraction by and union with the sun. The sexual nature of the experience is clearly indicated in sections five and seven; and yet, just as clearly, within the deeper structure of the poem there is an insistence on a wider dimension than the fulfilling and compelling excitement that fills the beautiful lily, that causes her to "swoon amorously" (1.45), to yearn vibrantly for the sun (11. 45-46), to tremble in ecstasy under its rays that permeate her, making her "tremoured with fire" (1. 43). In section seven, the initial tone and mood contrast quietly with the joy and exuberance of these quotations from section five. In this section there is an expectant quality ("dreams," 1. 57; "broods," 1. 59; "feels," 1.62), a compelling urgency (1. 61), near oblivion (11. 67-69), pause and hush (1. 71), and only then the delirious excitement (11. 72-73; 74-76) foreshadowed in section five. And again, there is the felt ecstasy (1. 78) expressed as before (11. 49; 51-53) by the surrounding environment.

There seems to me then to be an ambiguity in the presentation of the sexual encounter, in part because of the separation of section seven from section five, and in part because of the contrast in mood. The near repetition of the action of the shadow of light—

> The shadow cast by light
> On its own substance lies;
> (11. 40-41)

—suggests that section seven is the continuation of action initiated in section five. If this is true, then the insertion of the expression of ecstasy by the goldfinch in section six makes the role of the milieu even more emphatic. On the other hand, diction like "Maturity broods" (1. 59), "ripeness" (1. 62), "memory" (1. 68), "banishment to cloistral water" (1. 70) seems to suggest birth imagery. Both possibilities seem admissible, each contributing its own thrust to the total meaning.

Various and persistent qualities pull the emphasis of the poem beyond a simple metaphorical recreation of the beauty and fulfillment of sex. These qualities are both positive and negative in terms of the lily's excellence. On the positive side is the larger context already discussed. In addition there is an emphasis on the ethereal, even in sections five and seven, those concerned with the sexual experience. There are religious overtones, distant Biblical echoes. A combination of colour and cold belongs to a pattern developed further in *The Green Cloister* to extend beyond sexual experience to a more total concern with tran-

scendent reality. Further, in contrast to a very positive situation presented throughout the poem, there is repetition of diction insisting on imperfection in the lily, which is "Peerless" (1. 8). Oxymorons further emphasize the tension suggested, that very tension given large emphasis in "The Height of Land." Finally, several characteristics of the experience itself as described in that poem are present also in "The Water Lily."

First of all, the sexual experience is presented in a clearly ethereal symbolic language. This is seen in the following lines:

> The shadow cast by light
> On its own substance lies;
> (11. 40-41)

The sun is identified as source only later in the poem (1. 44), so the emphasis falls in these lines on light, a key symbol in Scott for the source of transcendent experience, as see also in "Ecstasy," "These Are in the Beginning," "The Forsaken," and even indirectly in the words "flash" and "golden" in "The Height of land" (11. 17, 50, 52, 59, 157). The close ethereal communion already emphasized in the lily-environment relationship is here emphasized metrically in the light-lily identification:

> \- /- / - /
> The shadow cast by light
>
> \- - / / - /
> On its own substance lies;
> (11. 40-41)

The next two lines explicitly confirm the spiritual aspect of the casting of this shadow:

> The clear etherealities
> Are tremoured with fire;
> (11. 42-43)

In section seven, the creative act itself is indicated in a physical-spiritual composite: "the germ of beauty" (1. 69), where "beauty" is functioning, as is common with Scott, as the source of supernatural experience. The word is significantly repeated in "The Water Lily" (11. 16, 34, 69), keeping the transcendent level of the communication in focus.

Not only is there an emphasis on the ethereal aspect of the sexual experience, but there is also a repeated though muted reference to the sacred or holy:

The throbbing circles tangled round the *shrine*
Of the Peerless one.
(11. 7-8)

An incense faint
Gathers and floats
Above the *chalice* of the breathing lily,
(11. 20-22)

Firm as the *halo* of a *saint.*
(1. 23)

The intense *heaven* of her cold white
(1. 38)

She sinks reluctant from sunlight,
From the *chaplet* of stars
(11. 63-64)

O banishment to *cloistral* water,
(1. 70)

The italicised words are admittedly only of secondary importance in the religious sense, but by association they suggest holiness in the lily. In contrast with these words belonging to the Christian era, "lotus" also has religious connotations, but ones which are pagan and which belong to an older and more primitive religion.

In addition to this contribution of diction is an express moral reference in section four, the beginning of the second movement of the poem considered on its deeper level. The lily, having survived flailing rain, is even more "troubled" by "evil thoughts" (1. 34) to which beauty is subject. She, who "slides with the air" (1. 10), takes the disturbance in her stride, transcends it, remaining uninfected; she is "buoyed in the lymph-clear shallows" (1. 36). "Troubled" is significantly repeated, so soon after its first use (1. 34) that the association in meaning is unmistakable:

The intense heaven of her cold white
Is troubled with colour;
(11. 38-39)

It is as if the sexual attraction were evil; yet the rest of the poem not only denies such meaning, but celebrates the beauty of the relationship.

We might note at this point that references to cold stand out by reason of the insistence on heat in full sunlight. In the first movement of the poem, the lily is not only bathed in light, she is outstanding, "the

Peerless one" (1. 8). She is holy. But the seemingly incongruous reference noted shortly before this, "the lymph-clear shallows," fills out the fundamental or basic meaning of the word "holy"—she is whole, healthy, physically and spiritually. In this context the words denoting cold—"immaculate and chilly" (1. 24), "cold white" (1. 28)—function in typical Scott fashion to denote what is objectively original, unblemished, unmarred. This purpose is reinforced by Scott's use of the words "pure" and "virgin."

In our sex-ridden society the words "pure" and "virgin" automatically suggest human sexuality, but in Scott these words have a wider and deeper term of reference—the fundamental or natural order of creation, which includes sexuality. This is more or less apparent from the following examples. The piper of Arll is deeply attuned to nature's law, to which he has conformed his life. His distress, then, at losing contact with a new and even deeper experience of nature generates an emotional storm, which, however, does not affect his already rightly ordered self:

> His lips were moved—his desperate speech
> Stormed his inviolable thought.
> ("The Piper of Arll," 11. 63-64)

Again, in the midst of his story of the lady for whom he yearns, the speaker of "Spring on Mattagami" makes the fundamental meaning of "pure" clear:

> Yet I saw her spirit—truth cannot dissemble—
> Saw her pure as gold, staunch and keen and brave,
> (11. 53-54)

In "The Dame Regnant" the potential for peace and happiness open to the person who aligns himself with nature's law (11. 210-14) is presented with something of Augustan wit. In the expository section of the poem, laughter is described as an element of rightly ordered human nature, a purifier of the imagination:

> Laughter silver and secure,
> From the crystal wells of wit,
> Springing sanely, springing pure.
> (11. 163-65)

> Bred to scourge the fancy pure.
> (1. 218)

In "Ode for the Keats Centenary," in a context which through its imagery is closely associated in Scott with "The Height of Land" experience while being also a felt awareness of nature, we have the following:

> Beauty is gone, (Oh where?)
> To dwell within a precinct of pure air
> Where moments turn to months of solitude;
> (11. 145-47)

So, "pure" is to be understood mainly as being wholly or closely aligned with nature's law or order in creation. The fundamental or pristine accent is important to notice, for it is part of Scott's obvious concern with roots, with first things. Unsurprisingly, "virgin" carries the same impact:

> O crystal dawn, how shall we distill your virginal freshness
> When you steal upon a land that man has not sullied
> with his intrusion,
> ("Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris," 11. 59-60)

> Ah! the soft budding of the virginal woods,
> ("When Spring Goes By," 1. 9)

> For all the wooded virgin land
> Was full of lonely peace.
> ("Catnip Jack," 11. 11-12)

> . . . as I plucked it
> Rushed a spider from his lair;
> He was armed and ambushed there
> To protect the virgin rose-tree from her foes.
> ("The Spider and the Rose," *GC*, 11. 171-74)[3]

> Virginal out of the earth
> Rises the Cherry-Tree,
> ("Intermezzo," *CA*, 11. 1-2)

The fundamental sense imparted by Scott's use of the words "pure" and "virgin" is conveyed more subtly by his use of colour. Colour is part of nature, and is treated as such to advantage in his poetry. Particular colours are recurrent: gold, allied with the joy of "The Height of Land" experience; rose, usually conventionally significant of love and, hence, aligned with the desirable, the good; red, crimson, and ruby, seemingly signs of promise in a fixed desire for the good, even while

3. *GC* and *CA* refer to Scott's final volumes of poetry, *The Green Cloister: Later Poems* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1935) and *The Circle of Affection and Other Pieces in Prose and Verse* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1947).

the struggle of life is in progress. The blue of sky, green of grass, the colours of flowers, trees, birds are all used generously by Scott. But in "Ode for the Keats Centenary" a subtle distinction occurs:

> Beauty shall stain her feet with moss
> And dye her cheeck with deep nut-juices,
> Laving her hands in the pure sluices
> Where rainbows are dissolved.
> Beauty shall view herself in pools of amber sheen
> Dappled with peacock-tints from the green screen
> That mingles liquid light with liquid shadow.
> (11. 150-56)

Colour is part of Beauty. But we should note the use of "stain" in line 150, and the fact that the pure sluices, the ones where the rainbows are dissolved, is where Beauty washes her hands. In "By the Willow Spring" the speaker names among other flowers "The stainèd asters" (1. 118). But the best examples of the same distinction occur in *The Green Cloister*. In "January Evening" the rose of sunset on the birds and branches of a maple tree, even the birds themselves (commonly symbolic either of deep inner experience or of the soul's flight to its perfection) are clearly signs of imperfection. The tree stands before the Spirit of Night

> Imploring to be absolved from the faint blood-stain
> In the rose-branches, and the rose-breasted birds.
> (11. 11-12)

In the end,

> Purified, the priestly maple loses his melody,
> In the darkness deepening
> He wraps him in silver air,
> In the quiet ecstasy of silver frost and silver starlight.
> (11. 22-25)

Apparently, on the deepest level of life, that most closely in touch with transcendence, even what is legitimate and good and natural constitutes impurity. The speaker of "Avis" would say this is "wan to look upon" (1. 30). But clearly supporting this judgment is the use of colour in "At Gull Lake: August, 1810." After the storm, basically similar to the one in "Powassan's Drum" where disruption of the natural order generates devastation, the moon, a symbol of the rightly ordered Keejigo further purified, rises triumphantly:

> The wind withdrew the veil from the shrine of the moon,
> She rose changing her dusky shade for the glow
> Of the prairie lily, till free of all blemish of colour
> She came to her zenith without a cloud or a star,
> A lovely perfection, snow-pure in the heaven of midnight.
> After the beauty of terror the beauty of peace.
> (11. 122-27)

The final oxymoron and the use of "pure" point again to the basic context of the poem—right order in nature. In this poem "the blemish of colour," like the rose colour of "January Evening," refers to a love that is imperfectly directed to transcendent reality. Keejigo, essentially rightly ordered, like the piper of Arll, is apparently wanting, though not at all in the way of Nairne or the Tabashaw Chief. She has storm associated with her (11. 44-45), as well as the "round moon of pure snow" (1. 48). Though she offers herself to Nairne "As Earth abandons herself/ To the sun and the thrust of the lightning." (11. 55-56), her passion is "abject, unreasoning" (1. 54). Her love for Nairne is more selfish, apparently, than nature can allow, being purely emotional, lacking in reason. So she has to become "free of all blemish of colour" (1. 124), which she evidently does through her part in the storm which had begun well before her submission to punishment (11. 104-05; 1. 75).

Perhaps the whole context of colour as used ultimately in Scott is best shown in the relation of a rainbow to white light—the container of all colour. The speaker of "The Height of Land" envisions the final unity of life as living purely in terms of the central experience; that is, attaining beauty born of the interpenetration of noble deed with noble thought. For the emergence of this beauty he uses a rainbow—something new: the individual purified that the trancendence within is manifest:

> Thus we have seen in the retreating tempest
> The victor-sunlight merge with the ruined rain,
> And from the rain and sunlight spring the rainbow,
> (11. 90-93)

And in the process of the battle of life, this point not yet being reached, the lesser manifestation of indwelling transcendence, experienced so obscurely, is finally presented in "Reverie" as a shadow-rainbow:

> Thus the unquiet mind is charmed and caught
> When comes to Beauty Beauty's afterthought,

> The shadow rainbow, that the rainbow flings
> On the torn storm-breast underneath his wings.
> (11. 26-29)

Finally, in a later poem, "To Deaver Brown" (*CA*), love, "Life's atonement" ("The Height of Land," 1. 131), the gold of the transcendent encounter and the rainbow become one:

> This burden of a rainbow-rhyme,
> A love that bears
> The seven diaphanous lines that bend
> Above the treasuries and hold
> The mystic hoard of gold.
> (11. 5-9)

The rainbow, the speaker says, is:

> Beauty of earth yet far above—
> The pure prismatic arc of love
> That bears the promise in the glow,
> (11. 14-16)

Thus, in "pure prismatic arc of love," we see that the earthly satisfaction of the senses in colour in all its forms finds its ultimate expression in white light, which transcends and contains all colour.

These fundamental meanings attached to the words "pure" and "virgin" and to the use of colour in Scott further clarify his use of cold. In "The Water Lily" cold operates in the way it does in the group of poems entitled "Variations on a Seventeenth Century Theme." In the first poem of the group the shivering evinced by Adam and Eve is associated with their disordered choice, not with cold:

> They were adrad at the broode wilderness,
> Shivering bothe, altho they knew ne cold,
> For the high sonne was shining bright and bold.
> (11. 12-15)

The cold of "The Water Lily" is that of the final poem of the same group—it is the general condition of a world which has reached its final days, final because time is fulfilled in creation's reordering in free choice. Adam and Eve, as represented by "The last of all the race" (1. 290), have returned to the primal law of love in truth, in reality, because they choose it freely, unselfishly:

Adam and Eve—beyond all ruth—
Above the need of trial or pardon,
Happy alone in their frozen garden,
(11. 292-94)

The time of warmth, noble fire, sunlight, burning hearts has passed—now there is happiness in cold, there is fulfillment in pure choice of nature's law:

They will love in a final fashion,
The quintessential human passion,
The summation of all vanished love
With beauty as the breath thereof,
Love their last word, and human bliss
Rounded upon a marble kiss.
(11. 303-08)

In a rather grotesque objectification of the refined and purified state of the rightly ordered power of human choice the human being is transfigured—this love lives because beauty is its breath (11. 303-04)—and, simultaneously, imperfect earthly life dies. The same situation appears this way in "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris":

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 otherwhere:
(11. 264-70)

And, in an extended simile comparing the world in its final days to a ripe fruit, the same process is expressed again without the use of cold. Using instead "deep enriched with effort and with love," the speaker says that the refined lives (or life, for the individual), "a gold kernel" (1. 274), "a lovely wraith of spirit" (1. 278), escape from the earthly life as we know it

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. 279-82)

Thus, as Scott is using it, cold does not exclude passion, it only excludes passion that is disordered. What constitutes fire to those who tell the "wild strange myth" ("Variations on a Seventeenth Century Theme," l. 299) is "the fire/ Of life" ("Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris," ll. 266-67), contained in forms naturally appealing to selfish desire. We observe the complete rule of this fire in "The Height of Land" (ll. 108-13) as being destructive, where human choice is powered by the disorderly pull within human nature. The cold, then, of "Variations on a Seventeenth Century Theme" is metaphorically the objectivity of human choice made in accord with right order, with nature's design or law. Thus we are saying that cold in this sense is pure love.

In the light of the foregoing discussion we may take the references to cold, "pure" and "virgin" to indicate a fundamental choice made so as to follow nature's design or law. This does not deny the rightness of sexual activity, but includes it. Further, as seen in the discussion of the use of colour in Scott, such a fundamental choice ultimately gives prior claim and pure dedication to the transcendent life in nature. It is in this context that the "intense heaven" (precise and apt if "heaven" is understood as the highest or purest fulfillment of any creature) of the lily's "cold white" (l. 38) "Is troubled with colour" (l. 39). The effect is that of simple statement, carrying no negative connotations beyond the emergence of a problem of choice. A Biblical reference, a possible allusion here, poses the same kind of problem. In chapter 1 of the Gospel of St. Luke is a passage about Mary, a virgin momentarily disquieted by the human impossibility of conceiving a child as announced by the angel while remaining true to her freely chosen total dedication to God:

> 29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.
>
> 30 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?
>
> 35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee . . .

The possible allusion would clarify the symbolic context: it involves the loving action of transcendent reality on one already dedicated to it. Another echo from Scripture qualifies the previous one by placing it in the perspective in which the poem is designed, that of the original order of creation; the final and key section of the poem begins with the words:

A shadow dreams upon the rounded mere,
(1. 57)

Conveniently, the word "mere" can mean "pool" or "sea." "Rounded mere" carries with it connotations of the vast sea spaces of Old English writings, like those describing the voyages of Ohthere. It is but a step from this impression to Genesis 1:2:

> 2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

In relation to first creation the passage already seen to be the core of the poem carries new and deeply spiritual overtones:

O banishment to cloistral water,
The pause in the limpid hush,
There to recreate
The form, the odour, the flush.
(11. 70-73)

Creation is present as re-creation (1. 72), brought about through the loving action of dynamic transcendent reality. The word "cloistral" harks back to "The world lost" (1. 67); "banishment" implies enforced action because of prior offense and/or as a consequence of prior commitment. The four lines seem to mirror the transfiguration of man noted above in the discussion of cold, particularly as such transfiguration is implied and developed in "Variations on a Seventeenth Century Theme." Also present, perhaps, in terms of the imagery of birth previously noted, are overtones of sacramental baptism. But neither transfiguration nor rebirth is final in this poem. The other element of the ambiguity, a completion of the sexual encounter initiated in section five, together with the textual orientation back to the first section of the poem, point to a continuing process in which rebirth or recreation recur.

The pull to disorder noted in "The Height of Land" is present in "The Water Lily" in the negative connotations associated with "Lolling so languidly" (1. 19), "Listlessly leaning" (1. 28), "haughty" (1. 35), "Languorously" (1. 37), "luxurious" (1. 48), "Moored languorously" (1. 56), "stately" (1. 83), "lolls" (1. 83), and a repetition of "languorously" (1. 85). As we have seen, the lily is to all appearances a perfect specimen of its kind, peerless, wholly so. But, subtly denying this, the negative words appear at or near the end of every section except the first. They are not condemnatory words; indeed, each can be assigned

a meaning which is positive: "loll" can be viewed as a sign of a relaxed, unworried attitude; "languorously" can be interpreted as "dreamily"; "listlessly," "languidly," as simply lacking force of movement; "stately," as grand or impressive. But to ignore the negative suggestions is clearly to strain interpretation, and any attempt to ally "haughty" with nature's law and holiness seems impossible. So we have a characteristic Scott paradox which is supported by oxymorons with their own symbolic resonances: "Hot to its shallow deeps" (1. 2), incense "faint" and "firm as a halo" (11. 20-23), "the luxurious pure lily" (1. 48), and, because "stately" regularly carries a positive meaning, "The stately lily lolls again." (1. 83) As in Keejigo ("At Gull Lake: August, 1810"), something is wanting, regardless of the perfection there. The "perfection" is not illusory—it is part of the given material of the poem; but such opposing tension is itself a recurrent sign in Scott's poetry, a sign of the pull to disorder which is part of the nature of creation. This creation, nevertheless, is favoured with immanent transcendence; and further, man is able to experience with awareness the beauty of this presence. This is the central experience.

In "The Water Lily" other marks of "The Height of Land" experience are present. The awareness comes to the lily, who is firmly aligned with the basic design in nature. Personification of the lily permits the inference that this alignment is freely chosen. The action initiated by the sun takes place independently of the lily, and is identified by light, the chief symbol of the transcendent in Scott. It is characterized by deep joy, ecstasy (11. 45, 49, 73, 74-82), silence (1. 71), and a certain amount of obscurity (1. 44). There is the spontaneous response (11. 74-82), then the return to normal. The lily "lolls again" (1. 83)—"pale"—no longer experiencing the trouble of colour.

The significance of the experience in this poem is its sexual character. At the deepest level of meaning, the level, we might say, of white light, of ultimate design, sexual activity is used as a metaphor for the personal and intimate love extended by transcendent reality to all creation, and especially to man who can respond consciously. But the sexual character itself is important. We find in it a much more personal and emotionally intense understanding of experience of transcendent reality than the metaphors of deep parent love:

> Dear God! to whom the bravest of us is a child,
> When I am weary, when I cannot rest,
> I have stretched out my hand into the dark,
> And felt the shadow stark,

> But no face brooding near,
> Nor any tear
> Compassionately wept:
> I have not slept.
> ("The Lesson," 11. 30-37)
>
> herein the clue,
> The love of life—yea, and the peerless love
> Of things not seen, that leads the least of things
> To cherish the green sprout, the hardening seed;
> Here leans all nature with vast Mother-love,
> Above the cradled future with a smile.
> ("Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris," 11. 210-15)

The reality of the personal, unique impact of transcendent love needs a stronger metaphor than parent love. Answering this need, the sexual encounter intimately charges the deepest springs of the human being with a known and ecstatic awareness of his free and open choice by another. And this knowing is in the body—a human proof, so to speak, more intrinsically and specifically inviting and captivating than the knowledge of parent love, also felt deeply ("The Lesson," 11. 33, 40; "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris," 1. 201), but lacking the sense of equality, the deep affirmation of the individual as worthy of special choice. Therefore, the sexual metaphor in "The Water Lily" characterizes the transcendent experience in a way that affirms such deeply personal and intimate knowing by unseen reality as one of its elements in much the same way as the prophetic books of the Bible present God, or as Jesus speaks of Himself as the Bridegroom in the New Testament.

II

One of the immediate effects of such an encounter is the desire for the continuation of the relationship. It seems to me that "Spring on Mattagami" fits more into this kind of reading than into one which views it simply as a love poem. The young woman seems more an allegorical figure, like one of the ladies of *The Faerie Queene*, than flesh and blood. The speaker's yearning for transcendent experience in the mode of "The Water Lily" might be natural, but that seems just the point—it is natural, not supernatural. And so his ardour is rightly subject to his own derision, even though he senses the validity of his dream which is basic to his life:

> Vain is the dream, and deep with all derision—
> (1. 105)
> What I dream is mine, mine beyond all cavil,
> Pure and fair and sweet, and mine for evermore,
> And when I will my life I may unravel,
> And find my passion dream deep at the red core.
> (11. 109-12)

An understanding of Scott's use of the word "dream" is important here, especially in view of the final stanza of this poem, one of those endings troublesome to critics. The word appears in its ordinary sense of fantasy. This in turn may be indicative of truth, or may, because of mistaken perception through the pull to disorder, be purely illusory through selfishness or through lack of full listening to the signs within and without. Such illusory dreaming engages the speaker of "Leaves" as he envisions peace as perpetual life amid a splendour akin to that displayed by autumn maples where the senses are always gratified, never pained. The impossibility of the realization of such basically selfish desire dawns on him in "a fairy jar" (1. 55). The illusion, then, is corrected through a sensitivity to reality, through the listening stance recreated in "The Height of Land." In Scott dreams are an indispensable part of earthly life; they "shadow forth the truth" ("Meditation at Perugia," 1. 22). They are the possibilities within the design of the growing, developing individual, which emerge into consciousness to become form in time. This form is attained both in himself as memory (Cf. "The Fragment of a Letter," 11. 59-62.) and in his mode of expressing new awareness in his life:

> Linked in the lovely motion
> Of air upon faery seas
> Drift my Dreams into darkness
> Leading my Memories.
> ("Dreams and Memories," 11.
> 9-12)

> Until on some chill dawn
> Breaks the immortal form foreshadowed in their dream,
> ("Ode for the Keats Centenary," 11. 95-96)

Sometimes Scott seems to equate his ordinary use of memory in its final sense with dream; all possibilities in dream are cut off by death, and all, then, is Memory, what has been realized in the self. The earthly dreaming is over, and life now is the realized possibilities, that part of

the great design in nature brought to reality of fulfillment. Examples of this use of dream (which is the same as memory finalized) are seen in the following quotations:

> Nor all the praise that sets
> Towards his pale grave,
> Like oceans towards the moon,
> Will move the Shadow with the pensive brow
> To break his dream,
> And give unto him now
> One work!—
> ("Ode for the Keats Centenary," 11. 30-36)

> And down she sank till, keeled in sand,
> She rested safely balanced true,
> With all her upward gazing band,
> The piper and the dreaming crew.
> ("The Piper of Arll," 11. 137-40)

So "dream" is the unrealized possibility within creation, destined to become realized, part of the vast unactualized design in nature, yet, even in its conception ordered according to the primal law in all creation. In "The Water Lily," the creating principle, a shadow, "dreams upon the rounded mere" (1. 57), bringing the recreation of "The form, the odour, the flush" to reality.

In the quotations slected from "Spring on Mattagami," the illusory character of the fantasizing which composes the action of the poem is recognized by the speaker (1. 105), while the validity and worth of the essential movement, the loving desire for knowledge of the transcendent, is defended. He says that the dream is his own, is himself really, that its root is to be found in the core of his being, in the redness of promise or hope:

> And when I will my life I may unravel,
> And find my passion dream deep at the red core.
> (11. 111-12)

In the final stanza of "Spring on Mattagami" pristine order reasserts itself. The planet of the goddess of love disappears (1. 113), the gold of transcendence becomes clearer (1. 114), the preeminence of the basic design in nature is seen as being loving and right (11. 115-16). The denial of the immediate satisfaction of his heart's yearning becomes acceptable in trust that he will eventually be fulfilled.

> Vaster than the world or life or death my trust is
> Based in the unseen and towering far above;
> Hold me, O Law, that deeper lies than Justice,
> Guide me, O Light, that stronger burns than Love.
> (11. 117-20)

A distinction lies in the balanced components of the final two lines. The "unseen" of line 118 is personified as Law and Light, while Justice and Love are legitimate and true characteristics of this unseen reality: the distinction is between reality itself and its attributes. Again there is a probing for the deepest roots: the dynamic element according to reason, the unseen reality, is seen to be the truer reference for his life, even though the urgency of the initial words "Hold" and "Guide," marking a shift from conversation to prayer, betrays the struggle with selfish desire.

Another "prayer," a complete poem, deals with the same yearning as "Spring on Mattagami," but with more detachment. Transcendence, here called angel, is addressed, and the subject of the prayer or conversation is a former experience of supernatural presence. The description is interesting for its embodying of nature as the transcendent personal reality:

> All your vesture glowed like verdure
> When the sap is new.
> ("The Apparition," 11. 11-12)

The poem is also noteworthy as indicating in brief terms the experiencing of supernatural presence with overtones of both "The Water Lily" and "The Height of Land":

> Then you mutely gave your warning
> And I felt the stress
> Of its passion and its presage
> And its utterness.
> (11. 13-16)

But the point here is that, even though the apparition is a past event, and the yearning (11. 3-4) is just as strong as before (as is seen by the tone, especially in the wistful quality of the two final lines), no request is made. Memory is reactivated, enkindling love, and that is all. The thrust still dreamed of at the end of "Spring on Mattagami" has become, to some extent at least, part of memory.

III

Maybe one of the most gratifying aspects of exploring the personal and intimate facet of the transcendent experience in Scott is that the converse situation, an awareness of transcendent reality, is found in the relatively few poems which deal with sexual love as the main theme. Thus the basic perspective is consistent. The best example of the converse experience is "June Lyrics."

"June Lyrics" is a composite of three poems which deals with sexual relationship in three different modes: (1) as a personal encounter in a transcendent milieu which is experienced in deep listening, (2) as a physical act with spiritual effects that endure and nourish the person, (3) as a natural, peaceful union which releases the spiritual element of human nature.

The first poem effectively creates an identity which preserves the individuality of the elements. "I," "thee," "air," "water," "the pine's voice" are all present in their uniqueness, but are one in the "something more." Sound is an apt metaphor for such a reality.

The structure of the stanzas substantially creates the pattern of unity enclosing uniqueness. Each begins with the words "All night," strongly accented with spondees, giving a distinct sense of wonder to the statements which follow. The first three stanzas follow a basically similar pattern of line structure, each naming a sound in the first line, identifying or describing it in the second and third lines, insisting on the comparatively greater element in the fourth. Stanzas one and two display near syntactical identity in each of the four lines. These strong similarities enclose gradually revealed uniqueness. Thus, moving from stanzas one to four, we observe subtle individual differences emerging: in stanza two, a distinct quality of sound (1. 8); in stanza three, the distinct human equivalence of the natural sounds; in stanza four, the individuality of the speaker as opposed to his knowledge of his beloved's similar response, his personal experience of the greater dimension of reality as "beauty" both "wild" and "new" (1. 16). This latter recognition pinpoints great spiritual awareness which incorporates the sexual excitement as part of itself. In the association of "wild" with wilderness we are back again to fundamental experience as well as to the symbolic equivalence with the unconscious, deep centre of the transcendent in human nature.

The deceptive simplicity of statement, particularly as it appears on the printed page in ordinary four-line stanzas, undistinguished even by

interesting punctuation, is complemented by a metrical structure which, in the words of line 16, "can take no rest." For example, one can, I think, scan the first line (and line 5 similarly) as either

```
/   /  -  /     /-   -  /
All night a sound was in the air
```

or

```
/   /  -  /    -  /  -  /
All night a sound was in the air.
```

The meaning of the entire poem would argue for the first scansion; the fact that it is the beginning line argues for the second. Again, the actual text is in marked tension with the expected basic pattern of iambic tetrameter alternating with iambic trimeter, particularly as seen in the third and fourth lines of the following:

```
/   /  -   /-    -  /  -  /
All night a crooning was in the air,
    -   /  -  /  -  /
  The wind amid the trees,
-   -   -  /     /     -   -   /    /
Neither the pine's voice // nor the wind's voice,
      /-   /  -     /
  Sweeter far than these.
```

And in the fourth stanza, where the pattern of differences emerges to identify the greater element as "wild new beauty," the metrical pattern, which had intensified in emphasis in the inversions in lines nine and ten in stanza three, breaks its bonds completely, helped by alliteration and a succession of monosyllables.

```
/   /    -    /-  -   -   /
All night // enchanted and enrapt,
  -      /      /   /-   -    /
  Our thoughts lay close in their nest,
-   /    /    -   /    /   /-
My heart heard the wild new beauty //
  -    -      /   /   /
  And could take no rest.
```

The experience is an inner one; the poetic structure recreates this.

The transcendent character of this first poem is given explicit

expression in "At Sunset" from *The Green Cloister*. The emphasis is different; the tone is quiet in the knowledge of past experience, in memory, trustful in the need for healing love. But the sense of a presence which surrounds as well as permeates is strong. The new excitement of being "enchanted" and "enrapt" ("June Lyrics, 1. 13) is absent, but the enduring transcendence of the first three stanzas of "June Lyrics" is present:

> Let us tell over now in rich reflection
> Our finite love treasured in Time's despite,
> Infinite Love instinct with all perfection
> Is settling close around us with the night.
> Our two, wild hearts have suffered grievous things,
> Let us be comforted beneath His wings.
> ("At Sunset," 11. 9-14)

In the second and third poems of "June Lyrics" the point of view changes from first person speaking within the situation, to first person speaking in retrospect, to third person observer of the situation rendered symbolically. Distance allows for comment with conclusive emphasis. In the second poem the structure gives final emphasis to the spiritual nourishment derived from the memory of the physical reality. The eating metaphor of the second part of the poem, muted in terms of itself (the eating of beauty) and in terms of the metaphor of plundering of the first part, combines in an acceptably civilized manner both the grace and the real destruction of the self (a kind of death) which enter essentially into authentic love. The third poem retires still further in perspective and centers the physical encounter in romantic symbolism. The natural terms—flowers, stars, night, air, perfume—emphasize again the unity of human nature with all nature. But the repetition of the specific human situation ("Breast to breast in the shadow," 11. 27, 39, 41) focuses the emphasis, allowing the symbolic force of the elements of nature and such recurring Scott words as "Dream" and "gold" to emerge dominantly to combine with the impact of the final line, "And their souls go out with a sigh" (1. 42). Unity is again established in the transcendent.

Therefore "June Lyrics" is the converse experience of "The Water Lily." The former presents sexual encounter in the context of transcendent reality; the latter resonates transcendent encounter with sexual overtones to communicate its personal and intimate aspect. Thus the omnipresent character of transcendent reality, pervasive and enveloping, is an important distinction here. Neither poem cuts the transcendent

to human terms; the human is always identifiable with human experience, while the known experience of the transcendent is presented in terms which are boundless—the light of "The Water Lily," the sound, fragrance and beauty of "June Lyrics." A particularly good example of the way Scott succeeds in communicating this intersecting of the eternal and the temporal is found in three passages of "Compline" (*GC*) which within the poem's structure function analogously:

> Love in our hearts is quiet,
> Tranquil as light reflected in water
> That trembles only when the water trembles.
> (11. 20-22)

> May we remember then of all life's loveliest things,
> This evening and the swallows wings,
> When infinite love was reflected in the heart
> And trembled only when the heart trembled.
> (11. 57-60)

> The sunset failed in ivory and rose,
> All that is left of light is the early moonlight
> That trembles in the lake-water
> Only when the water trembles;
> And the lustre of life alone is left at the long day's close,—
> That radiance of love in the heart
> That trembles only when the heart trembles.
> (11. 74-80)

The movement from the felt experience of human love to identification with transcendent love (1. 59) as it is placed in the context of faith in its section of the whole poem, back to the experience of the love which has both infinite and temporal components, is well conveyed in terms of the physical human heart, less bounded water, and boundless light—union in which uniqueness and finite character preserve their identity in and through the infinite.

"Compline" widens "June Lyrics" to its proper context, the marriage relationship itself, providing the basis for the awareness of the transcendent element in projecting the speaker's view of his beloved and of the kind of relationship they share. The same is explored at greater depth in "Twelfth Anniversary" (*CA*), a group of four sonnets, where the speaker affirms that his love is indeed inexpressible, but tries to suggest it in suggesting the kind of person she is. It is notable that the technique of communication belongs in great part to what I have called abstract writing which uses its own symbols. In the symbolic

rendering of the richness of his wife's mind, he shadows forth transcendent perfection in which she shares. We have again an excellent example of communication of the dual nature of man.

The first sonnet comes to grips with the difficulty of expressing meaning with the word "love," hackneyed to be sure, but indispensable because of its reality. In accord with what we have seen of the importance of love in Scott's view of life, his insistence on the presence of truth (1. 4) in the word "love" supports the general conviction quietly and just as insistently presented in all his poetry: this life is invaluable if we know and live according to its truth:

> How can I deal
> With things intangible yet so intense
> That they are all the best of all my life,
> Implicit in my breathing and my sense?
> (11. 8-11)

Although a superficial reading of the poem would apply these lines strictly to his love for his wife, the lines admirably sum up Scott's pervasive attitude. They also express his yearning, his urgency to lay hold on the truth, to whatever depth or height it may go, together with his knowing the ultimate impossibility of such a quest. Tension again—the basic tension:

> How can I hope to calm the heart at strife
> That tries to link the song the spirit sings
> With the hid source from which the melody springs?
> (11. 12-14)

See the abstract expression and its symbols: "the song the spirit sings"—his life, his attitude, his poetry, and of course, his love for his wife, part of and all of these; "with the hid source"—the springs, the roots, the fundamental element of his life; "from which the melody springs"—he knows that his person, all that he is, is dependent.

Sonnet II aptly picks up the deep, boundless unity of Sonnet I in the first word "One," repeating it (11. 15, 16, 17) with varying meaning that communicates difficulty of discernment through the very confusion it occasions. The fact that various values can be assigned is itself a point of meaning which is finally only clarified by recognizing the principle of distinction between the implicit sides of a two-fold division (11. 15-18): that which is attainable by the senses, that which is not. In the same pattern of development lines 19 to 22 repeat the questions posed by the sestet of the preceding sonnet with explicit detail. The abstract terms

are again notable: "delicacy," "perception of beauty," "truth of impulse," "tenderness of heart," linked as they are with their practicable verbs: "shown," "snared," "be made known," "shared." The third quatrain poses the dilemma of this linkage in terms of known experience that defies expression. As with the central experience itself, he knows her keenness of intellect, her rich creativity—but how is it objectified? The couplet proposes the way followed in all his poetry:

> One proof of sun is shadow: and a thought
> May prove the radiance whence its shadow
> was caught.
>
> (11. 27-28)

Here he introduces the transcendent element formally into this poem in the symbol of the sun: its presence is known through the shadows perceptible things cast when they are seen in its light. This couplet gives explicit expression to the basic poetic technique of Scott's poetry.

Sonnett III proceeds to implement this technique as it sketches the broad lines of human communication. The forest pool, containing the colour of as much of the natural environment as it is capable of reflecting when it is peaceful, is his wife's mind. The words "deep in the balsam wood" symbolically move the meaning to the rich, spiritual depths of the person. Sharing of these depths ultimately does not diminish the richness, even when the sharing is to the full degree that the other can take. Even so, there is definite recognition of time needed for recreation after such giving (11. 38-40). Silence (11. 33, 34, 39), gentleness and respect ("steals," 1. 34; "venturing timid," 1. 35; "gentle, slips away," 11. 37, 38) are understood elements of the communication.

Sonnet IV moves deeply into the source from which his wife draws her power. Her imagination is like the moon, all her light taken from the sun, and in her love all of it given freely. Time is stilled in her—she can freshly and artistically share what is past and what she envisions of the future without distorting the truth of the present. Her power, clearly of both body and soul, is a shadow, a bright shadow (the fundamental oxymoron in new, even simpler terms) of her imagination whose light, however, is received (1. 2). "These" (1. 51)—the comparisons of pool (Sonnet III), of Imagination as orb (Sonnet IV), the sonnet sequence itself—are like shadows cast by the sun, by her, signs of her rich mind and heart, as he, the speaker, perceives them. And the final couplet, in linking Sonnet IV to Sonnet I, provides the crown of love envisioned in the climax of "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris":

We of the sunrise,

. . .
Sharing with our brothers of nerve and leaf
The urgence of the one creative breath,—
All in the dim twilight—say of morning,
Where the florescence of the light and dew
Haloes and hallows with a crown adorning
The brows of life with love . . .
(11. 200, 205-10)

Delicately in the background, but essentially there as the source of the whole beautiful design in creation ("the one creative breath," 1. 206 above), the transcendent reality resides in his wife and is met dynamically in her without in any way denigrating her unique beauty. Indeed, the attraction of "Twelfth Anniversary" lies chiefly in its skilful projection of rich and fathomless beauty encompassed in one person, yet not limited to her, her real worth known by her as well as by him to have been given and received freely (1. 46), and, from the tone of the poem, gratefully.

Thus, the symbolic terms within the poem allow for transcendent presence. It is discerned in the compelling yet baffling quest of discovery (1. 18) of the nature of his love—a quest which is synonymous here with the writing of the poem. It is discerned in the technique he employs, the same that he uses so often to objectify transcendent experience, here seen as a precise embodiment of his wife's richness as he perceives it. Awareness of this transcendent reality gives both the journey and the challenge of its expression their vitality, gives his life of love its reason. In a far less remarkable poem, the dedicatory epigraph of *The Green Cloister*, this expression of the transcendent in the person of his wife is given more explicitly:

To Elise
The fluttering charm, the pliant grace,
The fragile form and spirit face
Are instinct with essential bliss,
Supported in its trembling line,
As melody in music is,
By a harmony divine:
Enough of Love the absolute
To give her heart the perfect fruit
Of love; enough of Wisdom's power
To give her mind an earthy strength;
Enough of Beauty's secret dower
Of lovely thought, to give her soul
The fragrance of a flower.

She sounds like the water lily when all insistence on virginity and chilliness is omitted. But, allowing for the presumably real human aberrations to which love is proverbially subject, the equation is probably not too far from accuracy in the total objective rendering of Scott's outlook.

We may say, then, that "The Water Lily" deals with transcendent experience on the personal, intimate level, which is best communicated figuratively in terms of sexual love. In corroboration of this are certain love poems. "June Lyrics" and "Twelfth Anniversary" deal with sexual encounter and relationship in marriage in terms of the total expression of human nature, where the transcendent ground of being is an intrinsic and essential reality. The emphasis is different, but complementary. However, in view of the emphasis of his poetry in general, it is notable that Scott deals in depth with this loving relationship present in transcendent experience. Not only does the personal and "equal" element explain something of the psychology which allows human nature to dare to enter on a serious religious quest, but it helps to balance the more mysterious elements which confound a finite being with insecurity, if not with fear.

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