Alchemical Transmutation in Duncan Campbell Scott's "At Gull Lake: August, 1810," and Some Contingent Speculations

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I

One of the most intriguing passages in any of Duncan Campbell Scott's Indian poems occurs near the end of "At Gull Lake: August, 1810." As a result of her flirtation with Nairne of the Orkneys, Keejigo, the half-breed protagonist of the poem, has been mutilated and blinded by her husband, "Tabashaw Chief of the Saulteaux."[1] After she has been thrown over a "bank/Like a dead dog" by the Chief's "old wives," a sympathetically violent storm bursts, "Wasting itself with riot and tumult—/Supreme in the beauty of terror." Then there occurs in the penultimate paragraph of the poem the following description:

> The setting sun struck the retreating cloud
> With a rainbow, not an arc but a column
> Built with the glory of seven metals;
> Beyond in the purple deeps of the vortex
> Fell the quivering vines of the lightning.
> 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.
> (*GC* 58)

Perhaps the most remarkable rhetorical feature of this passage is the ambiguity of the pronoun that begins its seventh line: although the "She" refers specifically to the "moon" of the sixth line, most readers of the poem, probably because of their in-

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[1] All quotations from "At Gull Lake: August, 1810" are taken from Duncan Campbell Scott, *The Green Cloister* (Toronto: McClelland, 1935) 54-58, hereafter cited in the text as *GC*.

volvement with Keejigo through some hundred previous lines, sense that the "She" referred to here is also the half-breed woman who now, in death, transcends the racial conflict that has divided her thoughts and loyalties in the dramatic centre of the poem. "Free of all blemish of colour," Keejigo has moved beyond mundane concerns to achieve the "lovely perfection" of a radiance unstained by prismatic/racial matters. So read, the conclusion of "At Gull Lake: August, 1810" seems to be undergirded by fairly conventional Romantic and Platonic assumptions: Keejigo has not, at least initially, undergone a corporeal death, but in spirit she has transcended the sublunar world in the direction of the heavens (where the meaning of her name, "star of the morning," suggests that she properly belongs), while in body she has moved beyond the conflicts of man's world and become part of a nature which is itself imbued with cognition: "Keejigo came no more to the camps of her people," the poem concludes, "Only the midnight moon knew where she felt her way,/Only the leaves of autumn, the snows of winter/Knew where she lay."

A more complex and recondite interpretaion of the penultimate paragraph of "At Gull Lake: August, 1810" is suggested by Scott's very precise and somewhat curious description of the "rainbow" that follows the hail storm: it is "not an arc but a column" and it is "Built with the glory of seven metals." By insisting on what the rainbow both is and is not, Scott seems to be trying to direct the reader away from a Christian image and interpretation of the rainbow and, by so doing, to imply an alternative significance for the "column . . . of seven metals." In the Christian tradition, of course, the rainbow takes its meaning from Genesis 9.8-17 where God, speaking to Noah, makes the promise that He will never again send a "flood to destroy the earth." As God puts it in the King James version of Genesis 9.13, "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." When it is recalled that the Latin word for "bow" is *arcus,* then it becomes evident that, in describing the rainbow in "At Gull Lake" as "not an arc," Scott alludes to Genesis in such a way as both to invoke and to revoke the Christian significance of the rainbow. The reason for this may reside in the context, not merely of grace, but also of race that surrounds the rainbow in Genesis, where Noah's story constitutes a myth both of divine intervention and of emerging racial disharmony: the progeny of Noah's sons, it will be remembered, were the "nations divided in the earth after the flood" (Genesis 6.32). Scott may have intended through the figure of the rainbow to place the story of Keejigo against a mythological (or historical) background of "nations divided in the earth" without bringing to bear on the conclusion of "At Gull Lake" two contingent impli-

cations: (1) the implication that in the poem racial disharmony will *follow* upon the appearance of the rainbow as it did in Genesis; and (2) the implication that the conclusion of Keejigo's story is to be understood in the context of the Christian "Covenant 'twixt *All* and *One*" (Henry Vaughan, "The Rain-Bow," 2: 510). By placing the significance of the rainbow under erasure, as it were, at the close of "At Gull Lake," Scott indicates that Keejigo's transcendence of racial conflicts (if that is indeed what occurs at the end of the poem) must be viewed both in relation and in opposition to the Genesis narrative and the Christian scheme. It is the description of the rainbow as a "column/Built with the glory of seven metals" that provides the principal clue to the context in which the conclusion of "At Gull Lake" should arguably be viewed.

While the word "column" is understandably present for its suggestion of (spiritual) ascent and the word "glory" is well-chosen for its suggestion of (Christian) numinousness, the description of the colours of the rainbow as "seven metals" may seem arbitrary or simply mimetic[2] until it is recognized as an alchemical allusion. According to the alchemists, the seven visible planets correspond to the seven principal metals—the Moon to silver, Mercury to quicksilver, Venus (the morning star) to copper, the Sun to gold and so on—and can be arranged in a "sevenfold gradation"[3] which in turn corresponds to the stages of the *magnum opus*—the great alchemical work of reintegrating the powers within man that became discordant "as a result of the loss of his original 'Adamic' state" (Burckhardt 149). Not only is Keejigo, the daughter of "Launay/The Normandy hunter/And Oshawan of the Saulteaux," fallen in the alchemical sense of being "divided within [herself],"[4] but various images of division such as summer and winter, the "two camps" and the "double flashes" of lightning that precede her mutilation by Tabashaw serve to reinforce her state of internal discord. Moreover, when Keejigo speaks "to her heart" (an activity in itself suggestive of division), she prays to be released and healed ("*Release the captive/Heal the wound under the feathers*") in a manner that is consonant with at least one alchemist's description of the process of transmutation as the "setting free of that which was bound and

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[2] See Stan Dragland, *Journeys through Bookland* (Toronto: Coach House, 1984) 112, for a description of the sort of rainbow that Scott may have had in mind: "Scott calls the rainbow 'a column built of the glory of seven metals.' What does this solid icon capture of Light's normally demure disclosure? I had no idea until a visit to Alberta, with Scott's poem in my head, I saw his rainbow for myself. Near Wetaskiwin, on Highway 2 between Calgary and Edmonton, it formed after a storm, standing so intensely in the sky it seemed almost opaque. In fact I could see where one arched column touched down, because the trees behind it were misted with glory."

[3] Titus Burckhardt, *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, trans. William Stoddart (London: Stuart, 1967) 184.

[4] Could there be a pun on Launay/Lunar?

could not manifest itself."[5] When taken in conjuction with the "rainbow . . . of seven metals," such points of accord between Scott's poem and alchemical lore suggest that it is at least as plausible to locate Keejigo's association with Venus ("star of the morning") and the Moon ("A half-moon of powder-blue/On her brow") within the interpretive context of alchemy as within the mythological structure of the prairie Indians.[6] The hypothesis that will now be advanced, then, is that a full understanding of "At Gull Lake" depends on the recognition that in the poem's conclusion Scott draws upon the alchemical notion of a "close correspondence, almost [an] identity, between transmutation of metals and spiritual purification and regeneration, between the alchemical furnaces and the 'furnaces' of affliction."[7]

According to one concept of the *magnum opus* in alchemical tradition, the great work of reintegrating or regenerating man can be divided into two quite distinct stages: the "lesser work," which has "the moon as end-point," and the "greater work," which has the sun as its "crowning-point" (Burckhardt 184). Of possible and particular importance for an understanding of the penultimate paragraph of "At Gull Lake" is the "lesser work," an "ascending movement" which corresponds to "'the spiritualization of the body . . . [and] has as its goal the regaining of the original purity and receptivity of the soul" (Burckhardt 189). Imagined broadly as a process first of blackening and then of "bleaching," this "lesser work" results in the "purity" represented by "White . . . undivided light—light not broken down into colours" (Burckhardt 183). As if to reinforce the applicability of the "lesser work" of the alchemists to the conclusion of Scott's poem, there is a correspondence between the three stages into which the "lesser work" is frequently divided and the various events that occur at the close of "At Gull Lake."

The "first stage" of the "lesser work," writes Titus Burckhardt, "corresponds to 'blackening,' 'putrefaction,' and 'mortification.'" As the beginning of the process that leads to "spiritual realization," the preliminary "calcining . . . of the base metal" so as to produce "ash" is described by Burckhardt as a kind of "dying to the world." "As the 'inner light' has not yet risen," he writes, "this turning away from the outward world is

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[5] This Theosophical view of alchemy from Annie Besant (the author with C.W. Leadbeater of *Thought-Forms* [1905]), is quoted by R. Swinburne Clymer in *Alchemy and the Alchemists* (1907; rpt. New York: A.M.S. Press, [1982]) 1: 248.

[6] See Melvin Dagg, "Scott and the Indians" in *Duncan Campbell Scott: A Book of Criticism*, ed., and with and introduction, by S.L. Dragland (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1974) 186-89, for a reading of the poem in light of the mythology of the "prairie Indians."

[7] E.C. Pettet, *Of Paradise and Light: a Study of Vaughn's Silex Scintillans*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1960) 76-77.

experienced as a *nox profunda*" (Burckhardt 186). In "At Gull Lake" the events that parallel the "first stage" of the "lesser work" are those glossed by the phrase "the beauty of terror": the searing and blinding of Keejigo "with fire," her disposal "over the bank/Like a dead dog" by the "old wives," and the destruction of nature's greenery ("sedges and reeds/ . . . the poplar . . . leaves") by the ensuing "hail storm." There may even be an alchemical as well as proleptic significance to Keejigo's earlier descent to the lake where "The reeds and the sedges/Were gray as ashes/Against the death-black water." In any event, the likening of Keejigo to a dead animal, her location below the surface of the prairie, and the deformation of her "beauty" (as of vegetation), can be seen cumulatively and alchemically as equivalent to the rendering back of living matter to its "formless origin" that constitutes the "first stage" of the "lesser work."[8] *Per ignem and lucem.*

In the "second stage" of the "lesser work," writes Burckhardt, "the soul has raised herself out of the earth to which she had returned and out of the night of initial chaos, in order to develop her power." "This corresponds to sublimation" (Burckhardt 187) and can be conceived as a bleaching or purification of the soul. In "At Gull Lake" the parallel passage occurs when the "cloud" retreats and the moon (for Plato and for some alchemists the literal home of the soul after death) appears: "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 from all blemish of colour/She came to her zenith. . . ." Not only do these lines seem amenable to an alchemical reading but they also seem to contain an allusion, through the image of the withdrawn "veil," to the passage of the soul into another life. In the Christian tradition, it may be recalled, the "veil of the temple" (Matthew 25.27) is associated with the Atonement, an event described by some historians of alchemy as the "At-one-ment" and, as such, as a metaphorical expression of the "culmination of humanity by union with the immergence in Divinity" satisfying or convincing. But it does at least permit the recogni-

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[8] Burckhart 187. And see also 44 for "the twofold spiral vortex, familiar as the Chinese *ying-yang*, and not the least in the staff of Hermes (the *caduceus*) "as a representation of the spirals of the sun in the course of a year. It may also be worth noting that in his account of Jacob Boehme's "Seven Natural Properties" in *Jacob Boehme: His Life and Teaching. Or Studies in Theosophy*, trans. T. Rhys Evans (London: Hodder, 1888) 68-74, Hans Lassen Martensen places the "fourth Natural Property, or the Lightning Flash" at the transition point between the dark ternary of "introspective desire" (Salt or Contraction), "outward-looking desire" (Mercury or Expansion) and "restlessness and Anguish" (Sulphur or Rosation) and the light or bright ternary of Wisdom or "gentle love," "intelligible Sound" and the "Essential," that is, Wisdom shaped into reality, life and corporeity." "Lightning, which is the *fourth* Natural Property," writes Martensen, breaks forth as, at once, a joyous and appalling surprise. By the Lightning that which is gross, dark and selfish in the desire of Nature is consumed. The Natural Properties, so to speak, faint away, sink out of their selfishness, and became quite meek and gentle. They accept the Will of the Light, wholly surrendering themselves to it, become as those who have no power of their own, and desire only the power of the Light" (70). "After the beauty of terror the beauty of peace"?

tion that the pronoun "*She*" in the penultimate paragraph of "At Gull Lake" refers to both Keejigo and the Moon because the two are now "at one" or, to put the matter differently, because the divided things of the fallen world are now being reunified as predicted by the *magnum opus* of the alchemists.

Burckhardt's description of the "third stage" of the "lesser work" is worth quoting in full as a gloss on the "beauty of peace" that subsumes the conclusion of "At Gull Lake":

> With the third stage, dominated by the moon, the colour white is completed. The lunar crescent has raised itself above the cross of the elements or cosmic tendencies and has dissolved their oppositions. All the potentialities of the soul contained in the initial chaos have now been fully developed and have united with one another in a state of undivided purity. (Burckhardt 187-88)

Parallel to this, "the regaining of the original purity and receptivity of the soul," in Scott's poem is the description of the Moon/Keejigo coming "to her zenith without a cloud or a star,/A lovely perfection, snow-pure in the heaven of midnight." The mood of these lines is not dissimilar to that of the description of the completion of the "lesser work" by Bernardus Trevisanus, the mediaval alchemist. "I tell you, with God as my witness," writes Bernardus, "that this Quicksilver, when it was sublimated, was clothed in so pure a white, that it looked like snow on top of a very high mountain" (Burckhardt 188). Since the alchemical work from which this quotation is taken, *La Parole delaissé* (*The Forgotten Word*) was published in the 1931 volume of *Le Voile d'Isis*—that is, some three years before the composition of "At Gull Lake: August, 1810" in the autumn of 1934[9]—it is just within the limits of possibility that Scott drew on Bernardus for his depiction of what can be seen in alchemical terms as the transmutation or spiritualization of Keejigo. Such a remote possibility has at least the value of opening up the question of the sources of Scott's putative knowledge of alchemical lore.

II

In an attempt to establish a clear parallel between alchemical lore and the conclusion of "At Gull Lake: August, 1810," reference has hitherto been largely restricted to the poem itself and to the English translation of Titus Burckhardt's *Alchemy:*

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[9] Unless otherwise noted, dates of composition for Scott's poems are given on the authority of Robert L. McDougall, "D.C. Scott: the Dating of the Poems," *Canadian Poetry* 2 (1978): 13-27.

Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul, a work admirable for its clarity but unavailable to Scott since it was not published even in the original German until 1960—twenty-five years after the publication of "At Gull Lake" in *The Green Cloister* volume of 1935. In the space remaining some speculations will be offered about the possible sources of Scott's putative knowledge of alchemy (or hermeticism) and about its possible importance for reading certain of his poems, particularly in *The Green Cloister.*

Interest in arcane and mystical philosophies was, of course, wide-spread in Europe, England, and North America from at least the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. In France, *symbolisme* (an evident influence on Scott as early as "The Piper of Arll") was inextricably bound up with hermeticism[10] and in Britain the very writer whom "The Piper of Arll" inspired to take up poetry, John Masefield, was evidently intrigued enough with hermeticism to write at least one novel centred on its practitioners.[11] In the well-known essay on "Demeter and Persephone" in *Greek Studies* (1895), Walter Pater (whose dictum that art should aspire to the condition of music Scott was fond of quoting) makes a connection between hermetic and romantic thinking that might well have intrigued a young Canadian poet around the turn of the century:

> Starting with a hundred instincts such as [the "feeling" (that) "just below the mould, and in the hard wood of trees, there were really circulating some spirit of life, akin to that which makes its energies felt within ourselves"], that older unmechanical, spiritual, or Platonic, philosophy [i.e. hermeticism] envisages nature . . . as the unity of a living spirit or person, revealing itself in various degrees to the kindred spirit of the observer. . . . Such a philosophy is a systematic form of that sort of poetry (we may study it, for instance, either in Shelley or in Wordsworth), which also has its fancies of a spirit of the earth, or of the sky,—a personal intelligence abiding in them. . . .[12]

The words "older" and "unmechanical" in this revealing passage point towards the rejection of positivism as an important

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[10] See Alain Mercier, *Les Sources ésoterique et occultes de la poesie symboliste (1870-1914),* 2 vols. (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1969, 1974).

[11] See, for example, *The Box of Delights: or, When the Wolves Were Running* (London: Heinemann, 1935) with its necromancers Cole Hawlings and Arnold of Todi. Masefield had come under the influence of the Yeats of *The Secret Rose* (1879) after his return from New York to London in 1897.

[12] Walter Pater, *Greek Studies: a Series of Essays* (1895; rpt. London: MacMillan, 1910) 96.

factor in the interest around the turn of the century in hermeticism and other archaic (and exotic) Philosophies. Not coincidentally, it was at this time in England, and, later, Canada that the Theosophical Societies and various other interested groups and individuals were helping to make widely available and discussed the writings of such mystics as Jacob Boehme, Meister Eckhart and Madame Blavasky, writings which embody to a greater or lesser degree the ideas and assumptions of hermeticism. Thus it was that in artistic circles in Canada and the United States, painters and writers as diverse as Bliss Carman, Marsden Hartley and Lawren Harris were profoundly affected in the twenties and later by ideas of a Theosophical or Hermetic nature. Indeed, Harris's case is of some interest to the present discussion, for it is possible that his thought, as expounded, for example, in his 1925 article on the "Revelation of Art in Canada" in the *Canadian Theosophist,*[13] was a channel through which information about Theosophy and cognate matters reached Scott. In 1931, Scott's future wife, Elise Aylen—a woman whose own interest in esoteric philosophies would eventually take her to India[14]—published in *Roses of Shadow*—a slim volume of verse with a "Foreword" by Scott—some "dithyrambic lines to a picture by Lawren Harris" ("Foreword" 5). That picture is the well-known *Above Lake Superior* (c. 1922) where, as Raold Nasgaard says in *The Mystic North,* a "foreground strewn with twisted pieces of deadwood . . . [and] solitary treetrunks" contrasts with a background of "lofty architectural forms [that] rise austerely and peacefully as symbols of transcendent experience" (Nasgaard 178). From Elise Aylen's appreciation of *Above Lake Superior,* it would appear that she either sensed or understood the mystical significance of Harris's painting. "What heart shall bare the meaning of these things?" she asks at the conclusion of her poem, "When shall the death-bands of cloud be rent/And light issue in revelation?"[15] To what extent, if at all, Scott was himself alert in the early thirties to Harris's esoterically symbolic use of natural forms may never be known. What can be said with certainty, however, is that by the early forties Scott knew Harris well enough to know also that the "abstract forms" of his later paintings were "full of meaning for him" (*The Poet* 28). It is thus plausible to speculate that the "animated talk" (Scott, *The Poet* 106) which Scott and Harris had in Ottawa in 1944 turned at least

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[13] See Roald Nasgaard, *The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape painting in Northen Europe and North America 1890-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) 166 and following for a discussion of Harris's Theosophical ideas.

[14] In a notebook belonging to Elise Aylen that was very kindly shown to me by R.L. McDougall after this paper was written, there are quotations from a variety of 'mystical' writers, including J.C. Powys, Albertus Magnus, William Law, Plotinus and, most frequently, Meister Eckhart. Though the period of this notebook's use is uncertain, one of its pages bears the date "20.9.53."

[15] Elise Aylen, *Roses of Shadow* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1930) 6.

in part on "Theosophical and other mystical doctrines" (Nasgaard 178).

Be this as it may, the evidence of some of Scott's earliest poems indicates that from almost the beginning of his writing life he shared the interest in occult ideas and esoteric philosophies that was so widespread in his day. His first volume of poetry is, of course, entitled *The Magic House and Other Poems* (1893), and it contains at least one piece, "The Sleeper," which, as A.J.M. Smith observes, plays sensitively and artfully with the notion of "arcane knowledge" ("Duncan Campbell Scott" 109). Indeed, a focal point of the poem is a "planet strange,/Not the moon that mortals know," but "Something different yet the same—. . . the maid moon's other side" ("Duncan Campbell Scott" 109). With its "magic mountain range" and "Roses lit with lambent flame," the moon of "The Sleeper" could have either a hermetic or, as Smith argues, a sexual significance ("Scott " 123-24). But even if the poem does contain a hermetic component, its imitative and decorative quality, like that of "The Magic House" itself, does not indicate a profound involvement on Scott's part with his esoteric materials. Evidence suggestive of a less superficial and more serious engagement with esoteric philosophy does not, in fact, appear in Scott's poetry until just prior to the First World War when, perhaps under the impact of the death of his only daughter in 1907 and of his close friend, Edmund Morris, in 1913, he could well have turned to hermeticism as a possible key to an understanding of the meaning of life.

In addition to "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris", there are two poems of 1913, "Mid-August" and "Mist and Frost," which seem to contain hermetic or alchemical ideas. In the dreamy meditation on nature that constitutes "Mid-August" the poet refers at one point to the "wraithlike scents" of flowers as "spirits of the florescence."[16] Not only is "florescence" a word with alchemical associations,[17] but an equation between floral fragrances and the precious essence sought in the *magnum opus* is frequently made by hermetic writers. According to Jacob Boehme, for example, "it is the *Tincture* which gives to metals their lustre, and to flowers their pleasant colour and fragrance" (Martensen 32). The poet concludes "Mid-August" with a fanciful and tentative thought"

I fancy
Only necromancy

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[16] *The Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott* (Toronto: McClelland, 1926) 192, hereafter cited in the text as *P.*

[17] Flores and flowers can be chemical terms, as in "flowers of sulphur."

> Could the web unroll,
> Only somehow linking
> Beauties that meet and mingle
> In this quiet dingle
> With the beauty of the whole.
> (*P* 193)

In the latter poem, "Mist and Frost," there is again mention of "a wraith of florescence," as well as a suggestively hermetic description of the mist as "Millions of essences/Fairy-like presences" which are "Formless as yet. . . . Floating unset" (*P* 194). Here, as in "Mid-August," Scott could, of course, be attempting merely to record a sensitive response to floral scents, water forms and light effects, but the possible existence in the poems of a hermetic subtext is raised by such lines as "What is there tragical/Moving or magical,/Hid in the mist?" (*P* 194) and reinforced by the alchemical significance of scent, light and water as especially potent manifestations of the essence or spirit of Nature (*anima mundi*),[18] Scott's placement of "Mid-August" and "Mist and Frost" in close proximity to "The Magic House"[19] in *The Poems* of 1926 further reinforces the possibility that an arcane or hermetic level of significance is present in the two poems.

The seriousness of Scott's concern around the time of the First World War with such hermetic ideas as the *anima mundi* becomes evident in the three most accomplished, philosophical, and important poems in the *Lundy's Lane* volume of 1916—the volume which, as it happens, "Mid-August" and "Mist and Frost" were first published. "Written in the winter of 1913-14" (Brown, xxvi), "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris" draws to its conclusion with the apocalyptic thought that, "when the old world" finally stops spinning and "all forms, that carried the fire/Of life are cold upon her marble heart—/Like ashes on the altar," "something will escape of soul or essence,/The sum of life, to kindle other where" (*P* 150). The *anima mundi,* this "lovely wraith of spirit," is described by turns as "the kernel of it all" and as "throated like a bird," two images which occur in hermetic writing as symbols, respectively, of the enclosed and liberated spirit or essence. "Birds," says Burckhardt succinctly, "are the 'seed' of gold and silver" (119). There is not room here to examine in detail any of the many passages in "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris" that contain images and ideas that are

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[18] See, for instance, Arthur Edward Waite, *The Real History of the Rosicruceans, Founded on Their Own Manifestoes, and on Facts and Documents Collected from the Writings of Initiated Brethren* (1887; rpt. Mokelunne Hill, Calif.: Health Research, 1960) 10.

[19] See Smith "Duncan Campbell Scott" 124.

suggestive of hermeticism. There is room, however, to quote the following passage, not merely because it contains a now very figurative use of the word "florescence" in relation to "light and dew," but also because it expresses an idea very like the central hermetica belief that a divine essence is immanent but hidden both in the external world and in the individual soul:[20]

> 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 urgence of 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; 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. . . .
> (*P* 148)

The vitalistic vision of the world that is confidently advanced in this passage is more tentatively explored in the two other major poems of *Lundy's Lane* volume. In "Meditation at Perugia" Scott could be drawing on the hermetic tradition when, in asking the first of a series of questions—"Shall not the subtle spirit of man contrive/To charm the tremulous ether of the soul,/Wherein it breathes?" (*P,* 132),—he distinguishes between the divine essence in man ("the subtle spirit") and man's immortal component ("the soul"). The remaining questions in the poem, turning as they do on the essential unity of "the powers of earth and air" and the concealed presence of "one deep law" in all creation, could also be indebted to hermetic ideas:

> Shall we not search the heart of God and find
> That law empearled,
> Until all things that are in matter and mind
> Throb with the secret that began the world?
> (*P* 132)

Something of the questioning attitude of these lines, together with their emphasis on a constitutive and discoverable "secret,"

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[20] See Arthur Edward Waite, "Introduction," *The Works of Thomas Vaughan: Eugenius Philalethes* (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1919) xxviii.

appears also in "The Height of Land," the third of the major poems in *Lundy's Lane.*

"Written in November, 1915" (Brown xxvi), "The Height of Land" is frequently compared with Lawren Harris's northern landscape paintings, and, indeed, Harris's vision of the North as a "source of spiritual flow" (Nasgaard 167) that is unavailable in the crowded areas to the South (see his 1925 article in the *Canadian Theosophist*) is remarkably akin to Scott's vision in the earlier poem. "The Height of Land" contains one passage that is of special interest to the present discussion: the description of the "Something that comes by flashes" to the poet on the height as "a spell/Golden and inapellable" whose "secret" "yet no man may tell" (*P,* 47-48). Early in the poem, this "spell" apparently awakens a sympathy in the poet ("Ghost tremors of the spell") and an ability to apprehend things not usually seen or heard (The gathering of the waters at their source"). At the end of the poem, after it has been associated with the intangible of "light" and "wind" and, moreover, described as a "deep/Influx of spirit," the "Secret" is capitalized for emphasis and once again described as "golden and inapellable" (*P,* 54). If Scott's interest in hermeticism was, in fact, growing during the First World War, then could it be that there is an alchemical significance to the "golden" and ineffable qualities of the "spell" and the "Secret" in "The Height of Land?" While admittedly conjectural, this notion may come further within the bounds of possiblilty in the evidence to be presented in a few moments.

While "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris" and "The Height of Land" are widely separated in *Poems* (1926) there are two pieces of 1919 which are placed together there, between "Mist and Frost" and "The Magic House," in what may provisionally be called the hermetic group of poems. An "unquiet" meditation on "The double of the thought or the thought's essence" whose "subtle presence" is announced by "a slight perfume" (*P* 200), "Reverie" may draw, like "Mid-August," on the alchemical association of pleasant fragrances with the precious essence. Indeed, this association and its implications may lie behind the sceptical questionings of the following passage from the poem:

> Is it aroma faint from Nature's chalice,
> The odour of the aurora borealis
> That shifts before the stars a silver fume,
> Or peacock-tints on pools of amber gloom
> In some fur-forest, all of light deluded,
> With the vain thought that here it lived before
> In many incarnations o'er and o'er,

> Till all this life seems but a spectral show
> Of something real that perished long ago?
> (*P* 200)

A similarly unusual, if not arcane, use of fragrances is to be found in the other poem of 1919, the decidedly mysterious "Water Lily":

> An odour vibrates upward from the flower,
> An incense faint
> Gathers and floats
> Above the chalice of the breathing lily,
> Firm as the halo of a saint,
> Immaculate and chilly;
> Or the distilled and secret odour weaves
> A silver snood,
> Binding the temples of the virgin lily
> Listlessly leaning by the lotus leaves.
> (*P* 197-98)

The mysterious suggestiveness of "The Water Lily" prompts Smith to call it a "symbolist poem akin to Mallarmé's evocation of the snowy swan or Yeats's of the rose upon the rood of time" ("Duncan Campbell Scott" 124). While Smith argues that the "hidden theme" of "The Water Lily" is again sexual ("the presentation of an ambivalent attitude towards virginity" [124]), more interesting to the present discussion is his association of the poem with Mallarmé and Yeats, two writers who exemplify the connection between *symboliste* poetry and occult philosophy (hermeticism, Rosicrucianism). With its constellation of words like "incense," "chalice," "halo," "saint," "immaculate" and "snood" about the "virgin lily" (itself an emblem of the Blessed Virgin), "The Water Lily" may merely be an application of Christian terms to a natural object for the sexual purposes that Smith indicates. Yet the presence also in the passage quoted above of such words as "distilled," "secret," and "silver," together with the emphasis on odour and the designation of the lily as a "lotus," my be indicative of the presence in a more mystical and hermetic attempt in the poem to intimate the presence in the water lily of a divine element or spirit (pneuma). It may not be fortuitous that in the same year as the writing of "The Water Lily" and "Reverie," Scott also completed a lengthy sequence of poems inspired by Henry Vaughan, the "Variations on a Seventeenth-Century Theme."[21] It may not be fortuitous because Vaughan, a poet who, by Scott's own admission, "appealed to

[21] The lines are from the opening stanza of "Regeneration" which can be found in Martin's edition of *The Works of Henry Vaughan* 2: 397.

[him] from [his] earliest reading" (*The Poet* 163), is a writer whose works are redolent with hermetic ideas. For example, the opening stanzas of Vaughan's "Cock-Crowing" draws on at least two alchemical notions—that of the "seed" (or "grain") of spirit within every earthly thing and that of the "magnetisme" between earthly and heavenly bodies[22]—in a manner that might have interested or even influenced the author of "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris" and "At Gull Lake: August, 1810":

> Father of lights! what Sunnie seed,
> What glance of day hast thou confin'd
> Into this bird? To all the breed
> This busie Ray thou hast assign'd;
> Their magnetisme works all night
> And dreams of Paradise and light.
>
> Their eyes watch for the morning hue,
> Their little grain expelling night
> So shines and sings, as if it knew
> The path unto the house of light.
> It seems their candle, howe'r done,
> Was tinn'd and lighted at the sunne. (2: 488)

While only one of Vaughan's alchemical allusions (his reference in "Affliction" to "the great elixir") is identified and explained by E.K. Chamber's in the "Notes" to the 1896 edition of the *Poems of Henry Vaughan, Salurist* (1: 306), many others are fully glossed by L.C. Martin in the definitive, two volume edition of *The Works of Henry Vaughan,* published by the Clarendon Press in 1914. For instance, in annotating the very lines that inspired Scott's "Variations on a Seventeenth-Century Theme"—"It was high-spring, and all the way/Primros'd, and hung with shade"—Martin refers to "*Lumen de Lumine: Or a new Magicall Light discovered . . .*" (2: 694n.), a hermetic dream vision by Henry's twin brother Thomas, the "leading British exponent" (Pettet 71) of hermeticism. Moreover, Martin's edition of Vaughan's *Works*—an edition surely known to Scott by 1919 (and probably earlier)—includes the poet's translation of Henry Nollius's *Hermetic Physic,* a treatise which contains various discussions of alchemy, including a reference to the process whereby "Gold is seven times purified" (2: 581).[23]

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[22] See Elizabeth Holmes, *Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1932) 37-38.

[23] See A.J.M. Smith's "To Henry Vaughan," *The Classic Shade: Selected Poems,* with an introduction by M.L. Rosenthal (Toronto: McClelland, 1978) 86-87, for clear indication of Smith's awareness of the hermetical component of Vaughan's thought.

If Henry Vaughan was one writer through whom hermetic ideals could have reached Scott, then another might have been his brother, Thomas Vaughan. Although most of Thomas Vaughan's alchemical treatises were published individually in the mid-seventeenth century, they were brought together and reprinted twice during Scott's lifetime: first in 1888 by A.E. Waite as *The Magical Writings* (only the first four treatises) and then again in 1919 by the same editor as *The Works of Thomas Vaughan, Eugenius Philalethes.* Prepared for and published by the Theosophical Society in England and Wales, this latter edition is thoroughly introduced and annotated by the A.E. Waite who had previously written or edited such works as *The Real History of the Rosicrucians* (1887) and *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus the Great* (1894). Now if Scott's admiration for Henry Vaughan, combined with his interest in esoteric philosophy, had led him to the *Works* of Thomas Vaughan he would have found there many passages that set forth ideas whose possible relevence to his own poetry has already been conjectured. "The Soul of the World," says Vaughan in "Anthroposophia Theomagica," "is in man, in beasts, in vegetables, in minerals," and "flowers are—as it were—the spring of the spirit, where it breaks forth and streams, as it appears by the odours that are more celestial and comfortable there" (40-42). In "the element of water," he says in the same essay, "the pulse of the Great World beats: this most men call the flux and the reflux, but they know not the true cause of it" (8). And in "Aula Lucis or The House of Light," having asserted an identity between light and spirit (or essence) he argues for the presence of "a certain face of light in all those things which are very dear or very precious to us." "For example, in beauty . . . there is inherent a certain secret, concomitant lustre" that brings its possessors "a clearness and serenity of mind" (331-32).[24] Although these passages, and others like them, seem pertinent to a number of poems in *Lundy's Lane, Beauty and Life,* and *Poems* (1926), it would be folly to argue either that their ideas are unique to Thomas Vaughan or that the presence in Scott's work of ideas very like them could not be attributable to one or many alternative sources. By the same token, the putative alchemical component of "At Gull Lake: August, 1810" need not necessarily derive from Vaughan's own particular versions of quite ubiquitous ideas. Yet it is worth noting that, in a text which was certainly available, probably attractive, and possibly known to Scott well before the composition of "At Gull Lake" in 1934, Vaughan makes statements that could well lie behind the conclusion of that poem. In

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[24] See also Clymer, 1: 188: "in the light of the Hermetic Philosophy, the Path to perfection becomes the Path to Beauty, as it is that of peace and joy." Clymer quotes several times from Thomas Vaughan, for example in 1: 52-54.

one place he observes that "properly the moon is 'in the instrument of the transmutation of inferior matter'" (29) and in another he writes that, when the soul is translated "from the natural to the supernatural state, the "material parts are never more to be seen" (101). Of the several references to the number seven in Vaughan, none might have captured the imagination of the poet, who liked to end his Indian poems with the achievement of rest after struggle, more than the following, from the section on "Regeneration, Ascent and Glorification" in "lumen de Lumine":

> Proceed then patiently, but not manually. The work is performed by an invisible artist . . . Remember that in the incarnation of Christ Jesus the *Quaternarius* or four elements . . . were united to the Eternal Unity and Ternarius. Three and four make seven; this Septenary is the true Sabbath, the Rest of God into which the creature shall enter. This is the best and greatest manuduction that I can give you. In a word, salvation itself is nothing else but transmutation. (302)

In returning to "At Gull Lake: August, 1810" and, to *The Green Cloister* volume of 1935, the discussion has, in true hermetic form, come full circle. Yet the discussion also returns to *The Green Cloister* bringing with it a reader who is saturated with alchemical lore to the degree that he or she may be prepared to recognize as never before the possible presence in that volume of hermetic ideas which may help to elucidate even its title.

III

In the late twenties and early thirties there were two developments in Vaughan studies which, in conjuction with such factors as Scott's deepening involvement with Elise Aylen at this time, may have contributed to the knowledge of esoteric ideas that seems to lie behind *The Green Cloister* volume. The first was the appearance, in 1927, of Edmund Blunden's small book *On the Poems of Henry Vaughan* which raises the question of "how far Vaughan travelled in hermetic philosophy or magic" and attempts to "point out the stange ubiquity of his 'philosophical' notions in his poetry" (13). Blunden writes of Vaughan's "solar, personal, firmamental, flower-whispering, rainbow-browed, ubiquitous magnetic Love" (48)[25] and he argues that "superstition or scientific truth, the secret power in which

[25] See also Waite's "Introduction" to *The Works of Thomas Vaughan* xxvii for the importance of Love in hermetic philosophy and xxix for the Art of Love "'by which . . . a particular spirit may be united to the universal.'"

Vaughan had such faith is the essence of his poetry" (17). Of even greater interest to the author of "Variations on a Seventeenth-Century Theme" might have been the second development in Vaughan studies of *The Green Cloister* period: the publication in 1932 of Elizabeth Holmes' influential (and some would say misguided) study of *Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy.* Claiming that "rays from . . .Hermetic and Catholic teaching meet at the angle of [Vaughan's] inner experience" (30), Holmes makes detailed reference, not only to the alchemical writings of Agrippa, Paracelsus, Thomas Vaughan and others, but also to the works of such Christian mystics as Jacob Boehme who, in her words, "images the 'three principles of the divine essence,' and 'the threefold life of man' in terms of the chemical trinity of sulphur, mercury, and salt" (28). In Holmes' book, as in Thomas Vaughan's works, there are passages which could serve as glosses on the conclusion of "At Gull Lake" and on the depiction of Keejigo with her "half-moon of powder blue":

> Each creature bears the 'character' or hieroglyph of its star. (60)
>
> The stars and the planets take the sublunary world in charge, and each planet has as it were a 'cure' of small terrestrial 'souls.' (39)
>
> Vaughan's belief in atonement is in an atonement through return to the source, and so through rebirth to universal regeneration. It is all a question of the return and the re-birth. Among the alchemists the transmutations of their art were types of re-birth. . . . (60)

It may be no coincidence that Holmes concludes *Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy* with a quotation from "L'Envoy" of *Silex Scintillans* which finds a strong echo in the conclusion of "At Gull Lake." Vaughan is describing the sun rather than the moon, but his diction and imagery are, in places, very similar to Scott's:

> Arise! arise!
> And like old cloaths fold up the skies,
> This long worn veyl: then shine and spread
> Thy own bright self over each head,
> And through thy creatures pierce and pass
> Till all becomes thy cloudless glass,
> Transparent as the purest day
> And without blemish or decay,

> Fixt by thy spirit to a state
> For evermore immaculate.[26]

True to the tradition that finds in both Henry and Thomas Vaughan the precursors of the romantic poets (particulary Wordsworth), Holmes sees these lines as "prophetic of Shelley in *Adonais*" (62), a poem which, of course, may also lie in the background of "At Gull Lake: August, 1810." In the light of the assimilation of Henry Vaughan to hermetic philosophy that was quite successfully achieved in the thirties by Holmes (and earlier by Blunden and Martin), it is worth wondering whether, when he commented somewhat tetchily to Brown "I cannot tell why [Vaughan] has so appealed to me from my earliest reading, and I am not called upon to do so" (*The Poet* 163),[27] Scott was not unconsciously revealing his awareness that in some eyes a life-long interest in Vaughan might appear odd or even suspect.

In his "Memoir" to the *Selected Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott* (1951), Brown explains that the title of *The Green Cloister* volume has "an obvious and also a recondite meaning" (xxxvii): obviously, it points to the poem entitled "Chiostro Verde" and, more reconditely, it refers to the contrast in that poem between the decay of the frescoes in "the old Green Cloister/At Santa Maria Novella" (*GC* 21) and the "constant renewal in nature, in the grass and flowers, the cypresses, the pigeons" (Brown xxxvii). "To the *chiostro verde,*" says Brown, "the green cloister replies" (Brown xxxvii). In "Choistro Verde" itself, however, the "green cloister" does not so much reply as prompt the series of questions with which the poem closes:

> Who painted the silver lights in the daisies
> What sheen in the grass-cloud
> That hides their stars or discloses,
> Who stained the bronze-green shroud
> Wrapping the cypress
> Who painted the roses? (*GC* 23)

Anyone who has followed the discussion this far might be ready now to accept as an at least plausible hypothesis the suggestion that Scott's unnamed painter is Thomas Vaughan's "invisible artist," the artist who works by "secret incubation . . . upon Nature" (302), and whose presence is declared, not only in the

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[26] Holmes 62, supplemented with lines from *The Works of Henry Vaughan.*

[27] See also A.J.M. Smith, "Some Relations between Henry Vaughan and Thomas Vaughan," *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters* xviii (U of Michigan P, 1933) 551-61 for a discussion of the "similarity of view" of the two brothers, and of the hermetic component of their ideas. Delivered in the same year (1932) Smith's paper shows the understanding of Vaughan's hermeticism that is also evident in his "To Henry Vaughan," first published in 1959.

"face of light in . . . things which are very dear or very precious to us" but also—and perhaps of central importance to an understanding of Scott's "green cloister"—in the colour green itself, the "*benedicta viriditas* that was for the alchemists [Thomas and probably Henry Vaughan included] the essence—and wonder—of the vegetable world" (Pettet 73). Could it be that when Scott framed the final question in "Chiostro Verde," he had the following passage from Thomas Vaughan's "Aula Lucis" in mind:

> It is light that forms the gold and the ruby, the adamant and the silver, and he is the artist that shapes all things. He that hath him hath the mint of Nature and a treasure altogether inexhaustible. (333)

Could it be that choosing for his titles and controlling metaphors "Chiostro Verde" and *The Green Cloister,* Scott had in mind, not merely "the philosopher's secret and blessed viridity" which, says Vaughan, is "to be seen and felt here below" (371), but also Vaughan's "Temple of Nature"—the "green umbrage" of "wood or wilderness" where in the dream vision of "Lumen de Lumine" he meets "a most exquisite, divine beauty" whose name, Thalia, signifies that she is "always green?" (247). Could it even be that in "Compline," the wilderness poem that, for Brown, constitutes "the deepest utterance of the green cloister" (xxxix), Scott is in his own way following Vaughan's advice in "Anima Magica Ascondita," his "Discourse of the Universal Spirit of Nature":

> In the summer translate thyself to the fields, where all is green with the breath of God and fresh with the powers of heaven. Learn to refer all naturals to their spirituals by the way of secret analogy; for this is the way the magicians went and found out miracles. (115-16)

In the absence of clear external evidence on which to base a claim for Thomas Vaughan's influence on Scott, the connections and interpretations suggested by these questions of "Chiostro Verde" itself such words and phrases as "sheen," "silver lights" and "bronze-green," together with the reliance of the passage as a whole on a correspondence between the realms of earth and heaven, there is internal evidence that is not inconsistent with an hermetic interpretation of the passage.

Although several poems in *The Green Cloister* besides "Chiostro Verde" and "At Gull Lake" contain words and ideas

that are suggestive of alchemical notions,[28] there are two other pieces which seem particularly and profoundly indebted to hermeticism: the short, untitled overture poem of the volume and the longer, meditative poem entitled "A Blackbird Rhapsody." Apparently written in reference to Elise Aylen Scott (the entire volume is dedicated "To Elise"), the overture poem begins with a statement that is resonant with personal and, possibly, arcane significance:

> *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. . . .*(*GC* [6])

Notably present in this passage are a number of what Blunden calls "Philosophers' terms" (51):[29] "spirit face," "instinct,"[30] "essential bliss" and "line"—this last recalling Blunden's comment that the "various uses of the word 'line'" in Henry Vaughan are understandable only to "those who know the earlier systems of science" (19). Could Scott perhaps have been thinking here of "Kabalist's Green Line" which, as Thomas Vaughan says in his discourse on "The Fraternity of the Rosy Cross" (*i.e.* the Rosicrucians), "compasseth the heavens and in them the earth, like a green rainbow or one vast sphere of viridity" and showers down "Divine Influences?" (370-71). Such an interpolation, farfetched as it may seem, accords quite well with the passage's overall claim that something of the "divine" is embodied and immanent in the person of the beloved. In the remainder of the overture poem, the tripartite structure of its opening lines ("charm," "grace," "form") is elaborated around a submerged woman/plant metaphor which effectively assimilates the beloved to the green cloister:

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[28] See, for example, "The Faithful" (60), "By the Sea" (61) and "Under Stars" (62), as well as the following stanza from "Old Olives at Bordighera" in *The Circle of Affection* (Toronto: McClelland, 1947) 53:

> The dust-green silver of the leaves,
> The silver subdued of the tree-stems,
> The branch-screen that draws gold from sunlight
> And casts a residue of silver shadow.

The *residuum* was the precious essence sought by the alchemists in the *magnum opus*.

[29] And see also Smith, "Some Relations . . . " for succinct definitions and discussions of the terms "instinct" and "line."

[30] It is worth noting that whereas Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, 1: 379 says of a "huge peak" that it rears its head "As if with voluntary power instinct," Scott simply says that the beloved's features "Are instinct with essential bliss." Of these two statements, Scott's is clearly closer to hermeticism than Wordsworth's, though see Ernest Lee Tuveson, *The Avatars of Thrice Great Hermes: An Approach to Romanticism* (Buckenell, 1982) 152-69 for a discussion of Worthsworth's "neohermeticism."

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. (*GC* [6])

Both neo-platonic and Rossettian in its conception of woman, this passage ends with a metaphor—a "soul" with "The fragrance of a flower"—whose hermetic resonances surely need no further amplification at this juncture. As well as assimilating the beloved to the green cloister, the overture poem performs a unifying function by gesturing towards other pieces in the volume—towards "The Fields of Earth" with its allegorical "Trees of Joy" where hang "the core of Beauty/And the seed of Truth" (12-13), towards "Compline" and "At Sunset" with their visions of the "radiance of [a] love in the heart" (*GC* 38) that is "instinct with all perfection" (*GC* 59) and even towards the volume's concluding poem, "The Nightwatchman," where the seemingly "Weird Mister Mee," with his "heliotrope" and "pungent herb" (*GC* 94-96), has the attributes and something of the aura[31] of an hermetic physician.

In Brown's view, "the simple love of life" that the speaker discovers in "the wild impromptu voice" (*GC* 14) of the bird in "A Blackbird Rhapsody" provides a powerful answer to the questions of "Chiostro Verde" (xxxviii). This may well be true, but of more interest to the present discussion is the mystical element that emerges near the end of the poem when "the blackbird is rendered as experiencing a moment of illumination" (xxxviii) and the moon is depicted in a markedly spiritual light. Poised at "the apex of a fir-tree" with "parted golden bill" and "Half-spread wings, rapt and still" (*GC* 16), Scott's blackbird does indeed seem to be experiencing and expressing the rapture (*raptus*) associated with mystical experience; moreover, Scott's rhapsodic blackbird begins to recall Vaughan's crowing cock when, despite the different time of day (sunset rather than sunrise), the Canadian poet speculates on the nature of the bird's "dreams of Paradise and light": "Is your dream a vale of rest?", he asks, or is it a dream "Of a day too rich for singing/By a brooding shadow nest,/Far beyond the mountains of the West?" (*GC* 16). When darkness begins to descend and the focus of "A

[31] The point of view of the poem is in part that of a "young mind" (*GC* 92) to whom the "great mourning ring" of Mr. Mee and the "mouldin-shop" in which he works at night seem both sinister and magical.

Blackbird Rhapsody" shifts to the wider landscape, the poem becomes, if anything, more suggestive of mystical, now even hermetic, experience: "An ethereal film of rose/Suddenly flushes the pale snows" and "as soon begins to change/To ashes of dead silver" (*GC* 17). That this last image, as much as the "column/ . . . of seven metals" at the conclusion of "At Gull Lake: August, 1810," is an allusion to the alchemical work of spiritualization becomes a distinct possibility with the final lines of "A Blackbird Rhapsody" where "The Immortal Pearl, The Moon"

> Driven ever with the cosmic urge,
> Striv[es] to escape beyond the verge
> To the veiled mountains of the imagined West
> Where She and all Immortal Spirits hope for rest. (10)

Despite Scott's allusion to Dante (*Paradiso,* iii, 13) in the Moon/Pearl metaphor, the thrust of this passage is neither Dantean nor Christian. Whereas both Dante and Scott envision the universe as driven by a "cosmic urge" (Dante's *Amor,* Scott's Love), the Canadian poet differs radically from his great predecessor in his conception and, indeed, deification of the Moon as an Immortal Spirit that seeks "rest," not in any kind of Empyrean (where God is perpetually comtemplated), but in "the veiled mountains of the imagined West." The vision here, then, is horizontal and imaginative rather than vertical and Christian. It is the vision of a poet who might have found hermetic philosophy congenial and perhaps did.

On 24 November 1946 Scott told Brown that he had long since "wandered far away" from the "Methodist Connection" into which he was born and was "lost in a wilderness;" but, he added, "I have a strong Faith of my own, you see I spell faith with a capital" (*The Poet* 180-181). From the imitations of alchemical ideas that have been assembled and discussed in the preceding paragraphs, it might be tempting to infer that an hermetic philosophy lay behind the "Faith" that Scott professed in his last years. Such an inference is possible, but it is not the conclusion that will be drawn here from a discussion that never attempted to argue that Scott was a thorough-going believer in hermeticism. What has been argued from the presence in a small but important part of Scott's work of various images and ideas which are evocative of hermeticism is that the poet may have been acquainted with certain hermetical writings, particularly those of Thomas Vaughan, and that he may have found attractive certain hermetical ideas, including that of the presence in nature and in man of a divine spirit. When viewed against the background of the Christian, Victorian, Transcendentalist, and *symboliste* her-

itages that were so much a part of Scott's poetic and philosophical makeup, the conjectured hermetic component of his poetry takes on its proper proportions and perspective. As a means of articulating his sense of the presence of the divine in the material and of the ascent of the material towards the spiritual, images and ideas drawn from alchemical or hermetic lore may have served Scott well. Like Henry Vaughan, Scott seems to have taken, if anything, primarily the "light and winged portion" (Holmes 29) of the hermetic philosophy and used it with the combination of "intensity and restraint" (see *The Poet* 80) which he and others have liked to consider characteristic of his poetry at its best.

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