

Bipolar Paths of Desire: D.C. Scott's Poetic and Narrative Structures

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For many critics, D.C. Scott is a writer whose work reveals an intriguing drama of personal ambivalence. In fact, some critics regard Scott as inconsistent—even hypocritical—in his dealings with and writings about Indians in Canada. While both interesting and vital, this kind of debate has obscured the importance of ambivalence as a formal strategy in the writer's work. Because he saw his cultural contexts as grounds of vital moral struggle, Scott often depicted his poetic personas or fictional characters as drawn by opposing desires. The result is a recurring pattern, narrative or rhetorical depending upon the genre: a bipolar path of desire.

For Scott, the circular, bipolar path captures symbolically a dynamic moral ambivalence, suggesting, at the same time, a desire to be consumed by the difference that is the Other, and a desire to extend the Self as an informing and ordering presence into the unstructured void of Otherness. In a significant number of Scott's poems and stories, this drama of opposition determines the structure of the tale or the dialectics of the argument.

A relatively simple example of this structural device is "Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon." In this poem, the flight of the dove, which figuratively describes the sound of the hymn, is circular:

Each long cadence, flying like a dove from her shelter
Deep in the shadow, wheels for a throbbing moment,
Poises in utterance, returning in circles of silver
To nest in the silence.¹

The dove which "wheels" traces a circular path between two poles of desire, the security of the nest and the freedom of the sky, like human consciousness responding alternately to the demands of the Self and to those of the Other. The scene at Lake

¹ *The Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott* (Toronto: McClelland, 1926) 24. Subsequent references to Scott's poems are from this text.

Nipigon shows the desires of the poem's speaker being first powerfully drawn to the outside, to some sense of completion through transcendent utterance (the hymns), then falling back again to the safety and familiarity of the Self. A rebirth or re-affirmation of faith is possible, if only the Self can project itself openly into the darkness. Unlike Noah's dove which does not finally return to the ark, though, and which symbolizes acceptance and trust in that which is given and exists outside the Self, Scott's dove flies in an orbit that always brings it back to its source.

In a letter to E.K. Brown which he wrote on 24 July 1947, Scott remarked that he had, for a long time, found the writing of Ralph Waldo Emerson interesting.² A likely cause for Scott's interest is that Emerson, too, had sought to understand the relationship between the Self and the Other, and he had also chosen the circle to describe the relationship. Scott, however, does not entirely share Emerson's view on the subject, and he creates an appropriately different symbolic value for the circle. The circle, Emerson believed, was a model of the Self that had its image repeated in the universe:

The eye is the first circle; the horizon where it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world.³

For Emerson, concentric circles approximated to the way in which the human Self could bring the unknown under control; each condition of knowledge or being could be superseded by another, larger circle:

. . . if the soul is quick and strong, it bursts over that boundary on all sides, and expands another orbit in the great deep, which also runs up into a high wave, with attempts again to stop and to bind. (170)

Always expanding, always seeking newness that inevitably will become familiar, Emerson's version of Self imaginatively seeks to possess and name the outside which, seemingly, cannot help but become part of the Self.

Harold Bloom and J. Hillis Miller identify Emerson as part of an American literary tradition of the strong Self in a crisis of identity. Bloom says that Emerson's formula was "The American

² *More Letters of Duncan Campbell Scott* (Ottawa: Bourinot, 1960) 82.

³ "Circles," *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside, 1957) 168.

Sublime equals *I and the Abyss*,⁴ while Miller yields further insight into the relationship of the Self and Other:

One of the crucial moments of Emerson's "Experience" is his rejection of any confrontation of another, or equal relation to another, even in love. The other can only be an image or icon of the self and so not its equal. All doubling or imaging must be rejected as introducing chaos into the spherical and all-inclusive unity of the self. Subject can only marry object, that is, not something its equal or fellow but something which can be devoured, wholly mastered. . . .

The American experience, as articulated by Emerson and subsequently interpreted by Miller, discloses an imperial Self, a powerful, subjective "I" colonizing and imaginatively levelling the world.

If Emerson's circles express a Manifest Destiny of the Self, Scott's circles suggest the irresolution of constant motion. The dualistic orbit is destroyed only when forces of situation or circumstance, symbolized by the storm in "Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon," intervene. Desire implies a separation of the Self from the Other it longs to join, and, in many cases, the unification sought can only be achieved in death.

The clearest example of how Scott's circular paths of desire fail to produce wholeness is found in the paired poetical study "The Wood by the Sea" and "The Sea by the Wood." Both poems speak in a first-person voice, an "I" who feels incomplete, alienated, and bored with its fragmented Self, and who desires to be joined with its counterpart. No resolution is suggested by the two poems, however; no discovery of a whole Self is implied by circularity of desire.

The speaker in "The Sea by the Wood" represents that yearning in the Self which seeks recognition, identity, and a particular sense of time and place. It abhors its own condition, which it identifies with death and loss:

The waves are weary of hiding pearls,
Are aweary of smothering gold,
They would all be air that sweeps and swirls
In the branches manifold.

⁴ *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* (New Haven: Yale, 1976) 285.

⁵ "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure," *The Georgia Review* 30 (1976): 24.

They are weary of laving the seaman's eyes
 With their passion prayer unsaid,
 They are weary of sobs and the sudden sighs
 And movements of the dead.

All the sea is haunted with human lips
 Ashen and sere and grey. . . . (209)

In these lines, the desire to join with the Other is fully realized in the great, obliterating wash of the sea. Otherness—for this is what the sea represents to the speaker—means complete loss of the individuated Self, an obliteration that is too powerful, too absolute to accept. The desire for the sea of Otherness is checked, then, by the speaker's discovery that its demand necessitates a loss of living experience or particularity, and, in short, the death of Self. As the speaker looks longingly to the wood, he acknowledges the beauty of the sea and its strong attraction, but he also expresses a strong yearning towards an individuated and self-protected condition:

The deeps are green as an emerald's face,
 The caves are crystal calm,
 But I wish the sea were a little trace
 Of moisture in God's palm. (209)

And again:

If mine were the will of God, the main
 Should melt away in the rustling wood
 Like a mist that follows the rain. (209)

Notice that the ideal action would have the sea "melt away" and become, somehow, one with its counterpart, the wood. The central desire is to reject the fact of death's awful terms of absoluteness by making it subject to the will, or vision, which guarantees the sanctity of the Self.

In contrast to this reluctance to relinquish life and its subjective experiences is the attitude expressed by the speaker in "The Wood by the Sea." In this poem, the "I" is tired of the familiarity of Self, of the particulars of experience:

I dwell in the wood that is dark and kind
 But afar off tolls the main,
 Afar, far off I hear the wind,
 And the roving of the rain.

The shade is dark as a palmer's hood,
 The air with balm is bland:
 But I wish the trees that breathe in the wood
 Were ashes in God's hand. (210)

The wood holds life which is peaceful and comforting, yet it is this same proof of consciousness, this detailed evidence of self-conscious life, that summons the desire for the fires of obliteration. In another seventeen years, Scott would find fault with Matthew Arnold's sentiment "Weary of myself, and sick of asking what I am and what I ought to be,"⁶ however, in this 1905 poem "The Wood by the Sea", the mood indeed is one of weariness:

The pines are weary of holding nests,
 Are aweary of casting shade;
 Wearily smoulder the resin crests
 In the pungent gloom of the glade.

Weary are all the birds of sleep,
 The nests are weary of wings,
 The whole wood yearns to the swaying deep,
 The mother of resting things. (210)

Studying the individual dilemma of too much Self, Scott's poetic speaker discovers a weariness that seemingly can be cured only by sinking into the Otherness of death.⁷

The two wood and sea poems pose a problem of permanent irresolution. Neither desire (for the absoluteness of Self or the absoluteness of Other) is achieved, nor are the two desires brought together in resolution: "But I dwell in the sea that is wild and deep," admits the one voice, and "I dwell in the wood that is dark and kind," says the other, as the two halves of the fragmented Self look longingly at each other from opposite points of an orbit.

While the wood and sea poems capture the ambivalence inherent in the balancing of strong desires, a poem such as "The Piper of Arll," introduces and, seemingly, resolves the circularity of desire—though not without great frustration. Scott again

⁶ Stan Dragland, ed., *Duncan Campbell Scott: A Book of Criticism* (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1974) 16. Hereafter, abbreviated as DCS.

⁷ The difference between Scott's attitude here and in his "Poetry and Progress" speech of 1922 is explained not only by the passage of years and an adjustment in personal outlook, but also by the fact that the speaker in the poem deals with the complexities of emotion on a personal level, while the speaker in "Poetry and Progress" is considering an ideal, intellectual model of cultural development.

uses the land and the sea to represent poles of perceived states of being, with the Piper as a pastoral figure of the Self whose "heart was swayed with faithful love, / From the springs of God's ocean clear and deep . . ." (35). The mysterious ship of sailors is itself an imaginative product of this love, and it appears to the Piper with an implied promise of fulfillment of his needs. The Piper thinks he wants to offer his Self to the Otherness of the sea, but the vision he summons—the ship—is in fact a narcissistic projection of that same Self. After singing "their longing songs of home," the sailors are silent:

When the sweet airs had fled away,
The piper, with a gentle breath,
Moulded a tranquil melody
Of lonely love and longed-for death.

.....

Then from the dark and dreamy deck
An alien song began to thrill;
It mingled with the drumming beck,
And stirred the braird upon the hill.

Beneath the stars each sent to each
A message tender, till at last
The piper slept upon the beach,
The sailors slumbered round the mast. (36)

The Piper's desire for idealized death is so consuming that the Self becomes abhorrent. When the desire for Otherness is not immediately realized and the sailors withdraw, the Piper goes into a Self-destructive rage, destroying the reed which is the instrument of his informing vision. But this act leaves him with the Self, grown wearisome like the consciousness of "The Wood by the Sea," and he quickly reconstructs the instrument and the vision.

As the Piper joins the sailors on board their ship, there is a brief and illusory sense of glorious resolution in death:

Silent they rowed him, dip and drip,
The oars beat out an exequy,
They laid him down within the ship,
They loosed a rocket to the sky.

It broke in many a crimson sphere
That grew to gold and floated far,

And left the sudden shore-line clear,
With one slow-changing, drifting star. (38)

Attracted to an interpretation which finds in the Piper a specific model for the Canadian artist, critics have not responded to the more universal, metaphysical message that informs the work and this passage in particular. Gary Geddes reads "The Piper" as an allegory of the artist. Living in harmony with his idyllic environment, the artist is confronted with a vision of loneliness to which he responds creatively.⁸ Because Geddes reads the poem as a journey from alienation to fulfillment, he interprets the ending as a realization of "intimations of immortality," a view which, though stated differently, is shared by Fred Cogswell. Arll, Cogswell claims,

represents the poet's physical universe; the sea becomes eternity; the ship represents an anthology, the repository of the poets and their works that affects the poet at an early stage in his career and to which he and his work are added at the close.⁹

Both Cogswell and Geddes read the concluding scene beneath the sea as peaceful and fulfilling, though Cogswell himself is troubled by certain inconsistencies in his interpretation:

A matter-of-fact critic of the analysis I have given above might well question how the dead poets of tradition appeared as living ones at the time of their first encounter with the piper; how and why they came to get him, again as living poets; and how and why they sank with him, and presumably shared his fate, at the hour of his death. (53)

He says that the demands of the ballad narrative form forced Scott to "violate a strict symbolic design," but I believe that the fault lies with Cogswell's initial assumption which sees the Piper as a poet figure. The poem's ending is especially difficult to accept, if only because the symbolism of the ocean is too consistent with usage in other Scott poems: the ocean here is symbolic of death and is both attractive and repellent to the Self.

The sailors and the Piper, after all, do not get what they expect. After the ceremonial fireworks, sails are made ready and "they waited for a ruffling breeze":

⁸ "Piper of Many Tunes," *DCS* 173.

⁹ "Symbol and Decoration: The Piper of Arll," *The Duncan Campbell Scott Symposium*, ed. K.P. Stinch (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1980) 48.

But in the world there was no stir,
 The cordage slacked with never a creak,
 They heard the flame begin to purr
 Within the lantern at the peak. (39)

The planned voyage is a failure, and the expectations of desire on the part of the Piper are fulfilled in an unexpected way: the ship's descent as it sinks beneath the waves is a journey into dream become nightmare. This is the place, described in "The Sea by the Wood," that is weary of its cargo of human dead:

All the sea is haunted with human lips
 Ashen and sere and grey,
 You can hear the sails of the sunken ships
 Stir and shiver and sway. . . . (209)

The similarity of "The Sea by the Wood" to the final scene in "The Piper of Arll" suggests that Scott is working on the same symbolic and psychological levels in both poems.

The Piper is certainly an artist figure, but the importance of this characterization lies in his imaginative yearning for an idealistic wholeness of being, a desire to grasp the mystery of death on terms wholly acceptable to the Self. His final perfect song on shore is a personal interpretation of this dream:

He, singing into nature's heart,
 Guiding his will by the world's will,
 With deep, unconscious, childlike art
 Had sung his soul out and was still.

And then at evening came the bark
 That stirred his dreaming heart's desire. . . . (38)

It would be misleading to place too much emphasis on the image of the Piper as one who has surrendered himself to the "world's will" and achieved a spontaneous, "unconscious" art. These sentiments of Romantic aesthetics are part of the ideal and Self-deluding vision of the Piper's imagination; the Piper plays, it must be remembered, with a purpose: to summon the ship, "his dreaming heart's desire." Also, before he sings his soul out (supposedly in unpremeditated ecstasy), he is seen as one who forms his song in complete control and self-consciousness:

Beneath the pines he piped and swayed,
 Master of passion and of power;

He was his soul and what he played,
Immortal for a happy hour. (37)

Thus a strong case can be made for interpreting the ship of sailors as a reciprocal part of the Piper's projected imaginative vision. The ship mysteriously appears after his "faithful" love for the ocean has been established, and the sailors' song prompts the Piper's own song of "lonely love and longed-for death." The sailors sing "longing songs of home," but this home is never named, detailed, or in any other way given a sense of actual place. The reason is that this home is part of the imagined place of the Piper's desire, just as the oceanic home is yearned for by the speaker in "The Wood by the Sea."

Those who desire death cannot grasp it by journeying across an ocean of their own making; the true and awful Otherness of death overwhelms the Piper and his desire, just as the darkness and storm finally overwhelm the dove-like hymns of "Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon." The ship *must* sink, and, as it does, the supposed resolution becomes ironic and emotionally unfulfilling. Faced with the actuality of lost identity in death, the Piper might well yearn again for life and the music of personal vision, but it is too late. As the crew begin to sink, the imaginative vision is directed, as a mute desire, back upwards. The loss is so profound, it can only be voiced in the negative:

They could not cry, they could not move,
They felt the lure from the charmed sea;
They could not think of home or love
Or any pleasant land to be. (39)

The mood in these lines is one of inarticulate regret and helpless sorrow, of yearning that can find no voice. Imaginative vision, which had desired to know and possess death within the control of the still-conscious Self, is likewise reversed: as the Piper and the dreaming crew are seen at ocean's bottom, they are "upward gazing." Their eyes are not real, only "starry pits of gold" that hold the lifeless memory of a dream. The Piper and his sailors have become like the drowned corpses in "The Sea by the Wood," dead men who desire to possess, once again, life and the Self.

Ambivalence is not limited in Scott's work to the duality of life and death. In fact, circular patterns emerge with more schematic clarity in those works, usually prose, which study the relation of the Self to a different form of the Other: the community, the family, or another individual. In "Charcoal," an early story that shows signs that the author is trying to articulate the com-

plexities of a thematic principle, the plot is patterned in an obvious circular way.

Generally, conflict in "Charcoal" conforms to Scott's concern with culture and change, and the reader is told that Charcoal's internal struggle is, in fact, a war between his "good" Indian and his "bad" Indian. The main character, a blood Indian named Charcoal, tries to adapt to the ways of the white man's world but fails when he murders his wife's lover. Occasionally, the author cannot help pointing the reader along the path of interpretation, as is the case when Scott observes that the conflict is "once more civilization against savagery."¹⁰ Yet, Scott's story also attempts to see the events as the unfolding dilemma of individual choice. At one point during his flight from the police, Charcoal is said to "circle like a hawk about his own reserve" (217). The circular pattern is established with the opposing poles of attraction being the exile's desire for self-preservation and his need to return to community. In fact, Charcoal's own thoughts about his behavior show that he has some insight into the problem posed by the conflicting desires of the Self and Other: his acts of murder are, he knows, an expression of the "bad," the tribal, and supposedly the more natural Self, while his yearning to surrender, to rejoin his people, is an expression of the "good" Indian who conforms to the new, communal image of the native transformed by white influence.

In this early story, however, the protagonist's actions are not informed solely by this psychological pattern of desire; they also lean upon clichés. Two examples show how inconsistent motivations result in an unsatisfying characterization. When the Indian is being pursued by police, the author observes that "Charcoal resolved that, so far as he was able, he would make it a long and merry chase" (217), and, later, that Charcoal "well knew what an excitement his escape was causing, and his gratified vanity bore him through perils and hardships which he might have shunned" (217-18). Noble and dashing rascal that Charcoal appears to be in these passages, Scott's portrayal of him as an aboriginal Scarlet Pimpernel tends to obscure the far more intriguing picture of him as a man experiencing fierce inner conflicts.

Further evidence that this is a story which reveals the author's imperfect grasp of human psychology and motivation occurs in the scene of Charcoal's capture. After weeks of depri-

¹⁰ *The Circle of Affection and Other Pieces of Prose and Verse* (Toronto: McClelland, 1947) 217.

vation and loneliness, he returns to his people's settlement and a relative's home:

Wolf-plume was Charcoal's brother-in-law. He had a house with two stories, and one bed in which he never slept. Following the agent's directions, by day his house wore an inviting appearance; by night it was lighted as if prepared for feasting and tea drinking. . . . [A description of Charcoal's appearance at the house follows, including the statement that his decision to enter is made after he smells stew cooking inside.] A bench was placed for him. The stew tasted like nothing which had ever passed his lips before; and weariness overcame him, weariness and sleep. After weeks of privation, starved, frozen, jaded with the saddle, hunted for his life, he lay down in the house of his friends and slept.

(220-21)

In terms of narrative conflict, Charcoal's problem before this passage is consistent with the central dilemma posed by the story: because the authorities seem incapable of capturing him, he is placed in a position where he must choose one of the two poles of his desire, Self or Other. He must make a commitment, or his life could become an eternal scenario of circular motion. Scott has established the language for such a choice through the terms "good" and "bad" Indian, and with the contrast between old and new ways; but, in the concluding scenes of the story, he deprives Charcoal of an earlier troubled awareness of his situation. By emphasizing Charcoal's physical needs as the crucial factors leading to his capture, Scott inadvertently undercuts the Indian's tragic dimension. What is forgotten at the scene of capture is the sense that, in his loneliness of Self, Charcoal increasingly felt the desire to join the Otherness of community, family, and friends. The fact that Charcoal is drawn to a sense of Otherness which no longer exists, and which is replaced by an Otherness determined by white law and values and therefore truly alien, is the potentially powerful irony Scott fails to develop to its fullest. Far more important than the comfort of a full stomach, for Charcoal, is the comfort of identity and completion. Rather belatedly for the purposes of characterization, Scott shows Charcoal before his execution gaining some comfort from an Indian medicine bag, the symbol of his desired community. By this time in the story, however, the lasting impression of Charcoal is that he is a victim of external forces; the equally important inner conflict of desires is largely obscured. Judged by the question of how well an author conveys the theme that he envisions, the story "Charcoal" must be viewed as a mixed success.

Other works show that Scott developed confidence when dealing with psychological motivations and their effects upon people's actions. In later works, a character's actions develop consistently and assume a logical magnitude in the determination of plot outcome. People's lives are guided according to their choices, and when characters are seen breaking from the circular pattern around the poles of Self and Other, it is usually because they have acted in accordance with their strongest desire. Pierre, the wandering son in the story "The Return," is such a character. Set in a rural Quebec village, "The Return" is an inversion of the Biblical story of the return of the prodigal son. For the central character, Pierre, the local environment had been stifling: as he grew from child to man, increasingly he perceived the traditional values of his community—hard work, the raising of a family, commitment to a home place—as being contrary to his self-interest. After an absence of many years, he returns for what proves to be an unsuccessful reunion with his family and friends.

In "The Return," Scott concentrates on the internal struggle created by conflicting desires rather than on the dramatics of external conflict as in "Charcoal." The result is a character, Pierre, who is doomed to a life of seemingly eternal restlessness: most of the time, he follows a desire to be rootless, to wander always without job, home, or family. But occasionally he discovers the desire to return to those very same things. When visiting his mother, for example, he says that life on the road is tiring but "that's not so bad as being in one place. I'd rather be tired, dead tired, than to always be like a tree, in one place."¹¹ Yet his return home represents more than mere curiosity to see what has gone on in his absence. Desire for the home place is strong and draws him back, almost against his conscious will; once home, he idealizes the desire in a dream:

He heard the women's voices far away; he thought his mother said, "Every ship has its harbour," and the words soothed him again. Yes, he thought, I'll stay home now, and I'll marry Olive; he dozed off. A pleasant picture filled his mind. He remembered a rich farmer who used to drive to mass with his wife, his stout carriage drawn by two fat horses, his many children wedged about him. Yes, he would stay home and become rich also, and drive to mass, and everyone would take off his hat respectfully. (209)

¹¹ Scott, "The Return," *The Circle of Affection* 208.

This idyllic picture of home life is appealing only as long as Pierre does not remember that it entails a very real and necessary loss of personal freedom; when his mother wraps his sleeping form with a shawl—an act wonderfully symbolic of a love both protective and confining—he is awakened to the implications of his desire. His mother's thoughtful gesture rouses Pierre from his sleep and dream, and he again leaves his family and community for the open road.

Two conclusions about Pierre's behavior may be drawn from the story's ending, and one is voiced by his mother. Discovering his disappearance, she assumes, perhaps rightly, that this absence, like the last one, will be temporary: "She thought, Yes, my poor Pierre, he will come back; he will come back again" (211). It is not entirely unreasonable to assume that he might continue to feel the alternating desires for flight and return, but such an assumption must be made without a consideration of Pierre's own feelings as he flees:

The effect of the warmth and his physical comfort had vanished. His one idea was to get away. He rose noiselessly. His movements were quick and decided. His thoughts were out on the road. His demon was again mounted, and only the world's end was his desire. (210)

Pierre's face is "altered with passion," and, if the world's end is his pole of desire, it is because his Self, threatened by the attractions of involvement with outside interests such as family, needs the anonymity of strange places to be satisfied. Alone and free, he shapes the world in his own image. What his mother does not realize is that, though he may return, each flight further strengthens his role as an exile and reinforces the attraction of the Self-dominated world. Pierre himself seems to realize how fully his actions are becoming shaped by one kind of desire: before leaving his mother's house, he grabs one of his childhood treasures, a small leaden image of St. Anthony of Padua. The gesture is futile and sad, for Anthony had, in his time, campaigned against vice, but Pierre's actions carry him further and further from civilized ways, and closer and closer to a dark and savage life bordering on criminality. The significant difference between Pierre and Charcoal is that the Indian's life is jarred by one quick, unthinking act—a murder—whereas the white man's is determined by a comparatively deliberate choice of the desires of the Self over those of the Other or community.

The lives of several other of Scott's characters show that, as a person chooses the Self over Others, elements in the outside world reciprocate, pushing the self-exiled one yet further out-

ward. Firmian, in Scott's *Untitled Novel*, begins his journey into permanent self-exile at an early age, running away from home and parents while still a boy. His life afterwards is a tale of increasingly antisocial acts which culminate in murder and his permanent sinking into a criminal underworld. His career as an outlaw finally causes his circle of opposing desires to be broken, a pattern of behavior that is repeated by other characters such as Laus in "Tete-Jaune." Laus arouses more sympathy than characters such as Firmian and Pierre because his separation from family and community is not altogether his doing: he is a victim of his father's misunderstanding and unintentional cruelty. Laus, the father's natural son, might never have adopted the circling pattern of exile and return had the father not become obsessed with the bastard son, Tete-Jaune, aptly called "Desire." But once begun, Laus's circling becomes ever more pronounced until he kills Desire and is forced to flee forever the vengeful wrath of law and society. Ironically, Laus's natural and strong desire had been to find identity and place in his family and community, but his course is the same as if he had tried consciously to satisfy the demands of a Self desiring to live isolated from its social context.

The circular pattern of desires is made clearer in the lives of Pierre, Laus, Firmian, and Charcoal because inner conflict has an outer correlative that is easily observed. The pattern is also present in the story "Paul Farlotte," though without the drama of murders, chases, and extreme personality types seen in the other tales. The result is much subtler, and the physical act of circling becomes a circling that is almost entirely psychological and imaginative.

Paul Farlotte is a bachelor teacher; one pole of his desires is represented in the story by three related interests or passions: gardening, through which he escapes the reality of his frustrating teaching job; reading Montaigne's philosophy; and dreaming of travels to France. The interrelatedness of these interests is highlighted by the fact that the trip to France would also be a return to Paul's birthplace, a pilgrimage to Montaigne's home, and a long-postponed visit to Paul's mother. The trip is planned and cancelled every year; it is a gentle obsession that allows him to make plans, dream, and forget the duties of his job. So strong is the vision of return "home" that Paul's garden becomes haunted by a ghostly dream-voice:

So it came to be a sort of companionship for him, this haunting voice; and sometimes one could have seen him in his garden stretch out his hand and smile, as if he were welcoming an invisible guest. Sometimes the guest was not invisible, but

took body and shape, and was a real presence; and often Paul was greeted with visions of things that had been, or that would be, and saw figures where, for other eyes, hung only the impalpable air.¹²

At the end of the story, the voice is revealed as his mother's; her invisible presence offers him a way to escape his surroundings by projecting himself into an ideal future. The stronger those desires which lead inwards towards self-satisfaction become, the less Paul functions as a part of the immediate, outer world. Visions in the garden, dreams of travelling to France, even the act of reading philosophy—all are aspects of this private and limiting experience.

The other pole for Paul is concern for his neighbors, the St. Denis family. The children lack a mother or father, and the oldest daughter, Marie, is losing her fight to keep the family together emotionally and financially. It is solely because he is concerned with their welfare, we are told, that Paul, year after year, postpones his trip. The shifting of Paul's attention from his personal desires to the welfare of Marie's family is much like the daily movement of the sun's shadow over their homes, which seemed "to figure the connection that existed between the two houses" (104). The cycle appears endless, with the movement of the shadow being repeated as surely as Paul's desires to move from the pole of Self-absorption to the pole of concern for Others. A crisis in the St. Denis family finally forces Paul to make a choice and break the perpetual orbit.

The crisis does not occur as a visitation of forces from outside the lives of the characters, but, rather, is a direct result of their interrelatedness. Marie knows that Paul Farlotte always postpones his trip because of her family's needs—he tends their yard and generally looks after maintenance—so she selflessly attempts to make preparations for his travelling. Her concern, however, has many unexpected results. She sends a brother, Guy, up to their attic for a trunk which Paul can use for packing, but while Guy is on the errand, he discovers the remnants of his father's fatal obsession, a mechanical invention. Guy, in a re-enactment of his father's behavior, falls prey to the obsession, and Paul, seeing in these events a shadowy version of his own descent into a world of self, inaction, and detachment, determines, once and for all, to abandon his trip to help the St. Denis family. Having made his decision, Paul experiences a peaceful satisfaction:

¹² In *The Village of Viger* (1898; rpt. Toronto: Ryerson, 1948) 104.

All night long Monsieur Farlotte walked in his garden, patient and undisturbed, fixing his duty so that nothing could root it out. He found the comfort that comes to those who give up some exceeding deep desire of the heart. . . . (113)

At last one desire has overpowered its opposite, so much so that Scott is able to show, symbolically, that Paul's desire for the trip to France (including the visit to see his mother) is killed. The dream world of the Self protests against his decision at first, and the voice in the garden grows louder until:

Early one morning, as he was working in his garden around a growing pear-tree, he fell into a sort of stupor, and sinking down quietly on his knees he leaned against the slender stem for support. He saw a garden much like his own, flooded with the clear sunlight, in the shade of an arbour an old woman in a white cap was leaning back in a wheeled chair, her eyes were closed, she seemed asleep. (114)

Paul tells Marie the next day that he knows his mother is dead; unlike Marie who wonders how Paul could know such a thing, the reader interprets the death vision as one of several indications that the pole of inner-directed attraction is weakening.

The final vision of Paul's mother is followed by other significant images:

Gradually the vision faded away, and Paul Farlotte found himself leaning against his pear-tree, which was almost too young as yet to support his weight. The bell was ringing from St. Joseph's, and had shaken the swallows from their nests in the steeple in the clear air. He heard their cries as they flew into his garden, and he heard the voices of his neighbor children as they played around the house. (114)

Having lost the support of one vision, Paul finds strength in another—the pear-tree. The pun implied by the sound of "pear" shows that Paul's new strength comes from his "paired" situation with the St. Denis family: the physical support of the tree that he tends is analogous to the purpose his life gains from the family he has been helping to support. The circularity of Paul's previous path of desires is replaced by an enlargement of interest around one pole of interest, an emphasis that approximates to the distinctive pear-shape. Hanging as it ripens, the pear appears to have shifted its mass from the top of the fruit to the bottom.

The images following the pear further underscore Paul's shift preoccupation with the dream-image of France and mother, to concern with the realities of his new-found manhood and "fatherhood". The ringing churchbell originates from a spot named for one of the most famous surrogate fathers of western mythology, Joseph. Swallows fly from the church into Paul's garden, a fact of no particular importance unless the reader considers that these are "the" swallows and remembers that the only others mentioned in the story were described by Paul as having nested in the eaves of his childhood home in France. Flying through time and levels of consciousness, the birds signal the departure from governing childish desires and visions to those of adult commitment. The vision of the child who was Paul in the past is replaced by the voices of the St. Denis children playing next door in the present. Paul becomes a "father" as he commits himself to them, giving up his dream vision of his mother, his child-self, and his "exceeding deep desire of the heart" (113). Scott had playfully foreshadowed the change in Paul's life by placing in the midst of the idealized thoughts on France the mention of the essayist, Montaigne. In the context of the story, the brief and vague reference brings to mind the skeptical philosopher's belief that one should follow the best that is in nature by living a life that is both good and harmonious with one's environment.¹³

Paul Farlotte's growth to awareness and maturity is representative of both a recurring structural pattern of ambivalence and a central thematic issue in Scott's writing. Like so many other characters and narrative voices created by Scott, Paul discovers the anguish of moral responsibility. Glenn Clever, in defining this dimension of Scott's work, has rightly said that the author tries "to express that kind of life that a world of moral confusion gives rise to. . . ." ¹⁴ Certainly, from the middle-class teacher who must choose between self-indulgent dreams and a commitment to his new family and community, to the Indian who must choose between the dictates of inner urgings and those of a new cultural identity, the characters are torn between the private self and the outer world. For some of these people, irresolution seems unavoidable; but for others, like Paul, there is fulfillment in accepting what Gerald Graff calls the "resisting reality" of a world that includes "death, the social nature of man, the irrevol-

¹³ See Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1979); see chapter 3 in particular.

¹⁴ Glenn Clever, "Duncan Campbell Scott's Fiction: Moral Realism and Canadian Identity," *The Duncan Campbell Scott Symposium* 88.

cability of historical events and changes. . . . "¹⁵ Exploring the paths between Self and Other, Scott tests the promises and limitations of solipism; his idealistic vision of a better life drew him, finally, to accept self-sacrifice and compromise as a price for a fuller existence.

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¹⁵ *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1979) 204.