

## "THE BITTERNESS AND THE GREATNESS": READING F. G. SCOTT'S WAR

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Among the pockets of Canadian literature still awaiting widespread attention are the more than one hundred works of autobiography and fiction that focus on personal experience at the front during World War I. Narratives both as early and now obscure as McKelvey Bell's *The First Canadians in France* (1917) and Jean Blewett's *Heart Stories* (1919), and as recent and well-received as Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (1977) and John Gray's *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (1981), belong to a discrete body of work that can be defined by similarities that extend beyond the inevitable commonality of situation and event. And apart from their obvious interest as records of personal response to the undeniable horrors of this war, such texts offer the modern reader a site for analyzing a pivotal event in the history of Canadian sensibility: the development of what Paul Fussell, in his study of British literature of the Great War, calls the essentially ironic modern understanding. In Canadian literature, this development reveals itself in the shift from the use of conventional romance language and structures in narratives published during or immediately after the war to an increasingly conscious ironic reversal of such conventions in later texts.

Frederick George Scott's 1922 memoir, *The Great War As I Saw It* (along with his poems, such as his 1917 volume *In The Battle Silences*) is among the best-known of the early Canadian accounts of World War I. As a chaplain of the Eighth Royal Rifles of Quebec City, Canon Scott volunteered to accompany the first Canadian Expeditionary Division before war was even declared, and he remained overseas until after Armistice. The range of emotional experience he draws on (broadened by the fact that he had three sons in the Canadian forces, of whom one was killed and a second gassed), and the detail he provides of daily life, make his memoir a valuable document in the study of the impact

of the war. Furthermore, Scott's memoir embodies both aspects of the movement from romance to irony: it is first of all, in its language, imagery, and value structure, a romance and, secondly, in its subtext, an ironic undermining of this interpretation of war.

## I

Although in the 1990s it is impossible to remain unconscious of the horrors of war and the tenuousness of war heroics, this modern understanding was unavailable and unthinkable to the generation that fought World War I. Recruiting slogans praising a noble fight in a just cause and a knightly crusade against evil, which would draw jeers or at least raised eyebrows today, in 1914 inspired the patriotic response of hundreds of thousands of Canadians who, with Canon Scott, were prepared to sacrifice themselves to protect the Empire. Almost universally—and almost certainly for the last time—soldiers marched off with glowing expectations of high adventure, heroism, and decency, firmly caught up in an image of war as romance. Faced with a traumatic experience for which, as historians such as D.J. Goodspeed and Carl Berger document, they were neither morally nor psychologically prepared, Canadian writers publishing during the war or shortly after it tried to express their experience by naively using the literary conventions made familiar in historical romances. These narratives depend particularly on conventions of the medieval romance as identified by Gillian Beer and Northrop Frye—the episodic pattern of the break with identity and the journey into the alienating underworld and back, the themes of love and adventure, the simple polarized characters, and so on—at the same time as implicitly honouring the chivalric values traditionally embedded in the romance genre.

Early narratives about war participants frequently open in Canada to describe the immediate pre-army life of the protagonist and his or her motivation to enlist, training in Canada, and journeys to England, France, and the front. From this point, the narratives detail the protagonists' movements to trenches, rest areas, hospitals, to different locations in England and France on leave, and back to duty at the front, until—in the case of many of the male heroes—a final wound ends the personal experience of war and sends the individual safely, if not quite soundly, back to

Canada. Such narratives are preoccupied with journeys and the meeting of trial after trial along the way in the style of the medieval romance, the goal appearing to be the glorious rescue of Europe and the British Empire from ignoble Germany.

True to this journey motif, Scott describes his movements during four years: to Valcartier, to Salisbury Plain, to France and the front, to and from various billets, hospitals, churches, trenches and dugouts, to the second battle of Ypres, the battle of the Somme, the capture of Vimy Ridge, and the battle of Amiens. The narrative appears obsessed with aspects of the physical situation. Chapters are defined by a single setting or series of settings and often dwell on transportation difficulties which the narrator experiences or observes: the vagaries of French railway travel, the shell-pitted roads, the mud, the darkness, the ambulances, the horses, the sidecars, and, when (as Scott sometimes finds) the Lord does not provide alternative forms of conveyance, the Canon's own feet.

Scott's narrator's experience is true to that of the romance hero. The break in consciousness which conventionally begins the hero's adventures occurs in the memoir when, during his isolation and confusion in Ypres, he is told that a general retreat is underway, "one of the most awful moments in my life" (Scott 58). He wanders back and forth searching for his company, alienated by his ignorance of what is actually happening and by his innocent use of language (such as the word "retreat") that is considered inappropriate. His eventual meeting with members of the Canadian Sixteenth Battalion rescues him from this experience of fear and loneliness; he remarks, "never before was I more glad to meet human beings" (61). However, in terms of his memoir's pattern as a romance, he is not rescued: this incident marks the beginning of his downward plunge, his descent into the night world of war.

At this point, he experiences the cruelty, horror, and separation of the romance hero entering the demonic world—an archetypal portrayal of the war front as Scott saw it. For example, consider the setting he travels through to locate the body of his son. On his way through the darkness to the trenches, he passes the bodies of four dead horses, then is passed in turn by "a troop of mounted men carrying ammunition. They wore gas masks, and as they came nearer, and I could see them more distinctly in the moonlight, the long masks with their two big glass eye pieces

gave the men a horse-like appearance. They looked like horses upon horses and did not seem to be like human beings at all" (155). The path through the mud presents "a scene of vast desolation, weird beyond description" (155); looking over the trenches, Scott sees on all sides "a waste of brown mud, made more desolate by the morning mist which clung over everything" (156). This is indeed Frye's subterranean demonic world surrounded by the shapes of animals. That Scott acknowledges the group of mounted horsemen as "one of the strangest sights I had ever seen, and one which fitted in well with the ghostly character of the surroundings" (155) suggests that he recognizes that his experience has its own "ghostly" conventions, those of the underworld.

These scenes of the demonic world at the front are, naturally enough, not uncommon in war narratives and contrast sharply with the upper world previously inhabited by the protagonist. In Scott's memoir, the contrast appears in his nostalgia for the other world he glimpses in his various billets. His descriptions frequently employ romance imagery: the rosemary bush in the garden smells like "peaceful times . . . the middle ages, with that elusive suggestion of incense which reminded me of Gothic fanes and picturesque processions" (113); the forest near the Chateau is lit by "a mysterious light suggestive of fairyland" (257); and the swan in the artificial lake at Bedford House inspires "something very poetical . . . living on through the scene of desolation, like the spirit of the world that had passed away. It brought back memories of the life that had gone, and the splendour of an age which had left Ypres forever" (127). These images suggest the powerful appeal of a fantasy world identified with the past, the details alluding both to the Victorian revival of chivalry, as described and related to the war by Mark Girouard, and to romantic poetry. The quality of enchantment, the "fairyland," only heightens the opposition between this ideal world and the demonic world of Canon Scott's war front reality, in keeping with the romance's central polarization of the ideal and the abhorrent worlds. Beyond this polarized nostalgia, images of chivalry are associated with more than the remote and irrecoverable past; Scott sees them all around him, very much in the present. The narrative is fraught with words from the chivalric lexicon: soldiers are "gallant" (206, 275), "noble" (299, 301, 317), and "knight-like" (24, 299); scenes are "glorious" (25, 180, 317); a bombardment is like a "romance" (241). The pervasiveness of such imagery and language in war

narratives such as Scott's, though sometimes undermined by irony, advances the values embedded in the chivalric interpretation of experience.

In this world of heightened contrasts and horrible sensuous detail, the romance narrative proceeds in a highly discontinuous, episodic manner. Logically enough, since it derives directly from his war diary, Scott's story unfolds in an order detailed by diary dates, the chronology alone serving to draw together various unrelated incidents. Episode follows episode with virtually no transition. A single paragraph, for example, describes "merry parties" in dugouts at the front, two cheerful men whose dinner preparation is interrupted and buried by a shell burst, and the sad death of a young man who is a favourite in his company (105). All that ties these incidents together is their occurrence within a prescribed time frame, their "and then" relation. While it is arguable that they all contribute to the final statement in this paragraph that "the men were being united more and more closely in the bonds of a common sympathy and a tender helpfulness" (106), the abrupt shifts between them suggest they are only co-incidentally juxtaposed.

Within this episodic structure, Canon Scott's intermittent efforts to take part in military activities reflect, along with his patriotism and pride in the Canadian army, his sense of the war as an archetypal adventure. Acting temporarily as a runner with a message about enemy movements, he feels "exceedingly proud at being able to do something which might possibly avert an attack upon our men" (250). Then, during the bombardment he has "ordered," he says he feels "like the fly on the axle of a cart, who said to his companion fly, 'Look at the dust we are making'" (250). On another occasion, he leads a company of "young heroes" into the trenches: "the humour of the situation was so palpable that the men felt as if they were going to a picnic" (250). Perhaps one of Scott's most memorable adventures as a pseudo-combatant is his taking of three German prisoners:

I was going on ahead when I came to a large shell-hole that had been made in some previous battle. At the bottom of it lay three apparently dead Huns. I was looking down at them wondering how they had been killed, as they were not messed about. I thought they must have died of shell-shock, until one of them moved his hand. At once I shouted, "Kamarad," and to my intense amusement the three men lying on their

backs put up their hands and said, "Kamarad! mercy! mercy!"  
 It was most humorous to think that three human beings  
 should appeal to me to spare their lives. (277)

Scott maintains this attitude even after being wounded, not questioning the value of a thrilling event that hurts so much, but rather regretfully feeling that "the great adventure of my life among the most glorious men that the world has ever produced was over" (317).

The theme of adventure and the values of chivalry are drawn together in a metaphor which runs through much World War I literature. This metaphor extends a popular saying—little more than a cliché in some ways—that nonetheless urges the connection between war and romance: the image of the war as a game, a contest to be played in the best chivalrous, sportsman-like behavior. Canon Scott incorporates the language of the game as part of his determinedly cheerful approach to his "boys." Meeting a group of men heading up to reinforce the line, he says: "That's all right, boys, play the game. I will go with you" (60-61). Later he conducts a leave trip to Rome and requests the soldiers' cooperation and good behavior by asking them to "play the game" (216). The value of sportsmanship becomes clear when Scott describes his aversion to the popular "crown and anchor" game, a board game which guarantees the banker success with odds of sixty-four to one and which, during the war, became a trap for naive "green youths" (264). Scott makes a habit of breaking up these games and, on one occasion, begins a sermon on dishonesty by producing a crown and anchor board and giving the impression that he is about to play the game himself (265-66). There are games and games, then, but true gentlemen of the Empire know the right way to play a game, and they understand what Scott means when, in his address as they disembark in Canada after the war, he asks them to "continue to play the game out here as they had played it in France" (319-20).

In war stories, the love element typical to romance is frequently not the conventional boy-meets-girl, hero-meets-heroine story, but rather either an idealization of such relationships or a translation of their bonds into love among men. To Scott, the mothers and sweethearts of dying men to whom he must write farewells and condolences are ideal objects of devotion and loyalty, rather than realistic characters (for example, 283). Not surprisingly, since women are scarce at the front, his work speaks of

love much more frequently as an element in friendships between males, in terms of brotherhood between equals. "As the war went on," he argues, "the men were being united more and more closely in the bonds of a common sympathy and a tender helpfulness. To the enemy, until he was captured, they were flint and iron; to one another they were friends and brothers" (196). These bonds are emphasized in a contrast to the "brave patient hearts" still at home, who "knew not the comradeship and the exaltation of feeling which came to those who were in the thick of things at the front" (133). In addition, the chivalric relationship between a knight and his squire—what Fussell terms a passionate but non-physical "crush"—is clearly an operating principle in the fighting of this war. Canon Scott is plainly devoted to his "boys" and sensitive to his inability, as a chaplain removed from the actual fighting, to fully comprehend their experience. One way he describes this bond is in terms of mutual honour and respect: shaking hands with "those glorious lads who had done such great things for the world was an honour and a privilege" (180). According to Paul Fussell, this war sanctioned the expression of the theme of beautiful suffering lads as none before, and Scott certainly subscribes to this emotion. He is also protective of the men's morale and makes a point of hiding his concern about recent losses, instead taking every opportunity to give "a word of cheer and encouragement" (197).

Narratives such as Scott's uphold the chivalric code of honour, the brotherhood of knightly warriors, and the rigidity of absolute values and truths. The adversarial nature of war sets up a simplistic belief in the rightness of the cause—a belief which accords with the romance pattern wherein moral facts are polarized and ambiguities avoided. The war presents a simple choice, Scott tells his "boys": "Victory or Slavery" (162), based on "the unquestioning faith in the eternal rightness of right and duty which characterized those who were striving to the death for the salvation of the world" (117). The connection of this belief with the world of romance is clear in Scott's naming of his mobile church, wherever he locates it, for St George, the knightly, dragon-slaying patron saint of England who perfectly symbolizes the association of chivalry with military imperialism (176, 233).

For St George, for the motherland, for the victimized women of the world, soldiers take arms against the enemy. And to Canon Scott, it is obvious that the Allied forces are fighting their cause

with God's help. As he sees it, God gives fearful men the strength to "go over the top with the others" (151). Moreover, God demands victory in His name: the night before the Easter attack on Vimy Ridge, Scott wonders,

What did the next twenty-four hours hold in store for us? Was it to be a true Easter for the world, and a resurrection to a new and better life? If death awaited us, what nobler passage could there be to Eternity than such a death in such a cause? Never was the spirit of comradeship higher in the Canadian Corps. Never was there a greater sense of unity. The task laid upon us was a tremendous one, but in the heart of each man, from private to general, was the determination that it should be performed. (166)

Later, in his exhilaration during the battle of Amiens, Scott shouts: "Glory be to God for this barrage!" (277). Such passages suggest his view of the war as a Holy Crusade, a very common interpretation, as Stanley Cooperman and David Marshall have suggested. Similarly, he greets the war's end as evidence that "swiftly and surely the Divine Judge was wreaking vengeance upon the nation that, by its overweening ambition, had drenched the world in blood" (318).

This glorified definition of "us" has as a corollary an equally simplistic definition of "them": the Germans must be sub-humans or, at best, godless barbarians. Scott contrasts them to the French who have such a "quiet dignified bearing, so typical of the chivalrous heroism of France, and so unlike anything we could look for in the officers of the German army" (188). He goes on, "one of the saddest things in the war was that, while we often admired the military efficiency of the Germans, we had absolutely no respect for their officers or men, nor could we regard them as anything but well-trained brutes" (189). The narrative thus deliberately creates a wholly unambiguous polarization of its characters—the Allies as comradely, the Germans as barbarous—which adheres to the black and white world of romance and, at the same time, embodies the "gross dichotomizing" which Fussell regards as the persistent imaginative habit of modern times.

Ultimately, many episodes and much love and hate later, the romance hero survives this journey to the lower world and returns to the world of identity. In Scott's case, this climax is reached when he and many of the original first contingent sail



back into Quebec. "Like those awaking from a dream," they greet Canadian soil and friends (319), concluding Frye's romance analogy to falling asleep and entering a dream world. Scott's final speech to his boys and his readers signals this awakening and bounce upward to identity:

I told them what they had done for Canada and what Canada owed them and how proud I was to have been with them. I asked them to continue to play the game out here as they had played it in France. Then, telling them to remove their caps, as this was our last church parade, I pronounced the Benediction, said "Goodbye, boys," and turned homewards.

(319-20)

Thus Scott—and his "boys"—joins romance heroes who, since Ulysses, have "turned homewards" at trial's end and faded out of sight after the story's last words into the ordinary reality of "happy ever after."

Through all of this, Scott uses various devices to develop an image of his younger self which acknowledges more complexity than do many early narratives, but does so without challenging the development of his text as a romance. He is, for example, forthcoming about his debt to luck, an intrinsic part of the current of energy attributed to the romance hero. In addition, his charm as a chivalrous gentleman is also evident, particularly in his good-natured and self-effacing humour. This predominant trait succeeds in the narrative through his gentle mixture of exaggeration and sincerity. For example, an ongoing fondness for reciting his poetry leads him to insist on completing a poem he has begun as a "reward" for a friend's warm greeting despite shells falling nearby, until he is left alone "standing in the road with the last part of the poem and its magnificent climax still in my throat" (196)—indignantly implying that he fails to understand his friend's discomfort. Obviously, if this account is accurate, Scott is behaving as absurdly as the batman he has already complained about, who recites to him whenever the Canon scolds him (18-19), and is kept alive in such situations by either luck or the supernatural. He continually pokes fun at himself through his poetry, mentioning that guards deprived of a recitation seem "more amused than disappointed" (236) and deciding that his poems would protect him in case of capture since "they always put my friends to flight and would probably have the same effect upon my foes" (238).

This self-mockery attracts the reader's sympathy and respect because the underlying concerns are valid, the surrounding narrative compassionate and sincere, and the absurdity so clear that the reader is left with a sense of Scott's trustworthiness. His humour succeeds by introducing into the factual, realistic reporting of places and events a kind of fiction which is outrageously unapologetic and impossible to verify. In this blend of fantasy with fact, Scott becomes an authentic and altogether engaging romance hero to whom the reader listens quite seriously.

Scott's narrative, then, recreates the war experience by adhering quite closely to the traditional conventions of medieval romance. Elements common to the romance pattern are pervasive: the journey, the natural chronology of events, the protagonist's descent into a demonic world where he experiences unrelated adventures, the stress on the importance of love and the distinction between those he loves and those he hates, the narrative's simplistic belief in the war cause and other chivalric values, the protagonist's final ascent and reintegration into a world of harmony, and the careful constitution of the protagonist as a chivalrous, heroic figure. In following this pattern, *The Great War As I Saw It* is typical of many other narratives published during or shortly after the war, including Gertrude Arnold's *Sister Anne! Sister Anne!* (1919), William Bishop's *Winged Warfare* (1918), Ralph Connor's *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land* (1928), Arthur Gibbons' *A Guest of the Kaiser* (1919), Robert Manion's *A Surgeon in Arms* (1918) and Harold Peat's *Private Peat* (1917). The prevalence of documentary detail in Scott's text, as in numerous other war narratives, represents an attempt to be "realistic," but it is far outweighed by the impulse towards romance.

Many narratives contemporary with Scott's, notably Manion's and Peat's, are overtly propagandistic—and even Canon Scott, the exception, waves his banner for the cause. This propagandizing in early works goes beyond the demands of wartime censorship; as Peter Buitenhuis comments in *The Great War of Words*, "writers exceeded mere complicity in the illusions created by censorship. They embellished the tales of barbarism and blood-lust on the part of the Germans, suppressed reports of staff incompetence, and sustained the myth of the high quality of British leadership" (101). This fact further consolidates the connection between these narratives and the rigid values embedded in the romance genre. Clearly, in writing so faithfully within this

conservative convention, writers were reacting to a bewildering destruction of values by recreating their experience within available structures that provided a stable—even if objectively no longer valid—value system.

## II

According to modern understanding, the Great War was not at all the glorious game that early narratives describe. In contrast to the early texts, war narratives published only ten or fifteen years after the war begin to make a dramatic shift away from an innocent use of romance—and to achieve this shift through the application of irony to the war experience. It is only with the passage of time that such an ironic interpretation of events can emerge, as Fussell argues, and the turmoil and disillusionment of the immediate postwar years fostered this development in Canadian texts. Yet the first indications of a tendency towards irony are subtle and, apparently, unintentional, arising from opportunities within the romance convention itself for ironic deflations of the comforting belief that victory always goes to the just cause, for portrayals of adventure as a chaos of fortuitous happenings lacking providential control, and for variations in chronology to reveal contrasts between events. Later narratives parody (in Linda Hutcheon's sense of the term) the early texts with a number of critical differences, combining many of the trappings of romance with an ironic awareness that ultimately alters, in some cases disrupting and preventing, the successful completion of the pattern. The development of irony in these narratives is reflected in language and structures which either include an ironic subtext or consciously structure themselves as parodies, following the romance paradigm yet also challenging and undermining its values. Canon Scott's memoir, for all its polished use of the familiar conventions, cannot fully conceal its ironic subtext. In this awareness of the failure of its own reading of the war, it is both atypical of early works and suggestive of those that follow.

Canon Scott, as a narrator, ultimately finds that the romance model does not accurately describe what he has experienced. His episodic recording of both the pleasures and costs of war creates striking but unacknowledged juxtapositions that contribute to a larger pattern of irony. The contrast, for instance, separating

"ghastly" stories of death and lost nerve from tales of "wonderful deeds" of heroism (139) is not overtly noted, nor is the irony in the dual experience of vulnerability (exposure to bombing raids) and safety (the shade of the trees) in a given landscape (185). The understated reporting of such ironic opposites heightens their effect. Similarly, the episodic structure of romance allows the narrator to record incident after incident with minimal need to relate them, the forward thrust of the narrative being provided by its chronology. The result is almost a collage of scenes, some noble, some humorous, and some horrible, with an underlying unstated irony of simple incongruity appearing in the frequent contrasts and gaps where the narrator avoids drawing a conclusion or passing an opinion. The reader encountering these conflicting images senses an opposition between the Great War as Scott saw it and the Great War as he would like to have seen it.

At some points, Scott suggests an interpretation of a contrast that reiterates positive values in keeping with the romance convention. For example, when recalling the rescue of a man who has fallen overboard en route to England, he comments, "Often in our battles when we saw the hideous slaughter of human beings, I have thought of the care for the individual life which stopped that great fleet in order to save one man" (28). Scott uses this incident—surely open to an ironic reading—to suggest that the army has an overriding interest in the welfare of the individual. In much the same way, he rewrites his awareness of the horrible cost of war after spending an evening with the 14th Battalion:

As I returned in the twilight and gazed far away over the waste land towards the bank of low clouds in the eastern sky, my heart grew sick at the thought of all those fine young men might have to endure before the crowning victory came. The thought of the near presence of the Angel of Death was always coming up in the mind, changing and transfiguring into something nobler and better our earthly converse. (301)

Alongside this rationalization lurks the admission of the horrors of his experience, tacitly but ironically contrasting a heart grown "sick" with a mind comforted by an ennobling Angel of Death.

In many places, however, the potential for irony asserts itself directly into Scott's narrative, revealing a persistent subtext beneath the romance pattern. The repetition of the word "romance," for example, illustrates a contradiction between the "ex-

traordinary romance of being out in the front line during . . . a bombardment" (241) and the equally powerful experience of the "glorious romance of being out of the war-zone" in Willerval (177). Wartime reality is not accurately described by the Canon's favourite romance imagery, and he begins to point out the failings himself, particularly connecting descriptions of natural attractions with the awareness that he cannot enjoy them in the present. For instance, he describes at length the beauties of the grounds at Etrun and concludes, "How one did long for the war to end, so that we might be able to lie down in the grass, free from anxiety, and enjoy the drenching sunlight and the spring song of the birds" (247).

Scott's polite and affirmative language is not always appropriate in the war and offers an opening for the development of an ironic reading. In one case, he describes an Allied gas attack as "wonderful to behold" and remarks to his less enthusiastic companions, who are at the front for the first time,

it was a beautiful night and [I] pointed out to them the extraordinary romance of being actually out in the front line during such a bombardment. They seemed to get more enthusiastic later on, but the next morning I was wakened in my room by the laughter of men on the other side of the canvas wall, and I heard one old soldier telling, to the amusement of his fellows, of my visit on the previous evening. He said, "We were out there with the shells falling round us, and who should come up but the Canon, and the first thing the old beggar said was, 'Boys, what a lovely night it is'."

(241-42)

While the pervasive humour in the narrative functions here, as frequently, to avoid directly acknowledging the conflict between romance and reality, Scott obviously recognizes the artifice of his romance interpretation. He is also typical of many later war writers in characterizing his experience as somehow resistant to language: "too deep and indefinable to be expressed in words" (11), "too horrible to be described" (141), "unutterable" (214).

Evidently Scott is aware of the war's effect on his use of and trust in language. He points out that his frequent eulogizing of men heading for the front—"it's a great day for Canada, boys"—has come to mean that half of those boys are going to be killed (62). He also recalls watching a battalion return, wet and muddy, from the trenches, the day before Christmas, 1915, and wishing

them a Merry Christmas: "my intentions were of the best, but I was afterwards told that it sounded to the men like the voice of one mocking them in their misery" (118). The next day, during the unofficial truce at the front, "the words 'A Merry Christmas' had got back their old-time meaning" (119)—and the reader joins Scott in hoping that the "old-time meaning" is back to stay. At the end of this chapter, he reverses chronology in reporting the day's events:

Not long after midnight, once again the pounding of the old war was resumed, and as I went to bed in the dugout that night, I felt from what a sublime height the world had dropped. We had two more war Christmases in France, but I always look back upon that first one as something unique in its beauty and simplicity.

When I stood on the parapet that day looking over at the Germans in their trenches, and thought how two great nations were held back for a time in their fierce struggle for supremacy, by their devotion to a little Child born in a stable in Bethlehem two thousand years before, I felt that there was still promise of a regenerated world. The Angels had not sung in vain their wonderful hymn "Glory to God in the Highest and on Earth Peace, Good Will towards men."

(120-21)

Although on the surface this artificial order promotes a positive interpretation of the day's events, the possibility of irony at the protagonist's expense exists in the double perspective afforded to the reader who knows of Scott's disillusionment with the world that has "dropped"—which the passage forecasts in the first paragraph—before learning that he saw "promise of a regenerated world" earlier in the day. The promise becomes a rather pathetic effort to smooth away the earlier recognition.

Scott uses a similar technique near the end of his narrative which describes his being wounded by a shell (316): several pages before the description of the incident, he includes a premonition that he has had his last ride on his horse (304). The preparation for this event stands out against the chronologically-ordered anecdotal style of the work as a whole, suggesting that his upholding of the romance values of courage and self-sacrifice is not unmarked by a very real fear of pain and death. In spite of the well-developed romance perspective, then, Scott must acknowledge the gruesome reality of his experience. At times, this

experience of the irony of events is simply horrible, such as his finding something red on the ground, "a piece of a man's lung with the windpipe attached" (157); at others it is almost indecently unfair: he congratulates a slightly wounded officer, who would now be able to return in good conscience to his new wife, only seconds before the man and his stretcher-bearers are killed by a shell (295). In the narration of these incidents are indications of a subtle undercurrent towards an ironic awareness which the romance pattern cannot entirely restrain.

Scott's experience of wartime reality cracks the brittle surface of many of his romance ideals. Attempting to report the war honestly, he cannot help finding that the Germans, viewed from afar as sub-human and godless, prove to be admirable human beings on closer examination. In fact, he begins to collect impressions of the Germans which contradict their polarized characterization as the enemy. A dying prisoner to whom he offers a benediction, is a "beautifully developed man;" of him Scott says, "I never saw anyone more brave" (142). Yet he is still "the dying, friendless enemy, who had made expiation in his blood for the sins of his guilty nation" (142). Later, however, there is a subtle change in the Canon's designation of the enemy. Ministering to Germans wounded at Amiens, he notes one who kisses his hand as he gives back Scott's crucifix: "it was strange to think that an hour before, had we met, we should have been deadly enemies" (279). This dying man is not automatically alien by virtue of his German uniform.

Just as experience erodes Scott's image of the deadly foe, it also weakens his confidence in his supposed friends, the Allied authorities. He learns that a Canadian, whose shell-shattered body is "a sight too horrible to be described" (141), was originally a volunteer who, for some offence, had received a long period of field punishment and a cut in pay: "For seventy cents a day he had come as a voluntary soldier to fight in the great war, and for seventy cents a day he had died this horrible death . . . I felt like dipping that page of the man's paybook in his blood to blot out the memory of the past" (141-42). He is clearly disturbed by the victimization of men by army authority, although inclined to balance his discussion of this aspect of war with an attempt to understand the official policy. Chapter XXII, "A Tragedy of War," is devoted to Scott's involvement in the execution of a deserter. The chaplain arrives to prepare the condemned man spiritually

for death but quickly comes to feel such sympathy for him that he spends several unsuccessful hours trying to have the sentence revoked. The accused's last moments, the execution and its aftermath, though "unutterable" (214), are described in detail. In his conclusion to this section, Scott's anger towards "shirkers" betrays his confusion about the rightness of authority:

I have seen many ghastly sights in the war, and hideous forms of death. I have heard heart-rending tales of what men have suffered, but nothing ever brought home to me so deeply, and with such cutting force, the hideous nature of war and the iron hand of discipline, as did that lonely death on the misty hillside in the early morning. Even now, as I write this brief account of it, a dark nightmare seems to rise out of the past and almost makes me shrink from facing once again memories that were so painful. It is well, however, that people should know what our men had to endure. Before them were the German shells, the machine-guns and the floods of gas. Behind them, if their courage failed, was the court-martial, always administered with great compassion and strict justice, but still bound by inexorable laws of war to put into execution, when duty compelled, a grim and hideous sentence of death.

If this book should fall into the hands of any man who, from cowardice, shirked his duty in the war, and stayed at home, let him reflect that, but for the frustration of justice, he ought to have been sitting that morning, blindfolded and handcuffed, beside the prisoner on the box. HE was one of the originals and a volunteer. (214-15)

Even more damaging to his illusions is the shooting of Scott's little dog (252-53). Here, the inhumanity of the military police, the enemy behind, acts against an animal victim, and the dog appears as a focus for the pathos inherent in such scenes. Yet it is clear that Scott now questions the infallibility of his superiors and makes a new connection between them and the enemy they are all supposed to be fighting.

From distrusting superiors who would shoot an innocent dog, it is but a small step to doubting the fundamental nobility of the fight in a just cause. Frequently, his syntax reveals the conflict between Scott's ideals and his experience—for example, his use of "however" and "but" in this description of the advance at the Somme:



The army had set its teeth and was out to battle in grim earnest. It was a time, however, of hope and encouragement. . . . If that had been done once it could be done again, and so we pressed on. But the price we had to pay for victory was indeed costly and one's heart ached for the poor men in their awful struggle in that region of gloom and death. This was war indeed, and one wondered how long it was to last. Gradually the sad consciousness came that our advance was checked, but still the sacrifice was not in vain, for our gallant men were using up the forces of the enemy. (139)

A clear event of irony occurs when, during the crossing of the Canal du Nord, Scott meets Cope, who is all that a young knight should be:

I said, "How old are you, Cope?" He replied, "I am twenty." I said, "What a glorious thing it is to be out here at twenty." "Yes," he said, looking towards the valley, "it is a glorious thing to be out here at twenty, but I should like to know what is holding them up." He had hardly spoken when there was a sharp crack of a machine-gun bullet and he dropped at my side. The bullet had pierced his steel helmet and entered his brain. He never recovered consciousness, and died on the way to the aid post. (311)

Once again, faced with an unmistakable irony, Scott leaves the story to speak for itself. At the end of his account, however, he admits to recognizing a change in his values. Lying wounded in a hospital in London on Armistice day, he hears the bells pealing and the "wild rejoicing" in the streets below, and comments, "it seemed to me that behind the ringing of those peals of joy there was the tolling of spectral bells for those who would return no more. The monstrous futility of war as a test of national greatness, the wound in the world's heart, the empty homes, those were the thoughts which in me overmastered all feelings of rejoicing" (318).

Scott's conclusion thus both explicitly completes the romance pattern with the return home of the hero and implicitly acknowledges its inadequacy to tell the story of those "who would return no more." The upward note urged in the turning homeward of his final lines—a romance recovery of harmony which is openly rejected in later works by such writers as Peregrine Acland (1929), Will Bird (1930), and James Pedley (1927)—is largely undermined by Scott's own subtext. Irresistibly, this subtext returns the reader

to the Preface in which Scott's diction has originally underlined his awareness of the duality of his experience:

It is with a feeling of great hesitation that I send out this account of my personal experiences in the Great War. As I read it over, I am dismayed at finding how feebly it suggests the bitterness and the greatness of the sacrifice of our men. As the book is written from an entirely personal point of view, the use of the first personal pronoun is of course inevitable, but I trust that the narration of my experience has been used only as a lens through which the great and glorious deeds of our men may be seen by others. . . .

If, by these faulty and inadequate reminiscences, dug out of memories which have blended together in emotions too deep and indefinable to be expressed in words, I have reproduced something of the atmosphere in which our glorious men played their part in the deliverance of the world, I shall consider my task not in vain. (11)

It seems fair to deduce that Scott's sense of "bitterness" comprises that part of his memory "too deep and indefinable to be expressed in words." Although he rewrites this element on the surface into "greatness," into the conventions of romance, it persists in the ironic juxtapositions, unavoidable scenes of horror and fear, and challenges to his belief in the war cause and army authority. This memoir, published a scant three years after his return from the war, recalls an experience still very much alive in the memory of the writer, with little of the critical distance from events that a greater passage of time affords later war narratives. It is not surprising, then, that acknowledgment of the failure of the romance pattern to describe his experience is restrained. But, in *The Great War As I Saw It*, the reiteration of the war as romance and the persistence of the ironic subtext undeniably create an ultimately unresolved tension. And the implication of a human mind behind the narrative that is sincerely disturbed by this dichotomous experience helps account for the story's appeal to the modern reader.

As an early indicator of the shift from romance to irony in interpreting the war, Scott's work anticipates the presence in later narratives of more developed and overtly portrayed instances of irony, such as Will Bird's grief for friends who are killed, John Gray's questioning of the war cause, James Pedley's fear of death, and Private Fraser's disgust with his superiors (ed. Reginald Roy,

1985). It also predates the search for understanding or comfort described in narratives by Philip Child (1937), Redvers Dent (1930), and Leslie Roberts (n.d., circa 1930), along with the utter rejection of religious or humanistic explanations in the novel by Charles Yale Harrison (1930), and the transformation of all these ironic responses in the affirmation of Timothy Findley's metafiction. In terms of structure, these later works extend Scott's irony to deny their protagonists the characteristic ascent of the romance hero at the end of his quest—the quest itself becoming a journey of the mind with the loss of identifiable friends and home as the only clear outcome. At the same time, they mock the language of romance, particularly the sporting motif and the use of polite euphemism, replacing these conventions with brutally precise diction. Texts published more than ten years after the end of the war embrace this new reading of the war experience, openly and, at times, viciously parodying the now-outdated romance conventions as they portray the war reality—and the modern human condition—as “sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

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