

# D. C. SCOTT'S VIEW OF HISTORY & THE INDIANS

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**A**LTHOUGH THEY MAY DISAGREE — and sometimes disagree heatedly — on aspects of interpretation, critics of Duncan Campbell Scott's literary portrayals of the Indian usually agree on a basic point: Scott held one set of ideals as a bureaucrat and another as an artist. Depending on the critic, Scott is either a racist hypocrite or a vulnerable civil servant who held real — though necessarily hidden — sympathies for the Indian. Even though Scott appeared to be one kind of man, these readers say, he was really quite another. Scott himself, however, was convinced of the intellectual consistency between his bureaucratic work and creative writings, and readers who compare his sense of history with a number of his stories and poems may see how he was able to make the artistic and pragmatic sides of his life compatible.

John Flood delivers what is perhaps the most representative of these critical attacks upon Scott. In the article "The Duplicity of D. C. Scott and the James Bay Treaty," he accuses Scott of having failed the test of "moral engagement" regarding the Indian and the native way of life.<sup>1</sup> Scott, according to Flood, had consciously divided his life into two parts and wilfully ignored as a poet those morally objectionable aspects of the job he encountered as a bureaucrat.

Even for those critics who wish to defend Scott, his Indian policies have been a problem. Robert McDougall, for example, has warned against the dangers posed by a narrow sociological view of the poet:

Aspects of that policy, questioned in some quarters even in Scott's day, have proved prime targets for attack in the native-rights atmosphere of the sixties and seventies. Because Scott implemented government policy, apparently without seriously questioning it, he has suffered the Nuremberg taint of guilt through compliance with unjust orders. Particular charges range from duplicity to genocide. And the reputation of the poetry, wrongly I think, is sometimes brought down with the reputation of the man.<sup>2</sup>

Although his purpose is quite different from Flood's, McDougall again draws a distinction between the sensibilities of the artist and the civil servant. For McDougall, the accomplishment of the artist comes first, and should remain untainted by other aspects of a man's life.

More recently, Gerald Lynch has argued that, although Scott began his career as a hard-nosed bureaucrat, he softened his attitude as he came into immediate

contact with the Indians. Eventually, he says, Scott was “resigned to the inevitability of assimilation, though certainly not the cold-hearted assimilation that critics of the socio-political school of Scott criticism read into the Indian poems.”<sup>3</sup> Lynch qualifies his defence, however, saying that Scott was moved by the “loss of a people and a way of life worthy of preservation, if only in the poetry.” We can attribute differences between the poetry and official statements, evidently, to the inherent constraints of Scott’s official position.

An examination of pertinent prose writings reveals Scott believed that historical process necessitated the death of old orders, and that Indian culture was one of these archaic forms. He saw himself as a manager of that process — and not an unwilling one as is sometimes suggested. A high level of consistency exists between his official position, expressed often in the non-fiction prose, and his artistic depiction of Indians. This unity of vision has not been recognized by critics who have previously seen the medicine man in “Powassan’s Drum,” for example, as a poet figure or as an expression of the nobility of Indian culture.

Like a significant number of his contemporaries in Canada, Scott accepted current Victorian concepts of history and change. Because he believed in the necessity and inevitability of change — what he and his fellow English Canadians often called “progress” — he was able to view the death of Indian culture as beneficial to *individual* Indians. I emphasize the word individual because Scott clearly distinguished between the Indian as a separate person and the Indian as a racial group with distinctive cultural and religious values. A life-long admirer of Matthew Arnold, Scott undoubtedly saw in the Indians a clear illustration that, caught in the shifts of historical change, many people would become pathetic creatures “Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born.”<sup>4</sup>

Works such as “The Half-Breed Girl,” “The Onondaga Madonna” and “Watkwenies” show a people suffering a racial and cultural death, but these poems also depict individuals who suffer tragically because they are neither of the past nor yet of the future.

Scott was determined, for both himself and his culture, to avoid being similarly helpless in the face of change. Through public service, he claimed in 1892 in a Mermaid Inn newspaper column, one could shape the future:

By this service we are linked to the past, and its throes are triumphant in us. So between the two abysses we stand conservators of the past, pioneers of the future. But we are most of all pioneers, the function of our service is one for progress, for advance; by these acts of humanity and usefulness we increase the store of the beauty and goodness of the race.<sup>5</sup>

Convinced this vision of progress demanded a professional kind of service, Scott looked for, and found, models upon which he could pattern his own budding bureaucratic career. He discovered these models in men who had eagerly served

the expansionist dreams of their governments, men such as Sir George Grey.

In a book review published during the same period, Scott observes that a biography of Sir George Grey reveals “a most useful and eventful life.”<sup>6</sup> Reflecting that Canadians “missed having the distinguished subject of these volumes as our own governor-general,” Scott offers the opinion that Grey’s was a life of service dedicated to the widening of Western civilization’s influence in the world. In the early 1840’s, he notes, Grey “administered the affairs of south Australia, and brought order out of chaos, saving the colony from threatened ruin” and, later, the commander had sent troops “in time for the relief of Lucknow and the saving of India.”<sup>7</sup> Scott’s admiration for the ability to bring “order out of chaos” was to be repeated in similar ways in later writings. This early review, clearly indicating his approval of a career dedicated to imperialist expansion and rule, suggests Scott defined his desire for order in ways compatible with dominant Victorian values and aspirations.

Toward the end of his life, Scott looked back upon his work in the Department of Indian Affairs and remarked to E. K. Brown that he had inherited a basic system and had felt no desire to alter it substantially:

I had for about twenty years oversight of their [the Indians’] development and I was never unsympathetic to aboriginal ideals, but there was a law which I did not originate and which I never tried to amend in the direction of severity.<sup>8</sup>

Both on the level of personal vision and in everyday matters, Scott’s involvement with the civil service for almost fifty years revealed his desire for an encompassing sense of order in the world. Few of his fellow Canadians of the time — at least few of those who would have bothered to consider the matter — would have disagreed with his actions in the Department. For many people, the civilization of the Indian was part of Canada’s grand scheme of expansion, which dated from the mid-nineteenth century: “The opening of the West was to be in the name of progress and that progress would be to the benefit of the whole Empire, and, for that matter, all of humanity.”<sup>9</sup> The Europeanization of the Indian was simply a part of the story of progress, and questions regarding the uniqueness of Indian culture were drowned out by the noise of a nation under construction.

**T**HE DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS had its roots, in practice and in theory, in the earliest days of political administration in Canada: the basic principles involved were “a carry-over of policies developed by the Imperial Government during the century preceding Confederation.”<sup>10</sup> Up to and including the time of Scott’s own administration, the Department did little to alter its aims, seeking the protection, civilization and assimilation of Canada’s Indians.

In three articles written for *Canada and Its Provinces*, Scott himself helped chronicle and establish a tradition of history for the Department. His first goal in the history is to illustrate the natural superiority of the British method over the French method of dealing with Indians in North America. Not only was the British approach more humane, its greater degree of organization was evident from the time of the appointment of the first agent in 1744: "From that date to present there runs through the Indian administration a living and developing theory of government."<sup>11</sup> Scott's respect for continuity of organization is everywhere apparent in his study, as is his sense of a paternal and humanitarian mission. He never questions the "efforts which were made to civilize, educate and christianize the Indians"<sup>12</sup> because they, after all, had been living in a state of "squalor, dejectedness and intemperance." In Scott's view, the Indian himself would provide the ultimate justification for Department policy by becoming a fully enfranchised and Westernized member of English-Canadian society.

This paternalism creates the ambiguity in a work such as "On the Way to the Mission," where Scott portrays the native victim sympathetically and the white murderers as "servants of greed": although he is obviously critical of the representatives of white society, he is also creating native figures who, in their innocence, are vulnerable. In a similar way, Scott wrote a carefully-worded preface to Amelia Paget's *The People of the Plains*, in which he gives qualified praise to her study. She is, he says, a "cordial" advocate of the Indian:

If there were hardship and squalor, starvation, inhumanity and superstition in this aboriginal life, judged by European standards, here it is not evident, all things are judged by the Indian idea of happiness, and the sophistication of the westerner disappears.<sup>13</sup>

The relativism of the above statement seems genuine; Scott did try, here and in other of his writings, to recognize that his view of Indian culture was coloured by "European standards," and he was not blind to the failings of "our so-called civilization."<sup>14</sup> Yet Paget, Scott implies, is at last sentimental because she ignores the most important fact about the Indian way of life: Indians were caught in the progression of time, and "the time for change was upon them."<sup>15</sup>

Nowhere in his writing does Scott overtly express belief in Darwinian principles of evolution, but he is convinced groups must adapt to survive. Beliefs and practices appropriate to Indian life before the coming of the white man had become inappropriate and even dangerous. Potlatches, the ceremonial giving away of wealth practised by tribes in British Columbia, had prevented the establishment of disparate economic groups within a tribe and so ensured a degree of social harmony. Scott, however, condemned these events as "degrading" and "wasteful feasts," and his position is easy to understand, given his belief that Indian social structures were anachronistic. In a letter to E. K. Brown, Scott defends his hostility to these practices, saying

One can hardly be sympathetic with the contemporary Sun-dance or Potlatch when one knows that the original spirit has departed and that they are largely the opportunities for debauchery by low white men.<sup>16</sup>

The moralist in Scott clearly worried about the Indian's inability to protect himself against "vices not his own," but his objections surely went deeper than to the fear of the effects of alcohol and gambling. In white materialistic society, the accumulation and hoarding of wealth ensured the growth of personal power and the establishment of a hierarchy of status and order. If allowed to continue, the Potlatch threatened the creation of European economics in Indian societies. Scott knew that traditional custom and ritual resisted change, and so he continued the government campaign to stop these practices.

In his hostility toward specific social and economic structures of Indian life, Scott was simply adopting an attitude established by European travellers and missionaries well before his time. Alexander Mackenzie, in his 1801 record *Voyages*, advised that the civilization of the prairie Indians could only occur if the "savage people" were introduced to agriculture, which

attaches the wandering tribe to that spot where it adds so much to their comforts; while it gives them a sense of property, and of lasting possession, instead of the uncertain hopes of the chase, and the fugitive produce of uncultivated wilds.<sup>17</sup>

Though Mackenzie emphasized the advantages of comfort and security that agriculture offered, his ultimate intention was that the Indian would discover a more civilized life. The missionary John McDougall, like Mackenzie, was convinced that nomadic life and tribal communism contributed to moral laxity; therefore, in *Pathfinding on Plain and Prairie* (1898), he interpreted the disappearance of the buffalo as a divine act designed to direct the Indian to more progressive ways. Dick Harrison identifies the unintentional irony of the missionary's remarks:

Agriculture, individualism, and progress were surely no more than peripheral to his professed religious beliefs, yet they became the main burden of his mission, and must be the only considerations that could lead a humane man to call the destruction of the Indian's food supply a divine, paternal act.<sup>18</sup>

Mackenzie, McDougall, and Scott each in turn saw in the Indian way of life an absence of civilized order; if the representatives of the white world did perceive any patterns or order among native peoples, these aspects of social structure were invariably judged as immoral and destructive.

Scott realized the indoctrinization of Indian youth would help sweep aside outworn customs, and he seized upon existing laws to initiate the transformation. In 1894, amendments to the Indian Act had already given the government the power to commit children to industrial and boarding schools. On 11 March 1920

Scott mailed one of a series of letters to clergymen, politicians and others of influence, asking for support for the government's plan for residential schools:

You will note first our proposals with regard to compulsory education. These classes will enable us to send children to residential schools and to have control over them while there, which we have never had in the past.<sup>19</sup>

If Indian children continued to live at home while attending school, they would often miss classes and accompany their parents hunting, trapping or otherwise helping the family. Not only did this practice interfere with their formal education, but it also ensured that the old economic systems of tribal life were perpetuated. Residential schools would enhance the civilizing process and have the added benefit of creating an instant form of assimilation, however artificial and small in scale.

**D**URING THE YEARS OF SCOTT'S ADMINISTRATION, the concept of assimilation, believed before to be attainable only in some distant future, changed significantly: "Assimilation was no longer regarded as a long term goal; it was one that could be attained immediately if the Indian were removed from the protective environment of the reserve."<sup>20</sup> The reserve had done its job too well, insulating Indians from the influences of white society. Increased pressures were applied to have Indians enfranchised, or given the same social and political rights as white men. In other words, if the Indian did not desire assimilation, the government would help him along by redefining him as a white man. In 1920, the Superintendent General was given the power to enact compulsory enfranchisement and strip any Indian of his or her special status. Indian protests followed these changes, and Scott defended the government position at a series of hearings on the issue:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that this country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone. . . . that has been the purpose of Indian education and advancement since the earliest times. . . . Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill.<sup>21</sup>

When Scott speaks of "the purpose . . . since the earliest times," he is referring to processes larger than individual bills or people: he is pointing to the movements of history. And those who stand in the way of these processes are either a nuisance (he called the legal counsel for the Indians "trickster lawyers"), or a clear danger. In a poetic rendering, the medicine man Powassan is one of the latter, a threat to progress.

In works such as "Watkwenies" and "The Onondaga Madonna," the native

characters are caught in forces which they do not understand and cannot control. Because they are helpless, their plight becomes tragic in a classical, fated way. In "Powassan's Drum," Scott creates a figure who challenges the irresistible forces of history: Powassan is one of those Indians who attempts to hold to old customs, who tries to dam up the weight of mounting social and cultural change.

Though readers of the poem appreciate its incantatory power and forceful imagery, they differ over the poet's intentions. Fred Cogswell describes the "apocalyptic climax" in the final lines, but sees in Powassan a representational quality which depends heavily on another poem, "The Piper of Arll," for meaning. The medicine man, Cogswell asserts, is a model for the alienated artist in society because, like the artist, he is a man feared by the tribe for his physical deformities and his awesome spiritual powers:

The vision, then, is both Powassan's revenge on his own tribe for his physical inferiority and an assertion of his own superiority, through magic. As such, it is psychologically appropriate.<sup>22</sup>

The appropriateness, psychological or otherwise, is consistent if one assumes this correlation between Powassan and the Piper in "The Piper of Arll," but I believe Scott clearly had another comparison in mind.

An entry in Scott's James Bay diary, kept during the 1905-06 expedition, records a confrontation between himself and a medicine man named Powassan who was conducting a forbidden ritual — the spirit dance. Scott, investigating a complaint made by the local Indian agent, spoke with Powassan and, in his own words, "warned the Indians not to dance."<sup>23</sup> Medicine dances, he believed, were a return to old tribal ways based on superstition. Tom Marshall, when he says that the headless Indian suggests "primitive instinct separated from reason,"<sup>24</sup> has grasped Scott's specifically moral intention. In other poems, Scott treats Indian characters sympathetically, but his purpose in this work is to illustrate as clearly as possible the dangers of instinct governed by irrationality, and therefore the two figures in "Powassan's Drum" emerge as forms of incarnate evil.

Powassan is a negative force who conjures the hatred and superstition Scott believes may hinder plans to bring the Indian into the modern, Europeanized world. The medicine man is a formidable threat because he is able to create a demi-world:

He crouches in his dwarf wigwam  
Wizened with fasting,  
Fierce with thirst,  
Making great medicine  
In memory of hated things dead  
Or in menace of hated things to come,  
And the universe listens  
To the throb — throb — throb — throb —  
Throbbing of Powassan's Drum.<sup>25</sup>

By no means a foolish, ineffectual figure, Powassan makes the universe listen: Scott uses the repetitive sound of the drum throughout the poem to suggest a compelling, hypnotic state. Powassan's immediate universe is his tribe. Scott is not sure if the medicine man wishes to pose any specific threat, but his white moral sensibility rejects the incantations as irrational. The medicine man called Powassan, in Scott's view, offers only one part of a duality to his people: blind hatred. There is no resolution in the poem to a beautified state, no sense of the other part of the duality which is love:

Is it the memory of hated things dead  
That he beats — famished —  
Or a menace of hated things to come  
That he beats — parched with anger  
And famished with hatred — ?

The passion is all-consuming, stretching from the past to the future; such hatred is an obsession that knows no place in human reason, and prevents the progress that leads to order. It is appropriate, then, that Scott chooses to capture the essence of Powassan's vision in the symbolic figure of the headless Indian.

Summoned by the relentless power of Powassan's drumbeats, the ghostly Indian rises out of a depth of horror, both visual and psychological. He comes in nocturnal mystery:

A shadow noiseless,  
A canoe moves noiseless as sleep,  
Noiseless as the trance of deep sleep. . . .

The reference to sleep is made four times as the spectre is introduced; the repetition reminds the reader that this creature does come from a deep and awful slumber — the sleep of the reasoning mind. The horror Scott creates through visual detail is similar to the effect generated in a series of pictures by the Spaniard Francisco Goya, one of which is titled "The Sleep of Reason Begets Monsters." In Goya's engraving, fantastic monsters are seen flying above the head of a sleeping man and, in another graphic image of moral disorder, Scott shows that the trance induced by Powassan releases a monster of irrationality. Though the Indian figure is literally headless, Scott makes it clear that the image points to a symbolic loss of reasoning thought. The Indian sits "modelled in full power, / Haughty in manful power, / Headless and impotent in power." The power of this image is real enough, to Scott's mind: the superstitious appeal of magical conjuring, coupled with the recreated image of former Indian greatness, has the strength to draw others to it. But, ironically, the power is directionless and impotent because it has no application beyond the simple statement of rage. The power of the headless Indian and, by association, the power of Powassan, have their most direct correlative in the storm which gathers force throughout



the development of the poem. Scott emphasizes the correlation in a section which employs powerful visual images and directs the reader's eye along lines which define the relationships between the spectre and the world:

The Indian fixed like bronze  
Trails his severed head  
Through the dead water  
Holding it by the hair,  
By the plaits of hair,  
Wound with sweet grass and tags of silver.  
The face looks through the water  
Up to its throne on the shoulders of power,  
Unquenched eyes burning in the water,  
Piercing beyond the shoulders of power  
Up to the fingers of the storm cloud.

The Indian, formerly described as a "statue," is again described in inanimate terms, "fixed like bronze," and is shown trailing his hair through "the dead water." The heavy inertia of metal is coupled with the image of travel through a lifeless element, while the head is held by the most tenuous of links to the body, hair. All elements in this verbal painting, even the small tags of silver, contribute to the tone Scott wishes to maintain. In a short story, "Charcoal," he mentions the way the philandering Bad-young-man dresses in "barbaric trappings, his hair full of brass pistol cartridges and the tin trademarks from tobacco plugs."<sup>26</sup> Bad-young-man's manner of dress is gaudy and vain but, more importantly, it reveals through the details of clothing the extent to which the Indian way of life is undeniably altered by exposure to white society. In "Powassan's Drum," the headless Indian's appearance, though initially awesome, is seriously qualified by this ironic reminder.

The eyes of Powassan's Indian, presumably "unquenched" because they are fed by hatred, look up and past the natural seat upon the shoulders of the body to the storm cloud where they find a present affinity. The line of "viewless hate" is clearly drawn, and when the question — "Is this the meaning of the magic . . . ?" — is again asked, the answer must be "yes." Powassan's vision represents an impossible return to a dead way of life: he succeeds only in creating an illusion of power based on memories of former Indian greatness. The line of viewless sight from the severed head suggests that Powassan's counsel can only lead to the destruction of the storm, as the irresistible forces of history break upon his people. A suppression of growth and development results in the murdered "shadow" of Indian dignity being swept from the earth. The concluding section of the poem must be read with a certain ironic appreciation because, though the sound of Powassan's drum "lives" at the centre of the storm, the "dark world" is nevertheless being crushed in a "wild vortex" of wind, hail and lightning.

I  
N SCOTT'S LITERARY WORKS a storm, such as the one which drowns Powassan's world, frequently marks the release of dammed historical processes which sweep over those who resist or ignore them. In "At Gull Lake: August 1810," Scott depicts irrational resistance to change as contributing to the suffering of an individual helplessly caught in processes beyond her understanding. Keejigo, the central figure in the poem, is a half-breed denied acceptance by representatives of both her worlds: the white trader Nairne, fearing the censure of his Indian neighbours, spurns her advances; the native women, enraged by her overtures to the trader, maim the girl and turn her away from the encampment. In their rejection of Keejigo, the Indians deny both her difference and the changes which are subtly coming upon their race. Their reaction is unreasoning, blind and terrible, and engenders a like response in the elements:

Then burst the storm —  
The Indians' screams and the howls of the dogs  
Lost in the crash of hail  
That smashed the sedges and reeds,  
Stripped the poplars of leaves,  
Tore and blazed onwards,  
Wasting itself with riot and tumult —  
Supreme in the beauty of terror.<sup>27</sup>

The meteorological tumult in the poem has an emotional equivalent in the minds of those who suffer in the middle ground of change. In "A Scene at Lake Manitou," the cultural scene of change is a religious one and Scott internalizes the upheaval in one woman, giving her the appropriate name of Stormy Sky.

Grieving over the death of her son Matanack, Stormy Sky is a woman for whom neither the old native beliefs nor the new white religion can offer a resolution of feeling:

She gazed at the far-off islands  
That seemed in a mirage to float  
Moored in the sultry air.  
She had ceased to hear the breath in Matanack's throat  
Or the joy of the children gathering the hay.  
Death, so near, had taken all sound from the day,  
And she sat like one that grieves  
Unconscious of grief.<sup>28</sup>

Scott creates in Stormy Sky a vision of grief so consuming that the sense impressions which define consciousness are drastically altered or even absent. Her emotional state is like a vacuum ready for the introduction of informing content: her thoughts wander to the past, to find recollections of Matanack's youth and, intermingled with these, to contradictory religious musings:

Mingled with thoughts of Nanabojou  
 And the powerful Manitou  
 That lived in the lake;  
 Mingled with thoughts of Jesus  
 Who raised a man from the dead,  
 So Father Pacifique said.

The naïve commingling of two religious viewpoints is marked by one common element: Stormy Sky takes from her pagan and Christian stores of belief a pragmatic, literal interpretation which allows her, however desperately, to believe that she can rescue her son from death. She believes the story of the resurrection — whether through her own lack of perception or through the literalist encouragement of the priest — without grasping the figurative importance of the miracle. For her, the rising of Lazarus from the dead and the spiritual resurrection implied through the use of Holy Water and Scapular are both to be accepted in the realm of earthly possibility:

To save him, to keep him forever!  
 She had prayed to their Jesus,  
 She had called on Mary His mother  
 To save him, to keep him forever!

But of course her son does not rise, and she must find her inner peace in the hope that he has gone “To hunt in the Spirit Land / And to be with Jesus and Mary.” At last, neither the appeal to Christian miracle nor the sacrifice of goods to the Indian lake god are enough, and Stormy Sky must fall back upon stoical resignation, often the only solace left to Scott’s sufferers in the middle ground of change. Her real peace is in acceptance, the willed surrender of desire that gives her character dignity.

Inner strength and dignity are at last the only reserves that Scott’s native characters can draw upon in the hour of their extreme suffering, as the case of Charcoal illustrates. Scott claimed that he had patterned the story “Charcoal” as closely as possible on actual events that took place in Alberta in 1896 and his version is generally similar to that offered in a detailed historical study by Hugh Dempsey.<sup>29</sup> Charcoal was a Blood Reserve Indian who murdered his wife’s lover and became the object of a celebrated manhunt. During his escape he killed a policeman and was finally captured and hanged. Not surprisingly, in Scott’s telling, the events become a study of one individual trapped in a disjunction of cultural values and perceptions.

Readers of Scott’s poetry will recognize a familiar plot in the story: an Indian drawn to white man’s ways but still bound by his tribal heritage of beliefs is crushed in the ensuing dilemma of choices. Charcoal is a character caught in the transition of time and society, seemingly unable to attain happiness. The plot has many points in common with poems of the same subject, but the author gives

more explicit voice in this work to the internal confusions experienced by an Indian. In the following passage, Scott shows Charcoal striving to become something other than what his natural self dictates:

Charcoal wanted to be what his agent called "a good Indian." He wanted to have a new cooking stove, and a looking-glass. He already had cattle on loan, and was one of the best workers in the hay fields.

It would be easy, and incorrect, to read an ironic tone into the phrase "a good Indian": Scott did not prefigure our contemporary scepticism of his culture's desire to turn Indians into white men. He was aware, however, of the difficulty that these changes created for Indians and of the inner confusion of values that resulted when individuals attempted the transition from old to new ways. Therefore, Scott polarized the duality within Charcoal, making him desire the new ways while falling back onto the old ways of irrationality and retribution when faced with a crisis.

When Charcoal seems to be successfully entering the white man's world by hard work and obedience, he is convinced that "the white man's ways [are] the best." Soon after, however, when frustrated by his wife's behaviour and threatened by a loss of prestige, he is equally convinced that "the old way was a good way." His personal confusion mirrors his ambivalent movement between Indian and white cultures, and he becomes an exile from both, running until he is finally betrayed into the hands of the police by Wolfplume, a relative. Charcoal's life verges on the pathetic; there is nothing he can do to solve the problem of living between two worlds:

He had thought of many things which he did not understand. He was to be killed in the white man's manner; to his mind it was only vengeance, death for deaths, which the warriors of his own race dealt to their foes in the old days, and in a braver fashion. They had driven away the buffalo, and made the Indian sad with flour and beef, and had put his muscles into harness. He had only shot a bad Indian, and they rose upon him. His gun had shot a big policeman, and when they had taught his brother-in-law their own idea of fair dealing he was taken in his sleep, and now there was to be an end. He did not know what Père Pauquette meant by his prayers, and the presentation of the little crucifix worn bright with many salutations. It was all involved in mystery.

The "mystery" Scott describes is one the reader shares with Charcoal, since the author presents a moral dilemma which goes partly unresolved: the reader is able to understand and sympathize with Charcoal's confusion — up to a point. Charcoal as an individual is a sympathetic character, but Charcoal as the author's representative member of a race in transition must pay the price of his imperfect moral vision and behaviour.

Scott signals his own position in the final passages of the story as Charcoal dies in a dignified manner, with "the calm of the stoic." The phrase is ambiguous,

because this form of stoicism bears little similarity to classical versions of the philosophy associated with writers such as Marcus Aurelius, and even less to concepts of Christian humility; Charcoal dies peacefully because he takes solace from the lingering scents of his medicine bag, another remnant of the archaic cultural beliefs Scott so obviously felt were detrimental to the Indian.

If Scott can be said to have entertained conflicting views of the Indian, these can only be seen in his distinguishing individuals as separate from the race as a whole; even then, the pattern of his characterizations reveals that he saw in people such as Charcoal, because of their unique historical situation, a ready type for the tragic form in literature. In the passing of a cultural heritage, however, Scott saw no such tragic dimension. Like Charcoal's medicine bag, the Indian way of life was empty, holding only a ghostly whiff of its former power to inform and enrich existence. D. C. Scott saw himself as a pioneer of the future; he saw the Indian as a victim of his own past.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> John Flood, "The Duplicity of D. C. Scott and the James Bay Treaty," *Black Moss*, Series 2, No. 2 (Fall 1976), pp. 40-63.
- <sup>2</sup> Robert L. McDougall, "D. C. Scott: A Trace of Documents and a Touch of Life," in *The D. C. Scott Symposium*, ed. K. P. Stich (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa Press, 1980), pp. 139-40.
- <sup>3</sup> Gerald Lynch, "An Endless Flow: D. C. Scott's Indian Poems," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 7, No. 1 (1982), p. 54.
- <sup>4</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. K. Allott (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), p. 288.
- <sup>5</sup> This untitled essay appeared 19 March 1892, and is collected in *At the Mermaid Inn: Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott in The Globe 1892-93*, ed. Barrie Davies (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 37.
- <sup>6</sup> *Mermaid Inn*, 10 September 1892.
- <sup>7</sup> *Mermaid Inn*, pp. 145-46.
- <sup>8</sup> Public Archives of Canada, Scott Papers, Scott to Brown, 2 July 1941.
- <sup>9</sup> Doug Owsram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 145.
- <sup>10</sup> John Tobias, "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation: An Outline History of Canada's Indian Policy," *The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology*, 6, No. 2 (1976), p. 13.
- <sup>11</sup> Scott, "Indian Affairs 1763-1841," in *Canada and Its Provinces*, eds. Adam Shortt and A. G. Doughty (Toronto: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1913), Vol. iv, p. 698.
- <sup>12</sup> Scott, "Indian Affairs," Vol. v, p. 331.
- <sup>13</sup> Scott, "Introduction" to Amelia Paget's *People of the Plains* (Toronto: Briggs, 1909), pp. 13-14.
- <sup>14</sup> Scott, *Plains*, p. 14.
- <sup>15</sup> Scott, *Plains*, p. 12.

- <sup>16</sup> Public Archives of Canada, Scott Papers, MG 30 D100, Vol. 2, Scott to Brown, 2 July 1941.
- <sup>17</sup> Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages* (1801; rpt. Toronto: Radisson Society, 1927), p. xxv.
- <sup>18</sup> R. Harrison, *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* (Edmonton: Univ. of Alberta Press, 1977), p. 49.
- <sup>19</sup> Public Archives of Canada, Scott Papers, RG 10 Vol. 6810, File 470-2-3, Scott to Rev. T. A. Moore, 11 March 1920.
- <sup>20</sup> Tobias, p. 22.
- <sup>21</sup> Public Archives of Canada, Scott Papers, RG 10 Vol. 6810, File 473, Vol. 12, Hearings Testimony, 1921-22.
- <sup>22</sup> Fred Cogswell, "No Heavenly Harmony: A Reading of Powassan's Drum," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 1-2 (Summer 1976), p. 235.
- <sup>23</sup> Public Archives of Canada, Scott Papers, diary entry 6 July 1905.
- <sup>24</sup> Tom Marshall, *Harsh and Lovely Land: The Major Canadian Poets & the Making of a Canadian Tradition* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1979), p. 31.
- <sup>25</sup> *The Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1926), p. 59. Subsequent quotations are taken from this text.
- <sup>26</sup> Scott, "Charcoal," in *The Circle of Affection and Other Pieces of Prose and Verse* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1947), p. 222. Subsequent quotations are taken from this text.
- <sup>27</sup> Scott, *The Green Cloister* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1935), p. 57.
- <sup>28</sup> *Cloister*, p. 49. Subsequent quotations are taken from this text.
- <sup>29</sup> Hugh Dempsey, *Charcoal's World* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978).

## OUR NORTHERN TOUR

*J. D. Carpenter*

"A cold coming we had of it"

T S Eliot, *Journey of the Magi*

Put in  
— Mattice

Osprey  
— mile 2

Hipdeep in flowers  
— Rock Island Portage