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Article abstract

Maurice Maeterlinck, hailed in 1892 as "the Belgian Shakespeare," influenced Canadian artistic circles around the turn of the century. A Canadian writer who appears to have been particularly receptive to the influence of Maeterlinck is Duncan Campbell Scott. Evidence suggests Scott drew upon the mystical positivism of Maeterlinck's *The Treasure of the Humble* in writing "the Forsaken," "On the Way to the Mission" and "Labor and the Angel".

DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT AND MAURICE MAETERLINCK

D.M.R. Bentley

"In this age of instantaneous and universal communication literary reputations spring up and spread with bewildering rapidity," wrote Archibald Lampman in his *At the Mermaid Inn* column for March 12, 1892; "[just] now comes to us the fame of Maurice Maeterlinck, a very young Belgian poet, who was suddenly and enthusiastically hailed a short time ago as 'The Belgian Shakespeare.' One of his short plays has just been translated and brought out in London, but it appears with only indifferent success. This young writer is the author of a volume of poems. . . a tragedy, and two short plays" (34-35).¹ On two counts, Lampman's account of Maeterlinck's meteoric rise to prominence is accurate: he was indeed praised as "'The Belgian Shakespeare,'" by Octave Mirbeau in the August 24, 1890 issue of *Le Figaro*, and on January 27, 1892 a translation of his *L'Intruse* was performed, by none less than Herbert Beerbohm Tree, at London's Haymarket Theatre (Symons 363-64). But on the third count Lampman was not entirely correct, for in addition to the volume of poems (*Serres chaudes* [1889]), the tragedy (*La Princesse Maleine* [1890]) and the two short plays (*L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles* [1890]) to which he refers, Maeterlinck had published two other works by 1892, *Les Sept Princesses* (1891) and *L'Ornement des noces spirituelles de Ruystroeck L'Admirable* (1891). Moreover, the works that would make the most impact on the English-speaking world on both sides of the Atlantic had yet to be published or translated: *Pelléas et Mélisande* appeared on stage and in translation later in 1892 and *Le Trésor des humbles*, an extraordinarily influential collection of essays, was published in 1896 and translated a year later. It is an index of Maeterlinck's popularity and importance in Canadian artistic circles around the turn of the century that translations of several of his works, including Alfred Sutro's translation of *The*

Treasure of the Humble, were published in Toronto as well as in London and New York.²

A Canadian writer who appears to have been particularly receptive to the influence of Maeterlinck is Lampman's protégé Duncan Campbell Scott. Although only a year younger than Lampman (1861-1899), Scott (1862-1947) belonged to a later generation in his attitude to late nineteenth-century writing, and, of course, he lived long enough to absorb artistic developments that scarcely impinged upon his mentor; for example, in "The Modern School of Poetry in England" (1885), Lampman expresses almost unmitigated disapproval of the Pre-Raphaelite poets, but in "Poetry and Progress" (1922), Scott quotes Rossetti with approval and cites Walter Pater's dictum that "all. . .arts strive towards the condition of Music" to support his view that music is "the art of perfection" and "the art of the future" (*Circle* 139). Scott was far from indiscriminating and unprejudiced in his responses to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers, however: in a revealing letter of June 18, 1904 to Pelham Edgar he rated Robert Bridges and T.E. Brown more highly than Rudyard Kipling, Laurence Binyon, and even W.B. Yeats, who, he nevertheless felt had "done some good work" prior to becoming "a theorist" and "cryptic and unreadable" in his use of "symbols and allusions" (*More Letters* 23-24). By way of contrast to Yeats, Scott urged Edgar to "[t]hink of Maeterlinck and reflect how much more important is his work for the mystical side of life. . . . He is endeavouring to awaken the wonder-element in a modern way, constantly expressing the almost unknowable things which we all feel. His is the work of the modern Mystic and he does not require a fund of Irish legends to set imagination aglow" (24). Gary Geddes assumes that these remarks refer to Maeterlinck's poetry (172), but it is more likely that they refer to his plays and the essays of *The Treasure of the Humble*, which more than the poems of *Serres chaudes*, convey a sense of the "mystery" that Scott believed to lie "at the root of everything" and within the grasp of future human understanding (*More Letters* 28). "Shall not the subtle spirit of man contrive / To charm the tremulous ether of the soul / Wherein it breathes?" Scott asked in February, 1905 in "Meditation at Perugia," a poem that envisages a time of spiritual communication "from pole to pole, . . . From star to star" and "Even from earth to the utmost secret place, / Where God and the supreme archangels are"—a time when mankind will have proved "That all

the powers of earth and air are one, / That one deep law persists from mole to sun. . . [That] all things that are in matter and mind / Thirst with the secret that began the world" (*Poems* 132). "Meditation at Perugia" is addressed to St. Francis of Assisi, but its vision of spiritual communication and universal understanding comes trailing clouds of glory from "the Modern mystic" who gave these and similar ideas his least cryptic and most readable expression in *The Treasure of the Humble*.

Well before Arthur Bourinot made selections of Scott's letters available in 1959 and 1960, Bernard Muddiman and A.J.M. Smith recognized that several of his poems evoke the work of the French and Belgian *symbolistes*, particularly Mallarmé, Maeterlinck, and Emile Verhaeren (see Smith 124 and Muddiman 35,37), and E.K. Brown, perhaps drawing on information provided by Scott himself, analyzed his "dream pieces"—specifically "In the House of Dreams" (1893) and "The Piper of Arll" (1898)—as products of the *symboliste* aesthetic of suggestiveness (see *On Canadian Poetry* 123-25). "The title-piece" of Scott's first volume, *The Magic House and Other Poems* (1893), "is similar in effect," writes Brown: "[a]t the end of the piece, although it is evident that the woman [has] passed through a variety of states, one does not know where the turning point, or turning points, lay. Just what these states were does not greatly matter; nor does it greatly matter how she passed from one to another; what does matter is a diffused sense of agonies undergone in silence" (125). Muddiman finds the "[v]ague and bizarre" quality—the "strange ethereal music"—of "The Sea by the Woods" and "The Woods by the Sea" in *New World Lyrics and Ballads* (1905) "almost like the early poems of Maeterlinck" (38), but he would have been closer to the mark if he had recognized the great importance that Scott attaches to "silence" as evidence of a temperament predisposed to the writer who took "active silence"—the silence in which "the soul test[s] its weight" (7,19)—as a principal theme of his plays and essays (see Symons 309,320-23).

As Arthur Symons suggests in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), Maeterlinck's two most widely known statements about the dramatic and spiritual significance of silence are the essay on "Silence" that begins *The Treasure of the Humble* and the long sentence in which he articulates his understanding of tragedy in

another essay in the collection, "The Tragical in Daily Life" ("Le Tragique quotidien"):

I have grown to believe that an old man, seated in his armchair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him; giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting, without comprehending, the silence of doors and windows and the quivering voice of the light, submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and his destiny—an old man, who conceives not that all the powers of this world, like so many heedful servants, are mingling and keeping vigil in his room, who suspects not that the very sun itself is supporting in space the little table against which he leans, or that every star in heaven and every fiber of the soul are directly concerned in the movement of an eyelid that closes, or a thought that springs to birth—I have grown to believe that he, motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or 'the husband who avenges his honour.' (105-06)

Here, surely, rather than, as Brown suggests, in "the tragedy of Lear or Goriot" (*On Canadian Poetry* 131)³ lies the conception of "the mystery of the universe" and "the weakness of humanity" (Symons 310) that underlies the conclusion of "The Forsaken" (1905) where the old Chippewa woman "Gaze[s] at the sky. . . without pain, or dread, or even a moment of longing" for two days and nights until the snow "Cover[s] her deep and silent" and "there [is] born a silence deeper than silence" (*Poems* 30-31). In Maeterlinck's terms, silence is the medium in which, without "alarm" or "agitation" the dying woman's "spirit" or "soul" "test[s] its weight" and comes to understand the "curious, preconceived design" that exists "somewhere above our heads" and manifests itself as "our truth as regards death, destiny or love" (17-20).⁴ "Remember the day on which, without fear in your heart, you met your first silence," enjoins Maeterlinck,

The dread hour had sounded; silence went before your soul. You saw it. . . and you did not fly. . . [Silence] is a thing that knows no limit, and before it all men are equal; and the silence of king or slave, in presence of death, or grief, or love, reveals the same features, hides beneath its impenetrable mantle the self-same treasure. For this is the essential silence

of our soul, our most inviolable sanctuary, and its secret can never be lost; and, were the first born of men to meet the last inhabitant on earth. . .the centuries notwithstanding, there would come to them, at the same moment. . .comprehension of that which the tongue shall not learn to tell before the world ceases. (9-13)

"The Forsaken" may have been "founded on a story told [to] the poet by the Hudson's Bay Company factor at Nipigon House" (Brown, "Memoir" xxii), but the quietistic treatment of the Chipewewa woman's death as the fulfillment of a "curious, preconceived" and universal design that has led to the charge of "unfeeling artistic aloofness" (Dagg 182) in the poem probably had very different origins.

Maeterlinck's presence may also be detected in "On the Way to the Mission," a poem written about a year earlier than "The Forsaken" (McDougall 20,22) and placed adjacent to it in *New World Lyrics and Ballads and Poems* (1926). Drawing this time, as Leon Slo-nim has shown, on a scene from Robert Rogers' *Ponteach* (1766) that Francis Parkman appended to *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (1900) as an illustration of the atrocities perpetrated by Europeans on Native peoples, Scott's poem depicts the murder of "an Indian trapper" by two "white. . .servants of greed" who mistakenly believe that the "long toboggan" on which he is carrying his wife for burial at a Christian mission is laden with furs (*Poems* 25-26). As the "white-men" pursue their quarry, "The Indian's face [is] calm. . . with the sorrow of fore-knowledge / But his eyes [are] jewels of content / Set in circles of peace" and his "toboggan [makes] the sound of wings, / A wood-pigeon sloping to her nest." Moreover, the sight of "something flit[ting] by his side" in "the deep forest" makes their "hearts stop. . .with fear" and prevents them from shooting him earlier than they eventually do. Scott's description of the trapper's death contains elements familiar from "The Forsaken" (snow, silence) and one particularly puzzling detail, the fact that the snow does not melt:

When he fell on a shield of moonlight
One of his arms clung to his burden;
The snow was not melted:
The spirit passed away. . .

* * *

Silence was born. (26)

It is as if the trapper's life had departed before he was shot, leaving no vital warmth to melt the snow. At one level "On the Way to the Mission" is about white rapacity and violence towards the Native peoples, but at another it is about foreknowledge and predestination: the "Indian trapper" is calm and peaceful because he knows that he, too, is on the way to the mission to be buried beside his Christian (and European?)⁵ wife "in spring, / When the bloodroot comes and the windflower / To silver everything."

The essay in *The Treasure of the Humble* that bears most on this anterior level of "On the Way to the Mission" is "The Pre-Destined," a moving meditation on the "signs that set apart the creatures for whom dire events lie in wait" and the means by which those who encounter such people become "conscious of the fate that is hanging over them" (48,50). Is destiny the creator or the creation of an individual, Maeterlinck wonders, and—in a trope that finds an echo in "On the Way to the Mission"—are momentous events "always unerring in their course. . . like the dove to the cote; and where do they find a resting-place when we are not there to meet them?" (51). Lists of such philosophical questions (more of which in due course) are characteristic of Maeterlinck's essays, and "The Pre-Destined" is no exception:

Do we not all spend the greater part of our lives under the shadow of an event that has not yet come to pass? I have noticed the same grave gestures, the footsteps that seemed to tend towards a goal that was all too near, the presentiments that chilled the blood, the fixed immovable look—I have noticed all these in the men, even, whose end was to come by accident, the men on whom death would suddenly seize from without. . . . Their faces were the same. . . . The same careful, silent watchfulness marked their actions. . . . It is death that is the guide to our lives, and our life has no goal but death. . . . What life is there but becomes radiant when the pure, cold, simple light falls on it at the last hour? (51-53)

Perhaps Scott's terse "Silence was born" is a condensation of Maeterlinck's ensuing remarks about the "silence. . . of the chamber when there will be peace for evermore" and the "solemn signals of silence" that unite those for whom death is near (53-54). Certainly, his description of the reactions of the "white. . . servants of greed"

to the "Indian trapper" resonate with Maeterlinck's remarks about the responses of ordinary people to those whom "death [is] leading by the hand" or for whom "a violent death [is] lying in wait" (53,58).

A sensation of awe cre[eps] into our life. . . .What [is] there that divide[s] us from them? What is there that divides us all? What is this sea of mysteries in whose depths we have our being? . . .A curious steadfastness already lurk[s] in their eyes; and if. . .their glance rest[s] upon us. . .there. . .[is] an instant of strange silence. We. . .turn round: they [are] watching us and smiling gravely. (55-58)

At the very least, the resonances between "The Pre-Destined" and "On the Way to the Mission" confirm the validity of G. Ross Roy's observation that "[t]he action [of Scott's poem] is merely the basic plot to which the poet adds. . .significance. . .[S]tory telling is not Scott's sole design here" but, rather, he "ma[kes] use of Indian themes" to treat large moral and spiritual issues (144-45). That this is so becomes even clearer when the title poem of Scott's *Labor and the Angel* volume of 1898 is examined in the light of Maeterlinck's plays and essays.

After a scene-setting description that uses the effects of wind and the arrival of dawn to suggest the dualities of external nature (sound/silence, light/dark, movement/stasis), "Labor and the Angel" focuses attention on the representatives of a seemingly very different duality in the lives of ordinary people: "Labor" (physical work, crushing routines, material hardship) and "the Angel" (spiritual and emotional guidance and succour). Representing the former is a "blind man. . .gathering. . .roots" in a "sodden field," and the latter a "Beautiful" girl who "Touches his arm with her hand, / Ready to help or to guide" and to give "Power and comfort at need" (*Poems* 100-01). Pre-Raphaelite in her appearance ("Her gold hair blows in the wind, / Her garments. . .flutter and furl") and Swedenborgian rather than Christian in her nature and function, the blind man's ministering companion is "The angel that watches o'er work" in "her visible form." Whether "Humble or high," anyone who heeds her encouraging counsel—"Effort and effort / . . .This is the heart-beat of life"—is soothed, strengthened, encouraged and, above all, "Heartened," for she is the "twin-sister of Love" and she is present in every workplace, not least in

"the cages and dens. . . Of th[e] hell-palace[s] built to the skies"
 "Where women work down to the bone, / Where men never laugh
 but they curse. . . where the pressure is worst" (*Poems* 101-02).
 Only when "a soul too weary of life / Sets to its madness an end"
 do her eyes "darken" and then only briefly before she sheds tears
 of grief and finds solace and renewal "on the bosom of Love"
 (*Poems* 103-04). As the poem draws towards its conclusion "the old
 blind man and the girl"—"The shape of the soul in the gloom, /
 And the power of the figure above"—are made "To stand for the
 whole world's need: / For labor is always blind, / Unless as the
 light of the deed / The angel is standing behind" (*Poems* 104). In
 the final verse paragraph, the blind man and the girl are no longer
 the focus of attention, but the values of "light" and "Love" that
 have been constellated around the "angel" are attached to aspects of
 the natural world as it moves towards darkness—"A star. . . in the
 clear / Line of the sky," "a cloud. . . Like the wing of a seraph," and
 "the planet whose ideal is Love" (*Poems* 104-05).

Both in its symbolic use of setting and in its use of universal
 "types," "Labor and the Angel" is strongly reminiscent of Maeter-
 linck's early plays, particularly, of course, *Les Aveugles*, where, as
 Richard Hovey points out in the essay that introduces his transla-
 tion of *The Plays of Maurice Maeterlinck* (1894), the blind symbolize
 "a world lost in the dark forest of unfaith and unknowledge" (6).⁶
 No more is Scott's "old blind man" merely a clone of *Les Aveugles*
 than is the poem as a whole "but a versified version of Carlyle's
 gospel of work" (Muddiman 6), for the significance attached to the
 figures and the setting of "Labor and the Angel" are quite differ-
 ent than Maeterlinck's and, as Muddiman suggests (7), the poem
 speaks from and to a distinctly North American context in its ana-
 lysis of labour. Like "The City of the End of Things," which was
 first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in March 1894, "Labor and
 the Angel" addresses issues that were of growing concern in Ca-
 nada and the United States in the eighteen nineties: "How can
 existence and work be harmonized? How can a man still preserve
 his soul and at the same time earn his daily bread?" (Muddiman
 35, and see Bentley *The Gay*] Grey Moose 187-200).

A principal source of Scott's particular response to such
 questions may well have been *The Treasure of the Humble*, which, as
 its very title indicates, concerns itself centrally with the spiritual

lives of ordinary people. "[I]n the work-a-day lives of the very humblest of men, spiritual phenomena manifest themselves—mysterious, direct workings, that bring soul nearer to soul," asserts Maeterlinck in "The Awakening of the Soul," the second essay in the collection and the fullest exposition of his conviction that the Western world was on the brink of a "new spiritual epoch" in which "an invisible presence" and an "*invisible principle*" were becoming increasingly evident (33,25,31,29). Optimistically believing that "the conditions of work-a-day life are changing. . . and [that] it is by the invisible alone that, though we know it not, nearly all of us judge each other," Maeterlinck argues repeatedly that art should treat of "the beauty, the grandeur and the earnestness of. . . humble day to day existence" (104)—the quotidian rather than the "*positive*" sublime (32), the invisible realm of the spirit that enwraps and inhabits every human being rather than the violence and passion of traditional dramatic heroes. "The poet [should] add. . . to ordinary life something. . . [so that] there comes to us a sudden revelation of life in its stupendous grandeur, in its submissiveness to the unknown powers, in endless affinities, in its awe-inspiring misery" (110). As to the form of the "superior" and "invisible beings" that "surround" all people (172), Maeterlinck proposes Swedenborg's "mysterious angel[s]" (224), and, characteristically, suggests that "silence and shadow" provide the best conditions for "call[ing] forth the smile of angels" even in the "myriads of hovels, . . . dens of misery, . . . [and] prisons" in which "thousands and thousands of poor creatures" subsist in ugliness and obscurity (194-95).⁷ It is the task of the poet "to keep open 'the great road that leads from the seen to the unseen'" by "reveal[ing]. . . something that is stupendous" "in the midst of the humble incidents of ordinary days," the "ineffable face. . . behind an old man's tears, . . . [the] vast night, starred with angels [that] extend[s] over the smile of a child" (188).

Scott may have drawn inspiration for "Labor and the Angel" from several such passages in *The Treasure of the Humble*, but one in particular towards the end of the final essay in the collection ("The Inner Beauty") stands out more than others:

If we could ask of an angel what it is that our souls do in the shadow, I believe the angel would answer, after having looked for many years perhaps, and seen far more than the things the

soul seems to do in the eyes of men, 'They transform into beauty all the things that are given to them.' Ah! we must admit that the human soul is possessed of singular courage! Resignedly does it labour, its whole life long, in the darkness whither most of us relegate it, where it is spoken to by none. . . . But thousands of existences there are that no sister [soul] visits; thousands of existences wherein life has infused such timidity into the soul that it departs without saying a word, without ever once having been able to deck itself with the humblest jewels of its humble crown. . . .

And yet, in spite of all, does it watch over everything from its invisible heaven. It warns and loves, it admires, attracts, repels. (215-16)

Maeterlinck is writing about the "soul" and beauty but his references to an "angel," his emphasis on humble "labour," his representation of souls as "sister[s]," and, finally, his conception of the soul as a tutelary spirit resonate richly with "Labor and the Angel," particularly with those portions of the poem in which Scott's "twin-sister of Love," whose "smile is the sweetest renown. . . Her crown the starriest crown," offers "Strength," "Courage," "hope" and "succour" to her "'agonized child[ren]'" (*Poems* 102-03).

If, as the evidence suggests, Scott drew upon *The Treasure of the Humble* in writing "The Forsaken," "On the Way to the Mission," and "Labor and the Angel" and, very likely, other poems in *Labor and the Angel* and *New World Lyrics and Ballads*, then he could have had no illusions about the origins and cast of Maeterlinck's mysticism. Quotations from Carlyle and Emerson as well as Swedenborg figure prominently in several of the essays in *The Treasure of the Humble*, but the collection concludes with a lengthy excerpt from "the great Plotinus" that urges the reader to ascend the Neoplatonic ladder from perceived beauty to "'intelligible beauty'" (224-25), and, in the Introduction to Sutro's translation, A.B. Walkley labels Maeterlinck "a Neo-Platonist" (ix) and aligns him with the author of the *Enneads*:

Plotinus. . . enlarged the boundaries of art by discerning in the idea of beauty an inward and spiritual grace not to be found in the 'Platonic idea.' That, too, is what M. Maeterlinck is striving for. . . . His cardinal doctrine will, I conjecture, be something like this. . . . The mystery of life is what makes life worth living. . . . He is penetrated by the feeling of the mystery in all

human creatures, whose every act is regulated by far-off influences and obscurely rooted in things unexplained. Mystery is within us and around us. Of reality we can only now and then get the merest glimpse. . . . We grope among the shadows towards the unknown. . . . In silence is our only chance of knowing one another. And 'mystic truths have over ordinary truths a strange privilege; they can neither age nor die.' (x-xii)

In characterizing Maeterlinck's thought, Walkley draws a quotation from *L'Ornement des noces spirituelles* that uncannily suggests the affinities between *The Treasure of the Humble* and the Scott poems that seem most indebted to it: "'We are here. . . on the borderland of human thought and far across the Arctic circle of the spirit'" (viii).

Although the impact of *The Treasure of the Humble* on Scott appears to have been greatest in the years surrounding the turn of the century,⁸ several pieces written around and after the First World War, particularly "The Height of Land," indicate the continuing presence of Maeterlinck's thought in his work. Written in November, 1915 (McDougall) and first published in Lundy's *Lane and Other Poems* (1916), Scott's major philosophical poem shows traces of several Romantic and Victorian writers (see Brown 139 and Ware), but its final verse paragraph probably owes at least as much to the mystical positivism and rhetorical technique of *The Treasure of the Humble*. As Bettina Knapp has shown, an element of "Schopenhaurian negativism" (95) sometimes surfaces in Maeterlinck's essays to temper his sense of being on the verge of a "new spiritual epoch" with moments when, as he puts it in "The Star," "it would seem as though we are on the threshold of a new pessimism" (127). Nevertheless, he remained optimistic: "[t]he sadness of man, which seemed beautiful even to [Schopenhauer and other 'redoubtable sages'], is still susceptible to infinite ennobling, until at last a creature of genius will have uttered the final word of the sorrow that shall, perhaps, wholly purify. . . . In the meanwhile, we are on the eve of divining" (128). And, as already observed in several quotations from *The Treasure of the Humble*, the rhetorical manifestation of Maeterlinck's mystical positivism is series after series of speculative questions:

What tidings do these things bring us? And wherein lies their significance? Are there laws deeper than those by which deeds and thoughts are governed? What are the things we have learned and why do we always act in accordance with rules that none ever mention, but which are the only rules that cannot err? . . .

When we venture to move the mysterious stone that covers these mysteries, the heavily charged air surges up from the gulf, and words and thoughts fall around us like poisoned flies. . . . Even our inner life seems trivial by the side of these unchanging deepness. . . . And would [the Jesus who condemned the Pharisees] be God if His condemnation were irrevocable? But why does He speak as though He lingered on the threshold? Will the basest thought or the noblest inspiration leave a mark on the diamond's surface? What god, that is indeed on the heights, but must smile at our gravest faults, as we smile at the puppies on the hearth rug. (67-69, and see 98-100)

At dawn on the height of land, as he observes a "presage of extinction glow[ing] on the . . . crests" of the stars and feels a "deep / Influx of spirit" with the light of dawn, Scott also wonders whether the future will reveal "a more compelling law than Love / As Life's atonement" and an understanding of the universe so advanced that the Christian "version / Of noble deed and thought immingled" will seem "uncouth" and the human condition appear "as simple as a sheep-boy's song" (*Poems* 50-51). Will the full knowledge (*gnosis*) that now can only be intuited like "strange immortal memories" in an old romance ("romant") become available to poets in the future or will they be no more enlightened than Scott is in the northern "sunrise" as he responds with all his being to "The thrill of life" and "The Secret, golden and inappellable" (*Poems* 50-51)? Scott's questions are not precisely the same as Maeterlinck's but they are asked in a similar spirit and with similar assumptions. In "The Height of Land" the portentous enquiries of *The Treasure of the Humble* are revisited in the silence of a Canadian night just before the monstrous carnage of the First World War cast a dark pall over the evolutionary optimism of the previous decades.

* * *

In *Kahlil Gibran: his Life and World*, Jean Gibran and Kahlil Gibran cast a revealing sidelight on the Maeterlinck-Scott relationship with the information that the future author of *The Prophet* (1923) and other mystical texts was profoundly influenced by *The Treasure of the Humble* when the Boston publisher Fred Holland Day read the whole of Sutro's translation to him at a single sitting in the fall of 1897 (56-57). Twelve years after the event, Gibran's biographers record, he was able to gauge its importance for his development:

"Maeterlinck is of the first rank. . . . In the early 'nineties big men were finding unlimited form. Maeterlinck perceived the current. . . . From fourteen to eighteen he was my idol. . . . *The Treasure of the Humble* is his masterpiece'" (qtd. in Gibran 57). The Gibrans also record that, along with "Maeterlinck's veiled mysteries" and John Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, their famous relative was exposed in the late 'nineties to Carman and Hovey's *Songs from Vagabondia* (1894) and *More Songs from Vagabondia* (1896), both of which were published by Copeland and Day (58), and they endorse Hovey's astute recognition that the motive and appeal of Carman's "'native symbolism. . . [and] Maeterlinck's strange new development of Neo-Platonic thought'" lay in the same rejection of "'materialism'" that was leading young writers to Emerson at this time (qtd. in Gibran 58). The relevance of all this to Scott does not reside merely in the fact that, after visiting Boston in April 1894,⁹ he had friends in Boston literary circles or in the fact that *Labor and the Angel* was also published by Copeland and Day, but in the fact that, sometime before the book's publication in December 1898, Gibran "made a pictorial illustration" of "Labor and the Angel" that was "prepared for publication," probably in the book itself (Gibran 61-62).¹⁰ Apparently, even predictably, Gibran found in Scott's poem something akin to what had attracted him in the previous year to *The Treasure of the Humble*.

NOTES

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¹ Lampman almost certainly got his information about Maeterlinck from an article by E.R. Pennell ("N.N.") in the February 18, 1892 issue of the *Nation* (New York). Pennell briefly discusses Maeterlinck's poems, plays, and reputation as the "Belgian Shakspeare" and concludes that "in the Haymarket version 'The Intruder' was not only without effect, but was absolutely meaningless, except to those who had already read it. . . . To-day the papers have been calling 'The Intruder' silly, and imbecile, and idiotic, and the usual adjectives that form the stock-in-trade of the English critic" (129).

² A full study of Maeterlinck's influence and reputation in North America remains to be done, but Joseph Hause records that in 1891 translations of *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles* by Mary Viel were published in Washington, D.C. and that in February

1893 *L'Intruse* was performed in New York (65). The bibliography in Jethro Bithell's *Life and Writings of Maurice Maeterlinck* lists numerous items in American and British periodicals such as the *Academy*, the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Poet-Lore* (Boston) from 1892 onwards, including two items by Bliss Carman's friend and collaborator Richard Hovey. A review of Hovey's translation of *The Plays of Maurice Maeterlinck* appeared in the *Week* (Toronto) in March 1895. An edition of Sutro's translation of *The Treasure of the Humble* was published in Toronto in 1908 by Musson, who also published editions of Maeterlinck's later collections of essays.

³ Brown subsequently published a translation of Honor de Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*.

⁴ As indicated by the fact that he begins "Silence" with a quotation from *Sartor Resartus*, Maeterlinck's conception of silence derives to a considerable extent from Carlyle.

⁵ Two aspects of the description of the trapper's wife—her "ivory features" and the fact that her hair is done "*In the manner of Montagnais women*" (*Poems* 26, italics added)—raise the possibility that she is white.

⁶ It is worth noting that in "Modern Symbolism and Maurice Maeterlinck" Hovey puts "Gilbert Parker in England and Bliss Carman in America" on a level with "Mallarmé in France" as practitioners of "modern symbolism," citing the "primitive types" in one of the stories in *Pierre and His People* (1892) as an instance of Parker's use of *symboliste* techniques (5). He also suggests that, in giving to "the simple truth of animal life a universal meaning," the animal stories of Charles G.D. Roberts are "symbolic in the same way" (7). In assessing the work of all three Canadians, Hovey claims that they arrived at their symbolic practices independently of any influences from France or Belgium and that their work is "saner, fresher, and less morbid" than its European counterparts: "[t]he clear air of the lakes and the prairies of Canada blows through it" (8). He makes no mention of Scott or Lampman, neither of whom had the advantage of being his friends.

⁷ Several other references to the "work-a-day existence" of ordinary people and to Swedenborgian angels appear in *The Treasure of the Humble*; see, for example, 6,14,40,63,68,69,113,152, and 171.

⁸ According to the dates provided by Robert L. McDougall, several of the blatantly "mystical" pieces in *Lundy's Lane and Other Poems* were written between 1899 and about 1906, cases in point being "The Apparition" (April 29, 1900), which begins "Gentle angel. . . I was yearning for a vision / Of the life unseen" (*Poems* 236), and "Dream Voyageurs" (July 18, 1906), which ends with a vision of the dreamers' destination as an astral paradise in which "musing shades. . . / Will share their veils of angelhood, / Thoughts that are tranced with mystic food, / Still broodings tinct with a seraph's blood" (*Poems* 223). See also "The Ghost's Story" (December 2, 1899), "Night" (April 21, 1905), and the first sonnet in "To the Heroic Soul" (May 13, 1906). To judge by the references to "the frail spirits of trees and flowers" in "The November Pansy" (December 1, 1912), to the "essences" and "floreescence" of ephemeral phenomena in "Mist and Frost" (February, 1913), and to the power of "necromancy" to "unroll" "the web. . . linking / Beauties that meet and mingle. . . With the beauty of the whole" in "Mid-August" (August, 1913), Maeterlinck's Neoplatonism was supplemented by even more arcane concepts in Scott's thought in about 1912

(*Poems* 53, 194, 196, 193). W. J. Sykes detects "pure Platonic idealism" [62] in "The November Pansy," but the poem is also redolent of the hermetic belief that even inanimate things contain a spiritual essence that reveals itself, for instance, in the green of leaves and the perfume of flowers. (See also "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris," written in 1913-14, and "The Water Lily," written in 1919.) Perhaps Scott's interest in the occult at this time was partly stimulated by the death of his young daughter in 1907; certainly "A Mystery Play," the piece that concludes "The Closed Door" sequence devoted to Elizabeth in *Lundy's Lane and Other Poems*, is as strikingly mystical in its vision as it is reminiscent of Maeterlinck's early plays. See also Bentley "Alchemical Transmutation."

⁹ In a letter of April 22, 1894, Edward William Thomson, writing to Lampman from Boston, records his first meeting with Scott (*Annotated Correspondence* 116).

¹⁰ In addition to reproducing this illustration, the Gibrans include photographs of a drawing and a note in a "dummy copy of [Lampman's] *Lyrics of Earth*" (see 64 and 124-25).

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"VERILY, THE WHITE MAN'S WAYS WERE THE BEST": DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT, NATIVE CULTURE, AND ASSIMILATION

Lisa Salem-Wiseman

"It is the opinion of the writer that . . . the Government will in time reach the end of its responsibility as the Indians progress into civilization and finally disappear as a separate and distinct people, not by race extinction but by gradual assimilation with their fellow-citizens."

(Scott, *Administration of Indian Affairs* 27)

From 1913 to his retirement in 1931, Duncan Campbell Scott served as the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in Canada, administering the federal government's policy of assimilation. During this period, he achieved success as a poet, producing several volumes of poetry, including a number of poems which have Native people as their subjects. Of the number of literary critics who have addressed Scott's "Indian poems" over the last two decades,¹ most have argued that a contradiction exists between Scott's portrayal of Native people in his poetry, and his advocacy of assimilation in his official capacity as the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs.² Robert L. McDougall has suggested that Scott's career as an administrator for the Department of Indian Affairs was merely his job, an "outer life" which allowed him little or no expression of his true feelings, while the poetry which he wrote served as a more accurate reflection of his "inner life." Many critics of Scott's poetry seem to agree with this separation of the two aspects of his life. Stan Dragland has remarked that "it is hard to reconcile the official Scott with the poet we know from the Indian poems" (*Criticism* 180).

The question often asked is: was Duncan Campbell Scott a racist hypocrite or, as Melvin Dagg maintains, a sensitive civil servant who was able to justify the policies of his department only by repressing his true feelings, which found voice in his poetry and