

## **“Answer in Chime”: Musical Tonality and Territoriality in D. C. Scott’s “The Height of Land”**

**by Emily Hoven**

Duncan Campbell Scott’s literary critics have long been concerned with distinguishing and reconciling his ostensibly binary roles. At once a government administrator and a poet, Scott took part in a series of treaty-negotiating trips over the course of his tenure with the Department of Indian Affairs, which served as the impetus for a number of his poems. A reading of Scott’s poetry as the integration of his creative and administrative work, however, invites us to consider Scott in a third register; alongside his work as a poet and government administrator, Scott was also an avid, though amateur, musician. These musical inclinations have widely served as a means to locate Scott as a figure: the photograph used as the frontispiece to Robert McDougall’s *The Poet and the Critic*, for example, is one of Scott at his piano, and the concluding chapter of Stan Dragland’s *Floating Voice: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Literature of Treaty 9* opens with a visit to Scott’s music room at 108 Lisgar Street. That McDougall, Dragland, and others<sup>1</sup> have found their way to “[Scott’s] beloved music room, where his whole life was arguably contained” (Dragland 255), suggests the profound connection between Scott and music.

While many of Scott’s critics have ventured into his music room, few have brought his poetry with them, despite A. J. M. Smith’s remark that “[Scott’s] is the poetry of a musician” (15). Indeed, his music room has largely been conceived by critics as a cognitive space to synthesize “the fossilized deposits of Scott’s whole life and art” (Dragland 255), without prompting much exploration into the ways that his musical inclinations inform his poetic work. Probing both the thematic and structural musicality of Scott’s poetry, Carolyn Roberts argues that “Scott’s poetry demands a close analysis of his explicitly musical poems” (n. pag.), yet she only considers “Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon” with any depth. Although critics such as Don McKay and Catherine Kelly have alluded to Scott’s musical impulses, Roberts’ article, coupled with a brief response paper from R. S. Kilpatrick, offers the sole sustained interrogation of Scott’s poetry from a musico-literary perspective. With Roberts’ reading of “Night Hymns on

Lake Nipigon” as foreground to a consideration of musical tonality in “The Height of Land,” this paper continues the musico-literary investigation of Scott’s work, considering the ways in which Scott’s integration of musical form within his poetics intersects with the colonial space that these poems chart. Because of both tonality’s spatial impulse—the propelling of tones towards a musical point of origin—and its assimilative movement of dissonant tones towards their resolving cadence, it is, as a musical framework, resonant with the colonial underpinnings of Scott’s oeuvre. This resolution back to a point of origin resonates deeply, in particular, with the spatial concerns that pervade “The Height of Land”; the framework of tonal resolution informs both form and content as the poem moves towards geographic, metaphysical, and political cadence.

Arguably the most extensive consideration of musicality in Scott’s poetics comes from Scott himself. From 1892 through 1893, Scott regularly contributed to the “At the Mermaid Inn” column appearing in the Toronto *Globe*. A collaborative effort by Scott and his fellow Confederation poets W. W. Campbell and Archibald Lampman, the column serves at once as “one of the best guides we have to prevailing intellectual tastes and currents” of the time (Davies vii), as well as “an index of the convergences and divergences that characterized the Confederation group at the height of its fame” (Bentley, “Introduction” n. pag.). Moreover, by tracing Scott’s developing ideas on the interplay between music and poetry, it offers insight into how he understood his own poetic practice. In his column of 24 September 1892, Scott signals his interest in the convergence of music and poetics—an interest that increasingly pervades his subsequent contributions to the column. This convergence, as Scott underscores, takes place on the formal level of poetry. Addressing an editorial published in *The Week* that excerpted Bliss Carman’s poem “Marjory Darrow,”<sup>2</sup> Scott speaks to the effect of an italicized phrase in the excerpt, writing that “poetry is an art by which impressions are conveyed as well as ideas, and [that] this translation into words of the cadence and pause of the thrush’s song [through the italicized form] ... conveys an impression of the song itself” (*Mermaid Inn* 155). Here Scott outlines the layered construction of poetry, where matter and form together convey the poem’s subject through distinct tenors: idea and impression, respectively. That song is, however arbitrarily, the subject expressed in Scott’s example suggests that poetry’s musicality emerges through the impression of its form; the italicization of the thrush’s song, as a formal convention, works to give “an impression of the song itself” (155). Indeed, where words contain the poem’s ideas, its

form gives poetry its impression of musicality, its “cadence and pause” (155).

Subsequent iterations of the column further trace Scott’s developing attitudes towards the intersection of music and poetry. In his column of 4 February 1893, Scott suggests that music strikes a “balance of form and context” by unifying them in “absolute fusion” (254). His argument here takes its shape through reference to Walter Pater, echoing Pater’s assertion that “all art constantly aspires towards the condition of *music*” (Pater 135), towards an indistinguishable unity between matter and form where “the end is not distinct from the means” (139). Pater suggests that the art forms that most closely succeed in approximating music’s effect—such as lyrical poetry—achieve a kind of musicality because their matter cannot be detached from their form without detracting from the matter itself (135-8). Scott’s own thinking is clearly influenced by this, as, in his meditation on Flaubert’s writing,<sup>3</sup> he reinforces a connection between principles of writing practice and music’s inherent fusion of matter and form: “it is better to [strive towards this fusion] than to deny the existence of any power in form and to battle for the native might of ideas in themselves” (*Mermaid Inn* 254). In his column of 8 April 1893, Scott explicitly calls for the convergence of art forms, writing in reference to the musicians Joseph Gould and J. W. F. Harrison that “[i]t is fortunate for a Canadian city to have its music in the care of a man who is more than a musician” (292). Again, Scott echoes Pater in his argument for a catholic approach to artistic practice, where “in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art” (Pater 134).

Scott’s own work speaks to this broad-reaching engagement with artistic forms, for his poetry converges with his musical practice in myriad ways. In much of his work, Scott fashions soundscapes by imbuing poems with musical cues. Such is the case in “On the Death of Claude Debussy,” with its allusions to orchestral “overtones of cymbals” (15) and “open organ tones” (30), and in “An Impromptu,” which evokes a musicalized experience of space through “the oboe croons / The canary-throated / In the gloom of the violoncellos / And bassoons” (10-13). Even nominally, a number of his poems make reference to music: “Adagio,” “Willow-Pipes,” “Bells,” and “Intermezzo” are but a few examples from the span of his oeuvre. For Scott, music also has resonance as a driving narrative force. In the “Piper of Arll,” for example, Scott uses “musical incantation” (Edgar qtd. in Geddes 22) to articulate the Piper’s creative response to his “vision of loneliness” (Geddes 22). Scott first inscribes this acute “loneliness” through the “music in the cadenced fall” of the gathering sailors that the

Piper hears from a distance, “[singing] their longing songs of home” (“Piper” 26, 32). The Piper’s response to the sailors with his “mould[ing] [of] a tranquil melody” (35) to signal his “longed-for death” (36), along with the rhythmic “exequy” that the oars of the sailors “beat out” (98) as they bring him aboard their ship, traces the poem’s broad narrative structure of longing and fulfillment through musical cues. Such examples outline the ways that Scott draws on musical form and language in his poetry, and in doing so, exercises a catholic engagement with art forms in his own poetic practice.

One of the most robust examples of Scott’s interest in converging art forms is “Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon.” As Carolyn Roberts has observed, the poem is a musical one by virtue of its structure, with both its content and form rooted in Sapphic and Gregorian musical traditions.<sup>4</sup> Written in the wake of one of Scott’s early treaty trips,<sup>5</sup> “Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon” maps intermingling voices of the colonizer and the colonized onto the liminal surface of the lake—a landscape that “stirs with [an] infinite, tender” musicality, as the midnight waters ripple with whispers and swell with an orchestral rain “ringing like cymbals” (33, 40). Scott thus charts a space of colonial contact through representations of music. Within this musicalized threshold space, the natural world—and the Indigenous voices that reverberate within it—is ostensibly set in counterpoint with the Christian hymns of the colonizers. As Roberts notes, “on the level of content, Scott has written contrapuntally, simultaneously describing two events: the singing of ‘Adeste Fideles’ and the approach of a summer thunderstorm as it overtakes the carolling canoers” (n. pag.).

To call the relationship of voices in the poem “contrapuntal,” however, fails to capture the implicit imbalance of power between the voices of the colonizer and the colonized in the poem. While the voices of the European colonizers and the Indigenous people are certainly oppositional, they are far from achieving the equal “balance between independence and interdependence” (Whittall n. pag.) that is characteristic of counterpoint, the first crescendoing sonorously as the latter is overwhelmed by the final stanza’s resounding storm. The faltering, Indigenous voice—characterized as a discordantly “savage” (16) other—manifests itself repeatedly in the soundscape, vanishing (8), lapsing (12), and slipping “down into darkness” (28) in a motivic waning: an evocation that is far from unprecedented when considered in light of Scott’s administrative work. Echoing his statement in “The Last of the Indian Treaties” that “the Indian nature now seems like a fire that is waning, that is smouldering and dying away in ashes” (n.

pag.), the assimilationist policies that Scott's administration upheld dovetail here with his poetics.

The poem's profound musicality functions, too, on a structural level, "complement[ing] subject with form ... by finding poetic structural equivalents for the musical form of the hymn" (Roberts n. pag.). Roberts elucidates the poem's formulaic ties to "Christian hymnology" (n. pag.), connecting the Sapphic stanza form of "Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon" to the "freely flowing [rhythmic features of] Gregorian chants, or medieval plainsongs" (n. pag.). The structure of the poem is thereby rooted in a distinctly European musical tradition. Mapping the contact zone of the lake onto a structural form whose "rhythmic and metric conjunction ... between music and verse" is "reminiscent of ... medieval plainsongs" (n. pag.), Scott brings together form and content incongruously,<sup>6</sup> as the ostensibly contrapuntal voices sound in an explicitly Western framework. The liminal surface of the lake, which serves as the grounds for the marriage of "sonorous vowels in the noble Latin / ... with the long-drawn Ojibwa" ("Night Hymns" 22-23), is charted within a poetic form that is resolutely aligned with Western cultural tradition: an alignment that subjects both poetic and geographic space to a colonial claim.

Moreover, the burgeoning colonial presence that sounds in the poem gestures towards a cadential resolution—"a harmonic goal" (Kostka and Payne 155)—achieved through Indigenous erasure. The rising "hymn of triumph and courage and comfort" ("Night Hymns" 19), coupled with the "sweeping" (39) sonority of the reverberating storm seems to dispel dissonance through a kind of cadence. The onrush of overpowering sound leads voices towards a musical resolution, undercutting the possibility of their distinctively independent contrapuntal movement; however, this may be more of a dissolution than it is a resolution. The ingenuous sense of harmony evoked by the poem's final lines serves, not to unite the voices of the Indigenous people with those of the European colonizers, but, rather, to assimilate them: "[b]ack they falter as the deep storm overtakes them / Whelms them in splendid hollows of booming thunder" (37-38). As Don McKay observes, Scott was "a bureaucrat charged with inducing ... native peoples ... to sign a treaty surrendering their land to the government" (2); these political affiliations suggest the kind of "harmonious" resolution Scott might have imagined for an Indigenous voice. Reverberations of the government's assimilationist project fill the soundscape of Lake Nipigon as the Indigenous people in the poem are "rendered voiceless" (7), "'disappear[ing] as a separate and distinct people'" (Scott qtd. in Dragland 7). The final stanza's ostensibly harmonious union is not a union at all; rather,

the poem engenders dissolution of the Indigenous voice through assimilation into a Western musical framework.

The same impulse towards resolution that characterizes the end of “Night Hymns” pervades much of Scott’s poetry; as Robert McDougall notes, his oeuvre is replete with “authorized endings” where tension and discordance are resolved “to a perfect close” (“Trace” 130). This impulse towards resolution reveals the deep ideological undercurrents that connect Scott’s poetry to his government work. In his defense of Bill 14, a 1920 amendment to the Indian Act that would “enable the Department [of Indian Affairs] to enfranchise individual Indians or a band of Indians without necessity of obtaining their consent” (Scott qtd. in Titley 48), Scott outlines his chief administrative aim:

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 is my whole point. Our objective 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 and that is the whole object for this Bill. (Scott qtd. in Titley 50)

Scott’s call here for enfranchisement and assimilation—for a kind of resolution—is anticipated by his years of preceding administrative work with the Department of Indian Affairs. Before his appointment as deputy superintendent, Scott was appointed as a commissioner involved in the negotiation of Treaty 9, which took him on a number of treaty-making trips throughout Ontario. These trips were the impetus for a flurry of poetic activity that resulted in such poems as “Spring on Mattagami,” “An Impromptu,” and eventually “The Height of Land.”<sup>7</sup> Though it was not written until 1915, “The Height of Land” draws from the treaty-making trips of 1905 and 1906, documenting an identifiable landscape; as Dragland notes, “the poem is rooted in the actual geography of the last phase of the 1906 trip—the journey up the Pic River from Heron Bay, over the height of land, to Long Lake Post” (234). The poem is thus geographically tied to Scott’s administrative work, poetically charting the topography that Scott travelled while securing Treaty 9.

Broadly, the poem documents a meditative moment from the treaty-making trip. Beginning atop the height of land, the poet tracks the journey that has led him and his party “up through the spreading lakes” (“Height” 25) to their camp at “the watershed” (2). Rooted at this geographic point, the poet’s thoughts turn outwards from the height of land. He visits, by memory, the “weird lakelet” (100) that he travelled through earlier in the

trip, and in doing so, spurs an emplaced metaphysical meditation that eventually returns to the height of land, where the poet “brood[s] on the welter of the lives of men / And dream[s] of his ideal hope and promise” (126, 127-28). Scott signals the broader philosophical meditation that the poem moves towards through the echoing of a “[g]olden and inappellable” “Something [that] comes by flashes / Deeper than peace” (52, 17-18). This “Something,” interpolated throughout the speaker’s navigation of the landscape, reveals the poem’s central concern with origins by evoking a “sense of primeval beginnings” (Krotz n. pag.). The repetition of the “[i]nflux of spirit” (“Height” 156) throughout the poem ties it to the spatial movement that the poem traces—a movement that similarly engenders a sense of origins through its departure from, and subsequent return to, the height of land.

The poem’s opening line emphatically emplaces the reader in a particular geography: “*Here* is the height of land” (1, emphasis added). In the following line, the poet describes a survey of the topography, detailing a sweeping panorama that extends from “the watershed on either hand” (2). The effect of the rhymed couplet that these first two lines create—“land” (1) paired with “hand” (2)—not only affirms the solidity of the poet’s spatial experience, but also gives a kind of structure to space, containing it in the rhyme’s closure. Rooted in a geographical setting that Sarah Krotz calls “a hydrological point of origins” (n. pag.), the opening lines lay the groundwork for a spatialized structure of departure and return—a structure that, coupled with the poem’s musical gestures, resonates with the structure of musical tonality. As the poem progresses, this place of origins also becomes a place “to foster noble thought” (83), which in turn enables the poet’s movement. The landscape—“the bright uplands / Where the air is clear” (77-78)—fosters an inward, meditative turn that serves as the impetus for a spatial one, effected through memory. Recalling “[t]he last weird lakelet foul with weedy growths” (100), the poet departs from the height of land through memory, mapping another geography entirely—one characterized by images of terror and gloom. This spatial departure, however, is short-lived. Later in the verse paragraph, the poet is again “wrapped in his mantle on the height of land” (126) at the poem’s point of origin. That this spatial return is signalled by the tolling of “the dark belfries of the spruces” (122) indicates the musical impulse that underscores the structure of the poem: a musicality that, though certainly less explicit than that of “Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon,” serves to mediate between Scott’s poetics and his politics.

This basic structure of movement in “The Height of Land” resonates with that of Western tonal music. While I do not argue that Scott expressly wrote the poem with a tonal framework in mind, his proclivity for music of this style, coupled with his interest in musical structures in previous work, reflects the underlying influence that tonality may have had on his poetic imagination. Throughout “At the Mermaid Inn,” Scott makes frequent reference to composers of Western tonal music, from Bach to Beethoven,<sup>8</sup> and relates their work to his sustained meditation on art and poetic practice. In his column of 24 June 1893, Scott quotes Henri-Frédéric Amiel, suggesting that what music achieves, and, indeed, what all art strives towards, is balance: “in Mozart the balance of the whole is perfect and art triumphs” (Amiel qtd. in *Mermaid Inn* 337). Extending from his writing on the convergence of music and poetics in earlier columns, Scott’s attention to Amiel’s remark affirms that music—and more specifically, Western tonal music—at the very least influenced the way he thought about the practice of poetry. That said, the explicitly musical form of “Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon” demonstrates that Scott also considered musical structures in his approach to writing.<sup>9</sup> That the “The Height of Land” is structurally aligned with the framework of musical tonality, then, is far from surprising.

As the predominant structural framework of European music from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century, tonality most commonly “refers to the orientation of melodies and harmonies toward a referential (or tonic) pitch class” (Hyer 726). As Brian Hyer writes, “in its power to form musical goals and regulate the progress of the music toward ... moments of arrival, tonality has become the principal musical means in Western culture by which to manage expectation and structure desire” (728). Such “moments of arrival” speak to the spatial impulse of tonality. Structured by its movement away from its originary tonic, tonality characteristically resolves tension through its movement back to a musical point of origin. With what Henry Cowell refers to as “a musical homing instinct” (qtd. in Hyer 731), tonality is driven by the desire to return, where “the tonic forms a conclusion ... [that] arrives at the ends of phrases, formal sections, and entire pieces” (732). The conclusiveness of tonality as a return home is particularly compelling when considered against the poet’s departure and return to a geographical point of origin in “The Height of Land”; the spatial structure of the poem mimics that of tonal music. Tonality’s resolving movement back into the tonic is predicated by harmonic succession from dissonance into consonance; it is the longing for a release from the tension of dissonance that leads to the ful-



fillment of resolution. Catherine Kelly's characterization of the "central experience" (n. pag.) at the core of many of Scott's poems echoes this principle of tonality. Characterizing experience as something that "happens in full actuality before it can be articulated," that "though given ... has to be wanted and after its perception ... has to be answered" (n. pag.), Kelly highlights the progression from longing to fulfillment that pervades Scott's poetry, and, in particular, "The Height of Land."

The poem begins by solidifying the poet's rootedness in the height of land through a rhymed couplet, however, this rhyme also works to solidify a sense of musical consonance in the poem's opening. Rhyme, as Stephen Adams suggests, is responsible for "largely determin[ing] the actual 'sound' of [a] poem" (31). The sense of expectation rhyme establishes both predicts and predicates a movement into a kind of closure, not unlike musical resolution from dissonance into consonance. In this way, the opening lines of "The Height of Land" not only establish the poem as a profoundly spatial one, but also mark it as inherently musical. The soundscape that the poet outlines in the subsequent lines continues to engender a sense of consonance, rendering silent the voices that may have otherwise undercut this consonance through their oppositional tension. Indeed, the poet introduces an Indigenous voice in the first verse paragraph through the sounding of a "long Ojibwa cadence" (7). While this voice initially serves as an auditory reminder of the limits of the poet's emplaced sense of origins, the dissonance that it has the potential to introduce is quickly resolved through its characteristic cadential quality. Similarly, the "mournful sound" of "Chees-que-ne-ne" (10) is characterized as one of "acquiescence"; it has a quality of "quiet subjection," of being brought to a harmonious rest ("acquiesce" n. pag.). The kind of dissonance evoked in "Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon" by the contrapuntal interplay of colonized and colonizing voices does not develop here. Instead, the poet quickly dispels any sense of tension by directing the movement of these voices into a resolution. By the end of the first verse paragraph, this resolution renders oppositional voices utterly mute; "the Indian guides are dead asleep" (22), to the effect that "[t]here is no sound" (23) save "[t]he gathering of waters in their sources" (24)—a gathering that suggests a tonic, or point of origin.

Worth noting, too, is the "Something [that] comes by flashes / Deeper than peace" (17-18) that first manifests itself in this site of origins. Echoed throughout the poem, this "Something" is qualified by the poet in its second iteration, where he notes that it "gives the inarticulate part / Of our strange being one moment of release" (54-55). As Dragland argues, this kind of release "would be a homecoming, a momentary return to origins"

(249). This is certainly the case on a structural level, where the reiteration of the “Something” signals a connection back to the place where it is first perceived by the poet: the height of land. In doing so, it also signals a kind of return, both in that its first perception originates there, but also in that it is spatially rooted in a geographic source. This call back to origins is characterized as a musical one; the poet issues the directive that, in response to this “Something,” “[w]e must answer in chime” (56). The word “release” (54) similarly gestures towards the musical underpinnings of this inappellable “Something,” as the same language is used to describe cadential movement in a harmonic succession, releasing the tension that dissonance creates in order to rest in consonance.

The emplaced sense of consonance that the poet underscores throughout these first sections of the poem is disturbed, however, by “sounds walking in the wood” (60). The landscape’s features, too, reflect this disturbance; “all the spruces shiver and tremble” (61), spurring a kind of dissonance as sound chafes against silence. Recalling the first verse paragraph’s “wind [that] sounds in the wood, wearier / Than the long Ojibwa cadence” (6-7), the poet evokes a parallel image of “sounds walking in the wood” (60). This parallel gestures towards an underlying Indigenous voice in the soundscape of the poem, where the “mournful sound / Of acquiescence” in the “Ojibwa cadence” (10-11, 7) is not unlike the “pervasive sigh” made by “[t]he ancient disturber of solitude”<sup>10</sup> (64, 63). Bolstered further by the shifting stars and the figure of “[t]he ancient disturber of solitude” (62, 63), the poet describes a landscape of disturbance that recalls, through parallel imagery, a kind of underlying Indigenous presence. This not only unsettles the ground the poet walks on, as the landscape “shiver[s] and tremble[s]” (61): it unsettles the claim of origins that he exercises over it.

In the first two verse paragraphs of the poem, the poet overwrites the landscape with his own sense of origins, staking a claim over the landscape by articulating its features. Mapping the party’s upward trip, the poet orders the landscape on the approach to the height of land “from level to level” (26), and in doing so, marks the poem as “an expression of territory ... [that] surveys and orders the northern landscape in ways that recall the appropriation and governance of land ... that Scott’s work as a treaty commissioner epitomized” (Krotz n. pag.). In an echo of the nineteenth-century tradition of inventory science,<sup>11</sup> the poet catalogues the natural features that he and his party encounter as they move “up through the spreading lakes” to reach “the last portage and the height of land” (25, 40), giving order to the landscape:

Pitching our tents sometimes over a revel  
Of roses that nodded all night,  
...  
Sometimes mid sheaves  
Of bracken and dwarf-cornel, and again  
On a wide blueberry plain  
Brushed with the shimmer of a bluebird's wing;  
A rocky islet followed  
With one lone poplar and a single nest  
Of white-throat-sparrows that took no rest.  
(27-39)

This meticulous detailing of the landscape not only bolsters the expansive view of territory that the opening lines of the poem establish, but also roots the poet in it by articulating his knowledge of the place.

As Suzanne Zeller argues, the inventorial impulse of this scientific practice “provided nineteenth-century colonists . . . with not only the practical means to dominate their physical surroundings but also an ideological framework within which to comprehend the experience of doing so”: a framework, that is to say, of nation-building (6). Ordering the environment, then, serves as a means of “construct[ing] an ordered society” (6). Even prior to Scott’s tenure as deputy superintendent, the Department of Indian Affairs was responsible for imposing such order. In *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada*, Brian Titley observes that “as an Indian administrative structure was being created in the new provinces and territories, it . . . became necessary for the Dominion to introduce order and consistency to the legislation affecting Indians” (11). The introduction of the Indian Act in 1876, along with Scott’s reinforcement of the Act throughout his career, worked to that end, “consolidat[ing] existing legislation and allow[ing] for its uniform application across the country” (11). On the 1905 treaty-making trip, for example, Scott and his fellow treaty commissioner Samuel Stewart “follow[ed their] ears to the site of a drum dance, to prohibit the ceremony [they] found in progress” (Dragland 62). This anecdote, drawn from Stewart’s journal of the trip and later rendered poetically in Scott’s “Powassan’s Drum,” indicates Scott’s efforts to reinforce the “ordered society” that the Act was established to create.

Scott’s impulse towards order in both his poetics and his politics is thus married in “The Height of Land”; even at the level of poetic form, he engenders a sense of the inventoried—and therefore, ordered—landscape. While “The Height of Land” is composed in free verse, the verse paragraph

that “surveys and orders the northern landscape” (Krotz n. pag.) is punctuated by rhymed couplets. Advancing a sense of structural closure, Scott’s rhyme contains an otherwise unruly landscape; the “revel / of roses,” “noisy, wild, [and] disorderly” (“revel” n. pag.), is tamed in its tidy coupling with “level” (27-28, 26). To the same effect, the “white-throat-sparrows that [take] no rest” (38) find repose in the closure of perfect rhyme, for “rest” is paired with the previous line’s “nest” (37). That the ordered landscape leads the poet to his destination at the height of land is therefore significant. Standing where he sees “[u]pon one hand / The lonely north enlaced with lakes and streams” and “[o]n the other hand / The crowded southern land” (41-42, 47), the poet is, in one sense, “a stranger precariously poised in a landscape not fully his own” (Krotz n. pag.). Yet “the long Ojibwa cadence” (“Height” 7) that sounds in the first verse paragraph reveals that while the height of land is geographically “a hydrological point of origins” (Krotz n. pag.), it is not much of an originary place at all for the poet. Nevertheless, the poet’s knowledge of place implicitly stakes his claim to it: a claim so profoundly felt that he senses “Something” “more native than the touch of time” (“Height” 50, 55). In this way, the poet figures the height of land as a place of both origins and order.

While the poem’s ordered structure of departure and return speaks to an underlying drive towards a resolution whereby the poet returns to the height of land after a dissonant departure to a landscape of disturbance, this structure also underscores the poet’s tenuous territorial control. On the level of form, there are clear limits to the poet’s ability to order the space around him. Unlike the verse that both precedes and follows it, the passage where “[t]he ancient disturber of solitude” (63)—the unsettling embodiment of dissonance—first emerges is unrhymed:

Now are there sounds walking in the wood,  
And all the spruces shiver and tremble,  
And the stars move a little in their courses.  
The ancient disturber of solitude  
Breathes a pervasive sigh.

(60-64)

This lack of rhyme precludes a sense of closure, or of controlled resolution. That said, the poet quickly dispels this dissonance by at once returning to a kind of structural order through near-rhymed couplets—“meditation” and “exaltation,” “shell” and “spell” (69, 70, 70, 71)—and displacing the “disturber of solitude” by turning his focus back to the height of land, to

“[t]he gathering of waters at their sources” where “quiet ensues” (63, 66, 67).

By reinforcing a pervasive silence within the space he occupies, the poet creates an auditory “*Terra nullius*” that makes room for a poetic telling of a colonial “creation story”—a story where, as J. Edward Chamberlin writes, “the new worlds were empty places” (28). Extending from the explorers’ mythology of discovery in early Canada, the poet’s rendering of an empty landscape promulgates the idea of his own origins at the height of land—origins that are repeatedly inscribed in the poem through the reoccurring “[g]host tremors of the spell” (71). These “tremors” are an abbreviated echo of the “Something [that] comes by flashes,” “a spell / Golden and inappellable” (50-52), which is imbued with a sense of origins through its qualification as “more native than the touch of time” (55). In this way, the poet tracks a shift from silence to a subtle echo, gesturing implicitly to the “Something” by paralleling the word “spell.” This echo works to the same effect as tonal intention. Rooted in the idea that “all consciousness is *intentional* in that it is directed toward objects” (Rings 105), tonal intention has been theorized by Steven Rings as “a subjective pointing of the ears *from* some subordinate tonal element *to* the tonic” (106), whereby “we ‘desire’ the tonic, ‘imagine’ it, or ‘relate’ all of the other pitches to it” (108). In other words, listeners hold on to the tonic as an orienting presence, even “in its acoustic absence” (106). In much the same way, the echo of the inappellable “Something” by such “[g]host tremors” (71) underpins the poem, periodically referring the reader back to the height of land by orienting us towards the place where the “Something” is first heard by the poet.

The echoing “Something” ceases, however, as the poet makes a meditative departure from “the uplands where the air is clear” to the “dark wood ... stifled with the pungent fume ... / That takes the place of air” (74, 95-98). Without an underlying signal orienting him back to a point of origins, the poet’s spatially rendered departure charts a profoundly discordant space:

Then sudden I remember when and where, —  
 The last weird lakelet foul with weedy growths  
 And slimy viscid things the spirit loathes,  
 Skin of vile water over viler mud  
 Where the paddle stirred unutterable stenches,  
 And the canoes seemed heavy with fear,  
 Not to be urged toward the fatal shore  
 Where a bush fire, smouldering, with sudden roar

Leaped on a cedar and smothered it with light  
And terror.

(99-108)

Though the poet evokes a spatialized image of landscape, this departure is made through memory: “[t]hen sudden I remember when and where” (99). Still “[w]rapped in his mantle on the height of land,” the poet charts this contrapuntally dissonant space “of vile water over viler mud” (126, 102) with the height of land as his point of orientation. Despite the cessation of the echoing “Something,” even the bush fire that mars the remembered space is tied to the height of land, described as having “left the portage-height” as a “tangle of slanted spruces burned to the roots” (108, 109). Though the poet’s recollection of this space eventually ends with his cognitive return to the height of land, the tension that it evokes in its imagery continues to mount through the poet’s metaphysical meditations. While, as Gordon Johnston writes, “resolving tensions is [Scott’s] stated intention,” “The Height of Land” ends like many of Scott’s major poems do: in the ambiguity of “a paradox or a question” (17). Ostensibly, then, the end of “The Height of Land” does not seem to extend a colonial ideology of assimilation; unlike “Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon,” it does not end with a resounding drive towards resolution. A spatial return to the height of land coincides with the poet’s litany of questions, firmly emplacing the poem out of a remembered place and back into a geographic one. Standing “[a]t the zenith of our wisdom” (154), the poet marks his placement in the height of land, itself a zenith of geography. Further, the poem ends with a final echo of “[t]he Secret, golden and inappellable,” that, in its near-rhyme with “tell” (157, 156), ends the otherwise unrhymed verse paragraph with a resolved closure. Together, these gestures back to the height of land articulate a resolution back to the poem’s origins—an impulse that resonates with tonality’s structure of departure and return.

In the poem, this structure becomes territorial. The poet’s inventorial mapping of the landscape, and, perhaps more profoundly, his imposition of his own poetic origins, which he locates in “[t]he gathering of the waters in their sources” (24), work to inscribe a colonial claim. While, from a cursory glance, “The Height of Land” does not read explicitly as one of Scott’s mediations between music and poetry, it is precisely this deeply wrought territoriality that binds the poem to musical tonality. Tracing the theoretical development of tonality, Hyer writes:

Schoenberg ... contended that [d’Alembert’s] view of the tonic [as passive] was erroneous, insisting that the tonic controls the dominant, not vice

versa ... In *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen* (1863), Helmholtz thus describes the tonic as ... a note that has dominion or maintains control ... over all the others. Political images of this sort are pervasive in theories of tonal music: to describe relations between harmonies in terms of dominance and subordination, as Rameau did, is to conceive them in terms of relations between persons, in terms, that is, of social power. (731)

These “relations ... of dominance and subordination” that imbue tonality with its political resonance weave through Scott’s politics and poetics alike. Scott articulates such a hierarchal dynamic in “The Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada” with his remark that “[t]he Indians are minors in the eye of the law, [and that] they are protected by the Indian Act” and the department who administrates it (n. pag.); in “The Height of Land,” the image of the “Indian guides ... dead asleep” (22), silenced by the poet, communicates a similar hierarchy. This hierarchal positioning, coupled with the structural framework of departure and return, underwrites Duncan Campbell Scott’s “The Height of Land” with an implicit musicality that, through a catholic integration, brings Scott’s poetics and policy into play with his piano.

### Notes

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- 1 See *Floating Voice*, 255.
- 2 Scott omits the name of the poem in his own column, noting only that “[i]n its issue of the 19th September last *The Week* devoted one of its editorial paragraphs to a comment upon the general obscurity of the younger verse writers of Canada, and a special request for light upon a poem of Mr Bliss Carman” (*Mermaid Inn* 154). The paragraph Scott refers to here was, in fact, published in the 16 September 1982 issue of *The Week*—there was not an issue published on 19 September of that year—and contains the first two stanzas of “Marjory Darrow.”
- 3 See Scott’s column of 4 February 1893.
- 4 Roberts writes: “[i]n ‘Night Hymns,’ Scott’s brilliance lies in the fact that he has united this tradition of using the Sapphic stanza to write odes, hymns and other musical verse forms with the familiar Latin hymn ‘Adeste Fideles,’ itself quoted at the central point of the poem,” and moreover, that “[b]y beginning each line of ‘Night Hymns’ with a strong stress, Scott has used a metric pattern which is in accordance not only with the metric pattern of the Sapphic stanza, but also with a rhythmic feature of the Gregorian chant” (n. pag.).

- 5 See Dragland, 20, 31 and Bentley's "Shadows in the Soul," 752.
- 6 While Roberts explores the overtly musical implications of this incongruity, Dragland also makes note of it in *Floating Voice*: "Scott was not unaware of such incongruities. An earlier trip had produced 'Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon' whose sapphics are as novel a container of the wilderness subject as the cultural opposites of the poem itself, the Indian and white canoeists and their simultaneous rendition of 'Adeste Fideles' in Ojibway and Latin" (31).
- 7 As Robert McDougall notes in the chart accompanying "D.C. Scott: The Dating of the Poems," Scott penned "Spring on Mattagami" on 1-3 June 1906 and "An Impromptu" on 19 June 1906.
- 8 See Scott's column of 24 June 1893.
- 9 Scott's short story cycle *In the Village of Viger*, as Gerald Lynch suggests, similarly functions as "a literary equivalent of musical form" (37), mimicking the structure of a suite.
- 10 A number of critics have speculated about the figure of the "ancient disturber." Catherine Kelly suggests a parallel to the murmuring "region-spirit" that appears a few lines later, imagining it as an invisible "other," that is "larger, greater than human life, yet comprising ... the most real part of human nature" (n. pag.). Tracy Ware suggests that this "'ancient disturber' is a projection of the speaker's own sigh at the inevitable cessation of his 'spell'" (18). Sarah Krotz notes the connection between "the universal essence to which Scott appeals" and "the land and its Aboriginal heritage," remarking that "in his more haunting form, in fact, the 'ancient disturber' strongly resembles the 'lonely spirit' of the Albany that Scott describes in 'The Last of the Indian Treaties'" (n. pag.).
- 11 Scott himself was associated with the practice of natural history. As Carl Berger remarks, "[i]n the 1880s and 1890s the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club was singularly favoured by the concentration in the capital of cultivated civil servants who joined its ranks and participated in its activities. These included not only nearly all the scientists employed by the government, but also the poet Duncan Campbell Scott" (13).

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