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Th. van Heijnsbergen

The Love Lyrics of Alexander Scott

The time has come to re-evaluate the achievement of Alexander Scott. The new insights that have been steadily amassing since the last full-scale critical edition of his poems was published almost a century ago[1] need to be tied up and made to work on his poetry. Until recently, the lyric of the kind he excelled in, the courtly lyric, had been too exclusively studied with contemporary ideas about literature and poetry in mind, at the cost of sixteenth-century ones. Moreover, in preparing a full-scale edition of Scott's work, one should be prepared to combine exclusively literary insights with those of other arts and sciences, no matter how large this task may loom. In the course of a short paper like this, I cannot deal with all aspects concerned, or enter into a detailed analysis of his complete *oeuvre*. What I will do is collect and connect recently developed insights into the courtly lyric as a genre in the sixteenth century, and from these distill an operational thesis with which to begin assessing Scott's work as a whole.

To start with, it is necessary to repeat some points of departure, agreed upon by scores of critics in general discussions on the type of poetry con-

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I would like to thank the "Nederlandse organisatie voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek NWO" for their financial support, which made attending the Scottish Conference and delivering this paper possible.

[1] *The Poems of Alexander Scott*, ed. Alexander Karley Donald, EETS, Extra Series, 85 (1902), published only six years after the edition by James Cranstoun, *The Poems of Alexander Scott*, STS, 36 (1896).

cerned but too frequently lost sight of when applied to individual texts. One of these points is the fact that these lyrics should not be approached as being above all expressions of personal emotion. Of far greater importance was their *collective* function within a court community, an ordering principle—in the guise of entertainment—structuring the sexual and social relations of a flourishing but fairly small Scottish court. Such a court community, controlling a relatively small area in most dramatically changing socio-political and religious circumstances, and, consequently, highly incestuous and fermentative, was always greatly in need of rules of play to stabilize existing hierarchies. These poems may have been used as personal unburdening—in fact it would be absurd to assume they never were—but to locate this aspect beneath the surface of these texts is extremely difficult, and, moreover, this personal element was not the *main* rationale of their existence to a contemporary audience.

This leads to another basic argument in Scott criticism, the reading of his poems as biographical documents. The wide range of moods in Scott's lyrics has been interpreted in two ways as a reflection of the poet's private life (for want of a better term I will use the label "biographical" for these approaches).[2] The more positive love poems have been conveniently read as "earlier Scott," the moralizing or cynical ones as the products of an older man. A second, less sweeping theory holds that, although there need be no strict sequence, the poems still reflect the personal moods of their "makar" at various moments of his life. However, although it seems impossible to find evidence that will disprove particularly the latter interpretation, we are forced to overtax the human faculty of empathy if we want to read all the extremes of emotion portrayed in Scott's work into one human mind. Consider, for example, the most carefully balanced tone of *Ane newȝere gift to the quene mary* as opposed to the supposedly biased *Ane ballat maid to þe derisioun and scorne of wantoun wemen*, the savage indictment of amorous play in *ȝe blindit luvaris luke* as opposed to the wholehearted embrace of physical love in *Vp helsum hairt*, and the condemnation of the faithlessness of women in *I muse and marvellis in my mind* as opposed to the condemnation of the *dowbilness* of men in *Ladeis be war*, all of these poems in their turn undercut by specimens of Machiavellian practical advice to courtly lovers in *The slicht remeid of luve*:

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[2] John MacQueen should be lauded for having devoted much of his attention to Scott; his is the most prominent name connected to the "biographical" approach, see especially his "The Biography of Alexander Scott and the Authorship of 'Lo, quhat it is to lufe'" in *Scotland and the Lowland Tongue*, ed. J. Derrick McClure (Aberdeen, 1983), pp. 50-8, and his *Ballatis of Luve* (Edinburgh, 1970). Large parts of the latter were repetitions from his 1968 Warton Lecture on English Poetry, entitled "Alexander Scott and Scottish Court Poetry of the Middle Sixteenth Century," published in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 54 (1968), 93-116. In MacQueen's view, Scott changed after the Reformation from a sensual, comical and cynical poet into a "satiric and censorial moralist, who may have entirely given over literary work in the last fifteen to twenty years of his life" (*Progress and Poetry: The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature* [Edinburgh, 1982], p. 130). Most of Scott's poems, however, cannot be dated, and the "biographical" approach generally has too many ifs; in the words of Denton Fox, it constitutes "a tenuous chain of hypotheses [that] may, of course, be true, but the odds against it seem staggering" (*Notes and Queries*, 217 (1972), 32-6, a review of the Warton Lecture and of *Ballattis of Luve*). Moreover, this lack of substantial external evidence exposes a more structural illogicality: the "biographical" theory justifies its right to live by using *itself* as evidence, providing evidence for a theory which only becomes valid evidence if we accept the theory in the first place; this substitution of theory for evidence (in other words, basing a theory on proof which its itself hypothetical, the evidence *itself* being a theory) is its major intrinsic weakness.

> Be subteill, secreit, sobir in thair sicht
> ffacound of wordis / bot feckill of intent
> And nevir lat ȝour mowth and mynd go richt (*ll.* 10-12)

Any attempt to fit these conflicting attitudes into one person cannot but take quite a few liberties with the human mind, postulating an exceptionally ambivalent human being behind these texts, who enounces extremities of judgment that are irreconcilable even when stretched over two or three decades, the time span in which Scott produced all his extant poetry. Apart from this psychological improbability, the absence of any external information about the poet's motives makes these "biographical" readings even more putative, hypotheses existing in a vacuum of their own. Reading a chronological development from naive youth to cynical, detached old age into these poems is a model too mechanical and a theory too indemonstrable to work with; besides, it does not account for *all* of Scott's paradoxes. Therefore, we should look for alternatives to this rather tenuous "biographical" reading, and a slight shift of emphasis, itself the result of new insights into the sixteenth-century reception of poetry, leads to a much more fertile and historically correct starting-point: we ought to view these poems not as personal expression but as being the articulation of a community code through established forms, shaped at least as much by the community and by the very language itself as by an individual author. This is only a small re-adjustment of our approach, but a very productive one: it allows us to read these lyrics not as expressions of an individual person but as stemming from an individual *poet*—which is, in the sixteenth-century context as described above, not the same.[3] Apart from its wider applicability, covering the whole of Scott's *oeuvre*, this what I will term "cultural" approach has the additional advantage of staying close to the text, so that we are able to construct theories which can actually be tested on solid material. Moreover, the application of such an analysis of Scott's work fits in perfectly with recent scholarship on the courtly lyric, especially in socio-linguistic areas. Finally, it should be noted that this thesis by no means excludes the possibility of reading courtly lyrics as personal documents, it merely frames such a "biographical" reading in a wider perspective, a perspective that determines more precisely the limits of the latter approach by taking better account of its contemporary cultural context, as we shall see below.

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[3] This adjustment would involve rephrasing a critical comment like "Scott suggests [in this poem] that he regards love as merely appetitive" (*Ballattis of Luve*, p. xlix) as "Scott suggests in this poem that love is regarded as merely appetitive."

On first investigating the poems with this "cultural" hypothesis in mind, they indeed strike us as an exemplary collection of communally-defined set pieces. We can distinguish amongst others a new year gift poem, a "lament", a mock-heroic tournament poem (firmly set, both technically speaking and content-wise, in the *Christis Kirk/Peblis to the Play* tradition),[4] two psalm translations, a celebration of May, and an exchange of hearts. Other Middle-Scots court poets characteristically show a similar command over a variety of genres. Apart from Scott, "makars" like Sir David Lindsay, William Stewart, John Stewart of Baldynneis and Alexander Montgomerie provide a general pattern of versatility in this respect. They were first of all craftsmen, lending their skills to all kinds and tones of verbal expression. This is not to say that there is no personal element in their work, but rather that it is expressed in more impersonal ways, usually hidden beneath the "public" surface of the text. Thus, in *Ane newȝere gift*, Scott's personality shines through the political surface of the text by means of carefully-chosen words and an evenly-distributed amount of criticism of both Catholics and Reformers. Likewise, wrapped up in forms like allegory, dream-vision (Montgomerie's *Cherrie and the Slae* being a prime example), and translation, personal ideas could be vented indirectly.

The manuscript in which Scott's poetry has survived, the 1568 Bannatyne manuscript, likewise shows the surplus applicability of a "cultural" over a "biographical" approach. That there is a method in the divisions and sub-divisions created by the compiler is beyond doubt.[5] As his directions to the reader show, Bannatyne consciously embedded the "ballatis of luve" in sections of religious, moral, and "mirry" poems (all of them, incidentally, containing works by Scott), making a univocal response even more difficult by subdividing the love-section itself into positive and negative approaches of various kinds. This very habit of dividing anthologies into categories according to a rational pattern can be observed in many contemporary collections of poetry, showing that poetry was approached with expectations different from ours; in Scott's days, the socio-political and cultural context rather than the author's private life was the referent of the work. His poems, therefore, should be studied as spatial and cultural phenomena rather than as testimonies of a temporal or personal-emotional process. In its own historical context, his work must not be read as a modern one-author volume; again, this is a critical commonplace, yet one remarkably often unheeded in textual analysis. Secondly, such poems must not be judged as private reading matter; their essence should be located in their being enjoyed in public, traces of their musical setting clearly visible, affecting amongst others rhythm, stress patterns, and rhyme scheme.[6] The fact that Scott himself was a Chapel Royal musician is important; it sheds light on both form and contents of his poetry. Add to this musical element the fact that writing to entertain an audience—as Scott did—increases the distance between writer and text, and we have yet two more creative priorities in his poetry that compete with the "biographical" one.

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[4] Alan H. Maclaine, "The *Christis Kirk* Tradition: Its Evolution in Scots Poetry to Burns," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 2 (1964-5), 3-18, 103-18, 163-82, and 234-50.

[5] See especially Joan Hughes and W. S. Ramson's *Poetry of the Stewart Court*, and Alasdair MacDonald, "The Bannatyne Manuscript—A Marian Anthology," *Innes Review*, 37 (1986), 36-47.

Furthermore, several poems seem set to a theme, written to evoke a reaction or elicit a debate rather than to express personal feelings; later editors recognized the expository rather than expressive nature of these poems by superimposing titles like "Of Wemen-kynd" and "On paciens in lufe."[7] Likewise, many of these poems provide generalized roles for any auditor to identify with, e.g. the disillusioned lover (*To luve vnluvit it is ane pane*), the devoted lover (*Only to ȝow in erd þat I lufe best*), the pragmatic lover (*I wilbe plane*), the socially inferior lover (*Luve preysis but comparesone*), the "consummated" lover (*Vp helsum hairt*), the wary lover (*Leif luve and lat me leif allone*), the misogynist (*The slicht remeid of luve*), the mournful lover (*Hence hairt with hir þat most departe*), the conventionally sweet-tongued lover (*Rycht as þe glass bene thirlit thrucht with bemis*), etc. Surely at least a large number of these represent *personae* rather than lived experiences;

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[6] The best study on this subject in a Scottish context is provided by Helena M. Shire in her *Song, Dance and Poetry of the Court of Scotland under King James VI* (Cambridge, 1969); for England, see especially B. Pattison, *Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance* (London, 1948).

[7] Titles taken from David Laing, *Poems by Alexander Scott; from a Manuscript Written in the year MDLXVIII* (Edinburgh, 1821).

they may be projections of the poet's inner self, but they are idiosyncrasies projected into a poetry which is defined by the community rather than by an individual author. Much of his writing still has a performative function; there is a distance between Scott and his poem similar to that between a dramatist and the actual text of a play,[8] and more than one Scott poem signals the onset of dramatic monologue.

All this fits in with a reading of Scott's poetry as primarily courtly entertainment, in a *milieu* well-known for its partiality for the play-element, many art forms still forming an organic part of society on all levels. In a highly stimulating article, Michael Lynch draws our attention to the revitalization of court life during the reign of Mary Queen of Scots, culminating in the grand celebration of the baptism of James VI in December 1566.[9] Not only does this "renaissance" of song, dance and poetry coincide exactly with the dates and with the main emphases of the Bannatyne manuscript, it also suggests quite strongly that Scott and his lyrics, which after all form the nucleus of the "ballatis of luve" section in the manuscript, were an established part of this scene. The identification of the manuscript and of Scott with this court, coupled with the climactic explosion of this circle only shortly afterwards, may go a long way in explaining the fate of both the manuscript and Scott's poetry.[10]

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[8] In a famous letter, contrasting art (individual, lived experience) as a different way of "knowing" to science ("the abstraction of structures"), Louis Althusser shows how basic such a process is to the emergence of art as we know it. The internal conflict in the work of novelists like Balzac and Solzhenitsyn, which constitutes the basic level of existence of their work, is the result of their writing from within their respective communities yet doing so from an abstracted, internal distance: "What art makes us *see*. . . is the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes . . . Balzac and Solzhenitsyn give us a 'view' of the ideology to which their work alludes and with which it is constantly fed, a view which presupposes a *retreat*, an *internal distantiation* from the very ideology from which their novels emerge" (*Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster [New York and London, 1971]). This is also true of Scott's poetry; note that Stephen Greenblatt convincingly applies the same theory to Wyatt's court lyrics in his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980), p. 153.

[9] Michael Lynch, "Queen Mary's Triumph: the Baptismal Celebrations at Stirling in December 1566," *Scottish Historical Review*, 69 (1990), 1-21.

[10] Lynch states that "the theme of Venus . . . as a metaphor for a bond of political union through love, was well known to Alexander Scott" (p. 15); likewise, Scott's *Ane newȝere gift to the quene mary* exactly summarizes what Lynch suggests was initially Mary's main policy. All this adds weight to the assumption that Scott was a prominent figure at this court.

Taking all this into consideration, it seems most plausible to approach Scott's work as consisting mainly of poems written to celebrate certain occasions and/or poems meant to serve as public entertainment, the love lyrics "activating," as it were, the game of love through display of poetical craftsmanship rather than answering to author-centered interpretations, which belong to a later era.[11] If, as a poet, Alexander Scott surpasses other court poets, it is not primarily because of the fact that his poetry cogently reflects a sensitive or otherwise pronounced personality (a romanticization of the period which literary criticism should have dismantled at about the same time as it acknowledged the artificiality of courtly diction itself) but first and foremost because of his technical superiority.

Scott's lyrics, then, should be studied above all not in the "biographical" sense but in the context of a courtly community. Describing the actions of this community in general terms and in its own highly stylized, even quasi-formulaic language, these poems invite the auditors to see their collective as well as their individual experiences alluded to, the latter generated by and embedded in the established code. In other words, these lyrics, as a genre, rely on the active participation of the auditors to create meaning, not—or, I should say, not only—on the author and his intentions. In more print-oriented days these creative faculties were gradually taken away from the reader, but in studying sixteenth-century courtly literature we must take into account the radically different conditions of pre-modern literary composition.

The above remarks have led us to the level and status of language and its power of generating meaning in its own right. Art forms risk becoming worn and hollow when they are too far removed from the reality they once "held," which may lead to a decadence of form and language. However, they may alternatively develop new languages with which to put into words new feelings; in such transitional periods, poets, rather than inventing language and form completely anew, turn old forms and conventional structures of discourse inside out, reforming literature from within through the dialectical potential of the language itself. This puts tremendous pressure on the language; in the words of Lawrence Manley, language was "called upon to mediate between the nature and the structure of reality, on the one hand, and the changing expectations, habits and shared assumptions of men on the other."[12] Linguistic tension thus shows to be closely linked to general social and cultural changes.[13] Poets, consciously or not, manipulated this tension to great effect; Wyatt's and Scott's exploitation of the code of courtly love is a good example, but we can see the same process at work in Dunbar's *Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*, in which the poet, too, relies on the subversion of well-established coded genres and languages (the courtly *débat*, saints' lives, sermons; clerical latinisms, colloquial language next to courtly diction, cursing and lecherous speech that is usually the domain of lower-class males now comes from the mouths of courtly ladies) to achieve his shock effect most successfully. As Edwina Burness observes, the widow asserts her freedom by parodying "the rhetoric of a society where females are required to suppress their true selves," ridiculing "in its own terms the morality which has hitherto sought to inhibit her language and actions."[14]

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[11] Hughes and Ramson argue that the poetry of the Bannatyne manuscript is occasional and public, written for a small and self-contained social set, which had its own stylized "rituals" (*Poetry of the Stewart Court*, p. ix).

[12] Lawrence Manley, *Convention 1500-1750* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), p. 137. The underlying thesis in Jonathan Goldberg's *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore,

How does Alexander Scott's poetry fit into all this? The first thing we notice is how the outside sparkles; his verse confirms T. S. Eliot's creed that "genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood."[15] When focussing more sharply, we see that his lyrics fall into several categories. Conventionally celebratory love poems like *Rycht as þe glass* or *Vp helsum hairt* fit in happily with the one-dimensional order prescribed by the closed language itself; Gary Waller has remarked that in this kind of poem (he mentions, amongst others, Dunbar's *The Thrissil and the Rois*)

1983), is the notion that language and politics are "mutually constitutive," that "society shapes and is shaped by the possibilities in its language and discursive practices" (p. ix). The same critic's "The Politics of Renaissance Literature" in *English Literary History*, 49 (1982), 514-42, provides a detailed survey of the attempts of modern criticism to structure our insights into Renaissance contextuality and intertextuality.

[13] "The unusual diversity of broken, mixed, unfinished works" in the late sixteenth century is frequently read as an indication of the fact that literature was trying to express something which was felt before the appropriate words and forms had been developed; in this way, texts may articulate more than their authors know (Gary Waller, *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century* [London and New York, 1986], p. 12); one might relate this to the development of dramatic irony in sixteenth-century drama, which exploits a parallel contrast between verbal reality and fact. Paul Zumthor's "From Hi(story) to Poem, or the Paths of Pun: The Grands Rhétoriqueurs of Fifteenth-Century France" in *New Literary History*, 10 (1979), 231-63, provides a fascinating account of how language can become hollow and ambiguous through overuse, and how the "history of the pun" illustrates the poets' attempt to break through the formulaic surface of "public" verse. The parallels to be found in other late-medieval national literatures prove this is a general socio-linguistic process.

[14] "Female Language in *The Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*," *Scottish Language and Literature, Medieval and Renaissance*, ed. Dietrich Strauss and Horst W. Drescher (Frankfurt a/M, 1986), p. 365.

[15] From the essay "Dante" (1929), included in *Selected Essays* (London, 1932), p. 238.

> the poet finds a pattern of discourse already existing and a role waiting for him to fill. He inserts himself into it in order to establish his own place within a discursive structure that is not merely a literary one but a whole pattern of social discourse. As such, his writing operates within a very narrow register of themes and unusual linguistic coherence on the level of both general style and particular verbal details, what linguists term the *ideologeme*. By analogy with morpheme or phoneme, the ideologeme is the verbal unit that carries ideological detail.[16]

In most of Scott's lyrics, however, the traditional diction is clearly out of joint, and the consequent friction may develop into a highly disruptive voice, announcing a kind of counter-culture from inside the text. How the closed formulas of the courtly tradition are manipulated by Scott and turned into highly ambivalent open-ended structures is shown by *Of May*, the diction of which looks thoroughly traditional at first sight, but on closer inspection develops a secondary meaning that hovers over the text until it is finally released in the last line, which thus becomes a clue to the overall ambiguity of the whole poem:

So May and all thir monethis thre
Ar hett and dry in thair degre
Heirfoir ȝe wantoun men in ȝowth
ffor helth of body now haif e
No*ch*t oft till mell w*ith* thankless mowth

Sen every pastyme is at plesure
I counsale ȝow to mel w*ith* mesure
And namely now May June & Julij
Delyt no*ch*t lang in luvaris lesure
Bot weit ȝour lippis & labor hully

Borrowing terms from a political sphere, we can distinguish three elements in literature expressing its relation to society: "dominant" features; "residual" elements, formed by past social and cultural institutions but still effective in the present even though they "cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture"; and, thirdly, "emergent," as opposed to merely novel, features. Unlike the other two, "emergent" culture is not a matter of immediate practice, it has to find new forms slowly by touch. If we transfer this model to Scott's work, we find that many of his poems show a remarkable "pre-emergent" capacity, reflecting experience "active and pressing but not yet fully articulated," providing vintage material with which we can reconstruct transitional periods in structures of feeling, in Scott's case the internalization of the dialectical element being taken from the public level of language to the private one.[17] Writing at the very center of this "emergence," Scott's poems help to "create the subjectivity they express . . . court poets are as much written by their conventional lyrics as writers of them."[18]

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[16] Gary Waller, p. 18; see also Stephen Greenblatt, p. 152: "The experience at the heart of the poem is less a matter of individual character, isolated like a laboratory specimen for scrutiny, than a matter of shared language, of deep cultural assumptions, of collective mentality." Note that Waller pays considerable tribute to court poetry in Scotland; quite remarkable is his indirect comment on Scott in his entry on Dunbar in the "Notes on Individual Authors": Dunbar's poetry, he says, is "arguably the best produced in Scotland between Henryson and Alexander Scott" (p. 300; see pp. 26 and 306 for brief but laudatory comments on Scott's achievement as a poet).

From within this social, political and linguistic network, and purely on the demonstrable basis of the poet's use of diction rather than on our own conceptions of life and poetry, we can observe a personal identity shaping itself in Scott's dialectical language. Writing on the sixteenth-century relation between literature and language in general, Stephen Greenblatt suggests we should approach contemporary poetry from three angles:

> as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes. The interpretative practice . . . must concern itself with all three of these functions. If interpretation limits itself to the behavior of the author, it becomes literary biography (in either a conventionally historical or psycho-analytic mode) and risks losing a sense of the larger networks of meaning in which both the author and his works participate. If, alternatively, literature is viewed exclusively as the expression of social rules and instructions, it risks being absorbed entirely into an ideological superstructure . . . the significance for us [of these texts] is not that we may see *through* them to underlying and prior historical principles but rather that we may interpret the interplay of their symbolic structures with those perceivable in the careers of their author and in the larger social world as constituting a single, complex process of self-fashioning and, through this interpretation, come closer to understanding how literary and social identities were formed in this culture.[19]

This perfectly summarizes the phenomenon we can detect in Scott's work: a personal element expressed through and within an encompassing, culturallydetermined whole. In the linguistic tension of these lyrics (as in the existential agonies of Shakespeare's plays) we can reconstruct the first self-projections of the modern individual in literature.

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[17] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 122-3 and 126-7; note that Williams explicitly signals that this model does not account for "the personal or the private," it deals with the *social* aspects of literature.

[18] Greenblatt, p. 139.

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

Parallel to this emergence of the poet as individual, another emancipation can be observed, that of poetry as a whole, from a communally-defined to an autonomous, aesthetic art form with an increasingly large and more directly expressed personal element. Paul Zumthor, to name but one critic, has sketched this development on the part of late medieval literature from "mimetic activity, derived from a need for collective participation, comparable to a choral song or dance" to a more individual voice mediated through the very language and structure of the poem, grasping a more particular quality of its object.[20]

Imagining Scott's lyrics being enjoyed in this environment, we begin to realize that they are actively dialectic, their meaning open to quite idiosyncratic interpretations. It is precisely this open-ended quality that creates the tension we immediately perceive when reading many of Scott's lyrics; the same applies to a poet like Wyatt. Any exclusively author-centered interpretation of these lyrics, ignoring their communal identity, covers only part of what these poems have to offer. That this open-endedness could turn them into statements highly subversive of accepted social stratifications—an ironical inversion of what the genre originally tried to achieve—was clearly perceived by political leaders. Language itself could perpetuate social and political systems, and the sixteenth century was intuitively aware of this; consequently, poetry had a public rather than an aesthetic function. Anyone discrediting this potential of language should consider how long courtly love jargon still functioned as an active agent in social and political relationships, while, as the records clearly show, every-day reality was everything but as "gentle" as this language made believe, with its continual, short-circuiting recourse to its linguistically closed, coded concepts like truth, service, honesty, etc. Wyatt's careful phrasing and perilous position at the court of Henry VIII is well-known, and it is interesting to speculate whether considerations of the same nature might also account for the silence surrounding Scott after 1568.[21]

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[20] "From the Universal to the Particular in Medieval Poetry," *Modern Language Notes*, 85 (1970), 816.

[21] Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton, 1978) relates how Spenser ran into similar difficulties over *The Fairie Queene* with James VI, another king who was very much aware of the power of language. But also in religious and moral writings the playfulness and dissimulation of courtly poetry was increasingly distrusted, it came to be identified with "fiction," and hence with immoral equivocation (see

The latter suggestion leads us to another sphere in which the emergence of the self played a decisive part: in the religious debate, a similar focus on the manifestation of the individual is of course a salient feature of the century, and in this process language itself again plays a crucial role. Protestantism was, inversely proportionate to its own emphasis on personal responsibility, uneasy about the open-ended potential of a text and its consequent multi-interpretability. Politics and religion, either separately or in combination, may have silenced Alexander Scott; this would by no means be an unprecedented event in a society in which poetry was strongly bound up with religious, social and political life. As contemporary witnesses show, the court considered poetic discourse the ideal language, and if we realize the central importance of language as operating at the very heart of existence, a simple analogy tells us that poetry in this period actively operated on the most elementary level of human experience and of politics.[22] The all-important thing is the fact that the structures of language were themselves part of the crisis that reflects the emergence of autonomous art and creative individuality from among communally defined forms and diction. If we realize in addition the central importance attached to poetry, this most condensed form of verbal art emerges as an apt touch-stone by which to measure this crisis.

However, there are several doors we have to pass through before we can confidently point to specific instances of the above aspects in the individual poems. First of all, staying *within* the limits of courtly diction, Scott's words admit no direct access to the deeper level we are trying to map. Secondly, we should note the copiousness of the language in general and its restless search for new meanings, as acknowledged by contemporary theorists.[23]

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esp. pp. 90-94 and chapter 4). This widening divide between a "plain" and an "ornamental" style, as noticed by Yvor Winters ("The Sixteenth-Century Lyric in England," *Poetry*, 53 [1939], 258-72 and 320-35; 54 [1939], 35-51) and C. S. Lewis (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* [Oxford, 1954]) provides a likely backdrop to Scott's lyrics.

[22] See Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528, translated into French in 1537, and into English by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561 as *The Book of the Courtier*) and George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*, printed in 1589 but written/conceived in the seventies and early eighties. In the "Introduction" and first two chapters of *Poetry and Courtliness*, Javitch shows to what a large extent poetry and model court conduct overlapped and reinforced one another.

[23] For example by George Puttenham in *The Arte of English Poesie*, included in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1904), II, 83-4, 93, 95, 164 and 191; see also Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (London, 1979). Gary Waller shows how "many Elizabethan theorists praised

Furthermore, paradox is the very foundation of the Petrarchan lyric, the main source of the courtly lyric, which led to a highly complex idiom. In the words of Scott's contemporary Puttenham, "the most puissant and passionate" of human affections required "a Poesie variable, inconstant, affected, curious, and most witty of any others" in order to reflect the "many moodes and pangs of louers" most truthfully.[24] Moreover, as contemporary authorities frequently emphasize, use of the "figure of *faire semblant*" (in other words: dissimulation) was a necessity in a courtly career.[25] To end the list, these lyrics were deliberately and openly ambiguous in order both to protect and provoke.[26] It should be clear that it is an extremely precarious undertaking to read any linear development into texts that, themselves ambivalent, deal with such a multifaceted phenomenon. More likely than not,

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language that was copious; *copia*, the ability to create multiple meaning from language, was seen as one of its distinctive features . . . Its pleasure was in variation, copiousness, in the transgressions of daily speech . . . language was plural, copious, overflowing" (p. 57; see also pp. 65-6). Adhering rigidly to a narrowly-defined courtly language was the court's policy in trying to control in this way an inherently subversive process.

[24] Puttenham, pp. 46-7 and 184.

[25] Puttenham summarizes the aim of his *The Arte of English Poesie* in a way that brings together the art of poetry, dissimulation, and being a courtier quite significantly: it "may serue as a principall good lesson for al good makers to beare continually in mind in the vsage of this science; which is, that being now lately become a Courtier he shew not himself a craftsman . . . but that so wisely & discreetly he behaue himselfe as he may worthily retaine the credit of his place and profession of a very Courtier, which is, in plaine termes, *cunningly to be able to dissemble*" (p. 183; my italics); see also pp. 164-5, where he writes that for "Ladies and young Gentlewomen, or idle Courtiers . . . none other science" is so fit "as that which teacheth *beau semblant*, the *chiefe profession aswell of Courting as of poesie*" (my italics). Castiglione is likewise insistent on this subject; see *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. J. H. Whitfield (London, 1974), pp. 97, 100, 132, 171, 179-80, 236-7, 248 and 250; see also *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Robert W. Hanning and David Rosand (New Haven and London, 1983). Javitch provides extensive comment on this aspect, esp. pp. 30-38.

[26] See, among others, Stephen Minta, *Love Poetry in Sixteenth Century France. A Study in Themes and Traditions* (Manchester, 1980), pp. 8-9; and J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London, 1949), esp. p. 191, where, in discussing the modern distrust of play-forms, he states that we should realize that the "precarious balance between seriousness and pretence is an unmistakable and integral part of culture as such, and that the play-factor lies at the heart of all ritual and religion. So that we must always fall back on this lasting ambiguity, which only becomes really troublesome in cultural phenomena of a non-ritualistic kind." This is exactly what can be observed in Scott's language, the emancipation of poetry from public, formulaic art towards highly personal expression.

instead of bringing us any closer to the imagination of the sixteenth-century "makar," such an attempt will reflect the critic's wish to "make sense" of the beginnings and endings of his or her *own* reality; the reader's enjoyment of the kind of poetry concerned, however, is likely to suffer rather than benefit from such an anachronism.

We may conclude by saying that Scott has injected a polemical element that reflects all the above tensions right into the heart of his poetry, which on the formal surface still looks as elegant and musical as the best provided by courtly poetry of earlier periods. This interplay between text and tone, form and content, gives nearly every Scott poem a fascinating second level of communication. In his verse we witness a crisis in language as much as in sexual and social relations, a crisis reflected through the medium of language itself, which lifts these lyrics to the level of meta-poetry. In the attempts to deal with a paradoxical theme expressed in deliberately equivocating diction, we find that it is very difficult to locate Alexander Scott, the person as individual person (i.e. the "biographical" aim); however, the position of Alexander Scott, the person as individual poet within the network of social, linguistic and literary relations, can be brought out quite lucidly by the "cultural" approach. Moreover, the latter provides us with a more exhaustive apparatus through which to assess the poet's achievement.

The lack of an accepted critical terminology in which to set out this new reading shows how much ground such a reading still has to conquer. The approach to poetry with this "cultural" eye—so alien to our post-Romantic mind, which puts emotional appeal above technical accomplishment and often considers literature that does not represent a distinct personality inferior in creative potential—is of vital significance in studying sixteenth-century court poetry, even though it may as yet look something of an ugly duckling in the splendid company of traditional criticism. The one mistake we should not make is to treat these approaches as mutually exclusive; they are different in kind and in predominance, but they are not opposites. There is clearly room for the personal element, but it has been too heavily stressed at the cost of a "cultural" reading. Consciously emphasizing the latter until the balance has been redressed, therefore, seems a fertile policy for the near future. Putting the "cultural" hypothesis first without excluding the "biographical" one yields a much more resourceful thesis than an approach which would only make use of either the one or the other. If we learn how to make this seed bear fruit, fascinating new insights, I think, lie ahead; in the case of Alexander Scott, this approach may prove the key to an extremely elusive and paradoxical poet.

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