

SEEING THINGS AS THEY ARE

Mosaic Orpheus (Hugh MacLennan Poetry Series). Peter Dale Scott. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009.

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Scott's *Seculum* is one of the essential long poems of the past half century, in three books (*Coming to Jakarta: a Poem about Terror* [1988], *Listening to the Candle: A Poem on Impulse* [1994], and *Minding the Darkness: A Poem for the Year 2000* [2000]). Essential, too, because it attempts to resolve tensions which I suspect the public for poetry will subtly misread. Explicit grief-work over the civic failure to take stock of systemic political crimes, and the forensic sleuth's pursuit of resolution through Buddhist mind-training practice (vipassana or come-what-may seeing), stand ready in Scott's framing of his large triptych—a contemplative epic—to prompt from many an unquestioning nod of the head. So too, for many of the same readers, his activist tie to Romantic imagination, especially in Wordsworth and Shelley, against contemporary brands of aestheticism, will not excite much inquiry. Yet from the first chapter of *Seculum*, both elements in the title for his new collection—mosaic discontinuity and Orphic retrieval—figure in non-standard ways.

Item: In that same first chapter, from *Coming to Jakarta*, his attempt to contain distress over the blocked publication of his investigative research findings comes up against “*mosaic darkness*”—not familiarly seamless obscurity, but kaleidoscopic stuff—while in the poem's later books Dante's civic grief and wrath, with his loyal love for a dead woman, make him an Orphic brother-father to Scott, in that Alighieri's existential defeat folds out into contrary visionary assurance. Such is not regulation Orphism, particularly as invoked collegially against American amnesiac indifference toward a largely occulted, webby congress of state terrorism, proxy mass slaughters, off-the-books funnelings of the sluice from international drug cartels to black ops, economic decline and the management of fear by debt, false-flag events, assassinations, and greasy resource wars. Several such exemplary writers are invoked in *Seculum*, who fail only in the world's eyes but triumph as witnesses, and for Scott wear the Orphic hue. A perfectly sane critic may object, then, that Scott oddly adapts the Orphic aura to his great allies, just as he torques Buddhist mind-training somewhat by leaguering it in support of unwarranted hopes. But we must ask such a critic to wait. For if activist imagination is not to fail as Orpheus did in his hubristic project, then it has

got to come out as something other than empty-handed. And likewise if it sets its sights on winning through with a long-odds bet on millennial hope, then it is banking on something other than the potent fusion of unfoolable wisdom with fierce compassion. To my feeling, *Mosaic Orpheus* does not simply sum up and refine a life's work. It also replaces the prepaved terms of resolved tension with a surprise. While I cannot identify that factor with confidence, I do want to show that the work itself leaves room for its manifestation.

Mosaic Orpheus collects work from the last decade, subtly extending the long poem in clear yet subtle ways. Its handsome but unidentified cover image already cues us to subtlety: detailing a 3rd-century Roman mosaic from Sefhoris near Nazareth, the pictured face does not in fact allude to the mythic singer of the book's title, but instead another one from that site, a Hellenistic Roman stunner with laurel crown and earrings whom tour guides have dubbed "the Mona Lisa of Galilee." Not the strenuously failed lyre master is pictured, then, but a *donna anonima*: if somehow a revenant from the dead, then not the lost Roman-U.S. republic which he has grieved but a quality that lives, now, apart from that agony. The Orpheus mosaic elsewhere at Sefhoris (close by Nazareth), its lyre player off-center to an aerial flock overhead, is mentioned at the beginning of "Holy Land II: Force" as the goal of a drive conducted by a local man "from the shell-pocked city / to the mosaic of Orpheus / gently charming the birds."

Let me linger over this poem's procedure, which matches the cover's doubleness while also scoping Scott's motives for most of his work, in both the long poem and his dozen or so investigative studies of U.S. deep politics (his term for occluded governance as distinct from the conspiracy label invoked dismissively in the press). The fact that the pictured mosaic face is not that of Orpheus parallels the demographic fact that for many readers his work in both verse and forensic prose remains, as an integral matter, invisible. He must be the only poet now writing who can say that Czeslaw Milosz, peace-studies scholar Ola Tunander, various prominent vipassana teachers, and certain unnamed informants in government service deceased in mysterious circumstances, equally have nourished his effort. This span, together with an iron stomach for the forensics and catharsis of difficult findings, spell his personal equation. His poetics therefore will likely be neither a standard Orphic affair nor a canonical Buddhist one, although the poetry plainly arises in order to square those canons, and that personal equation, with a civics obdurately impersonal and malign.

Let me track the poem closely as a way of setting the agenda for both this book and its predecessors. The key chime struck by the poem is

shock—Walter Benjamin’s great theme in reading Baudelaire, here transferred from the prototypical urban swarm to the PTSD malaise of an entire body politic and its alert sleuths. In a paper for the 2004 Brandeis conference on *Literary Responses to Mass Violence*, citing his frustration in making his forensic case for the civic murder mystery, Scott observes that he had to do in himself what others refused, convening “facts and thoughts which had hitherto obsessed me. . . to face me from outside on the page.” He adds: “It helped that in the same period I was meditating. There too I learned to move towards equanimity by noting an emotional state in my mind, rather than being that state.” Ingeborg Bachmann has observed that sorrow, grief-work or *Trauerarbeit*, is an essential labor. But when such processes for the general get off-loaded onto designated Cassandras, then Hawthorne’s Gray Champion has returned only to be half-heard or ignored.

In the poem’s outer frame, the driver mutters something; Scott is roused by his shock at hearing it—while having just swiftly registered the storied town’s layered history of Jewish-Christian healings, compilation of the Mishnah, and a crusader tower that became an Arab school: “*the Americans should have taken all their planes / and flattened Mecca*”—but roused also by “the shock of my silence.” The remainder of the nine-page poem inventories a parallel instance of appalled reaction in conversation, a gaffe made by Scott two decades earlier, at a party honoring the Sandinista U.N. ambassador Nora Astorga, “by then pale with terminal cancer / but still beautiful.” Later he calls it a *trivial wrong*. It involved not Astorga but Dekka Treuhaft, a.k.a. Jessica Mitford, daughter of British pro-fascist aristocrats and herself a Communist and muckraker. All that parallels Scott to his Israeli driver, although quite inadvertently, is this; he wished to relate to Mitford-Treuhaft a moving synchronicity that involved his visit to the Cotswold church whose stained glass memorializes her parents, on the same day when he had revisited the home of Sally Kavanaugh, the daughter of novelist Rosamond Lehmann (and her second husband, a Communist). In the churchyard he stumbled on Sally’s grave, “as if Sally my Rilkean angel / had guided me there herself / the way her mother Rosamond Lehmann / had spoken of her / in her bizarrely spiritualist book / as a corn goddess *Persephone* / with a sweet returning *force*.”

Thus the force of destruction already contextualized by the outer frame at Sephoris now meets its counterpart, the force of revenant love. Lehmann’s grief over her daughter persisted into old age; the autobiographic *Swan in the Evening* (1967) was written at age 74. “At which words—*Rosamond Lehmann*— / Dekka turned away / with a look of what I still / vividly remember / as Communist aristocratic / anticolonial scorn.” In the remainder

of the poem, Scott sifts the motives for his “middle-class Canadian / talk of *gentleness* / not to mention *courteous love*,” and uncovers a webbed rationale. First comes the Florentine: “I suppose what I really wanted / ... was to engage her with Dante,” whose loyalty to “beauty transfixed in death / wrote of a sweet new / different society / with the force of a *gentle heart* [*cor gentil*] / able to change the world”—that is, “*bad government* / *not nature corrupt in us* [*Purgatorio* 16].” Then in swift roster come Hölderlin, Schiller, Marcuse, and at greater length the Wordsworth who got past his shock at revolutionary violence, and later the leaden impress of counterrevolution, to a hope that he might through example teach men how to “*soften* / *the future*.” These swift linkages among stymied witnesses take up Dante again, as the party of one (“*for himself*”), and again solitary Hölderlin, then Scott’s nightmare about his old camp counselors strewing his stuff, “evincing the violence / that explodes within myself,” from which he wakes “relieved / to be only where I am / chastised with self rebuke.” Finally come reflections about the fit, or not, between mind and cosmos, comprising an urgent handbook of questions, not answers: given the prehistoric origins of meditative practice, might aspirations for justice become gentler in the way that surf-rolled stones do, “to help explain how / in the throes of disaster / hatred violence madness / the world becomes more loveable (as in / the faces of the young women / who brush right by me / on their morning runs) / so that a few maintain / *all will be well* / and others rightly or wrongly / are still willing to risk death / for love to prevail?”

Inquest, exhaling slowly, thus rolls out the long view and defers any answer, this particular inspector having seen too much to offer one. The unintended gaffe, twenty years later, issues into the autobiography of an ambitious, precariously activist and meliorist poetics. In it, even those who risked death must be carefully distinguished from others among the informants for Scott’s tracts on deep politics. As *Seculum* testifies, some of Scott’s informants played a double game. Surely he writes for the other kind of witness, those who painted targets on their own backs while alive to the same uncertainty which he has just framed. The closing begins:

Mosaic Orpheus
 in the House of the Nile
 gently charming the birds
 and *calming tigers*
 with wisdom from having seen
 ghosts driven like leaves
 in the gusts of a wintry gale

mulcentem tigris Virgil *Georgics* 4:510

with *great Caesar* once again
 on the *Euphrates*
 I write of a trivial wrong...

Virgil Georgics 4:560-61

The spooked opening pages of *Coming to Jakarta* were likewise marked by a “*wind-driven ghost of snow*.” There, describing a near-breakdown phase in his political research and writing, when Scott’s work on the U.S. direct backing of Indonesian massacres in East Timor was being ignored or suppressed, a page swells to cinema size, accusingly white with the unwritten lethal poems in “the mean vaults at the back of my head.” He addresses them: “*Mosaic darkness // constellations of the gulf’s floor / naked half-limbs swift / alpine cloudburst hail and you // wind-driven ghost of snow / down the side of the dark / oak outside my childhood window...*”¹ Then, a time of near-shattering that gave birth to *Seculum*; now equably, toward the end, it is round-off time.

Yet retrospect, with all its weight and scope, in “Holy Land II: Force” hangs on that mere gossamer of exchange. The trivial wrong was his evocation of an Orphic override, another woman’s passionate recovery of her daughter, provoking Mitford-Treuhaf’s disdain, that muckraker of the American funeral industry (irony: “I plagued Dekka / with Rosamond’s belief / in Sally as a *revenant*”), who also sneered at sometime fellow-travelers from her own class, such as Lehmann. But in what sense was his speaking wrong? Scott tags himself out as Orpheus; he had spoken from “some wild impulse”—his marginal note on *Georgics 4*, line 488, marks the singer’s failed attempt to bring back Eurydice (*cum subita incautum dementia cepit amantem*: when madness suddenly seized the unwary lover). And who is *Euru-dike*? “Justice at large,” encompassing justice. In tallying the motives of the great political activists of meliorism, those who “rightly or wrongly / are still willing to risk death / for love to prevail,” Scott seems to include himself among them, as Orpheus. But is it Orphic wild impulse that places him there? In antiquity, Orpheus was excluded from that willing group. The signal case against the forceful singer was made by Socrates in the *Symposium*; precisely because Orpheus did not love Eurydice enough to die, so as to join her as Alkestis did in place of her husband, the judgment goes against him. No trivial wrong, that, and therefore not what is at issue here after all. Just who in this episode, then, like Orpheus, turns their head away? Not Scott, but Dekka-Jessica Treuhaf-Mitford, she who fought to liberate others and ridiculed the profiteers of death. What she turns from in disdain is an enduring loyalty to loss. It looks, then, like Scott stands as a trivial Orpheus to Mitford’s substantial one. His instinct would bring the counterforce of a softened heart against another force, which fails as Orpheus

failed. Although by direct allusion Scott styles himself as the inept restorer, it is really the passionately insistent restoration attempted by Lehmann that prompts the author of *The American Way of Death* to pivot away.

Thus it is soft force against hard in this stock-taking, recasting the *yin-yang*, darkness-light structures of *Minding the Darkness*. And Eurydice is one of the daughters of light. In teasing out these parallels I intend no neat equation, but rather the same irresolution in which Scott leaves the large questions rekindled here by apparently small shocks and remembered small talk. That party scripts in miniature the wide array of figures in Scott's long forensic poem—no surprise in that—yet what counts is his principled irresolution about the big questions. And with it counts the fact that courage consists, not as for Plato simply in being willing to die for what one loves, but also in living as if dead to the prospect of historical amelioration while remaining loyal to a gentler influence. The new poem sets a philosophically erotic postscript as seal on the larger work. It places Henry James's magnifying glass over *Seculum's* passions, not in order to extend its forensic debate over a murder mystery, but to scrutinize the detective. *Seculum* swarms with probes among longed-for but inascertainable certainties—not only about Who Done It, but also about how to Think It if It Can't Be Think, or How to Hope It if messengers go on wearing the clown's sad face. With this later, subtle twist that sets Orphic cowardice and hardness against Orphic courage after all, things inch farther along, much as the new book's cover writes Orpheus by name but pictures something like lost justice found. Although history seems not to choose between Julian of Norwich, opaquely resolved, and martyrs for justice, "*the Tao that can be expressed / is not the true Tao [Tao Te Ching I]*"—that is, some counterforce *within* the death-force inexpressibly makes things *more loveable*. This Eastern gloss on Western history composes the double-take which Scott now adds to *Seculum*—to the big poem's systematic doubleness about force, which Scott learned through teaching and prolonged study to derive from the canons of both pastoral and epic (a set of constructive-destructive antinomies and their "deeper / current of cross-intention" that emerge from the long conversation credited in his "Letter to Paul Alpers," his Berkeley colleague, in *Crossing Borders: Selected Poems*). The functional contraries of *Seculum* climax in one pair: forensics and meditation. Here, by way of extension, the subtle contraries enacted between himself and Mitford twenty years after being triggered do not condemn her for an Orphic refusal to die for love. The poem's final courtesy is Jamesian indeed; its trail of little shocks leads to an absolving struggle and indeterminacy, a consummate doubleness, for everyone in the roster.

With this scrutiny of only one key poem in *Mosaic Orpheus*, a reader

familiar with *Seculum* will already be climbing the next part of Scott's spiral. Those moving from this book to *Seculum* will correspondingly find lights winking on across its large game board. The same of course holds true for other poems here, as with the pair of poems in the first section devoted to the complex improvement / ruination of contemporary Thailand under U.S. influence, home of the beleaguered Forest tradition of Buddhist insight meditation. When one turns to the central poem of *Mosaic Orpheus*, "The Tao of 9/11," where once again forensic assessment and the cloudy intent among his contacts wrap their crackly aura around abiding motives, meditative commitment sets its plow deeper: "to live in hope / we must let go of our torments." Ah, but does not Buddhist practice routinely advise against hope as being delusive? If I grasp Scott's advice here, it stems from a tactical aim at getting clear of the temptation to write from balk and even hatred—Pound's blowtorch compositional emotion against financial crimes and the weapons cartels as eviscerators of governance in *The Cantos*, to which Scott has devoted three essays—and write instead from the suspended expectation teased out in "Holy Land II: Force," the prospect that a cosmic fit between our instincts and *the way things are* (in Pali, *vipassana* means *come-what-may seeing*) will eventually justify the practice of maintaining an even keel whatever the hell may happen. Such, in fact, is *satipatthana* practice. And sati, in Pali, usually translated into English as "mindful," literally means *stop*: stop going on with ordinary mind hell-bent on changing, or avoiding, or simply having things one's own way.

I want to suggest, by way of two excerpts from *Seculum*, how thoroughly *Mosaic Orpheus* pertains to a fruitful doubleness achieved in the long poem, an attempted Orphic retrieval of justice that also wisely lets go at the same time. This amounts to an Orphism of zero degree. No other writer now alive has attempted this balancing act, to my knowledge, let alone has crawled out to the wide view available from its rim. Both passages require of us only that we remember that *Seculum* rises from and intensely pursues, to that zero degree of poise, the attempt to steadily bear witness to the intolerable. The first of these comes in Chapter IV.x of *Minding the Darkness*; the second occurs in Chapter IV.vi of *Listening to the Candle*, which explores *stopping* in depth.

In Chapter IV.x of *Minding the Darkness*, Dante (self-designated, as later in *Mosaic*, as *a party of one*) stands as paragon of "the memory-work / that follows political failure," for whom Orphic loyalty to both city and a woman forge the enjoyment of *amor dei*. "Enjoyment" becomes the loop-stitch Scott retrieves, after a long plunge "focused on this path // already under foot / which is a plebeian one," where precisely the inventories of

deliberately floated *headless bodies*, U.S.-sponsored in Colombia as once in East Timor, intervene. “Enjoyment / as much as enmindment // needed to bring to focus / *fei yang fei yin* [*not yang not yin: Zhuangzi*] / the scattered traces // from which we cannot make / a coherent picture....” Two sections onward, Odysseus, Aeneas, Dante, and Pound all descend in order to climb Orphically, unfrozen and weeping, to a man—“*intelligence!* Twofold / both what there is to be known / and the power to know it // the mysterious correspondence / (as in biblical typology) / unresolved by Aristotle.” A chant stops time, tuned by Dante’s Orpheus:

God of the blue jay
through the yellow mustard patch

God who has brought us to compassion
and to corpses in rivers
God whose declining dharma

P.D.Scott, P.D.Scott

will reveal like the waning moon
as our shadow moves across it
the outline of its fullness

God before whom
we stand alone
till the time when God’s failure helps

Hölderlin, Heidegger

so that we can see the world
both as Saint Bennet did
the size of a *walnut*

*gathered within the ray
of a single sunbeam*
and also as Orpheus

*Greg. Dial.
Paradiso 22.137*

immersed from love in the redeeming
stink of earth
the passions of destruction

which at times overwhelm us
being also from God
this earthway is everyone’s

in the chaos of the present
from our place in time
not yet to be decoded

is the tao of all the dharmas
 from the brookside wren
 in its burst of *nibbana*-chatter *Nirvana (Pali):enlightenment*

to the reconciled
 Colonian chorus saying
all these things are well ordained *Sophocles Oed. Col. - Heidegger*

[IV.xii, pp. 219-220]

Such unpunctuated lobes, floating the unnameable toward the intolerable, throughout *Seculum* argue that Western grasp must go East to recover its own lost kind of *actively* embracing attention. In fact, Chapters IV.vi through IV.xii play imagination against intuition in a debate whose climax—as Orphic retrievals go—constitutes one such activist suspension, announced as early as Chapter VI’s rejection of the still prevalent view of poetics as inherently inactive, taken from Auden’s page (“in an age striving to believe // that *poetry makes nothing happen* / (a quietism which challenges / without any mind to // Shelley’s conviction that poets / whatever their actual beliefs / *advance the interests of Liberty* // truth emerges / from letting go / of the need for poetic Truth”).² The central poems in *Mosaic Orpheus* bring these activist-suspensionist dicta into full play.

Chapter IV.vi of *Listening to the Candle*, devoted to the fruits of a mindfulness retreat, equips that activist-suspensionist posture with the mental and spiritual laser surgery which it needs in order to become real. The chapter is especially notable because only such micro-acts of attention supply Scott with his sole exit through a forensic and agonistic poetics into genuine *quietus*. Again, no one else has tried scaling this face of the mountain, to my knowledge; Gary Snyder’s poetics come to rest in the vastness of the geological cycles and the biosphere rather than in such Bachmannian essential labor. The shocks inventoried by Scott, past those so deeply anatomized by Benjamin and Adorno, have Scott weave an Orphism of zero degree right into mindfulness practice, so that, with Eurydikean *sati*, stoppage may ventilate and even tie off the *motu perpetua* of complicity and inquest. This strategic marriage of modes takes place perhaps most concretely in the bearing which the key Orphic phrase from “Holy Land II: Force,” namely “wild impulse” (Virgil: *dementia*, craziness that seizes or captures), has upon this same earlier chapter in *Listening to the Candle*. That bearing rests upon liberation—not historical but mental. In “Holy Land II: Force,” the grip of a mild shock moves slowly, across twenty years, toward a cleared mind’s release; in the chapter from *Candle*, the mind’s ability to learn how to halt

the normal buzz of all mental contents whatsoever means the end of shock's capture. And in that chapter the demonstration paves the way for the later poem's access to freedom. The Virgilian verb lurking beneath "Holy Land II"—*cepit* or seized, from *capio*, take, grasp, capture—has cousins in the Chapter's rich array of *n*-roots laid out as if surfacing during a meditation retreat. Scott's global philology in this skillful yet essentially playful chapter happily breaks the rules: riffing on an already double root term meaning both *submission* or *refuge entry*, he cooks up an allusive word-hoard for that particular duality. One takes refuge, after all, from the assiduous construction project called *I/me/myself*. Thus the *n*-roots proliferate into near-contradictions implying off-stage resolution. For instance, the Chinese for refuge, *na mo* (also a respectful hailing or bowing down), dovetails remarkably with Homeric resentment and indignation—*nemesin* as the distillate behind *nemesis* in the *Iliad* and grazing in the *Odyssey*—and with the Anglo-Saxon *niman* for capture or seizure, in *Beowulf*. (Here we skirt Pound's anger and hatred.) These epic chimes—an Indo-European-Sinological farrago ending with Wordsworth on the numbness of hands ("making murder possible / but not the restoration of the world") and Rilke on farewell (*nehmen immer Abschied*)—inscribe the lintel which Scott erects over *Seculum's* episodes of strategic retreat from inquest: "in a community // of pure impulse / there would be only Names *Nāmas*." Scott can move thus repeatedly from inquest to back-wall mind because that rhythm writes engagement only when it also produces freedom, namely (*nehmlich*, *nom* or captured, *nemeai* or feeding on, *namo* or bowing to) freedom both from one's object and from oneself as its pursuer. Such is the Orphism of zero degree, an apophatic disappearance into, not retrieval, of love. According to the legends, Shakyamuni told Bahiya, who insisted on getting the straight dope in a few words, that the entire medicine consisted of bare awareness: when the seen is only the seen, the heard only the heard, the felt only the felt, and the known only the known, then "you will be neither here, nor there, nor in between. This is the end of *dukkha*" (mental suffering). That is, whatever subsists is neither object, ego, nor consciousness. Intriguingly, Scott's philological riff can be taken further, for what bare awareness catches is the ur-linguistic micro-interval nano-act, that proliferating manufacture of the sign (Pali *nimitta*). This retreat chapter in *Candle* distributes a laser surgery kit for spiritual battlefield applications, against injustice but also against that subtle self-capture, both *captum* and *niman*, of the warrior who forgets what liberation finally amounts to.

To recapitulate or capture once more: "Holy Land II: Force" opened by stopping Scott in mid-trajectory toward Orpheus, dropping him into

memory of the gaffe, thus stopping the revenant's climb anew, so as to dilate the main tensions in the now full-stopped *Seculum*. *Mosaic Orpheus* frees the explicitly liberated poetics of the long poem, with its repeated reportage on meditation, into reflections on stoppage-as-liberation. Satic and Orphic at once, this poetics. Its extensions into *Mosaic Orpheus* only deepen repetition, and that persistence is only appropriate; in the 2004 Brandeis essay, long-term forensic procedures prompt the following observation: "Only with time can one acquire the perspective and strength to deal with the intolerable." Longinus or Coleridge would have called this the negative Sublime. The Lincoln android in Philip K. Dick's *We Can Build You* wakens into consciousness as if into the same force field, with a "fear so great that it could not be called an emotion. . . , yanked away from some fusion that we could not experience." Fredric Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future* comments on Dick's personnel, "What characterizes all these figures is their essential selflessness." While Ajahn Amaro says simply, "Small boat, great mountain."

Looking once more at the cover design for *Mosaic Orpheus*, I would draw a further inference about its pertinence: Scott's full force as a writer similarly discloses something opposite in character to what might have been expected. That surprising quality manages to live where otherwise death would prevail. Nor is it conventional apocalyptic hope, for it wears an ornament, the bauble of eros and grace, to prove that the great thing it is conquers gently. Not quite in parallel fashion, but still similarly, "trivial wrong" opens onto the prospect of glacial transformations that qualify even the wisely canonical Buddhist invalidations of delusive hope. And such remolding of expectation points to a task: a simultaneous commitment to both Orphic daring and a fundamental revision of the normal Orphic outcomes—indeed a detachment from both a defeated narcissism in Plato's critique and a tragic-elegiac hangover.

Lest I leave the impression that this achievement comes sweetly to our writing guild, I must chime the impolite note struck in both *Mosaic Orpheus* and the long poem against aestheticism. We are back to the engine churning through all this, with a tension near the scream's pitch. George Seferis, recording a spontaneous drop to his hands and knees on a mountain path, cried out that the beauty was *unbearable*. Greek fuses beauty and good in one word, *kalokagathia*, which none the less leaves open the matter of just how one bears sublimity. Likewise, with the adjective *intolerable*, Scott would have us take neither collective amnesia nor his own anamnestic motives as the stuff of truisms. Scott's Shelley is no genteel mentor. His reach drew him past normal load-bearing limits, for which, Scott remembers,

Yeats blasted Shelley, damning the frenzied views of some in his own circle. Thus in four chapters of *Minding the Darkness*, IV.viii ff., Scott shakes up imagination and then intuition to stretch his dialectic. This leads him among other things through dark-age pastoral (the topic of his early scholarship) into dagger slices at current poetic tastes and their socially entropic context, which diffuses things “to the point where imagination / filling every cranny of the mind // with truth and its opposite—lies / has become a fetish / in the cult of Imagination // *the virtuoso croaking / of shivering frogs / despairing in their swamp* [Nietzsche '87 #809] // self exfoliating to Self / enlightenment to Enlightenment / as *civilization progresses // accumulating its pyramiding memories /* (the Web by which moments ago / I called up the text of Audradus...)”.³ If I read this part of *Seculum* rightly, such multiplicity on the cheap, the enemy of fruitful doubleness, parodies the encrypted forces in culture and politics. The 9th-century prophet and church leader enters this whirlwind at the same risk that you might incur, fellow reader, although later “The Tao of 9/11” in *Mosaic Orpheus* administers the acid drip more quietly: “from Whitman’s hopes for the unwritten / to the *New Yorker* poets / with a toad in their lawn mower / or snake in their burning brush pile.” Such swipes are not gratuitous, exposing as they do the exasperated vein of a flat-out attempt to confront intolerable public findings while maintaining a civilized demeanor in the college of scribes. Of course, that decorum remains unworkable; subtly, the syntax of research roasts the poet’s own meat and his trade in earnest. The abattoir of complicities and the barbeque of vanities spare no one.

In *Seculum*, confessed inadequacy often provides the loam from which greater capacity grows, beginning with his *felix culpa* at Oxford in failing his degree in poli-sci (like Hopkins clutching Scotus to his breast while his examiners drubbed him, Scott clove to Hegel and the Romantics). He thus sags the fabric of reflection with referentiality and counter-weighting. But neither does he make hell into a way of seeing, as Pound did. Seeing as-is, seeing ordinary mind for what it is, can settle into neither righteous wrath nor aesthetics; exasperation plus calmed nerves mark *Seculum*, or balked witness plus release, the girl lost but none the less always still climbing from the dead.

Scott quotes himself at the Brandeis conference from *Minding the Darkness*, on civilization as amounting to “a great conspiracy / of organized denial.” From that reading hangs investigative subversion, with genteel civilization as undressed meat and poets as epic Roman worms, who “act in the name of a truer and more stable order, into which the forces of violence have been accommodated, not merely denied.” What is political realism,

and spiritual realism with it, if they do not require their adherents to chemically incorporate the resistance mounted against them? Who can grasp Sheldon Wolin's recent polemic against totalitarian sham democracy without first bitterly acknowledging that Machiavelli and Hobbes stand as dark first cousins to Dante, in their lonely cubbies of insight into mass psychology? Like Scott's much later, Dante's stance is zero-degree Orphic, whereas Machiavelli like Nietzsche counts on sheer force to cut through demonic conflicts, and Hobbes votes dourly for tyranny. Scott ventures to act out the rhetoric of Germanic memory-work and Thai-Forest alert compassion at the risk of merely mimicking the steep climb out of prematurely genteel composure. For the detective, like the perps and the bystanders, at times prefers not to grasp the complicity in broadly shared crime. Even in his recent *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America*, Scott leaves its ligatures with his earlier tracts on JFK, Vietnam, and Central America a matter of narrative implication, although such tact, like the iron stomach, already adheres to unembittered attention through a prolonged phase of disorder. In this regard the great émigré Pole, as well as Shakyamuni Buddha, is Scott's exemplar: this, in spite of the fact that Milosz broke with Scott during the Vietnam years ("my dear Peter of course / you gave the enemy comfort"). Scott's obituary tribute of 2004 predicts that "Americans will turn more and more to Milosz, including Americans who now share his pain at being governed by strangers with little intelligence and even less compassion. There is a new timeliness to his studies of how brilliant minds can adjust themselves to the intolerable."

Epic sweats toiling into provisionally pastoral clearings: a procedure, distilled more finely in *Mosaic Orpheus*, that razors beyond grief-work into inarticulable *yin, pax, tao*. As Fairfield Porter said of Whitehead, if you believe in your terms, you repeat them. From mid-phase on, Scott alternates immersions in civic guck with reports on retreat practice because *culture*, even when sifted dialectically, proves inhospitable to self-interrogation so long as its history still fills the field of vision. To oversimplify, then: Scott's Orphism and mindfulness practice repeatedly converge in firmly getting a grip and then releasing it, softly exhaling all inspiration, because the recurring patterns in deep events potentially know no end; the rhythmic loops in the poems are meant precisely to end the suffering instilled by that other cycle. Such cessation is of course Buddhist, or apophatic in Eckhart and Merton, but in Scott's hands it also turns zero-degree Orphic. The Jamesian finial set upon such cessation in *Mosaic Orpheus* points the classic act, and class act, of seeing the girl climbing from the dead while letting her go. It is Bahiya's lesson over again: the loser, however precious his retreating phan-

tom, has won the richness of being neither the object, nor himself, nor the consciousness which until then had bridged them. The gem which is “Holy Land II: Force” approaches this limit, past which accommodations to crime but also releases from judgment float the beheaded lyrist in separation. Such Orphic distinctness is not cowardly as it was for Plato, nor is it catatonically tragic, for it produces a sustained tone from bare awareness.

The late Tony Judt eulogized Scott’s difficult friend Milosz in his last published essay, in particular for his study of mental capitulation (Eastern bloc Ketman and Murti-Bing Pills, or accommodationist thinking and self-administered anesthetic), because the current U.S.-Western European consensus on economic and social policy prevails against all tested reason and fact. Scott confronts the massive mind-set of domestic Ketman (dismissive scoffings at conspiracy) and smug assurances of continuity (the Can’t-Happen-Here pill) which furnish much of the obstacle to real change. Thus the double thrusts in pastoral and epic, as Alpers and Scott have taught them, in our setting meet an operational doubleness not so much intended as co-evolved, by parties committed differently but collaboratively to fraternal self-delusion and systematic corruption. Our former Canadian envoy to Poland therefore writes to show that when poetic research comes to grips with back-wall truth, and then eases that same grip, it both does and does not insist on what it has so urgently sifted. Scott’s cycles, his Whitehead-like repetitions from tested belief, suspend activism in the interest of release without annulling the act. Susan Howe has performed a similar feat by cycling her antinomian impulse through archival materials, to which it repeatedly submits; in the interview included in *Birth-Mark* she says, “a lot of my work is about breaking free: starting free and being captured and breaking free again and being captured again.” To vary Whitehead’s maxim; if you believe in your terms, you repeat them in cycles of paradoxical counter-affirmation, toward a higher freedom. Speaking for myself, I feel no need just now to choose between a Romantic-*vipassana* circumstantialist and an antinomian tester of linguistic isotopes, or between Howe’s paratactic arrays and Scott’s reeled out hypotaxis, his memorious forensics contemplatively at risk. The spirit of research in this our dump needs every acolyte who carries a shovel. My Ketman-meter, its needle pushing into the red zone, tells me that our bitched order forces doubleness into both zones, out behind the vast oligarchic scrim and down into the crannies of palimpsested authority. Scott has done us the honor of adopting this country as his own. Shall we read his voluminous *J’aime mais j’accuse* with due attention? His vade mecum, *Mosaic Orpheus*, reminds us that this labor has been one of hopeless, yet justified, love.