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Preceding the Source: Gabriel Scott's *Camilla Dyring*

The recrudescence of interest in the Norwegian novelist, poet, and dramatist Gabriel Scott (1874-1958) during the latter half of the 1990s led to the constituting of the Gabriel Scott Selskap and the republication of several of his once very popular works. Not that he had ever faded completely into oblivion; Scott's authorship was described at considerable length in the standard histories of Norwegian literature by Edvard Beyer and others, and some of his works, perhaps most notably *Kilden, eller brevet om fiskeren Markus*, were repeatedly reprinted. Moreover, numerous postgraduate students wrote *candidatus philologiae* theses about Scott's works, and popular articles about him continued to crop up especially in the southern Norwegian press long after his death. Yet scholarly enquiry into his authorship has always advanced on an uneven front in which his early works were never given their due. The lion's share of the attention has almost invariably been focussed on *Kilden* and a few other novels in addition to the books Scott wrote for children.¹

¹ The few scholarly exceptions to this generalisation include *inter alia* Frederick Hale, 'History and Historicist Millenarianism in Gabriel Scott's *Himmelurel*', *Scandinavian Studies*, LVII, no. 3 (Summer 1985), pp. 229-243, and Frederick Hale, 'Gabriel Scott's *Fant* and Norwegian Social Reform', *Edda*, LXXXIV, no. 1 (1984), pp. 39-52.

In the present article it is my intention to fill one crucial *lacuna* in the body of published literature by exploring central themes in Scott's novel of 1906, *Camilla Dyring*. It will be seen that more than a decade before the publication of the immensely popular *Kilden* in 1918 the pivotal themes of the latter work, such as its argument for contentedness, or *noisombet*, as the key to happiness, the unity of man and nature, mysticism, and, supposedly, Spinozan pantheism,² had been foreshadowed in this work. From the perspective of literary history, our understanding of *Kilden* and its place in Scott's authorship can thus be enhanced by a consideration of *Camilla Dyring* as an antecedent text. It has never received more than the scantest scholarly consideration. Neither of Scott's biographers, Arne Beisland and Truls Erik Dahl, explored the rich trove of themes in *Camilla Dyring* or evinced any awareness of its antecedent significance to an understanding of *Kilden*.³

Nowhere in his early works did Gabriel Scott introduce so many religious themes which he would subsequently develop in depth than in *Camilla Dyring*. This little-known *Bildungsroman*, published by H. Aschehoug, is a crucial key to an understanding of the unfolding of Scott's religious thought and therefore requires detailed

² Guttorm Fløistad has argued that Spinoza's pantheistic views provided the philosophical underpinnings of Scott's view of the relationship between an immanent God and nature in *Kilden*. See Guttorm Fløistad, "Marcus [sic] og Spinoza. Panteiske trekk i Gabriel Scotts Kilden", in Sverre Dahl (ed.), *Dikt og idé. Festskrift til Ole Koppang på syttiårsdagen, 18. januar 1981* (Oslo: Veröffentlichungen des Germanischen Instituts der Universität Oslo, 1980), pp. 219-231. In my forthcoming study of Scott's religious thought, however, I argue that Fløistad's argument is seriously flawed and fails to take into consideration the fact that Scott's concept of divine immanentism sprang from Norwegian romanticism and was shared by *inter alia* Vilhelm Krag. It is further argued that Scott's acknowledged devotion to Spinoza developed only after the publication of *Kilden*.

³ Arne Beisland, *Gabriel Scott. En Sørlandsdikter* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1949), and Truls Erik Dahl, *Gabriel Scott. Et levnetsløp* (N.p.: Juni Forlag, 1998).

consideration here. After briefly introducing the work in general terms, we shall turn to an analysis of how Scott touched on such topics as theological liberalism, divine immanentism, mysticism, the problem of evil, religious hypocrisy, and the relationship of the church to nature. Key biographical and autobiographical elements will also be highlighted. Within the context of Scott's authorship generally, one cannot fully comprehend the place therein of his masterly *Kilden* more than a decade later or, for that matter, certain aspects of scholarly debate concerning that novella, such as its alleged indebtedness to Spinozan pantheism, without reference to *Camilla Dyring*. The neglect of this antecedent novel is thus a serious conspicuous omission in previous treatments of *Kilden*, one which probably helps to explain why the religious dimensions of Scott's literary production generally have been frequently acknowledged but never really given their due.

It must be stated at the outset that *Camilla Dyring* is not a product of mature literary artistry. In the very early years of the twentieth century Scott was still a dilettante in the genre of the novel, and the limits of his experience in it are manifest in this work. The plot is poorly developed and unengaging; the dialogue is very weak, especially in the first half of the book; the narrative technique completely lacks originality; and most of the small gallery of characters are only vaguely drawn. Scott's presentation of his views is in the main very unsubtle and thus seems intrusive in the narrative. For an investigation of the author's religious views, however, this is obviously advantageous, as they stand out in such bold relief that no theologically conscious literary sleuth can overlook them. The purely artistic dimensions therefore need not concern us to any great degree. In brief, in *Camilla Dyring* Scott employed a conventional, omniscient narrator point of view and linear narrative when relating the formative years of his juvenile protagonist. The economical plot follows the maturation of a widowed Lutheran pastor's daughter in an unidentified village on

the south coast of Norway from the age of approximately eight to eighteen. Scott focusses on her early and intuitive intimacy with nature as well as her Christian *barnetro* and eventual questioning thereof, her relationship with her father's domineering sister, Virginie, who comes to their home for a few years to provide for private education and the debilitating impact this experience has on her spirituality, the consequent loosening of her ties to her natural environment, her brief exposure to liberal theology during confirmation instruction, her enlightenment regarding human sexual conduct and her uncle Munch's alcoholism and, in the end, her departure from rural southern Norway to begin a new phase of her life in Kristiania.

Intimacy with Nature

Scott lays the groundwork for his understanding of the inseparable relationship between man and nature in the first few chapters of *Camilla Dyring*. In her daily wanderings near the manse, the young principal character feels small and surrounded by nature (p. 11). Often pensive in her introverted demeanour, she is amazed by what strike her as miracles which she cannot fully comprehend. Questions about the existence and behaviour of animals thus abound in her mind, but she does not find answers to most of them. Through a variety of means Scott emphasises Camilla's intimacy with her natural habitat. To her the distinction which her grandmother draws between wild and cultivated flowers, for instance, seems unnecessary and artificial. The girl questions why the former are "ukrudt" and asks whether God is not the creator of them, as well (p. 29). Why not domesticate the bluebells in the meadow, Camilla wonders, and then they will no longer be dismissed as less worthy (pp. 30-31). The pastor's daughter puts her thoughts into action by creating a garden to which she transplants flowers from the wild and whose perimeter she garnishes with

shells from a brook. Camilla takes great joy in her creation: “Hun kunde sidde stille hele timer ad gangen paa en sten og stirre fortabt ind mellem sine blomster” (p. 34). A condescending attitude towards uncultivated plants is completely foreign to her: “Var ikke hendes blomster nu lige saa rigtige som bedstemors?” (p. 38). It is perhaps not coincidental that two of the kinds of flowers highlighted in her garden mirror ecclesiastical themes, namely *blaaklokker* and *prestekraver* (p. 37). Her unimaginative grandmother perceives the undertaking through different eyes, however, and, upon being shown Camilla’s montage of plants, exclaims that had she only requested assistance “saa kunde du jo faaet ordentlige blomster!” (p. 39). This motif of establishing and meticulously caring for a garden, which bridges the cleft between what are customarily regarded as civilisation and nature, foreshadows a similar undertaking by Markus in *Kilden*. In Camilla’s world, the garden declines after her aunt arrives and, in her rigorous efforts to impose discipline on her pupil while schooling her, severs some of her ties to her natural environment.

Turning from flora to fauna, Camilla is close to the animal life of southern Norway and in her way communicates with some species, especially those generally regarded as being on a lower scale of evolutionary development and having little in common with *homo sapiens*. When she finds a May beetle, for example, she takes it up in her hand and recites a verse which her uncle has taught her (pp. 36-37). Snails also engage her attention. Camilla speaks to them, as well, and, “som om det var heste”, seeks repeatedly but without success to make them go faster and adhere to a certain course (p. 65). This pastor’s daughter wonders whether animals pray, yet another means by which Scott underscores that in the mind of his youthful protagonist there is little distinction between people and the rest of nature (p. 55). Even after a few years of formal education, Camilla retains at least part of her sense of intimacy with the animals in her habitat. She prefers to swim

among fishes, for example, and is fascinated by larvae and pupae of butterflies (pp. 152, 232ff.).

Scott does not merely allow Camilla's own words, thoughts, and actions to elucidate the point that people are inherently part of nature and that when they loosen their ties therewith or establish artificial lines of demarcation between themselves and their habitat. In a clear example of authorial intrusion, he preaches the point explicitly. Camilla's uncle Munch, who at times serves as Scott's spokesman, agrees with her in indirect discourse that

hendes blomster var ligesaa gode som dem i haven. Det var ikke naturen, som havde sat skillet – det var menneskene. De havde taget nogen bestemte arter i skole og dyrket og pleiet og forædlet ved alle slags kunster og kneb [...].(p. 228)

Whenever Camilla is removed from nature, she feels less happy and, concomitantly, re-establishing those ties invariably lifts her spirits. Her stays at Munch's home inland from her coastal village provide such respites from her aunt's authoritarian schooling. Understanding his niece's predicament, he takes time to assist her in getting her feet literally back into the soil, though now wearing waterproof boots: "da vidste hun ikke, hvordan hun skulde bære sig ad i sin glæde" (p. 214). Cherished memories of her early childhood, *i.e.* before the beginning of her formal education, are rekindled whenever Camilla walks in the forest near Munch's house (p. 242). This is a persistent theme in her mind, one which accompanies her into young adulthood. After the death of her father, Camilla prepares to move to Kristiania, but the nature of which she is an integral part clings to her tenaciously. Casting aside all subtlety, Scott describes its physical grasp in botanically graphic terms: "Nyperose og bjørnebærbusk greb vel imellem i hendes kjole – men hvergang stansed hun op og løste de spidse torne forsigtig ud, som om det var smaa, ømfintlige negle" (p. 336). Camilla must leave the village and its cherished natural setting,

however, and move to the capital, knowing that her detachment from her childhood environment would be most consequential. She ponders the question: “Begyndte livet nu – – eller var det ikke allerede forbi?” (p. 339).

The Personification of Nature

Part of Scott’s strategy in *Camilla Dyring* for underscoring the unity of the human species with the rest of nature and for expressing a cosmology of comprehensive oneness which appears in some of his subsequent novels and forms a seminal part of the basis of his religious thought is to depict diverse aspects of nature in anthropomorphic terms. He thereby closes the gap between them and the young protagonist. This theme, too, Scott launches at an early point in his narrative of Camilla’s childhood. At the beginning of the second chapter, she hears “den syngende lyd af vand” from the brook near the village (p. 6). This poetic language is not, of course, at all innovative, but in Scott’s description of Camilla’s relationship to her environment it is an integral component in a series of related comments which underscore the portrayal of nature as a living entity, part of a cosmic organism. In the same chapter, for example, Camilla perceives nature breathing in the ferns and the blueberry plants (p. 9).

The personification continues to emerge in subsequent chapters to reinforce the point. Camilla interprets a storm which strikes the village in anthropomorphic terms. The walls of the manse begin to move; “det var, som en stor kæmpe udenfor vilde blæse det overende. Hun vidste godt, hvem det var – det var vindmanden.” During a respite in the storm, She imagines that “vindmanden” is sitting on his haunches resting, “eller han var langt borte i skogen og sloges med furuerne” (pp. 121-122). One could hardly imagine a more lucid or direct literary example *mutatis mutandis* to fit Scott’s cosmology of what R. Gunnarson had identified at the beginning

of the twentieth century as the typical linkage in the minds of coastal Norwegians of natural and supernatural powers, expressed in personified Gunnarson, to be sure, was describing conventional pietistic religiosity in “det kirkeglade Vestlandet” (which in contemporary Norwegian usage included what would shortly come to be known as “Sørlandet”) when he explained the popular use of the term “Storemannen” as a reference to God. “Storemannen er altid mere eller mindre bevidst subjekt i deres ytringer om veir og vind,” Gunnarson generalised. He gave examples of this in portraying how such Christians whose piety inhibiting them from mentioning God by name attributed meteorological shifts from day to day to a very personified deity.⁴ For Scott, however, who by 1906 had an emphatically immanentist concept of divinity with little in common with the theistic God of pietism, one power of nature correspondingly becomes “Vindmanden”.

Centrality of Imagination, Dreams, and Mystical Experiences

Crucial to an understanding of the religious dimensions of *Camilla Dyring* is an awareness that the young protagonist is gifted with a keen imagination. In her exploration of nature and her awareness of her oneness with it, she obviously learns much through her senses, but these sensory data are interpreted in a poetic mind. This, too, Scott underscores virtually from the outset. Unburdened by scientific conceptualisations, in the first chapter little Camilla perceives a drop of water on a leaf as a crystal; only upon close examination does she realise that it is something different (p. 3). By the same token, in the same chapter she imagines the wild flowers strewn across a hill as gold coins (p. 4), and a few pages later she

⁴ R. Gunnarson, ‘Norsk naturreligion og naturmoral’, *For kirke og kultur*, VIII (1901), pp. 497-498.

envisages the brook near her home as a scythe cutting through the meadow (p. 9). This element of Camilla's personality is repeatedly highlighted in subsequent sections of the narrative. In the attic of the manse, for instance, she imagines that her rocking horse moves of its own volition, carrying her to distant lands, and, aided by the murky atmosphere there, she transforms the chimneys into human beings: "Naar hun saa længe paa dem, blev de til to mennesker: den tykke var mølleren, og den tynde var konen" (pp. 20-21, 24). A beam of light streaking through the attic is "et mægtigt sølvspyd, der var stødt ind fra tag til gulv" (p. 26). After climbing the steeple of the local church on a Sunday morning, she likens the people treading the road towards the edifice as tiny animals on the move (p. 51). Small wonder that, given this metaphorically inclined mentality, she earns from her uncle the appellation "digterpige" (p. 270). Her father agrees with his brother-in-law's assessment of her gift and assures her that "du digter noget vakkert om alt, du ser", just as his late wife did (p. 270). Camilla's down-to-earth paternal grandmother, who also resides at the manse, however, is of much more pragmatic bent, and at several points Scott juxtaposes these two female characters to bring out even more fully the strongly intuitive strain in Camilla's personality. At one relatively early juncture the well-intentioned grandmother challenges Camilla's free-wheeling imagination, thereby inadvertently bringing tears to the girl's eyes (p. 39).

It is this kind of uninhibited mentality, Scott stresses, which is most receptive to dreams and mystical experiences. It should be stressed that mysticism as such is not a carefully developed theme in *Camilla Dyring* or its eponymous protagonist's personal development. Nevertheless, it is a prominent minor one which prefigures this theme in several of Scott's later novels and therefore merits consideration here.

Camilla's dreaming is not, in the main, described as particularly atypical. In one early reverie, for example, she is flying over the

countryside at a low altitude at dusk, skimming above the treetops. This takes on a symbolic dimension when Camilla is juxtaposed with her grandmother. As the girl glides through the air, she notices the older woman standing on the beach, waving to her: “Hun stod der saa ubehjælpelig med begge ben plantet i marken og kunde ikke flyve og var uhyre angst, for at Camilla skulde falde ned” (p. 12). This is all of a piece with what Scott presents elsewhere about the interaction of these two characters and their divergent personalities. What is not directly suggested, however, is that this kind of dream is a form of soul travel. At a later point in her childhood, Camilla has something akin to an out-of-body dream in which her body grows beyond Gargantuan proportions, stretching into space so that the earth is merely a pillow beneath her neck (p. 164). Neither the significance of this incident to the plot nor the symbolism embedded in it emerges with absolute clarity. It is conceivable that Scott is suggesting another early union of Camilla with nature, though in this case carried beyond that of the planet on which she lives to encompass the universe.

Camilla is unquestionably portrayed as a nascent mystic whose direct, extrasensory encounters with the supernatural may well be a projection of those Scott experienced during his childhood and adolescent years. The first hint of a mystical vision occurs in Chapter XVII, shortly after Camilla’s structured education begins. “Hun kunde lægge sig tilbage i stolen og lukke øinene. En rosenrød skumring begyndte – hun hørte sit eget aandedræt suse” (p. 96). Not until Chapter XXVI, however, does Scott provide further details. At that point he presents a somewhat more specified mystical incident in which Camilla and her father are returning from an expedition to an island in the archipelago near their village. In this encounter, which Scott places narratively immediately after a paragraph in which he relates how Camilla finds it difficult to love the God about whom she reads in books, a new departure in her spirituality emerges. It merits quotation *in extenso*:

Men saa var det undertiden han [*i.e.* God] traadte frem for hende helt anderledes – især husked hun godt en aften, de rodde hem fra en ø, som hed Nibe. Der blæste en ganske fin bris, og maanen fulgte dem henover skjærene – den flytted sig paa himmelen som en stor guldbrikke. Om lidt gled en tæt, støvgraa sky over den, og landskabet forandredes. Skjærene krøb sammen eller dukked sig i mørket, luften og sjøen slukned. Det vared bare et minut, saa var det som før altsammen – kun syntes hun, at maanen var blevet dobbelt saa blank.

Da stod Gud saa tydelig for hende – god, blid og levende – saadan som han maatte være, naar han gik og stelte med fuglene, blomsterne, fiskene og træne.

Hun saa op til maanen – det var, som Gud netop havde pudset den af med skyen! (p. 162)

Scott uses his brief commentary on Camilla's dreaming to explain to a slight degree the relationship of this dimension of her consciousness to mysticism. Occasionally she has nightmares. These remain on her mind on the following days, nurturing her imagination and reinforcing her awareness of mystical experiences. "De forekom hende stundom at være mere end drømme – nogenslags dunkle, gaadefulde syner, som hang sammen med mørkerædselen og al nattens og naturens mystik," Scott explains. When Camilla is asleep her mind can penetrate beyond sensory images to the supernatural:

Det var som det, der i det vaagne liv fyldte hende med gru og bæven, men som hun ikke kunde se – det, der var *bag* tingene – – det var, som det viste sig for hende i drømme. Naar hun var bange i mørket eller ensomheden, tænkte hun, at det kanske var, fordi hun aned omkring sig, hvad hun bare saa med søvnens øie. (p. 166)

One must wonder whether Scott was writing autobiographically in

linking this sense of the supernatural in his protagonist to her spiritual development and describing how it may have preceded a flight from conventional Christian descriptions of the Biblical God as an all-powerful but not always benevolent deity. In any case, Camilla's nightmares instill in her an existential *Angst* of the supernatural and of death:

I saadanne øieblikke var tanken paa Gud forfærdende, og døden og graven skrækked hende ved sin ubønhørighed. Det store himmelrum omkring, jordkloden, som rullede blindt om i afgrunden – selve livet – – aldrig, aldrig var det saa grufuldt i sin hemmelighedsfuldhed og uforstaaelighed som nu. (p. 166)

Divine light comes, however, to conquer these darkest moments of Camilla's nocturnal existence and her fear of death:

Men iblandt, naar hun laa paa grænsen af søvnen, flyttedes et øieblik alle skranker. Forhæng gled lydløst tilside – blankt lys vælded ind – der var ingen, ingen hemmelighed mere. Himmelrummet – døden – Gud – – hun forstod det, saa sammenhængen i det hele!" (p. 167)

This assuring, life-affirming consciousness of the relationship between God and the *cosmos* would come to the fore in several of Scott's subsequent works, not least *Kilden*, although he does not develop it explicitly or at length in *Camilla Dyring*. Here it is an important harbinger at an early stage of his literary career of what would become a *Leitmotiv* in his fiction.

Camilla's Childhood Faith and Incipient Doubts about Christianity

Unmistakable elements of Scott's own departure from the confessional orthodoxy of the Church of Norway are represented in Camilla's spiritual formation and relationship to her father and the

religious establishment of which he is an integral part. *Camilla Dyring* is *inter alia* a story of a young Lutheran's *barnetro* and subsequent doubting of aspects of the faith imparted to her during her childhood.

Camilla is initially presented as one who accepts without question what her elders have taught her about God and whose relationship to the church is positively depicted. When she asks her grandmother whether God is everywhere, for instance, she is assured that such is the case and apparently accepts this (p. 16). In the previously cited passage about whether God created weeds, Camilla also receives her grandmother's affirmative response without question. When parishioners stream into the church on Sunday morning, she feels proud of her familial relationship with that institution. "Hun følte et øieblik stolthed over at være prestens datter. Kirken og søndagen og klokkeklngen – var det ikke igunden fars?" Camilla thinks. Ascending the steeple from within, she feels like a princess when she looks out and surveys her domain (pp. 51-52). Quite in accord with her *barnetro*, the God of her childhood is perceived in personified, theistic terms, and she does not doubt that God hears her prayers (p. 54).

Incipient doubt begins to appear only after Camilla learns to read and in her school books encounters a deity which does not fully correspond to what she has earlier been taught and which she has experienced in nature. Immediately before the previously cited text in which Scott relates her mystical experience when returning from the island of Nibe, Camilla's thoughts turn to the bookish description of God, whom she finds unlovable:

Hun tænkte paa, hvad der stod om ham i skolebøgerne – at han var saa forfærdelig streng og saa forfærdelig almægtig. Det var saa vanskeligt at være glad i ham da, syntes hun – der kom saa meget iveien [...]. (p. 162)

This is virtually a child's version of nineteenth- and twentieth-

century liberal theology's rejection of certain aspects of the Biblical portrayal of God which were manifest in the works of Arne Garborg and others in Norway around the time that Scott wrote *Camilla Dyring*. Moreover, when juxtaposed with the benevolent image of God Camilla has through her mystical experiences, especially that related on the same page, it makes the latter stand out all the more prominently.

A Burgeoning Liberal Faith

Confirmation is apparently a turning point in Camilla's spiritual evolution, particularly in her understanding of God. She receives instruction for it while residing at her uncle's home in the interior of southern Norway. Liberal theology has reached that rural district, brought by the unnamed pastor who serves as Scott's embodiment of post-orthodoxy. This is one of several clergymen whom he portrays in positive terms, notwithstanding Truls Erik Dahl's unqualified assertion about Scott's *prestebat*.⁵ He is the antithesis of the fire-and-brimstone, eschatologically speculative lay evangelists who crop up as negative referents in *Himmeluret* and other works. Far from instilling fear into his prospective confirmands, this benevolent man of the cloth addresses all of them in a kindly fashion, and there is no hint of catechetical drilling. Camilla responds affirmatively to this kind of instruction, the content of which she finds fully understandable. In harmony with her understanding of God, neither the pastor nor his message is at all severe; on the contrary, "han dvæled ikke saa meget ved synden og straffen – – det var livet, han snakket om og forklarte". For that matter, in Scott's brief synopsis of the instruction, there is nothing specifically Christian at all. Instead, life, according to this clergyman, "var som en reise [...] hvor de fleste utaalmodig haged mod

⁵ Dahl, *Gabriel Scott. Et levnetsløp*, p. 172.

nyhed og skjønhed, mod større glæde og større lykke – mod det store og straalende!” This path, he emphasises, leads nowhere. Following a different and simpler road is more rewarding: “Men livets goder og livets lykke var ikke altid i det store og straalende, men ofte, kanske oftest, i det smaa og det stille – netop derfor reiste saa mange forbi – – ” (p. 246). This message is an unmistakable introit to the gospel of *noisombet* which Scott would preach from cover to cover in *Kilden* twelve years later. Moreover, it corresponds to the joys Camilla has experienced in her coastal village. She recalls:

Lykken stod ikke med stort skilt og bød sig frem og vinked og praled – nei, nei, den gjemte sig ofte som en liden graa lærke i græsset – – den, som da ikke kjendte fuglen, han reiste kanske hele sit liv forgjæves. (pp. 246-247)

Intimately linked to this, the pastor stresses the here-and-now of living, rather than the hereafter which earlier troubled Camilla in some of her nightmares: “Se jer tilbage, havde han sagt – stans paa reisen og vend hodet, ja, se jer om hver eneste dag!” These words, too, encourage Camilla in her search to recover the joy she knew before being placed into her aunt’s educational straitjacket. She now believes that “det kunde ogsaa hænde i verden”, not only teleologically after death (p. 247).

Camilla is confirmed by her father after she returns briefly to the village. During the economical service, she experiences undefined mixed feelings rather than any elation at the occasion. The precise reasons for her reaction are not clear, but they appear to relate to Camilla’s dislike of being in her aunt’s presence again with all the painful associations accompanying memories of the strict instruction which this severe woman has imparted.

At any rate, Camilla’s religious mentality has become more contoured, and she has largely outgrown her *barnetro*. In the wake of her confirmation, she is not “ordentlig religiøs” (p. 279), but what Scott means by that is not apparent. There is in any case no reli-

gious fervour in this young Christian; “hun havde endnu ingen anfægtelser og ingen tvil.” In a possible allusion to theological liberalism, Scott emphasises that she does not think often about hell, apparently because “far snakked saa lidet om det i sine prædikener”. Furthermore, Camilla’s faith is decidedly Christocentric. She still perceives God the Father as “forfærdelig streng” and cannot like him nearly as much as Jesus, whose Passion narrative especially impresses her, but she refrains from challenging anything about the Father. “Han var jo ogsaa alvidende og almægtig, saa det vilde ikke være saa greit”. Yet she continues to say her evening prayers conscientiously with her hands folded under her blanket while residing at her uncle’s home, and she reads the Bible frequently. Her explorations of the Holy Writ do not spring from spiritual zeal, however, but primarily because she believes her beloved father would like her to read and that it would please God, as well (pp. 279-280).

Doubts sprout in Camilla’s mind during her later teenaged years. Unfortunately, Scott does not define most of the erosion of certitude of her childhood faith, but merely refers to this process in generalised terms. After Camilla prays repeatedly for her alcoholic uncle, she notices that she does not feel certain about the efficacy of her supplications; Doubt overshadows them: “Hun bad vel om igjen flere gange – men den var der hver eneste gang, hvor haardt hun end tvindede fingrene sammen” (p. 292).

In any case, and almost simultaneously, Camilla evinces signs of the theological liberalism which characterised Scott beginning very early in the twentieth century. In a conversation with Munch, for example, whose propensity for the bottle has damaged his self-esteem, she reveals that she does not believe in human depravity. Even if a person has weaknesses, Camilla declares, it does not mean that those flaws permeate the individual completely. Indeed, “der kan være meget, uendelig meget godt ved siden,” insists this youthful optimist (p. 295). On a much less positively portrayed note, Camilla’s nocturnal spiritual struggles return when she is in

her late teens. Nightmares fill her with fear of death, and there is little Christian faith left in her to vanquish this foe. Scott describes her unsuccessful search in terms of an existential struggle: "I sin nød søgte hun Gud alle steder – hendes tanke fløi ud mellem stjernerne som en forskræmt fugl – hun maatte ha hjælp, maatte ha trøst!" But God seems to be a *Deus absconditus*: "Men Gud gjemte sig – hun ledte i rummets inderste kroge – overalt det samme mørke og den samme stilhed – kloderne sused forladte omkring". Camilla's conclusion is one of despair: "Der var ingen skaber, ingen barmhjertighed – ingen – ingen – ingen hjælp! [...] Gud havde flygtet fra altsammen" (pp. 308-310).

Theism, apparently, is no longer a viable article of faith in her mind. Her attempts to believe in a transcendent deity have rolled back down on her like the stones of Sisyphus. What she has left is her close relationship to nature, and this provides her consolation and spiritual succour when conventional faith has failed: "Naturen var is sig selvbarmhjertig". Divinity is no longer attainable through reflective cogitation. Instead, "nu tog hendes hjerte magten" (p. 310), and from that point onward Camilla is clearly beyond the pale of confessional orthodoxy. To be sure, some remnants of her *barnetro* are still evident. When her ailing father collapses in her presence, the shocked Camilla cries out to her grandmother and the servant girls, "Herre Jesus – far ligger og dør inde paa gulvet – skynd jer! Aa Gud –aa Gud – hjælp –hjælp!" (p. 315). This emotional plea does not, however, in any noteworthy way indicate a shift in the current of her post-orthodox thinking.

In the antepenultimate chapter Scott includes another element of Camilla's thinking which may suggest the influence of a minor current in Norwegian religious thought during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, namely spiritism, which never achieved a discernible foothold among the country's Lutheran divines but gained some prominence during the 1890s when Arne Garborg and others participated in serious research on spiritistic

phenomena, and it was further popularised after 1900 by *inter alia* the economist Hans Jæger at the university in Kristiania.⁶ This is presented in a context which probably also underscores Scott's personal quest for more signposts in his own spiritual journey. In a conversation with her patently dying father, she pleads with him, as the only member of her immediate family of origin she has ever known, to try to communicate with her from beyond the grave so that she can believe in life after death. That, she thinks, will fill a heart-felt need, "saa jeg ikke behøver at tvile mere". The elder Dyring declines to make such a commitment, however, and explains that doing so might prove counterproductive, because if he were unable to fulfil it, his daughter's faith might receive yet another blow (pp. 326-327). As this incident occurs late in the plot, Scott makes no attempt to pursue whatever relationship it has to his protagonist's spiritual development.

The Problem of Evil

In one of the final religious issues which Scott adduces chiefly after describing Camilla's departure from much of her *barnetro*, he returns to the problem of evil, which would be a recurrent theme in much of his fiction and a bit of his non-fiction. Scott touches on elements of a theodicy obliquely in Chapter VI of the present early novel when Camilla and her grandmother discuss weeds, as was cited above under the sub-heading 'Intimacy with Nature'. At first blush the relevance of this conversation to the problem of evil may not be apparent. Camilla cannot understand why her grandmother insists on removing weeds, and the older woman's answer that they

⁶ Synnøve Kirkebo, 'Teosofi i Norge 1893-1940: en historisk skisse', in Ingvild Sælid Gilhus and Lisbeth Mikaelsson (eds), *Skjult visdom - universelt brorskap. Teosofi i Norge* (Oslo: Emilia AS, 1998), pp. 82-83; Carl Fr. Wisløff, *Norske kirkehistorie* (Oslo: Lutherstiftelsen, 1971), p. 274.

are ugly fails to satisfy her, especially because she cannot harmonise a rejection of them with her belief that God has created these forms of plant life. In *Kilden*, Scott would use jellyfish as an example of how a seemingly malevolent nuisance actually has a constructive purpose in Creation. In a related incident in which Camilla sees the positive in what people have been conditioned to regard as an ugly part of nature, her fascination with butterflies entails accepting them in their earlier stages as larvae and pupae, knowing that they will eventually attain a state which she finds beautiful. This is cast in explicitly religious language: “Det var Guds egen vidunderlige finger, som rørte sig bag skallet!” (p. 234). This is another in a long series of incidents in Scott’s fiction in which natural revelation of the divine is depicted as clearer than what in Christian theology is generally regarded as special revelation through, particularly, the Bible.

Turning to human suffering as one crucial dimension of the issue of evil and suffering, Camilla cannot understand or accept why her father is subjected to severe tribulations which apparently have nothing to do with his Christian ministry. His health problems trouble her repeatedly and cause her chronic worries both before his recuperative international travels and several years later after he suffers a stroke which leads to his death. Concern about her father’s health is virtually the only tribulation the nearly insouciant girl has while residing in the village, apart from her fear of her autocratic aunt.

After Camilla completes her structured education and then her stint of residency at her uncle’s home, she gains more access to the outside world (which, apparently, she has not seen since her father was called to the village parish) by reading history books in the library at the manse. This window to less idyllic conditions admits the major problem of evil in her young life. From her sheltered perspective, it appeared that “menneskene drev deres liv hen med at kives og ødelægge og slaa ihjel. Det ene land vælted sig over det

andet, altid raser krig etsteds – den slog ud som en vandrende lue af jordens indvold.” How this could be seems incomprehensible and incompatible with the very eroded faith of her childhood, and, looking more sceptically at the world, she wonders whether “Gud havde kastet den fra sig i afsky”. Camilla’s perspective on the matter then shifts fundamentally after she engages in more reflective cogitation on the matter, and she declares bluntly to her father: “Du far – jeg kan ikke, kan ikke tro paa Gud, naar jeg læser dette!” His response comes immediately, indicating empathy, if not necessarily agreement: “Det er heller ikke let, Camilla.” This admission coincides with her realisation that her faith has become unravelled since her previously cited conversation with her uncle in which she assured him that people still incorporate some goodness despite their flaws and subsequently prayed for him:

Siden den aften hos onkel, da hun mærked tvilen for første gang – siden den aften var der ligesom løsnet maske efter maske i den skinnende væv, hun havde eiet af tro og tillid. Hun stred imod, hun værnede den efter sin yderste evne – hun bad til Gud og læste i bibelen – men tvilen bored sig ind i bønner og skrev spørgsmaalstegn ved hver eneste linje. (pp. 307-309).

As he lies dying in Chapter LII, the elder Dyring, possibly serving as Scott’s spokesman, (and, one must wonder, perhaps voicing an opinion expressed by S. Holst Jensen not long before his own death), explains the relationship between his faith in God and his perception of widespread evil in the world. In response to Camilla’s bedside query whether he believes in God, her stroke-ridden father replies with striking coherence:

Du sagde engang, Camilla, at du ikke kunde tro paa Gud, naar du tænkte paa al den rædsel og skyld og uretfærdighed paa jorden – al den grænseløse sorg og lidelse op gennem tiderne – – men Camilla, jeg synes ofte, at netop derfor maa jeg tro. Ingen uden en Gud kunde svare for et saa uhyre regnskab –

men han maa være saa mange gange større, end vi mennesker magter at forestille os. Bruger vi menneskelige maal – da kommer ogsaa min tro tilkort. (p. 321)

Dyring continues in the same monologue to expound on his concept of the divine and reveals that he is not fully committed to a conventional theistic one but can nonetheless affirm his belief in life after death:

Jeg ved ikke, om jeg tror paa en personlig Gud – jeg tænker undertiden, at hvis der er en saadan, saa er han saa uendelig vældig, at jorden, vi bor paa, kanske bare et molekyl i hans tænkende hjerne – men jeg tror paa en fortsættelse efter dette – – uden det kan jeg ikke forklare mig livet” (pp. 321-322)

His final concern is to prepare his sheltered daughter for the tribulations she is bound to face after leaving rural Norway. If he could live longer, he assures Camilla, he would devote much of his time to that task. “Jeg vilde saa nødig lade dig svag og hjælpeløs igjen,” Dyring professes; “livet er vanskeligt og kan være saa svært – om mit barn kunde komme lettere fra det end jeg, vilde jeg dø saa ubekymret og glad” (p. 325). His partial consolation is that he can bequeath enough to Camilla and her grandmother so that they will not have financial woes for at least five or six years.

The Church of Norway *vs.* Nature?

Both while and after establishing Camilla’s natural, intuitive religious tendencies in tandem with her Lutheran *barnetro*, Scott at several places compares the church with his protagonist’s natural habitat and allows the two to interact in ways which place the religious establishment at a distinct disadvantage. To be sure, to Camilla during the earliest phase of the novel the two are not discrete entities; in her mind they intersect without difficulty. In one of her dreams,

for example, as she flies through the air along the coast the sea is suddenly transmogrified into the church. The local gravedigger is in the pulpit, and in the sanctuary worshippers sit with oyster shells in their hands. A muskrat is perched on its hind legs on the altar, reaching up to one of the candlesticks (p. 13).

Just as Camilla feels at home when close to the flora and fauna of nature, she feels emotionally comfortable on her periodic ascents into the loft of the village church, where “det lugted mugg og ælde.” What Scott emphasises above all else in his description of the interior, however, is the transitoriness of ecclesiastical accoutrements. Nature constantly renews itself, but the same cannot be said of religious properties. Scott paints a dismal portrait of them as virtual relics of the past:

En døbefont med fladt tinfad stod midt paa gulvet, et sort kors hælded mot væggen, og ved vinduet kunde hun skimte et lavt, simpelt knæfald. Rotterne havde ædt det meste af skindet, det lodne stop grodde af hullerne. Det spinkle tremmer kastede lange skygger hen ad gulvet [...]. (p. 49)

Scott appears at this early stage of his authorship to have perceived the institutional church as *inter alia* an unnatural growth on the body of nature. As a teenager Camilla apparently views it as such, notwithstanding her devotion to her father and her pride she took a few years earlier in being the daughter of the pastor. In one bizarre and seemingly incongruous reference to her perception of the congregation which has no obvious connection to the bracketing narrative, she looks down from the gallery inside the sanctuary and views “nogen rare koner med krum ryg og tørklæder paa hovedet”. To Camilla, “de blev mindre, for hver gang hun saa dem – de var ligesom underjordiske” (p. 142). The reader can wonder whether Scott regarded some faithful worshippers as aberrant folk who had little in common with normal people.

Hints of Incipient Liberal Theology

Although *Camilla Dyring* is not a religious *roman à thèse*, at several points Scott embeds in the text unmistakable hints that he is advocating post-orthodox theology and a religion of living in harmony with nature without entirely scrapping the legacy of the Church of Norway. He also sets forth certain underlying premises which would undergird his later elaboration of man's crucial relationship to nature. Some of these prefigure themes which he would develop in subsequent fictional and nonfictional works and thus merit consideration here.

Virginie's authoritarian pedagogy at the manse provides Scott with an opportunity to underscore his preference for intuitive as opposed to bookish learning and to portray the latter as essentially unnatural. Camilla's aunt constantly stresses the primacy of the principles which she imposes. The older woman declares to her young charge that "noget af det, som mest gjælder her i livet, er at ha principer. Har man det, saa har man altid noget at gaa efter, en rettesnor, om jeg maa kalde det saa, en ledetraad." Ironically enough, Virginie adds that she does not expect Camilla to be constantly conscious of the principles which are being drilled into her, though nothing in her antiquated pedagogical methods meshes with that assurance. Instead, Virginie declares categorically that she expects Camilla "efter bedste evne søger at tilegne dig mine" (pp. 86-87). This emphasis dovetails neatly with catechetical religious instruction, but it runs counter to Camilla's intuitive attachment to nature and her acquisition of both knowledge and appreciation thereof through hands-on experience.

In a related vein, Scott criticises the systematic, rational cogitation which Virginia seeks to impart to Camilla as less reliable than this teacher assumes it to be. The conclusions this woman draws from her observations, he underscores, can be erroneous. The key episode involves her accusation that Camilla does not care about

her ailing father. She asserts that because her niece has not enquired about her father's condition, she does not really care about his well-being. Indeed, taking another step out on precariously thin ice, Virginia declares, "Du gaar den hele dag omkring uden at ofre din syge far en tanke" (p. 110). This, as Scott points out, squarely contradicts the concerns which occupy Camilla's mind. Moreover, the spirit of censoriousness which it represents is inimical to her emotional state and to interpersonal relations. "Hvor det var uendelig vanskeligt at være liden – at gaa der saa hjælpeløs og misforstaaet af de store, kloge voksne!" Camilla thinks (pp. 112-113). She also notes that on several occasions her aunt misinforms the bed-ridden pastor about various matters (pp. 117-118). Scott returns to the theme of the undesirability of excessive rationality when describing the dry-as-dust draughts games which the chaplain who assists her father insists on playing with her. This enthusiastic young man embodies reflective cogitation to an extreme and in the process both bores and alienates Camilla with his "omtænksom og sendrægtig spiller" which often entail using several minutes between moves. "Hun kom efterhaanden til at grue for disse vidtløftige spilletimer med sine lærde, dybsindige udredninger, og hun søgte at undgaa dem efter bedste evne" (p. 134).

Going to the heart of the religious matter, Scott very briefly but unmistakably underscores the incomprehensibility of preaching to Camilla's natural mind. There is little description of worship apart from the confirmation service, which is portrayed as an uninspiring time. On the occasion of her father's return to the pulpit after his recuperative international journey, Camilla benefits little from his sermon. The entire service seems too long for her. Nevertheless, "Hun forsøgte nok at følge med lidt i prædikenen, men der var saa meget, hun ikke kunde forstaa." Scott does not avail himself of this opportunity to state in any way what Pastor Dyring is preaching on or explain precisely what in his homiletical technique makes his sermon difficult to grasp. In any case, it does not inspire the joy

that Scott believed should be one product of religion. The people whom Camilla notices most clearly in the sanctuary sat there “med stive, alvorlige ansigter” (p. 143).

Religious Hypocrisy in the Church of Norway

A final religious theme which Scott touches on only briefly in *Camilla Dyring* and to which he would return at much greater length in some of his subsequent novels, such as *Kilden* and *Skipper Terkel-sens levnetsløp* (1935), is the hypocrisy of seemingly spiritual members of the Church of Norway in what was widely regarded as one of the most pietistically orientated regions of the country. In the present work his consideration of this motif is limited to Chapter XXIV, which focusses on the elder Dyring's return to the village after his recuperative travels abroad and the resumption of his ministry in the village. On his first Sunday back in the pulpit, the sanctuary is full of parishioners—more, in fact, than on most other occasions. The congregation is a cross-section of rural local society. Coming from near and far, the worshippers include “bønder, fiskere og gamle, rige skippere med udringet vest og stiveskjorte og runde guldørenringe”. Scott concentrates his description of behaviour during the service on the wealthier members, chiefly men who flaunt their spiritual fervour:

De var forfærdelig fine med guldknapper i brystet, sorte silkeslips og salmebøger saa store som bibler – dem holdt de paa stiv arm ud i luften, naar de sang, og rokked hele tiden takten med sine svære, knudrende hoder.

Precisely these ostensible paragons of liturgical zeal, however, are the least acquainted with the life of the Christian community, as the pastor's daughter is keenly conscious: “De var meget sjelden i kirken – næsten bare til høitiderne, da de havde saadan lang vei – og hun maatte altid tænke paa havmænd, naar hun saa dem” (pp. 141-

142).

Concluding Observations

It should be stated that the presentation of Scott's religious views before the end of the first decade of the twentieth century was not limited to the dramatic, fictional, and poetic works considered thus far. One can also see them manifested to a limited degree in *inter alia* the novels *De tre lindetrær* (1907) and *Broder Lystig* (1909). Yet nowhere at this early stage of his literary career—and, for that matter, seldom at any subsequent time—did Scott touch so explicitly on so broad a spectrum of religious issues, both in terms of criticising what he perceived as faults of varying magnitude in the Church of Norway and espousing, albeit in a not particularly well developed form, his own views of what religious practices and the goals of religion should be. When one examines Scott's novels from the second and third decades of the century, especially those from what Arne Beisland identified as the golden age of his literary career, the antecedents of his religious views manifest in *Camilla Dyring* will become evident. This is the case not least with regard to such pivotal and recurrent matters as Scott's treatment of the problem of evil, the immanence of God in nature, the centrality of ethics to the religious life, and mystical experiences of the divine. All of this suggests that despite its aesthetic shortcomings *Camilla Dyring* is absolutely a key work in the thematic evolution of Scott's thought.