

Dorothy Dunnett's Lymond and Niccolò series : history versus experience

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Dorothy Dunnett's Lymond and Niccolò series: History versus Experience

Dorothy Dunnett's two series of historical novels, based on the related heroes Francis Crawford of Lymond and Nicholas vander Poele, are configured by the twin imperatives of being a Scot without being a Scott; it is no accident that the Lymond series exhibits its most marked change of direction after the passing of 'the heroic spirit of Walter Scott of Buccleuch' (*DK* 481), for Dunnett is both acutely and uneasily aware of the influence of her great predecessor, as for instance when we are told in *The Unicorn Hunt* that the convent at Haddington has a nun 'from Waverley, England' (*UH* 41), or when we discover that the name of the Vatachino, arch-enemies of Nicholas, derives from the Italian for Walter, even though no member of the St Pol family whom we meet or hear of bears that name. There is certainly a rich extradiegetic resonance to Astorre's remark, à propos of Jodi, 'What's all this about a room of his own, when a lad wants the house of his father?' (*LWL* 62), in which Virginia Woolf's classic description of the woman author's predicament is subordinated to the vision of a firmly patriarchal tradition.

Until the death of Wat Scott, the Lymond novels have been characterised as unmistakably historical; after that, they start to take on more contemporary resonances, with allusions to drug-taking, sexual experimentation, and gap years, and a hero who would increasingly be as much at home in the 1960s as in the 1560s. Moreover, Scott's ethos of post-enlightenment rationalism increasingly gives place to a growing interest in alternative forms of spirituality and belief, most of which have a distinctly teleological emphasis. This essay explores the twin pulls towards the past

and the present in Dunnett's work in order to argue that during the course of the novels she develops a vision of the historical novel as neither Scottian nor nostalgic but a manifesto for the future of Scotland, in which it is seen not as a small and geographically isolated northern country but as a lively and thriving part of a wider European culture. (Indeed just before her death Dunnett was working on a French TV project on European culture, and had also been involved in an exhibition on the connections between Flanders and Scotland in the early Renaissance.)¹ To articulate this vision of Scotland's future, Dunnett needed to return to the past – as Diana Wallace puts it, 'In looking back to the past to create an ideal leader, Dunnett is expressing the need for such a leader in the present' (Wallace 145) – and specifically to a period of the past in which Scotland had had strongly developed links with Europe, most notably in the shape of the Auld Alliance between the Scots and the French. It is therefore to the centuries when the Auld Alliance flourished that she turns for her two great sequences.

There can be no doubt that Dorothy Dunnett's two series of novels about Francis Crawford of Lymond and Nicholas vander Poele both have history at their heart. There is clear and copious evidence of research, as for instance in the effectively gratuitous reference to Temple Newsam as the home of Margaret Lennox and Thomas Howard as her erstwhile lover (*GK* 305). A rare error of a reference to the future Francis II of France as 'the six-year-old fiancé Louis' apart (*QP* 98), these novels are astonishing in the quality of their research, and in the complex and multi-layered picture they offer of the shifting power structures and changing political and indeed geographic landscape of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe.

It is not only the history of the period in which Dunnett is steeped, but the literature too. This is announced at the very outset of the first in the Lymond series, *The Game of Kings*, when we are told that ‘In his tall house in Gosford Close with the boar’s head in chief over the lintel, Mungo Tennant, wealthy and respectable burgher, had invited a neighbour and his friend to call’ (*GK* 3). The boar’s head is an unmistakable reference to the tavern in Eastcheap in which Shakespeare’s Prince Hal and his cronies drank, and there is indeed something of the Hal about Lymond, just as Dunnett’s two novel sequences will ultimately follow the narrative logic of Shakespeare’s two tetralogies, with the second written being the first chronologically. The blowing up of the convent at St Mary’s recalls Marlowe, whose *Massacre at Paris* features the poisoning of an entire nunnery, and so too does Lymond’s comment that ‘I may find I have the habit of lying on my face even when turned, like George Faustus’ (*GK* 339). Lymond quotes Ascham, later to appear in *The Ringed Castle*, on the need for English and Scottish unity (*GK* 405), while the account of Sir Hugh Willoughby in *The Ringed Castle* is clearly indebted to the Elizabethan poet William Warner, author of *Albion’s England*, who interweaves the Chancellor and Willoughby narratives and says that ‘They have one famous *idole* amongst them, which they call the *Golden Old Wife* [in margin, *Aurea Vetula* or *Zelotibaba*]’ (Cawley 122). Lymond also recalls Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* when in *Pawn in Frankincense* he is like Redcrosse led by Una / Oonagh, and the Caroline dramatist John Ford is evoked by the brother-incest in *The Disorderly Knights* and by Gabriel’s rebuke to Joleta, ‘I would have given you my heart to eat’ (*DK* 443), while Anna von Hanseyck’s seduction of Julius is like the Duchess of Malfi propositioning of Antonio (*LWL* 507). The sense of period is thus thoroughly maintained. Indeed one might even think that Dunnett had been reading criticism of the period as well as the

literature itself when we read in *Race of Scorpions* (first published in 1988) that ‘A demure Primaflora had been created for the Hopitalers, as a timorous Primaflora had been fashioned for Thomas, and – he supposed – a seductive Primaflora for himself’ (*RS* 120), a phrase which seems to directly recall Stephen Greenblatt’s seminal *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare*, first published in 1980.

So far from writing in the expository manner of a history book, though, Dunnett’s preferred method of revealing events is characteristically oblique, with a particularly striking example coming from *The Spring of the Ram*: ‘When he raised his eyes, and met those of the Emperor, he felt the hair rise on his forearms. It was true, then. She had been seldom explicit, and he had not been sure’ (*SR* 256). The crucial battle of Pinkie Cleugh is told in a one-sentence paragraph: ‘Among the ten thousand dead of that day were Lord Fleming of Boghall and Tom Erskine’s older brother’ (*GK* 50). The impact, or lack of it, of major public events on the general populace is neatly captured in a telling exchange in *The Game of Kings*, the novel which effectively expounds Dunnett’s philosophy and *modus operandi* of historical novel writing:

‘...Was it the year of Solway Moss?’

Jonathan Crouch looked blank.

Johnnie expounded. ‘The year the Scots King James died, and the small Queen was born. The year Wharton broke up the Scottish army on the Solway and took half of it prisoner to London, including Lymond. The year Lymond’s pastime was first discovered in Scotland, and the English gave him a fine manor for his pains. Fifteen forty-two.’

Mr. Crouch said, ‘Well now... Yes. I’d be with the Princess about that time. Five years ago, near enough.’

Nevertheless, information on public events is given, indirectly but effectively. In *Pawn in Frankincense*, the wonders of Constantinople are refracted through Pierre Gilles' descriptions to Jerott (*Pawn* 434), while in *The Ringed Castle*, Adashev says to Lymond: 'You have heard, no doubt, how the Tsar...' (*RC* 37); the political situation is conveyed in the form of letters to Lymond from a variety of European correspondents (*RC* 54-5); information about the religious situations in Russia and England is given in the form of a conversation between Lymond and Adam Blacklock (*RC* 236); Lymond quotes Sigismund-August's official pronouncement on the subject of weaponry for Russia (*RC* 285); and we are offered a description of a Lappish burial (*RC* 286).

This is a pattern insistently repeated in Dunnett's novels. In *Checkmate*, the plan of attack at Calais is described through the information Philippa has cajoled and mulls over (*C* 306-7). In *Queens' Play*, a significant change to the political situation is deftly hinted at when we are told that 'There was some wit on the changes which other times and other alliances had brought to the quintain itself: instead of the Turk there hung a crude painted barrel with eyes, nose, chin and a string midriff to mark the points of high scoring' (*QP* 156). Lennox provides the reader with some necessary information when he says to Sir George Douglas, 'You heard about the scene at Saumur where none of my Reformed colleagues would bow to the pix. At Orléans, they distributed consecrated bread to the populace; and at Angers the whole legation would have been massacred if the dear Marquis had not intervened' (*QP* 467); and O'LiamRoe performs a similar function when he remarks to Cormac O'Connor,

Well, the great Earl of Kildare is dead, his family attainted, his heir a child with an Italian accent living in Florence these ten years. True for you, your own mother was daughter to the ninth Earl, your lands are gone, your father fast in the Tower, your ten brothers and sisters homeless or on alien soil; but 'tis fifteen years since the English took Kildare's son Tomás at Maynooth Castle and broke their pledged word to him; and three hundred and fifty years since an O'Connor was supreme monarch of Ireland.

(*QP* 522)

Similarly in *The Disorderly Knights* information is conveyed when we are told that 'In the long journey from Marseilles Lymond had not wasted his time. He knew that Malta had no rivers...' (*DK* 64). In all these cases, though, what is striking is not merely what we learn, but the way that we are invited to register its impact on a contemporary consciousness. What Dunnett's narratives typically strive to convey is a sense of the past as it might have been understood at the time – of the past, in short, as a form of the present.

Dunnett's particular forte is to take us behind the scenes at a Renaissance pageant. In *The Ringed Castle*, 'The cane-play was an artistic disaster' (*RC* 91), while in *Checkmate*, 'The Seven Planets and the Nine Muses both decided at the last moment to demand new bolts of cloth and different dressmakers, and Mercury's staff disappeared and turned up, to much recrimination, in pawn with the silver snake missing' (*C* 586-7). Dunnett has a keen eye for the ludicrous, particularly when it has to do with the exotic animals so beloved of the Renaissance, as when in *Queens' Play* 'Mary Queen of Scotland spoke first, dreamily, her face cupped in warm palms. "I regret," she said in English, "that I bit your marmoset, my aunt"' (*QP* 97), or when

the fact that a play originally about Adam and Eve might have to be suddenly adapted as the *Mystery of St Vincent of Saragossa* leaves the rabbits from the Creation with no rôle to play (*LWL* 25). Dunnett also likes to catch the Renaissance in the act, as it were, of becoming the Renaissance. In *Niccolò Rising*, Nicholas and his companions arrive in Italy to find building sites: ‘There was a lot of wet sand and mortar round about the Palazzo Medici as well when they got there. Taking shape was a long block of an edifice built of squared stones’ (*NR* 134), and ‘Everything in Milan was huge. In front was the biggest church Felix had ever seen. It was half-built and covered in scaffolding, with brown-backed workmen in breech-clouts moving from plank to plank like seagulls on the Crane’ (*NR* 356). Dunnett particularly rejoices in the sense of the ridiculous or incongruous:

In single file, the four passed through the archway and into the Medici courtyard. Julius faltered.

‘Judith displaying the head of Holofernes,’ said Nicholas helpfully, gazing at the fountain before them and the streaming sculpture within it. ‘*He* was a friend of Donatello’s and *she* didn’t like it.’

(*SR* 43)

Later, Nicholas dresses as a lion for the procession and actually meets Donatello, whom he mischievously pretends to confuse first with Ghiberti and then with Brunelleschi (*SR* 87) (though Gelis subsequently tears up Donatello’s drawing of Nicholas [*UH* 321]), and Nicholas’s bribe to Whistle Willie is ‘what they’re going to play at Lorenzo de’ Medici’s wedding in Florence’ (*UH* 218). (De Fleury, the name which Nicholas assumes in tribute to his mother, may perhaps owe something to the Fleury Playbook.)

The sense of innovation is also caught, as when Pigello Portinari ‘used Arabic numbers, Felix saw, adding quickly on scraps of paper; and so did Nicholas, counter-checking’ (*NR* 357), or as when Nicholas enchants the small Cosimino de’ Medici with a yoyo (*SR* 45), newly brought back from the East. Equally – and reminding us that she was a professional portrait painter before she was a writer – Dunnett notes that ‘Monna Giovanna, to be sure, still sported horns of red hair of a sort, but Meester van Eyck was dead, and Messer Arnolfini half dead by the look of him. All that was the same was the convex mirror, though one of the enamels was recent, and the silver-gilt chandelier overhead with its six candles burning politely’ (*NR* 181), while in *The Unicorn Hunt* we are told casually that ‘The somebody else was Huge van der Goes the painter, from Bruges’ (*UH* 216).

The sense of Dunnett’s books as being historical, that is set in the past, is also somewhat counterpoised by her flirtations with what might be called counterfactuality *avant la lettre*. In *The Game of Kings*, Lymond speculates that ‘in the future, they can expect the Queen’s children to rule France and Scotland between them’ (*GK* 407), just as in *Queens’ Play* Mary of Guise dreams of ‘the grandson who one day, surely, would reign over Ireland, Scotland and France’ (*QP* 593). Also in *The Game of Kings*, we are expressly told that ‘it occurred to nobody in this busy month that history was being made’ (*GK* 510), and we are offered a direct parody of the chronicle mode in ‘In such a way ended Sunday, the fifth of February’ (*GK* 284), while the general description of the raid on Hawick is characteristically counterpointed with the personal (*GK* 282-3), just as the argument between Richard and Mariotta recapitulates the war between Scotland and England (*GK* 290-1), or as Lord Grey of Wilton sketches out tactics with the salt cellar under Kate Somerville’s nose (*GK* 523).

As the two series unfold, the sense of the pastness of the past recedes even further, as Dunnett's own, very distinctively 1970s and 80s experiences increasingly come to condition them, as when Nicholas's itinerary in Iceland so obviously replicates the Golden Circle tour which is standard for modern tourists there. This has always been there to some extent – a visit to Threave Castle clearly lies behind the episode in *The Game of Kings* in which Lymond is imprisoned there, since the description of the prison corresponds so closely with the layout of the room thus identified by modern heritage notices, and the description of the Tower of Tantallon includes a reference to the tourist sight of the Bass Rock (*GK* 267). It moves, however, increasingly to the fore. In *Queens' Play*, Lymond demands of Abernaci, 'What drugs do you keep?' (*QP* 161), while in *Pawn in Frankincense*, in the house into which Oonagh had been sold, 'the old man... lift[s] eyes glazed with drugs' (*PF* 107), Marthe expounds the workings of the drug trade (*PF* 345), and it is broken to Lymond that he has been unknowingly taking opium (*PF* 515). Oonagh's militancy in the cause of Ireland clearly recalls the IRA, while the Geomalers with their bells, sandals, and lack of possessions (*PF* 225) are equally obviously based on hippies. The 60s and 70s climate of growing sexual freedom and experimentation is echoed in the way 'the Aga Morat's eyes rested on Francis Crawford also with a curious and vivid attention' (*PF* 204) and when Will Scott 'was not slow in following the Master across the jammed, leg-strewn room' when he thinks Lymond is inviting him to bed in the Ostrich (*GK* 192), while Philippa's make-up lessons (*PF* 446-7) and the sophistication which she brings back from abroad are strongly suggestive of a glorious parody of a gap year, as is the serious scrape that she gets herself into: '*Dear Kate. As you will see from the*

address, I am staying as a concubine in the harem of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent' (PF 399).

Along with this goes a growing tendency to anachronism. There are references to Eastern religious customs which people living in 1550s Scotland would have been most unlikely to know: Margaret Douglas compares Lymond to 'Krishna among the milkmaids gored by a cow' (GK 310), and 'The Richard Crawford who returned was, as his wife ruefully put it, as sociable as a Trappist monk' (GK 206). Similarly, Marthe speaks to Lymond of Nirvana (PF 144); Lymond says 'There'll be sand and prints and maze-toothed Labyrinthodontia if need be' (PF 160); Marthe demands of Jerott, 'Are there no balloons, no bunting, no dancing round bonfires? Does the machine not make festival when the great Gabriel is dead?' (PF 332); and Francis quotes Buddha as he goes into cold turkey (PF 688). In *The Ringed Castle*,

What happened at Novgorod was not entirely George Killingworth's fault, although Danny Hislop afterwards blamed his beard, which he claimed had a life of its own like Chang-kuo Lao's miraculous donkey, which could travel thousands of leagues a day, and then at rest could be folded like paper

(RC 226)

In *The Disorderly Knights*, Lymond wonders if Joleta is planning to be 'A little unmarried mother?' (DK 391), and notes that 'Randy Bell...is, Archie Abernethy tells me, an obvious addict himself, and possesses imported drugs in quantities usually unobtainable except in Mediterranean countries' (DK 403), while Adam does an artist's impression of Gabriel's steward to convict him of a crime (DK 463). There is a jadedly sophisticated post-Darwinian view of the world in Buccleuch's remark that Lymond's men are living 'in the jungle' (GK 271) and in Lymond's comment to Sir

George Douglas that ‘In the siècles de foi you would be irresistible’ (*GK* 268), and the scene where the Janissaries chase Lymond through the streets is structured like a Hollywood screwball comedy (*PF* 588-9). There is an improbable awareness of population size in Roger Ascham’s response when asked if he knows Leonard Bailey, ‘There are one hundred and eighty thousand people in London. I know them all’ (*RC* 96), and of other planets when Lymond says to Richard, ‘Since Moscow is in the same planet as Philippa, I know how my son is’ (*RC* 364). There is a wholly anachronistic reference to scouting, first established in 1908, when Lymond says to Piero Strozzi, ‘You must have got your bloody bâton for something other than scoutcraft’ (*C* 255). Most notably, Lymond plays jeu-de-paume to relieve tension, clearly the modern equivalent of squash (*C* 695), and goes skiing (*RC* 251), for all the world like a sixteenth-century James Bond – which is of course in many ways what he is.

The Niccolò novels, for all their careful recreation of fourteenth-century detail, can be equally cavalier, as when in *The Spring of the Ram* we read that ‘I sometimes wonder,’ said the lord Cosimo, ‘if it is because Genoa is so sadly dominated by others at home that she behaves as she does in her outstations. It is a frequent quirk of the colonial’ (*SR* 52), while in *Race of Scorpions* we have the improbable observation that ‘You are far from the shipping lanes to the west, Grand Commander’ (*RS* 232). In *The Unicorn Hunt* Nicholas asks ‘Do you know about candied marijuana seeds? They have an amazing effect in spiced wine’ (*UH* 206) and Gelis says of her aquamarines: ‘I sent away for them’ (*UH* 207), like a housewife shopping from a catalogue. Equally in *To Lie with Lions* the Getty kidnapping is evoked – ‘Among the richer class of dealers and traders, the kidnapping of the heir to a bank signifies

trouble. Some investors snatch back their ducats at once, assuming that half an ear and a ransom note are about to arrive at the counting-house' (*LWL* 3) – and Tobie opines that 'The war will be over by Christmas' (*CR* 468).

Modern literature also begins to leave its traces, not least in the growing similarities between the Crawford family and that of Lord Peter Wimsey. Both Francis and Wimsey have an older brother with the title and a small, exquisite dowager for a mother, who understands them better than anyone else, and in Wimsey's case that mother is called Honoria, as was the first wife of the first Baron Crawford, and has a father named Francis. Wimsey, like Lymond, is perceived as being able to do 'anything' (Sayers 1921 246 and 191), and in *Checkmate* Lymond, like Wimsey, goes back to his old college (*C* 181) as a prelude to a final entry into a full marriage. Wimsey's Oxford is, of course, directly suggested by the reference to Philippa's 'sheer Somerville resolution' (*DK* 420). Less strikingly anachronistic, but nevertheless also so, are the parallels between *Scales of Gold* and the works of Rider Haggard – the Fountain of Youth is like *She*, Godscalc and Nicholas are like Leo and Holly, the pillars crashing down recall the close of *King Solomon's Mines* – and Nicholas's reference to Timbuktu as 'Paradise Lost' (*SG* 471).

Most notably, Dunnett's novels become more sympathetic to feminism as they progress. In the Lymond series, Marthe is condemned for man-hating – Lymond says to Jerott 'She hates, if you notice, anything masculine' (*RC* 148) – and for being unable to keep servants, while even Kate Somerville is marginalised on the grounds of her sex when Lymond says dismissively that 'being a woman, although unique among women, Kate thinks of the particular and not of the general' (*RC* 274). Certainly

locked into the deep structure of these books is an idea that sisters are there to be sacrificed for brothers, for at the end of the Niccolò sequence Margaret dies to save Rankin (after Lucia has already died instead of Simon [*UH* 144]) just as at the culmination of the Francis sequence Marthe involuntarily dies to save Francis, after Austin Grey mistakes her for him. In *The Spring of the Ram*, however, Catherine's dawning business sense is seen as entirely commendable: 'What, said Catherine de Charetty, was she to make of a man who had wanted to take over her business and yet couldn't buy shrewdly or supervise proper accounting?' (*SR* 439), and Gelis in particular is allowed to want success in both her business and personal lives without being punished for it. Moreover, Francis and Nicholas are both punished for ignorance of gynaecology: the fact that Francis has to kill Khairuddin can be traced directly back to his initial failure to notice that Oonagh is pregnant, while Nicholas can never know the truth about Bonne because he did not think early enough of the possibility that Marian might have died in childbirth. This emphasis is underlined by the joke implicit in the name of Dr Andreas of Vesalia, since the historical Andreas Vesalius (1515-64), who studied at Nicholas's alma mater Louvain, wrote *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, and thus opened for the door for the exploration into the mysteries of birth.

This increasing shedding of the trappings of the past can be attributed to the fact that the novels themselves are interested not only in the the fifteenth and sixteenth century past but above all in the future, and specifically, as might be expected from the wife of the editor of *The Scotsman*, the future of Scotland. Scotland's destiny is Dunnett's abiding theme. Early in *The Game of Kings*, we catch a glimpse of Lymond's underlying commitment to his country: "“English! Lucifer, Lord of Hell!” (Here

was passion.) “Do I look like an Englishman?”” (*GK* 59). In *Queens’ Play*, there is a neatly ironic moment when we are told that

Vervassal paused. He had spoken in English as excellent as his French had been. Harisson realized, as his brain darted shrilling among the impossible obstacles of this fresh landscape, that this man, whose own name he did not know, must be not French but Scots.

(*QP* 361)

In a series of novels in which individual identity becomes increasingly bedevilled, Scottishness is the one constant. Godscalc, dying, puts Scotland first (*UH* 293), and it is in the presence of the Scottish Duchess of the Tyrol that Nicholas has the premonition of Francis in the water-mill (*UH* 334-5), and the first real indication of the link between the two men.

The pre-eminence of Scotland in the narrative becomes even stronger after it is hinted at the conclusion of the Niccolò series that both Kuzucuyum and Khairuddin are likely to be great-grandsons of Nicholas (Henry having presumably fulfilled his promise to Muriella Reid Maloch that ‘If you want a baby, I’ll give you one [*G* 457]), so that the thread of descent has in fact been continued despite Francis’s apparent killing of his son. The unsettling similarities between Francis and Gabriel have been repeatedly stressed: in *Pawn in Frankincense*, D’Aramon thinks Francis might be behind the attacks on the embassy staff which Gabriel has organised (*PF* 494), while in *The Disorderly Knights*, when Gabriel enters Oonagh’s tent: ‘Under the African sun, his hair was a cap of gold, and the blood emptied from her skin, leaving a cold imbalance which lasted some seconds. Then she saw, as he stepped into the shadow, that it was no one she knew’ (*DK* 142). The answer to Francis’s question ‘Does it

matter? Should it matter which child is which?’ (PF 533), then, is in one sense no, since both are apparently great-grandchildren of Nicholas. In this sense, the general is more important than the personal, as when in *Checkmate* Sybilla smiles in the midst of her pain when Lymond says Russia does not mean more to him than Scotland (C 388).

There is also a growing strain of messianic imagery surrounding the link between Francis and Scotland. Although this is, in characteristic Dunnnett mode, ironically handled, it is nevertheless unmistakable. Gabriel goes to St Mary’s and fails to announce the birth of a son to a woman who is no virgin, the title of *Pawn in Frankincense* reminds us of the gift brought to the infant Jesus, and the neatly-named Nostradamus says to Sybilla, ‘I wished to see the chosen vessel and learn why it was chosen’ (C 553), referring to the Dame de Doubtance’s engineering of the union between the first baron and Sybilla in order that a son should be born – the reason being, of course, that Sybilla is the granddaughter of Nicholas, a link of which we are powerfully reminded when, walking through Edinburgh, Nicholas hears in his mind the words which will later haunt Sybilla when Francis is under sentence of death towards the conclusion of *The Game of Kings*:

*There was a Ewe had three lambs; and one of them was black. The
one was hanged, the other drowned; the third was lost, and never found.*

(UH 58)

Indeed the word ‘Messiah’ is openly used by Nicholai Giorgio de’ Acciajuoli to Nicholas, albeit in connection with Russia, the country which Francis wants to save rather than the one he is fated to: ‘Sometimes the Messiah comes from outside’ (CR 413). It is no surprise that we read in *Pawn in Frankincense* that ‘It is doubtful if, at

the time, even Lymond realised how little of all this was coincidence' (*PF* 56). As Lymond himself says on Malta, 'As for the Cross...my habit is to fight for the Saltire' (*DK* 93), and there can be no mistaking the Christ-like imagery when he voluntarily submits to scourging at the whipping-post of St Mary's. Not without cause does Lymond declare that Jerott 'was to be Gabriel's Baptist and oust me before he came' (*DK* 409).

Indeed to some extent the two series of novels can be seen as the Old and New Testaments of Scotland's history, with the Promise implicit in Nicholas's ultimate commitment to the country redeemed by Francis' final return to it. The parallels between the two series are obvious. Nicholas rescues Margaret Stewart from death as Francis will rescue Mary Stuart, and the echo is underlined when Margaret calls for 'one Mariota' (*UH* 22-3); Nicholas meets Gelis when she is an unprepossessing child just as Francis first meets Philippa at a similar age; short, sandy-haired, shrewd, womanising Danny Hislop is reproduced in Tobie; the loyal disciple Robin is a Will Scott who survives his maiming. A further link between the two texts seems confirmed when seeing a vision of Güzel in Moscow, Nicholas thinks of her as 'Like Violante, perhaps' (*CR* 387); surely the Greco-Italian Güzel, who calls the Dame de Doubtance her cousin, is the daughter of Violante's son Nerio, who will, Nicholai Giorgio de' Acciajuoli confirms when dying, continue his line in his old age. Similarly in *Race of Scorpions* the hearing of Nicholas in Rhodes is like the trial of Francis at the end of *The Game of Kings* (*RS* 198-9), while Nicholas and John le Grant have to put out the fuses at Famagusta just as Francis does at Tripoli (*RS* 434). Similarly, Gelis is like Marthe when she play-acts to fool Raffaello Doria as Marthe did to rescue Jerott, and also in her misanthropy, highlighted when Bel says of her

‘I’d have taken that one into my house even though she hated the whole of mankind, as she does’ (*SG* 342).

However, the two series are bound together by typology as much as by genealogy, since the messianic rôle which will ironically accrue to Francis is already foreshadowed, with equal irony, in Nicholas, who, in a nice play on words, not only passes through the ordeal of the Jordan but provides too the Jordan from which Francis will emerge. (The association between the name and the river is explicitly made when Nicholas explains his son’s name to the Princess Mary.) When the elder Jordan tells Simon Gelis is pregnant, Simon says ‘Holy Mary!’. “‘It was not, unfortunately, the Annunciation,” said Jordan de Ribérac’ (*UH* 53). Handsome, black-haired, Julius da Bologna, with his unsuccessful marriage prefigures handsome, black-haired Jerott Blyth with *his* unsuccessful marriage, and, like Jerott, Julius is associated with John the Baptist in *Scales of Gold*, first when ‘They left, past the spouting archers, the dribbling pelican, the John the Baptist dispensing showers of experimental water. Julius suddenly shivered’ (*SG* 496), and then when ‘Nicholas thought of John the Baptist and Julius, and wondered if happiness killed, or merely made you insensible’ (*SG* 508). In *To Lie with Lions*, Anselm Sersanders asks Kathi: ‘would it interest you...to know that God’s darling, King David, sailed into Leith yesterday, or perhaps it was only my lord Nicholas de Fleury and his wife and son?’ (*LWL* 110); we are reminded that ‘Nicholas had met John le Grant through a Magi procession in Florence’ (*LWL* 178); and Julius refers to the arrival of Gelis and Jodi as ‘like the Flight from Egypt’ (*LWL* 570).

Most notably, even before Gelis and Nicholas meet on Mount Sinai, Gebel Musa (*UH* 532-3), Nicholas' divining has clearly identified him as Moses, the Old Testament type of Francis's Jesus. As in the Bible, then, the chronologically earlier text can be seen as merely foreshadowing the chronologically later one, and although the uncertainty about fatherhood is replicated in both books, and Tobie clearly reminds us of Khairuddin when he says of Jodi that 'the child himself has turned into a pawn' (*UH* 626), it ultimately does not matter: it is not the identity of the individual which counts, but the rôle they play in the teleological narrative of Scotland's destiny. Dunnett might well have said with Dr Andreas that 'My concern is the Future, thus capitalised' (*G* 725).

This focus on Scotland's future is, I think, partly what accounts for Dunnett's extraordinarily cavalier way with death: other things matter more, as we see in *Scales of Gold* when Umar (shortly before himself becoming one of Dunnett's spectacular fatalities) tells Nicholas 'Nicholas, you have a place in this world. Men will lose more if you die than they will ever gain if Father Godscale reaches Ethiopia' (*SG* 353). In *The Game of Kings*, we are told breezily that 'That year, as in other years, death was not man's ultimate terror and chief source of his disquiet...Children in thousands never came to life, or lived only hours' (*GK* 547). It also explains her striking willingness to kill off characters, which is rarely more apparent than in the closing sequences of the first two Lymond books. There is a remarkable similarity of structure here: in each case Francis Crawford is endangered and indeed imprisoned; in each case a character who has previously been sceptical performs prodigies to secure the evidence that will save him – Will Scott defeating Thomas Palmer at cards, O'LiamRoe persuading Oonagh O'Dwyer to speak – while another dies for love of

him, a parallel sharply accentuated by the fact that both the characters who die are called Stewart – Christian in the first book, Robin in the second – and that Stewart / Stuart was in itself a name which was ultimately to prove the most spectacular of all the many red herrings in the shape of Scotland’s history, in the shape of Charles Edward Stuart, the Young Pretender. (One of the reasons for this is touched on in *Gemini*, which makes very clear that the Stewarts suffer from porphyria, even though it requires its characters to display improbably advanced diagnostic powers to make this point.) What is perhaps most marked – and in that context most apt – is that both sacrifices are futile. Christian Stewart dies to protect a sheaf of papers which prove to be blank; Robin Stewart may posthumously teach Lymond a lesson, but his death serves no purpose in the campaign to save Mary, Queen of Scots from assassination. Conversely, Will Scott and O’LiamRoe not only achieve their immediate objective but learn and grow during the experience: for Dunnett, it is only life and the living that matter to Scotland’s destiny and enable it to form a community like the one briefly but significantly hinted at when we are told that Will Roger ‘forgot to eat, until the nuns noticed and began sending down baskets’ (*LWL* 208) – perhaps Dunnett’s ideal vision of a world in which art is supported by a communal effort and all have a fitting and fulfilling place; not for nothing is the second series called the *House of Niccolò*, for Nicholas does indeed constitute a community around himself wherever he goes. The unimportance of the individual in this vision is most shockingly shown in the starkly unemotional narrative of the death of the child Khairuddin, who seems likely to have been Lymond’s son, but it is a message that will also be repeatedly conveyed elsewhere, as character after character – Felix and Marian de Charetty, Will Scott, Tom Erskine, Margaret Crawford of Berecrofts, to name only a few – is dispatched and consigned to pitiless oblivion, while the narrative sweeps majestically

on without them. For all their ostensible status as historical novels, these books are, in fact, vibrant with the energies of the present, and, above all, of the future.

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Notes

¹ I am indebted for this information to my former history teacher Miss Margaret Hilton, who collaborated with Dorothy Dunnett on the exhibition.