

# PAUL SCOTT : LIFE AND WORKS

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## Abstract: -

Paul Scott left behind a legacy of thirteen published novels, some unpublished poetry, and several plays and essays in manuscript form. He enjoyed some fame during his life; however, it has only been after his death, that readers have gradually been giving the novelist the attention that his work merits. His novels persistently draw on his experiences of India and service in the armed forces with strong subtexts of uneasy relationships between male friends or brothers; both the social privilege and the oppressive class and racial stratifications of empire are represented, and novel by novel the canvas broadens. The last impression of Scott's work is of a manifold richness which demands detailed analysis, but defies over-simplification.

**Key Words: -** Legacy, Novels, Indian experiences, Relationships, Richness.

## Introduction:

Paul Scott left behind a legacy of thirteen published novels, some unpublished poetry, and several plays and essays in manuscript form. He enjoyed some fame during his life; however, it has only been after his death, that readers have gradually been giving the novelist the attention that his work merits.

Paul Scott is certainly the **most outstanding** of all the English novelists who have written about India and its impact on the British and also about the last years of the British Raj in India. He has **constructed each novel with much thought and care as revelations of human behaviour**.

## Life of Paul Scott:

Paul Mark Scott was born on March 25, 1920, the younger of two sons of Tom Scott, a commercial artist, and Frances Mark Scott. Disappointed in love early in life, Tom Scott did not marry the socially ambitious, thirty-year-old Frances Mark until he was forty-six. He was, thus, distanced in age and by progressive deafness from his two sons, whose early years were dominated by their wildly imaginative but emotionally suffocating mother. Paul Scott was born in suburban North London, where he would continue to reside throughout most of his life. His father, Thomas Scott, was a commercial artist, and his mother, Frances, was a former shop clerk;

she had written some novels which she destroyed after her marriage. George and Gilbert, his uncles, were commercial artists, who painted horses and hunting scenes with great success.

Scott was educated at Winchmore Hill Collegiate, a private school. He had inherited literary ambitions from his mother, Frances, and by the age of 9, he was conceiving plots and dialogues for characters. His scholarly aspirations began to take shape here. During the Great Depression, his father's business was destroyed. In 1933, the family lost their home and had to move in with their relatives. In 1934, he was forced to abandon his studies at the age of 16 when the family's money ran out. Scott then was sent to be trained in accountancy. Due to his "photographic" memory he passed the examination with great ease.

The family's new found poverty taught him a bitter lesson in the complex relations of class and financial status. This is further embodied in many of his characters. It was at this stage that his literary horizons opened up and he discovered a "pantheon of modern literary gods" – W.H.Auden, T.S.Eliot, Christopher Isherwood, Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov. During these years he read Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which had a profound and lasting influence upon him. He had a lover, an aesthetic estate agent called Gerald Armstrong. The middle-aged, culturally sophisticated Gerald Armstrong introduced Scott to the worlds of ballet and theater, and encouraged him to think of himself seriously as a writer.

With the outbreak of the war, young Scott joined the army as an N.C.O. He served in the British and Indian armies in the United Kingdom, India and Malaya during the years 1940-46. On October 23, 1941, he married Penny Avery, a pretty but insecure and eager-to-please nurse whom he had met only six months earlier. They were soon separated. He was then sent to India in 1943. Scott stayed for three years in India and during this period, he travelled widely and acquired first-hand experience of life in British-India during the crucial forties.

Scott departed India in May 1946. After a stint as bookkeeper and company secretary for a failing publishing enterprise, he became a literary agent, successfully representing clients as diverse as science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke and poet D. J. Enright, and nurturing the talents of budding novelists John Braine, Muriel Spark, and John Fowles. Doubly burdened by the needs of his own growing family and financial responsibility for his aged, unemployed parents, Scott worked hard and drank heavily to relieve the resulting tension. The pressure on him was both aggravated and eased by his determination to write.

### **Works of Paul Scott:**

Before the war, Scott had concentrated on poetry and drama. But with *Johnnie Sahib* (1952), Scott discovered both his natural medium and great subject: the novel about India. It was set in the border area of India and Burma at the end of WW II. Despite 17 rejections from publishers, it met with modest success. Scott

won the Eyre and Spottiswoode Award for it. Retiring every night and all weekend to his study to write and to drink, Scott produced a steady stream of novels that received respectable reviews while generating mediocre sales.

His novels persistently draw on his experiences of India and service in the armed forces with strong subtexts of uneasy relationships between male friends or brothers; both the social privilege and the oppressive class and racial stratifications of empire are represented, and novel by novel the canvas broadens.

*The Alien Sky* (1953), his second novel, was adapted for radio and television. In the United States the book was published under the title *Six Days in Marapore*. The novel is set during the dying days of British rule in India. It centres on Tom Gower and his wife Dorothy, who, unbeknown to him, is half Indian. The effects of this revelation on her husband and their friends form the basis of this novel.

*A Male Child* (1956) is set in London and South England in the late 1940's. It is a novel about relationships and coming to terms with the past. It is a study of post-war disillusion. *The Mark of the Warrior* (1957), is set in India in 1942 and is about Officer-cadets being trained for combat in the region. The novel's title aptly describes the main theme of the book – those soldiers who have what it takes and those who haven't. The characters of Major Craig and Bob Ramsay are drawn extremely well.

*The Chinese Love Pavilion* (1960) follows a young British clerk, Tom Brent, who must track down a former friend – now suspected of murder – in Malaya. Tom faces great danger, both from the mysterious Malayan jungles and the political tensions between British officers, but the novel is perhaps most memorable for the strange, beautiful romance between Tom and a protean Eurasian beauty whom he meets in the eponymous Chinese Love Pavilion.

*The Birds of Paradise* (1962) is a coming of age tale. It is a story of a boy and his childhood friendship with the daughter of a British diplomat and the son of the Raja. Scott artfully brings his young narrator's voice to life with evocative language and an eye for detail, capturing the pangs of childhood and the bittersweet fog of memory with nostalgic yet immediate prose.

*The Bender* (1963) is a novel of wit and its characters, while amusingly drawn, are not comic caricatures. The story is set in 1960's London and revolves around George Lisle-Spruce. He has everything – money, divorce, friends and loneliness. His problems are modern and the answers are modern too – He ends up in the country looking after his brother's 17 year old pregnant daughter.

*The Corrida at San Feliu* (1964) is set in Spain where writer Edward Thornhill dies in a car crash and leaves four manuscripts behind him. They hold the key to his work and the mystery of his identity.

Beginning with *The Chinese Love Pavilion*, however, Scott became more willing to examine in fiction the destructive nature of sexual repression. A new power evident in his work convinced his publisher in 1964 to guarantee him an income, freeing him to quit his job as a literary agent and to write full time.

He gained an international reputation with the *Raj Quartet*, which was also adapted for the Granada television series *The Jewel in the Crown* (1982). Most of Scott's works depict India or have Indian themes and characters. *The Raj Quartet*, set in the final years of British India in 1942-47, was completed in 1974. It includes four novels, told from different point of views. Through its characters and their worldview Scott examined the moral and ethical decline of the last years of the colonial rule.

The immediate stimulus for the novels that compose *The Raj Quartet* (*The Jewel in the Crown*, 1966; *The Day of the Scorpion*, 1968; *The Towers of Silence*, 1971; and *A Division of the Spoils*, 1975) were the return visits to India that Scott made in 1964 and 1969. Traveling widely about the subcontinent, Scott questioned everyone he met regarding the native Indian character, the nature of the British occupation of India, and the consequences of its 1947 withdrawal. These conversations led to sensitive examinations of the dynamics of power, the nature of racism, and the corrosive effects of imperialism on both the governed and their governors.

In 1964, a medical specialist diagnosed a parasitic infection that Scott must have first contracted in India during the war and because of which he had suffered fatigue, nausea, insomnia, and bouts of chronic diarrhea for twenty years. The amoebiasis may also have contributed to the suicidal depression that he had fought much of his adult life. Although a rigorous and painful treatment was able finally to destroy his intestinal parasite, allowing him the stamina that he would need for the ten-year ordeal of researching and writing the Raj novels, Scott's self-loathing continued so powerfully that he was unable to stop drinking. Thus, his new found professional success--acclaim for the novels that compose *The Raj Quartet*, and receipt of the Man Booker Prize for *Staying On* (1977), his final novel about the British in India—was counter balanced by the disintegration of his family. While in college, his younger daughter attempted to commit suicide, in part because she did not feel loved by him. And, humiliated by his disdain and exhausted by his alcoholic binges, his wife Penny left him in July 1976. Penny's desertion shook Scott badly.

Initially, he was distracted by the novelty of a visiting professorship at the University of Tulsa in fall 1976. One year later, however, Scott was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver, the result of his drinking a quart of vodka and smoking more than sixty cigarettes a day. Worse, his doctors discovered that a previously undiagnosed cancer had already spread from his colon to his liver. Penny returned to nurse him in his last days. He died March 1, 1978, three weeks short of his fifty-eighth birthday.



**Conclusion:**

Scott's greatest success proved posthumous. In 1980, British television movingly dramatized *Staying On* with revered film icons Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson in what poignantly would be their last performances. Its success was but a prelude to the international acclaim that greeted a mini-series of *The Raj Quartet* initially televised in Britain in 1984 under the title *The Jewel in the Crown*, which won enthusiastic new audiences for the novels in both the United Kingdom and North America.

Scott stated that *“For me, the British Raj is an extended metaphor [and] I don’t think a writer chooses his metaphors. They choose him.”* (Spurling, 1970) From his earliest experiences in north London, he felt himself an outsider in his own country. As his biographer comments, probably only an outsider could have commanded the long, lucid perspectives he brought to bear on the end of the British raj, exploring with passionate, concentrated attention a subject still generally treated as taboo, or fit only for historical romance and adventure stories. However Scott saw things other people would sooner not see and he looked too close for comfort. His was a bleak, stern, prophetic vision and, like Forster's, it has come to seem steadily more accurate with time.

The last impression of Scott's work is of a manifold richness which demands detailed analysis, but defies oversimplification.

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