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PAUL SCOTT:

'A WRITING PURPOSE'

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to identify the essential components of what Paul Scott described as his "writing purpose" (1), and to chart its development from the early novels, through the Raj Quartet to the last novel, Staying On. An analysis of the early novels, with their concentrated focus on the subjectivity of truth and the prevalence of illusion, forms a useful springboard from which to continue an investigation of the themes which interested Scott as a novelist and which he pursued to a logical conclusion in the Quartet and beyond.

The Raj Quartet forms the basis of this study because it contains the fullest exposition of Scott's philosophy both as a writer and as a disillusioned member of a society which failed to fulfil the promise of the immediate post-war years. The multiplicity of characters, classes, destinies, roles, jobs and so on which forms the foundation of the Quartet creates the background against which the metaphor of India and the

Indian situation can work. Scott's narrative technique which compiles this background is involved and multi-faceted rather than complicated, and works successfully towards the creation of a literary work which mirrors something of the infinitely varied textures and patterns of life.

The techniques Scott uses to present and explore character are interesting primarily because of their diversity. I have discussed character presentation in the Quartet by trying to arrange the individuals into the character groups which they represent in the terms of their thematic, and not structural importance. The categories I have chosen are my own and are selected for ease of analysis and I accept that there is a strong argument for dealing with them all as individuals. However, those characters who resist categorization most strongly and have an individual role to play (Sarah Layton and Ronald Merrick, for instance) are dealt with separately.

There is also a chapter on Scott's use of symbolism because it is too important an aspect of the overall narrative technique not to be dealt with in its own right. The richness of many of the images in the Quartet is one of the more obvious catalysts to the successful functioning of the metaphor.

Although there is an overall chronological construction to this thesis, I have not attempted a novel-by-novel analysis. There are some novels which do not contribute very much of value to an examination of this nature, and which have therefore not been discussed. Other novels may seem to receive a disproportionate amount of emphasis, but I have tried to illustrate innovative developments in style and thematic preoccupation with the best illustrations available and therefore make no apology for either the space given to The Birds of Paradise and The Corrida at San Felú or the omission of The Bender and A Male Child.

I have attempted to pull together the separate strands which form the basis of Scott's narrative technique in the concluding chapter, concentrating on his last novel. Staying On is a distillation of the abundance which precedes it, and provides the concentrated focus necessary to isolate the themes and techniques which absorbed Scott until his death in 1978, and which distinguish his "writing purpose". The last impression of Scott's work is of a manifold richness which demands detailed analysis, but defies over-simplification. I hope I have managed to find a few of the answers to the many questions posed by a study of Paul Scott's fiction.

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CHAPTER ONE

REALITY AND ILLUSION - AN ASPECT OF THE TRUTH

"...perhaps he hoped that he would be present when a dream revealed the dreamer's image so that the moment of truth could be shared too and the belief in the existence of images vindicated."

(The Chinese Love Pavilion, p.50)



Throughout Paul Scott's fiction the concurrent themes of dream and illusion and the elusive qualities of reality and 'truth' are of considerable importance. Several of the pre-Quartet novels are written in the form of a literary quest; a quest for reality in the past, for identity and vindication, for rational explanations of irrational deeds. Central to this idea is the notion that if a man's past is exposed as a selective idealization of reality, the present can be seen as equally illusory, built as it is upon the shaky foundations of past experiences and values. Patrick Swinden points out in his book Paul Scott- Images of India (1) that Scott was particularly concerned with two different responses to the illusionary status of the British in India: that of those who foster the illusion of permanence on the one hand; and that of those who are beginning to recognize the illusion for what it is and to do something about it - to escape, or to immerse themselves in an anaesthetic cocoon of perpetual dreams. This concept of how people cope when the pillars of their own private temples begin to crumble and fall was an idea that Scott pursued up to and beyond The Raj Quartet, perhaps most effectively through the characters of Mildred and Sarah Layton, and of Lucy Smalley in Staying On. However, the evolution of this particular theme begins in the earlier novels which are the subject of this first chapter.

But nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else.(2)

It is probable that Paul Scott agreed with Forster's sentiments as expressed in the above quotation, with perhaps one small refinement. Omit "in India" (for to retain it is to limit the implications of the statement) and we come a little closer to one of the most central driving forces in Scott's fiction. Read the novels themselves and we find not the answers we might expect, but a myriad of questions and counter-questions, questions Forster himself seemed happy to leave unvoiced, drawing his own conclusions (or non-conclusions) in the caves at Marabar with the indiscriminate reverberations of an echo.

Johnnie Sahib, Scott's first novel, is distinguished by an unparalleled (for Scott) directness of narrative, and touches upon many of the important themes which will come to dominate various later novels. The main theme of Johnnie Sahib is the attitude of men to their work (a theme given lengthy attention elsewhere), but the quest for truth in the face of illusion is still very important. Although Johnnie Brown (the Johnnie Sahib of the title) is absent for

almost half the length of the narrative, his presence fills the book and dominates the minds of the other characters - especially those of his second-in-command Jim Taylor, and the company Major. Johnnie has what amounts to a mystical belief in the importance of his relationship with the men of his section, fostered by "the direct communication between himself and the men he picked". His egotism leads him to subjugate all other concerns, such as military discipline and tidiness, to his own code of values, much to the chagrin of the Major. When the air supply companies come under the more rigid framework of 'Ramo' (the Rear Airfield Maintenance organization), the informal atmosphere begins to change and Johnnie's illusion begins to crack, although he himself can do nothing to arrest the decay. He meets his first obstacle over a slight altercation with Moti Ram when the section is ordered by Ramo to reload a 'plane in the middle of the night - something Johnnie refuses to allow:

'We do not mind the loading parties, sir. These are the orders sir'. Moti Ram paused. He wanted to say: And we do not want you to get into trouble; but Johnnie Sahib might not understand, and to say such a thing might bring anger.

'You mean they're Ramo's orders, Sahib.'

'It is your orders we obey, sir.' The answer, without his meaning it, was phrased like a question because he was unsure of Johnnie.

(p.144)

Some of the most important passages in this novel take the form of dialogues between Johnnie and the Major, through which their contrasting ways of looking at things emerge. Johnnie makes a comparison between himself and Scottie (a character who looks remarkably like an autobiographical portrayal of the author himself), pointing out how the other man sees all sorts of information about lines of communication and ways of lifting supplies when he looks at a map, whereas he himself sees the map-markings only "as places I've been or haven't been". Each place-name on the chart conjures for Johnnie things that happened there to his men: "It's the men", he says; "what they do and what they think." He accuses the Major of beginning to change that outlook, but the Major insists that things change themselves, and that it is all part of a natural progression: "It's inevitable, I suppose, that we have opposite views. Don't let's make it more than our views, Johnnie."(p.103)

Johnnie is an example of a man driven to creating illusions, doomed to disappointment and, to a certain extent, self-destruction. He refuses to recognize the "reality behind the apparent magic" and is squeezed out of his illusions by the advent of the Ramo steamroller which crushes his dreams in its wake because he refuses either to get out of the way or to move along with it.

The Major voices the cynical but more realistic opposite view to Johnnie's idealism:

Men were not connected. There was no communication between them. Sometimes a duplication of action and desire would make it seem as if it existed. But it was only there superficially; emotionally. It did not go deeply to connect up the separate cores of their isolation.

(p.135)

There is a subtle parallel between Johnnie and Lieutenant-Colonel Baxter, the officer put in charge of Ramo, which is outlined at the very beginning of the novel when Baxter comes to inspect the air supply lines: "He hated to feel out of place, to feel too, that practice had disproved the theories of a lifetime and of a career."(p.8) The difference is that although Baxter has to forget the military rule of never allowing an advance to stretch beyond the range of ground communications, he has the flexibility to bend and to change his ideas to the extent of becoming the O.I.C. of the new air supply organization. For Johnnie, this kind of adaptability proves impossible. He knows no compromise, and forces the Major to take the unpleasant step of having him transferred to another unit.

Jim Taylor feels the influence of Johnnie acting on the men of Section Three to the almost total

exclusion of everything else, especially when Johnnie goes on leave and he has to take over full control. Geoff Smith, an old friend of Jim and the newest arrival at air supply, gives him sympathy and tries to explain the enigma away by blaming Johnnie, dismissing him as having a "hide like a rhinoceros and smug as hell." Like so many others he feels that Jim "worked Johnnie out" of the section:

'He must've been hell to work for. Surely everyone sees that?'

'I don't know what everyone sees.' He wanted to say 'nor care.' Words were no good. Words were like actions: misunderstood, misinterpreted; friendship a cloak to venom and meanness.

(p.169)

Anger stings Jim when he realizes that Geoff has been misguidedly favouring him over the transport allocations, blocking his chance for individuality and bringing Johnnie's face back to him, closer than ever before, real "as far as a man or his face could be real; but only hate was real, and hypocrisy, and the fact that men were cyphers, and so expendable; expendable because the job they were doing fed the instruments of destruction."(p.188)

Nina, the Eurasian nurse and Johnnie's mistress when the book begins, changes Jim's attitude and persuades him to stay with the section instead of giving up and requesting a transfer. Johnnie sends a

letter to Jan Mohammed, who is killed in an aircraft accident after being ordered by Jim to begin the flying duties from which Johnnie had excused him. Jim wrongly interprets the letter as an insidious attempt to "restake a claim" with the men, but Nina, through an analogy of her love for Johnnie ("He doesn't feel me hanging on"), makes him see things differently:

'Johnnie's happy in Ambala. You can see that from his letter. But he still loves whatever he loved before. Love doesn't end, Jim, but it becomes unselfish, I think.....My letter will mean I'm letting go. I think his means that too.'

(pp.206/7)

Not unusually in Scott's fiction, the quiet voice, the voice that finds it hard to make itself heard, is the voice which brushes the elusive abstract we call 'truth'.

The plot of The Alien Sky hinges on our initially subconscious participation in the illusion of Dorothy Gower as a 'pukka' white memsahib, whereas in reality she is an Eurasian and therefore under the constant threat of exposure. Many of her seemingly incomprehensible actions and motives, perhaps above all her coldness towards her husband, become only too clear when we learn her 'dreadful secret'. As an Eurasian masquerading as an Englishwoman, Dorothy is terrified

of Tom's plans to return 'Home'; she has never been before and it will be only a matter of time before her invented past is discredited through a lack of local knowledge. This fear leads her to tell Tom that if he goes back to England he will return alone. Being a "conventional man", however, Tom makes the logical and false assumption that his wife must have a lover in India, which marks the beginning for him of a nightmarish illusion, provoking passions and jealousies he has never felt before. Ironically, Gower concentrates his jealous suspicions on Steele, his assistant on the model farm at Ooni, who is one of the very few people who knows the truth about Dorothy's real identity.

In addition to this delusion about his wife, Gower begins to discover that the whole fabric of his life in India has been built on a shaky foundation. The first indication he receives is the public insult delivered him by Vidyasagar, and the second follows quickly when the same young man daubs the motto 'Go Home Gower' on the wall of his newspaper offices. Gower comes half-way to a realistic appraisal of his situation in conversation with Joe MacKendrick:

'You've been in Marapore long enough, I think, to know that my future's rather uncertain. In fact you probably see that more clearly than I do myself. You've got a couple of hour or so's clear evidence. I've got fifteen years' self-deception standing between myself and reality.'

(p.64)

These fifteen years are responsible for the persistence of Gower's illusion of Ooni as some kind of personal Eden : "Ooni is safety. Nothing that goes wrong here can touch me in Ooni."

Tom Gower's personal tragedy lies in the way he rids himself of illusion after illusion only to fall into yet another misconception of reality. He is mistaken in the way he switches his jealousy from Steele to MacKendrick, but so understandingly so that even MacKendrick himself cannot bring himself to contradict him. His suicide note is as much a cry of exasperation as of despair : "St. John, Chapter eleven, verse thirty-five"(Jesus wept).

When MacKendrick takes Dorothy in his arms, temporarily justifying Gower's suspicions of him (albeit for the wrong reasons) he elicits the truth from her about her tight-lipped refusal to share her secret with her husband:

'You could have told him what you were long ago, couldn't you? You've deliberately not told him because all you wanted him to feel was how much you hated him. What happens now? You can't go on hating somebody more and more year after year, can you? Dwight's ghost taunted him. He cried, 'What happens now? How long do you intend to hate me? That's what it's going to be isn't it? Having your own

back on me because of Dwight. Having your own back on Tom because you were forced to marry him. They're both the same. What happens when you've got nobody left to get your own back on? What happens when you've got nobody left to hate?'

She wrenched her hands away and shouted, 'There'll be myself, won't there? That's what you want me to say. That there'll be myself!'

(pp.204/5)

In the face of so much bitterness and misery, indicative of the desolation of the twilight years of the raj, Tom Gower's old friend Miss Haig battles against disillusion with the doggedness of senility. She harbours delusions about the Indians' affection for Gower, about Jimmy Smith's affection for herself, and about the promise of the non-existent job for Gower in Kalipur. When all these illusions fail, her refuge is in closing her eyes to reality, shutting out the harsh truths of a world of desolation.

The shooting of poor dishonest Bholu is a symbol for the whole spectrum of misunderstandings that riddles the narrative of The Alien Sky. But Scott infuses the book with a dynamic energy geared towards the desire for understanding, the quest for reality. Although the illusions flourish, they are not without opposition: "One could never kill the wish to understand; only disguise it, so far as one could disguise the existence of a caged beast". (p.142)

One of the techniques frequently employed by Scott

in his fiction is to posit a situation at the beginning of a novel, and then investigate its implications or the actual components of the situation retrospectively and at exhaustive length, in a further quest to establish not so much the truth itself, but the elusiveness of truth. In The Mark of the Warrior, the situation with which Scott confronts the reader is a brief description of a military engagement involving a retreating Indian Rifle Company and a Japanese patrol, during a river crossing. The prologue which contains the account is short, but its implications are far-reaching, and the full significance of the events which it describes is only gradually revealed. The construction of the novel brings the two central characters, Major Craig and Bob Ramsay, into a very similar situation at the end of the book to that in which Craig and Bob Ramsay's dead older brother, John, found themselves in the prologue. The main difference between the two situations is that the first existed in the 'real' circumstances of war, whereas the other takes place within the artificial terms of an army exercise. However, Scott makes a philosophical statement about the relativity of reality by presenting the psychological implications of the two situations as almost identical, and the exercise as real enough to claim Bob Ramsay's life.

The novel itself is predominantly concerned with

the evolution and gradual emergence of the characters of Craig and Ramsay. The physical lay-out of the book into chapters entitled either 'Craig' or 'Ramsay', and identified only by sequential numbers, supports this idea. It gives Scott the opportunity to adopt an omniscient narrative standpoint, but from a focal point of consciousness, from inside the mind of the character in question. The argument of the novel, as expressed in these five lines before the prologue, stresses the importance of the character theme:

Three things are to be considered:
a man's estimate of himself,
the face he presents to the world,
the estimate of that man made by other men.
Combined they form an aspect of truth.

The subtle crux of the situation Scott explores in this novel is the acceptance that men like Craig, who fear the jungle and who are in it to survive, need men like Sergeant Thompson and the two Ramsay brothers, who are in it to kill. Craig sees that Bob Ramsay has the potential to be like his brother, and so deliberately sets out to create in him the perfect war machine. However, while he never relaxes the pressure on Ramsay, Craig remains fully aware of the implications of his actions, an awareness he voices after Ramsay's fatal accident: "I thought I was helping him to be what I thought he had it in him to be," he confesses to his wife, "but he had other things in him as well and I

lethim destroy them...Things he needed. Things we all need."(p.188)

As mentioned above, reality and unreality are placed in direct opposition in this novel through the device of provoking real emotions and reaction in the context of a military exercise. The exercise is, by definition, unreal; it is an elaborate military game, something which Blake, the 'enemy' commander and therefore Ramsay's opponent in the game, is unable to forget. When Craig confronts him with this failure to accept the terms of the exercise as a temporary reality, Blake explains his difficulty by pointing out that he has first-hand experience of what he calls "the real thing". Craig's reaction is interesting: "So have I. At least in what we call the real thing." Craig thereby casts doubt on the aptitude of linguistic terms to describe and evaluate human experience, perhaps because he has been exposed to the opposite reaction in Ramsay: "Above all", Ramsay impresses on him, "I want to establish reality." This need on Ramsay's part reveals itself when Blake 'cheats' the exercise by allowing Havildar Baksh to cadge a lift in the assault force supply truck (with the aim of gaining information about Ramsay's intended movements) which, for the purposes of the exercise, is supposed to be an aeroplane. Ramsay reacts angrily, but then concentrates on incorporating the arrival of the 'spy' into what he

sees as the real situation: Baksh, in effect, becomes an authentic prisoner of war. Ramsay's attitude is made clear when he resists recommendations to compromise the situation by 'shooting' the prisoner, and proceeds to create a relationship between Baksh and the men similar to that which would exist between a genuine P.O.W. and his captors. Ramsay eventually tricks Baksh into escaping, and uses him as the ideal decoy, making sure he takes with him false information to mislead Blake over the planned point of attack. Ramsay's attitude to the exercise stamps a reality on things which cannot be escaped; Craig, in conversation with Blake, concedes that "there are certain things which are real in any case", a statement which becomes a sombre prediction when Ramsay is drowned in the river crossing and the parallel to the situation in the prologue is completed.

Central to an understanding of Ramsay's psychological outlook on the exercise, and specifically on the attack, is the realization that he dies in an attempt not to save the man in the water, but, paradoxically, to save himself. The exercise has become so overwhelmingly important that Ramsay feels his entire existence to be measured in terms of the pattern he has woven in his conception of the assault on Elephant Hill; he has become the core atom in a long and complex molecular chain:

I am one hundred links in a chain which is only the image of a chain. I must preserve the image of the chain. If the image is destroyed I am also destroyed. I am nothing without the image and the image is nothing without me.

(p.177)

This identification of himself as the centre of an intricate pattern of nerve-endings, represented by the man-links in the chain, lies behind Bob's understanding of his brother's action in the prologue when he deliberately "bodged the raft" to rid the group of the weakest links (the non-swimmers), thereby increasing the general chance of survival. Nevertheless, Bob condemns this action as the sacrificing of a "sacred trust" and therefore considers it inexcusable. Craig wants to know, with the curiosity of the creator for his invention, if Ramsay's professed willingness to have shot his brother as he lay dying is because of this perpetrated act of murder. Ramsay denies it:

'No. Because he'd murdered himself. He couldn't face up to the weak links. He broke the pattern deliberately. He broke his own image.'

(p.178)

Ramsay's growing contempt for Craig lies in his knowledge that although it was John who failed to live up to the pattern he had created around himself, it should have been Craig's pattern all the time. But

Craig could never have been the man John Ramsay almost was, and the man Bob Ramsay definitely becomes: "the whole man who was not for them a man at all but the sum of their separate longings to survive in the dark, green, drowned world." (p.162) The ambiguity of Craig and Ramsay's relationship is voiced by the latter when he collects his thoughts before the attack begins: "It is what I am forced to be, but wish not to be." How much has Craig forced on Ramsay, who has no choice but to comply, just to escape the weight of responsibility himself? Craig's feelings of guilt at a betrayal, perhaps, of his own 'sacred trust' lie behind the enigmatic ending of the novel, with Craig and his wife in an embrace of mutual anguish, forgiveness and love.

Two novels which should be considered an inter-related pair because of their image structure and thematic similarity are The Chinese Love Pavilion and The Birds of Paradise, although the second of these books is a far more impressive literary achievement. In the earlier novel, the leitmotif of the pavilion as a mysterious emblem of sanctity, love and death is established very early in the haunting prologue to the narrative. Brent's gift to Teena of the kris is of obvious symbolic significance, but the reader has to wait for a long time, and absorb a substantial amount of straight-forward narrative description, before the symbolism is explained.

One of the most important themes in this novel is the power of dreams. "It's only in dreams you get anywhere near the truth" is one of Brian Saxby's earliest statements indicative of his eccentric life-philosophy, eccentric because he has no dreams of his own. In fact, his attitude to dreams is perverse, as explained by Brent: "His having no dreams of his own would explain the earnestness with which he applied himself to foster them when he thought he found them in others."(p.49) But when Brent visits Saxby in Singapore after his unproductive years in Greystone's valley, he finds his friend totally immersed in an entire world of illusion. As the story unfolds, Saxby sinks from eccentricity into insanity, and finally into a green death, surrounded and choked by the insidious tendrils of the jungle:

I cried aloud when I saw him resting on his bed of flowers and hid my face, sickened by his smell and the look he had of being shaped from earth.

(p.237)

Saxby, like Shakespeare's mad king, regains his dignity through madness and death - "the flower dreamer".

The kris Brent gives to Teena during the peaceful and happy time of their lovemaking is the weapon responsible for her violent and ambiguous death. As death shrouds the love-pavilion once again, the veil of love and peace, behind which Brent found shelter, falls, and a cyclic return to the days of bloody executions is effected: the pavilion is once again the last object of beauty the victim sees before she dies.

The Birds of Paradise is a neatly-constructed novel about one man's attempt to gain a firmer hold on the reality of the present through an examination of different aspects of his past. The physical setting of the novel on the tiny island of Manoba is significant because William Conway, the central character of the book, is very much aware of how the 'reality' of the past tends to cloud over and to assume a different shape under the changing influences of the present. Conway's efforts to see his own past in a different perspective through the move to Manoba becomes a powerful means to reshape the present and thereby gain a firmer grasp on this reality.

The central image of the novel is the birds of paradise themselves, symbols, perhaps, not of a lost

paradise, as suggested by Swinden (3), but of an illusory paradise - a paradise that only exists in the unseeing eyes of a child, in much the same way as the mysterious wheeling horsemen 'existed' as a threat to Dora. However, the image is remarkably complex. Conway's only first-hand experience of the beautiful birds is in the cage at Jundapur, where, of course, they exist only as stuffed relics of a former glory now lost to them for ever. During their adult reunion, Dora tells Conway the old joke first aired by Krishi's grandfather about the birds as a symbol for the British raj, "creatures who took it for granted they excited wonder and admiration wherever they went and had no idea that they were dead from the neck up and the neck down, weren't flying at all and were imprisoned in their own conceit anyway." (p.217) In addition to this idea, the image is enriched by the historical confusion which surrounds the birds, to which attention is drawn repeatedly, not least by the extracts from documented reports that punctuate the narrative at its divisions. Behind the romanticism of the many and varied fables which surround this "too beautiful a creature to inhabit the natural world", lies the harsh reality of the deliberate mutilation of the birds by the natives, "who knew the truth" but cut the birds' feet off to perpetrate the myth of their belonging to another world.

Perhaps the most conclusive evidence for these beautiful birds as an image for maya, or illusion, is Conway's own fruitless search for live specimens on the island. He comes to suspect that they have gone from Manoba for ever, although neither Daintree nor Griffin, nor the natives on the island will admit it. The only evidence for their continued existence is the sound of their calling, which he suspects is mimicked by the natives for his benefit. The final compromise to reality comes with the gift of Melba (whose presence graces the novel's opening page) from Dora and Krishi to William, and Conway's acceptance that "the parrot would be my personal bird of paradise." Melba herself seems to hold the key to the central theme of the book with her "mature acceptance that so much of her youth was maya, so much of it illusion."

One of the 'lessons' of the novel is how the passing of time is constantly qualifying and modifying previous judgements and evaluations. Conway's relationship with his father, or rather his attitude toward him, is an obvious but effective illustration of this tendency at work. To the young boy, Robert Conway appears to be "the second most important man in India"; but the picture he holds in his mind at the end of the novel, after a long and detailed examination of his father's motives and experiences, is that of a disillusioned man whose life has been buoyed up by

pretence and self-deceit. "It was the illusion of father I loved", is the acknowledgement, but the final understanding is expressed with a shock of clarity and regret:

...and then I see only what was honourable in the name they gave him, Old Very Light; and bitterly regret that not once in my life did I sit with him and let him feel that I understood how vulnerable is the illusion that a man has of his own importance, not of his importance to others, but of his importance to himself, and how to speak of what drives him to sustain the illusion, of the means he finds to drive himself, of the dark that falls on him when the illusion is gone, is virtually impossible.

(pp.234/5)

Similarly, as a boy, William Conway enjoys a fruitful relationship with a skilful tutor, Grayson-Hume, whom he admires immensely and tries to emulate. The passing of time again colours his memory: "Now I see his excellence as motivated by an ambition to do well as the tutor of a political agent's son." The same motive probably explains why some anonymous and unfortunate boys in Berkshire became the victims of homosexual interference at the hands of Grayson-Hume, and not the young William, when, as Conway acknowledges, "his temptation must have been sore."

However, as well as clarifying certain issues, time obscures many others. While trying to piece together his complicated emotions at the time of his

childhood tiger hunt, for instance, Conway experiences a strange mélange of confusion and clarity:

Does his heart miss a beat? Is it sadness for the old tiger that comes up into his throat and is swallowed again? I think it is, but who can swear that this was so? It was so retrospectively, it is so now, it is so out there in the darkness of this island just beyond the veranda, that black screen on to which this picture of the fields at Kinwar has been projected.

(p.50)

When the three childhood friends meet up again as adults, the unreliable nature of memory is revealed by the way in which they all recall the same events differently; but curiously enough, as Dora points out, none of them has a memory of the three together which any of the others questions. The only major differences of opinion occur when it was just the two of them together, or one person alone. Scott uses a sharp image to describe this effect as it appears to them all at the time of the reunion: "These were the sessions in which throwing our different pennies into a pool dated 1929 we produced a series of similar if not exactly corresponding ripples." Conway's memory projects his boyhood as a "series of pictures", some of which his friends share, but arranged differently on the montage of their minds in differing degrees of prominence and from many different perspectives. The mysterious image of the wheeling horsemen which concludes the sixth

chapter of the first book conjures up its own image for the revolutionary churning of the memory, galloping round and round one central idea, in a desperate quest for clarification, but only succeeding in obscuring everything in clouds and clouds of dust:

It is hopeless trying to get at what we call the truth...The arms of a day as you live it are not made for lying in, being hard and angular. Later you can lie in them and the day is then transformed. You go back to it forewarned, wiser than it. Words that had never entered your head when the sun set on it now give it a substance it never had. You can also pick an old day up, like a shell, press it to your ear and hear the sound of the sea.

(p.173)

The Corrida at San Felíu is the single most complex and ambitious novel Scott wrote before the Quartet. Within the Russian doll-like framework of a novelist writing a novel about a novelist writing a novel, Scott describes a psychological investigation of Edward Thornhill's attempts to face up to his past and to confront the present in doing so.

The novel follows the pattern of The Mark of the Warrior, The Chinese Love Pavilion and The Birds of Paradise by describing a situation (in this case the

death of Thornhill and his wife in a bizarre car accident) and then attempting to unravel it. The main question seems to be whether or not Thornhill committed suicide, and if he did, for what reason. Through the subtle interplay of autobiographical details and 'fictional' material, a picture is constructed of Thornhill's past, his attitude towards it, and how this affects the way he views the present - especially the advent of the "godling" into Myra's life.

It becomes abundantly clear through the fictional account of how Bruce Craddock stole Thelma from Nigel that Thornhill feels guilty about the way he took Myra from his young cousin John (who subsequently died in a car crash). In the passage entitled 'The Plaza de Toros', Thornhill explains how he wrote the abortive 'Arrival in Playa de Faro' as his own subconscious way of giving back to John and Myra some of the love they were denied. Everywhere, though, Thornhill remains fully aware of the elusive nature of truth, whether it be his own, or that belonging to Myra and her godling which he tries so hard to conjure:

But in going about their business and in describing their circumstances to each other and to themselves, people are endlessly inventive. It is they who set the precedent, not the storyteller who, as a consequence, is bound only by his version of the truth and by the words he can muster to record it.

(p.74)

Thornhill's own imaginative flights of fancy, especially in regard to Myra and her lover, are very important factors in driving him to the corrida, which he has avoided for so long, but where he at last finds a relationship between his life and his art. As the affair develops, he comes to see the godling more and more as a reflection of what he did to Myra and John twenty years before. Seeing them together makes him realize that he is too old for her - forty and twenty was all right; sixty and forty is not. Spain proves a good place to discover this about yourself and your wife: "Contemplation of the mysteries is always cut short by the reality of the hummocky grave and the flowers wilting in the heat stirred by the wind from the mountains."(p.182)

The climax of the novel is contained in the visit Thornhill pays to the corrida, following his accusations, his tears and the realization that Myra will stay with him - not through love, but through habit. In the bullfight he sees reflections of his own "endless struggle to transmute the raw perpetual motion of life into the perfect immobility of art."(p.202) However, he also sees that the manner of the bullfight itself, the bloodiness of the struggle, make the perfection and the immobility illusory. The translation of the killing of the bull into a symbol of

tranquillity is a mere snatching at "an illusory moment of peace":

But peace itself is an illusion, if by peace we mean something more durable than temporary respite from the prick of ambition, and the soaring and sinking fever of passion. Perhaps it is only in art that this more durable peace is to be found; not in the creation of it - no, not there - but in contemplation of what has been created, endless Edens, shapely worlds formed out of the terrible void and the deep blue darkness of endless frightening space; the carved stone, the living word, the sound of music, the poster announcing the splendours of next week's corrida.

(p.202)

Thornhill appears to have found something of this peace in the curious epilogue to his autobiographical narrative. For the first time he gives us a description of the sensual embrace of Ned Pearson and Thelma (or of Myra and John, or Myra and the godling) in an unselfish celebration of sexual love. On this note the novel ends, and as Swinden suggests (4), the perfect selflessness Thornhill has attained leaves nothing to look forward to but the tranquillity of death, or a return to selfishness. The irony lies in the fact that Myra dies with him - but I do not believe Scott would end a novel of questions and searching without one last question unanswered. A fitting requiem for this novel, and for Edward Thornhill, would be a few lines from T.S.Eliot's East Coker, the same few lines with which Scott closed his paper to the Royal Society of

Literature in 1968:

We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end
is my beginning.
(5)

The noises that bounce off the walls in the caves of Scott's imagination amount to much more than Forster's 'Boum'. Substitute light for sound, a prism for the echo, and a brilliant light refracts into colours, individually distinct, but merging by almost imperceptible gradations, one into the other; questions receiving answers of yet more questions. Perhaps it is significant that the spectrum fades into invisibility at each end, but takes with it on one side the capacity for tremendous harm, and on the other for taking photographs in the dark.

CHAPTER TWO

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

"She found it difficult later to remember things in the order they happened. There was a sense in which they became interchangeable."

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.344)

I

In Scott's fiction it is easy to see a definite evolution of narrative technique taking place. Johnnie Sahib, the first novel, has a stylistically and chronologically straight-forward structure, and is written throughout in the third person narrative. When this is compared to certain 'middle-period' novels, most notably The Birds of Paradise and The Corrida at San Felíu, several radical differences emerge; differences which prefigure a blossoming into the richness of the Quartet and the masterful precision and economy of Staying On.

It is as if time were telescoped...and space dovetailed...so that at once past, present and future are contained in your cupped palm.
(The Jewel in the Crown, p.133)

In The Birds of Paradise, the above effect is achieved in a mad game with the artificial constraints Man has imposed on Time. As explained in the last chapter, the novel is a psychological quest for identity, a retrospective analysis of conscious and subconscious memory, and it therefore has to be written in flashback form:

Everything had grown directly out of the past, undeviatingly; you could squint from the rather blowsy flower down the stem and see the living root; a root which had shaped me...

(p.224)

The novel begins in the present tense at the present time, with Melba the parrot and her vulgar, exclamatory "Wurrah Yadoor-a!"; with which she tries to attract the attention of William Conway, and with which Scott attracts the attention of the reader. The first page also gives us an example of a technique Scott frequently employs to effect a time-slip: the juxtaposing of ideas, disconnected in time, but reunited through associations with objects or with people. The cage in the clearing where Melba lives by day is one such idea, because it has, almost by accident, assumed the shape of the birds of paradise cage in Jundapur; it acts, therefore, as a link with one month ago, and also with thirty years ago (the times of Conway's visits there). The way Melba's cage was built has a bearing on the construction of the novel: "It was", says Conway, "just a question of consciously finishing what I had subconsciously begun."

In The Birds of Paradise there are seven main time divisions: the moment of writing on Manoba; the return to Jundapur and Conway's visit to Cranston a month

before; an account of Conway's marriage to Anne; his return to India after the war; descriptions of life in the Japanese P.O.W. camp; Conway's youth in England with his Uncle Walter and Aunt Ethel; and the lengthy passage on his childhood in Jundapur with Krishi, Dora, Mrs Canterbury, Grayson-Hume, and, of course, his father. Although I have listed these divisions in reverse chronological order, there is no corresponding logic in the text. Time is made subject to thematic, not temporal considerations, and what we are exposed to is a gradual revelation of perspective, as opposed to linear narrative description.

Scott is very eager to display his awareness of the relationship between past and present, and the extent to which the latter depends on the former for its definition. Melba is very much of the present, but as Conway's "mock bird of paradise" she also belongs to the past and to his lost childhood. When she sings, Conway recognizes the poignancy of her dual identity: "I feel that it is my youth she has been singing and not her own." (p.19)

In the same way that Scott uses the shape of Melba's cage, so he uses the image of the tiger to turn back thirty years at the beginning of the second chapter: "There are no tiger in Manoba, but if I were to go out into the forest now I could take a tiger with

me." This idea of a man carrying around with him wherever he goes the sum total of his human experience is very important in the context of this novel, built as it is from one man's collection of such "invisible luggage". The tiger image comes with the immediacy of the present - accentuated by Scott's use of the present tense - an almost tangible visitation in the mind that confuses the distinction between past and present experience:

He stands stock-still, red gold, with black, tapering, disruptive whiplash stripes; his white wiry whiskers curving out from his mask. Now the muscle shifts, articulating the bones, moving over the soft corrugations of rib, and the hot tiger smell reaches me where I perch, an awe-struck boy, alone with Dora Salford, a little girl dressed as I am in a white shirt, jodhpurs and topee, in the machan that has been built in a previous year around the forked branches of a tree.

(p.20)

The above description is full of precise detail, accentuated by the "hot tiger smell" and the sensual moving of the animal's bones and muscle, and the past is suddenly established as real and important. From this impressive overture, the rest of the first book moves outwards to a full description of Conway's childhood in Jundapur, until the time comes to move to England "out of the prison of my Indian boyhood."

Book Two begins with a brief reference to the inscription on a column at the Viceroy's house in New Delhi: " 'In thought, faith; in words, wisdom; in deed, courage; in life, service.' These words were engraved elsewhere, on the invisible columns that marked the end of the narrow path along which I was prodded, blind and deaf to the truth." With the memory of his son Stephen fresh in his mind, Conway then describes the time in his life when he was perhaps most 'blind and deaf' of all - during his marriage to Anne. This short catalogue of adulteries, humiliations and bitterness is one of the most disturbing in the whole novel, a radical perversion of the traditional values of marriage into a study of lust, cupidity and disillusion. If any criticism need be levelled at this novel, it concerns the account of this particular period in Conway's life; the work would be more balanced if this episode had been either explored in much greater length and depth, or passed over completely. The cramming of so much into just ten pages tends to reduce Anne to a caricature, although Scott may in fact be executing a literary double-bluff, recognizing the pain involved in marital break-ups ("What is there really to say of my life with Anne?") and the fact that you never get to the truth of any such situation without evidence from both partners. Whatever the answer, the question is too insignificant to mar the novel as a whole.

The next time-slip concerns the period Conway spent with his Uncle Walter and Aunt Ethel at Four Birches in Surrey. Once again the link between the two periods is effected through the association of an object with both past and present, this time the house which Conway and his wife appropriated after Walter's death and in which the young William grew out of childhood. The title of the second book is significant because, after years of blindness and delusion, it is on the banks of The Water that Conway's illusions about his father begin to crumble and the truth to filter through, especially over Robert Conway's decision not to allow his son to train for an Indian career:

On the banks of The Water I measured that distaste, measured it against what had been my love but wasn't love any longer. I told myself that it wasn't simply in this one case he had let me down. He'd never thought anything of me at all. I measured the years of exile against the fortitude with which they had been borne, for of course in retrospect I saw it as fortitude. The fortitude had been for nothing because the exile had been intentional. I measured my old expectations of arrival against the reality of journey's end, and shrugged at my expectations. I had been made a fool of.

(p.117)

Book Three is constructed in the form of a flashback within a flashback, the horrific description of Pig Eye P.O.W. camp within the context of the return to Gopalakand after the war. The sensation of

clear-sightedness that Conway describes reveals itself in several startling images of simple mundane objects and actions. Conway's father, for instance, is captured "drinking water from a glass misted over with cold and marked with earlier prints from his now sallow, dry and blue-veined fingers." The random selectivity of memory is emphasized by the seemingly incongruous images it retains: "traces of four parallel lines with a fork on a cork table-mat" or Daintree's rib-cage with "the look of having been forged and shaped on an anvil, or carved in wood in the Middle Ages by a man working for the church." Images of such disparate richness are indicative of the textured prose that fills Paul Scott's novels, a style well-suited to exploring some of the fundamental concerns of mankind.

The final part of The Birds of Paradise begins with a cyclic return to the first book: "There are no tiger in Manoba", although in this case the quoted words serve to bring the action back to the present instead of sinking it in the past. One of the joys of William Conway's life on the island is the periodic attentions of Kandy, a negroid prostitute, with whom he enjoys a relationship of "unrestrained physical connection". He worries about her cleanliness only after she has left, as though what actually happens to him, or the moment of its happening, is unimportant: "Perhaps this is another aspect of the new obsession I

seem to have about the ends that people come to: an obsession which may prompt me to see parallels where none exists."(p.183) Following on immediately from this meditation is an account of the recent meeting with Cranston, and the few days spent with Krishi and Dora, all of whom are people Conway is interested in, which seems to prove the 'new obsession'. The progression is effortless and flows very smoothly through the flashback, back to the present; back to a realization that although Conway had long ago identified the illusion of his father, he had made no effort to understand it.

On a general reflection, the effect of Scott's narrative technique in this novel is to suggest the whirling convolutions of a lively mind in search of truth through the tenuous medium of the past. If answers cannot be found in one place, there are plenty of other avenues to explore, although the validity of the answers, as expressed in the 'autobiographical' account Conway is writing, is thrown into doubt:

I asked myself the question: Have I been telling the truth? I saw how likely it was that Father, pausing in his own record, asked himself the same question and found that the answer was: No, not always; and so destroyed it.

(p.170)

When Daintree finds the manuscript and leaves it scattered all over the floor, his actions make their own comment on the whole novel: the page order does not really matter; all that matters is the total consciousness. Even when the past has been sifted through and evaluated, how can anyone be sure that he has the right answers? The Birds of Paradise is a beautiful, thoughtfully constructed investigation into what Conway defines as "the relativity of truth".

The Corrida at San Felú continues the autobiographical theme in a very different, but equally interesting way. As mentioned briefly in the last chapter, most of the narrative is in the form of an autobiographical 'novel' called 'The Plaza de Toros' concerning the professional and marital problems of Edward Thornhill. The main text is interspersed with fragments of another novel Thornhill is trying to write, which comments on the main events and emotions described in the narrative through the inter-relationship of Bruce and Thelma Craddock, two people who, in Thornhill's words, "turn up somewhere in disgrace."

However, before 'The Plaza de Toros' begins, there are four passages of narrative written by Thornhill, and a preface in the form of a memoir about the author. Of the narrative passages, two are self-contained short

stories, and two are abortive attempts to begin a new novel. The central paradox of The Corrida at San Felú is that 'The Plaza de Toros' begins by being an autobiographical lament for the novel Thornhill finds he cannot write, and ends by becoming the novel itself. Because the main character is in this case a novelist, it seems logical that the investigation of the past and its effect on the reality of the present should take the form of creative literary prose in conjunction with semi-fictional autobiography, instead of the purely autobiographical style of The Birds of Paradise.

The real value of the two short stories and the novel fragments is their relationship to Thornhill's past life, as briefly documented in the preface and later elaborated in the 'Plaza'. In fact, the structure of The Corrida is far too elaborate fully to unravel in one reading, and a concerted effort is necessary to sort out the exact relationship of each individual part of the narrative to the whole. It is clear that Bruce and Thelma are usually to be taken as portrayals of Thornhill and his wife Myra, and that Ned Pearson is symbolic of the outside threat to their relationship. Ned is the literary embodiment of the godling, or of John, Thornhill's younger cousin whom Myra was going to marry. 'The Arrival in Playa de Faro' is the exception,

where Bruce is portrayed as John would have been had he married Myra and had he not been killed in a car crash shortly after her elopement with Thornhill. The reasons for this one inconsistency are bound up with Thornhill's guilt, and the recognition, aided by the arrival of the godling, that he himself is too old for his wife. The disillusion of Bruce and Thelma in 'The Arrival at Mahwar' contrasts markedly with the glorious arrival at the Plaza; the former represents a realistic transmutation of Thornhill's cynical self-appraisal, while the latter is an evocation of a future which John and Myra might, but never did, have together.

The inclusion of the short stories at the beginning of The Corrida is surprising, and their significance not easy to ascertain. 'The Leopard Mountain', allegorical according to the preface, and presumably a cautionary tale about the futility of coveting the unattainable, describes (through the character of Saunders) Thornhill's Uncle James. The story is neatly and tightly structured, and stands up as a separate piece of work in its own right. Bearing in mind the shadow of Hemingway which inevitably lies across The Corrida, it is interesting to consider how much this story owes to him, especially with regard to his own short story The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber. (1)

The second story, 'The First Betrayal', introduces a young Thornhill and Lesley, a girl who appears elsewhere in the shape of Ned Pearson's wife, and whose character is 'borrowed' for a portrayal of the young Thelma in Thornhill's embryonic novel.

Scott's method in shaping his novel in this way is effective by dint of how it invites the reader to sift the 'documentary' evidence in the text for answers to the mystery of Thornhill's death. In this novel, as in The Birds of Paradise, Scott creates a clever illusion of real, complete and rounded characters, already three dimensional at the outset. He tells us nothing directly, but allows the characters themselves to do so with apparent carte blanche, or relies on other characters, like the fictional editor of Thornhill's manuscripts, to fill in the details. Such is the strength of the illusion that it is easy to find oneself criticizing the narrative as if it really were autobiography. The Corrida itself is in the form of an elaborate riddle, scattered with clues, but with the answers concentrated beneath the surface of 'The Plaza de Toros'. However, as in all of Scott's fiction, the number of questions raised far outweighs the number of answers provided.

"In my end is my beginning." It is only when Thornhill realizes that his time has passed, and that

Myra's capacity for love, which he can no longer awaken, belongs to someone else, someone like Ned or the godling - only when he realizes this, and lays bare his realization in the last extract that ends the novel, can his own literary work begin to live again. The paradox of this beginning is that it demands his own end: the recognition of his uselessness inspires the need for death. It is exactly the paradox of the corrida, that Thornhill has avoided for so long: the bull in the ring must die to allow the corrida to continue - and there are always more bulls...In this respect, the last words of Thornhill's autobiography (so-called) are of importance:

I once wrote about a man called Biddle who was a missionary like my father and had strange dreams that drove him mad. One day the dreams went and he said, "Thank God, now I can have a bit of peace." But he was wrong. He should have said: Now I can begin to make discoveries.

(pp.215/6)

The critical thing to realize is that Thornhill is too late in making his own discoveries. Once again he is like the bull in the faena; after discovery there is only death:

Toro, Toro, now it is between us two; you in your querenia, I in mine. Come, come, follow the cloth. You are not alone. We all follow the cloth, we are all deluded. Too late you will find the cloth was nothing, that there was no enemy at all other than your pride,

your greed, your self-esteem. There is a sword behind the cloth, but that is nothing either, until you have fought yourself to a standstill and found that the cloth was nothing. Then you will see the sword. But not before.

(p.214)

"In my end is my beginning." Thornhill's own beginning is in the lease of life he gives his work, and the freedom he imparts to the spirit of love in that final enigmatic passage describing Thelma and Ned Pearson's physical passion. By the end of The Corrida, Thornhill seems to share the existentialism of Albert Camus' central character in L'Etranger: " 'Eh bien, je mourrai donc.' Plus tot que d'autres, c'était évident. Mais tout le monde sait que la vie ne vaut pas la peine d'être vecue." (2)

II

When Paul Scott was asked about his methods of constructing a novel he gave the following explanation:

You end up with a sort of juggling act; you are balancing the need to be clear, and to create your illusion for people. To sustain

the illusion you are creating for them, you need to balance that with this concern for rhythmic shape and the general shape of the book as a whole. A writing purpose.

(3)

In other words, Scott is concerned with four basic things:

- 1) clarity, or what he is trying to say;
- 2) the creation of the illusion through which he is trying to say it;
- 3) a balance between these two things;
- 4) balancing that with the problem of shape and rhythm necessary to sustain the illusion.

Leaving aside what Scott is trying to say in The Raj Quartet as the thematic content, the first thing to consider is how the illusion in the tetralogy is created. Obviously, the whole basis of this illusion is life in India during the last few years of the British raj; and it is interesting to look at the techniques Scott uses to make the illusion seem real.

Patrick Swinden describes the basis of Scott's prose as "a slow-moving, hesitant, grammatically complex and heavily loaded sentence structure which gathers together fragments of what has already been, more than it propels forward events that are about to come into being." (4) The effect of this technique is that one is kept aware of each little episode as an integral part of a larger whole. However, one must not

lose sight of the sheer variety of style in the four novels.

Throughout the tetralogy Scott uses four main methods of presenting his material: the use of first-person narrative; documentation (such as diaries, letters, newspapers and a notebook); the transcription of interviews with different characters; and a skilful use of third-person narrative to pick out and highlight the lives, thoughts and opinions of his characters. Frequently it is by subtle changes of technique that Scott manages to combine a gathering-together of what has been with what is about to happen.

Whenever one is considering any literary treatment of India, it is impossible to ignore E.M.Forster's A Passage to India, especially valuable in regard to the Quartet because of Scott's own awareness of the weight of Forster's contribution. A comparison of characterisation in these two works is interesting for the basic reason that Scott believed (along with many critics) that Forster's characters "lack a dimension important to my view of them"(5). A plausible explanation for this 'shortcoming', which Scott puts forward in his essay entitled 'India: A Post Forsterian View' (published by the Royal Society of Literature in vol.xxxvi of Essays by Divers Hands), is that Forster was primarily concerned with the moral conflict between

the two philosophical extremes of colonial imperialism on the one hand, and liberalism on the other, a conflict symbolized by the differences between the Turton-like characters and Fielding. Scott, however, is determined to create 'real people', and so caricature is unacceptable to his "writing purpose". There is no room for rigid character grouping, and as will be demonstrated later in this paper, even the members of such rigid society groups as the British memsahibs are all portrayed as individuals.

The importance of this concern in Scott's writing can be seen in the two long passages from The Jewel in the Crown entitled 'Civil and Military'. Both of these categories are manifestations of British rule in India, and might therefore be expected to share a very similar outlook on the 1942 Mayapore riots. The fact is, however, that Scott describes two sharply contrasting views, from the simplistic military outlook of Reid to Robin White's subtle appraisal of the situation, both suffused with an individual authenticity of tone. Reid's recollections, set out in the form of unpublished memoirs, are written in the curt, abbreviated idiom of the soldier:

Having spoken to the Deputy Commissioner I then called my own staff together, told them of the situation as seen (a) by Merrick and (b) by Mr. White, and finally (c) as seen by myself, that is to say one that was

potentially grave but at present under the control of those whose duty it was to control it.

(p.313)

His thought patterns are unimaginatively logical, the judgments unequivocal, and the overall impression is that of a military administrator eager to get on with the job in hand: "There was a tough job ahead...I did not have any illusions about relaxation now." There is also the clever inclusion of a personal side to Reid; the loss of his wife and son, and the information that he translates the poems of Gaffur in his spare time. Although deeply affected by his bereavement, Reid refuses to allow private considerations to impinge on his work; a characteristic revealed after a short and touching acknowledgment when he writes his wife out of the pages of his memoirs:

I shall not write her name again. Goodbye dear Meg, cherished wife and mother of my children. God willing, we shall be reunited in a happier place.

(p.296)

This personal aspect serves a dual purpose: it gives Reid an extra dimension, establishing him as a 'real' person, and also shows us the bold line he has drawn for himself between his work with the army and his private life - a line that Ronald Merrick, for instance, does not attempt to draw.

The passage from Robin White's point of view contrasts vividly in both style and attitude, being far less confident in his judgments and more aware of the complexity of human affairs; he explains how, in his opinion, a man's attitude colours his interpretation of historical events:

The action of such an attitude is rather like that of a sieve. Only what is relevant to the attitude gets through. The rest gets thrown away. The real relevance and truth of what gets through the mesh then depends on the relevance and truth of the attitude, doesn't it? If one agrees with that one is at once back on the ground of personal preference—even prejudice — which may not have anything to do with "truth", so-called.

(p.357)

He immediately draws attention to the fact that in Reid's account "there are of course some inaccuracies, or anyway gaps in the narrative or alternative interpretations, that would need attention if a more general and impersonal picture were required to emerge."(pp.333/4) This awareness of a more general picture separates White's thinking from that of Reid straightaway, and conjures up the idea of a man who has thought very deeply about all the implications of the situation in which he finds himself. White also has a highly developed sense of proportion: "I know that his book gives an impression of a not insensitive man, but he was sensitive, broadly, only to major issues and

grand emotions. In his daily contact with other human beings he did tend to bear pretty much the proportional weight of a sledgehammer to a pin."(pp.337/8) He has the generous grace, however, to admit that perhaps, all things considered, "I was no less guilty of conforming to a generalized pattern of behaviour than he was."

White presents the anonymous narrator of the book with a complicated analogy of the relative positions of England and India (an analogy it would not even occur to Reid to look for), and then broaches the question of self-doubt in public affairs. He actually raises a few very perceptive philosophical notions, confirming the difference between his own character and that of the military commander:

I suppose true anarchy in public life is inaction arising out of the element of doubt as opposed to action following the element of decision. And of course between the doubt, the decision, the action and the consequences, I suppose you find what Srinivasan calls the areas of dangerous fallibility.

(p.345)

This and similar abstract thinking establishes White as an individual in the same way that Reid is distinguished by his military incisiveness.

A third contrasting piece of characterisation takes the form of the deposition by S.V.Vidyasagar,

giving an Indian viewpoint of the Bibighar affair. The first striking aspect of the account is Scott's presentation of Indian-English, the formal imprecision of which gives an initially comic effect:

In my sixteenth year I was plucked in the matriculation and left the Mayapore Government Higher School with the reproaches of my parents and no prospects to a career. For nearly twelve months I was living a life of shame and wickedness, going with loose women and impairing my health.

(p.358)

The resultant effect, when the deposition is considered alongside the two preceding 'pukka' accounts, is to project, through humour, a living parallel of the contemporary British lack of respect for the Indian voice. The whole of Vidyasagar's account is touchingly Indian, and therefore vulnerable. It is easy to see how a person who writes like this could be manipulated by the finely-trained minds of the Civil (White) and Military (Reid). This is an element of the vulnerability which Merrick seizes upon.

Alongside this precise and painstaking characterisation, one of the most important elements in sustaining the illusion is the historical framework into and around which the Quartet is woven. In an interview with The Times (October 20, 1975) Scott

explained the importance of this background. "You have to get the historical framework right, so that the action grows both out of the characters and the pressure of history." One of the ways in which the pertinence of history is demonstrated is the juxtaposition of characters, some of whom move with the current of history, and others who try to fight against the tide, in an attempt to arrest its inevitable progress. Sarah Layton, through her relationship with the Nawab of Mirat's daughter, is a clear example of the former, persuading her to leave behind the claustrophobic seclusion of purdah, teaching her how to swim and how to relate to people from outside the secluded world of the palace. On the other hand, Sarah's uncle, Colonel Grace, is indicative of the opposite approach, setting up a training course for army officers to enable them to 'stay on' after independence and continue an Indian career when it is becoming abundantly clear that there will be no real place for them in the new society.

In a work of such magnitude, especially when it has a submerged metaphoric interpretation, it becomes inevitable that certain characters, no matter how individually drawn, will have to serve certain specifically designated functions. The desire for historical and political accuracy is a good example, and Guy Perron controls much of that particular

narrative concern. Scott portrays Perron as having a vocational interest in Indian history, and his notebook provides an insight into the complicated political wrangling of the period. He makes his first appearance in the last novel of the tetralogy, and this coincides with Scott's first serious attempt to examine the political consequences of withdrawal and partition in both abstract and concrete terms. At the beginning of A Division of the Spoils, Perron writes the following in his notebook:

India...turns out to be curiously immune to the pressures of one's knowledge of its history. I have never been in a country where the sense of the present is so strong, where the future seems so unimaginable (unlikely even) and where the past impinges so little. Even the famous monuments look as if they were built only yesterday and the ruined ones appear really to have been ruined from the start, and that but recently.

(p.11)

This short extract emphasizes the reality of the present and the sense Perron has of things happening in front of him whose effect on the future will be so momentous that the consequences are almost too great even to contemplate. His comments here, as elsewhere, maintain the relationship between the linear progression of the narrative and the chronological scale against which it is to be measured.

Scott weaves the fictional story around the context of historical reality with considerable literary skill, and stresses the unchanging pressure of the past on the present and future. Although Perron refutes this relationship in the above quotation, Scott describes how what has been before can retain its pertinence whilst remaining dangerously invisible to those it most nearly concerns, and who stand to suffer most by its existence:

In the world outside new action could be taken and new decisions made. But the light of what had been performed would glow on unblinkingly, like radium in a closed and undiscovered mine.

(p.290)

The beginning of The Day of the Scorpion is important in creating a sense of recent history with a preliminary examination of the political theme through the arrest of Mohammed Ali Kasim (MAK), and the description of the Layton family seen mainly through the eyes of the young Sarah. The details of the Amritsar Massacre in the Jallianwallah Bagh are given during the passage describing Mabel Layton's unconventional stance in pukka society over General Dyer's compensation fund. Dyer's attitude to his job and his interpretation of the situation he found at Amritsar provide a significant parallel with Merrick and his own reactions to a different 'situation'; it is

indicative of Scott's literary technique that he should posit such a primary consideration in an almost off-hand fashion and later evaluate it in a different way and in an unexpectedly different context.

One of the historical catalysts to the rapid withdrawal from India after the war was the election of a Socialist government in England, and the reality of Scott's literary illusion is sustained by Perron's obvious interest in this event and its relevance in the Indian context:

I know that getting rid of India, dismantling all this old imperial machinery...has become an article of faith with the intellectual minority of the party we have just voted into power. But we haven't voted them into power to get rid of the machinery, we've voted them into power to set up new machinery of our own for our own benefit, and for the majority who voted India does not begin to exist. Odd that history may record as pre-eminent among the Labour Party's post-war governmental achievements the demission of power in countries like this?

(pp.105/6)

Other references to actual events and people reinforce the credibility of the illusion: MAK writes to and receives letters from Gandhi, and is the most important thematic link with history from the Indian side: "So: Kasim's face. There was history in it; the history of Islam's holy wars and imperial expansions" (p.38); Miss Crane wakes in the morning on the day of

her attack and learns of Gandhi's arrest the day before; and Barbie Batchelor dies at the time of the first atomic bomb at Hiroshima.

The geographical context of the Quartet is another consideration crucial to the success of the illusion Scott is trying to create, especially so because of the emphasis placed on the effect India has upon the people who live there. In order to examine this effect, Scott must first establish the landscape, and this he does with the clarity and precision of a camera: "The huddles of mud villages; buffalo wallowing in celebration of their primeval slime; men, women and children engaged in the fatal ritual of pre-ordained work" (The Day of the Scorpion, p.111). The smell of the river, the poverty and the filth, and the beauty of the landscape form part of the paradoxical juxtaposition of the ugly and the beautiful that is an integral part of India.

Scott was also fascinated by the way India made people feel small against their background, but correspondingly large when they returned to the insularity of England. This was a sensation experienced by many of the British in India, demonstrated in this extract from Plain Tales from the Raj (6), a collection of first-hand reminiscences published by the BBC:

The country stretched to eternity. The sky was immense and the whole horizon was far away. And you were very small in this immensity and in some curious way this gave you a heightened awareness of everything about you.

(p.54)

To support this idea, Scott repeatedly emphasizes the vastness of the backcloth against which the drama is played. The wealth of detail in these descriptions serves the dual purpose of extracting the reality of the landscape from the vagueness of a concept and of creating a balance between what he wants us to see and what he needs us to feel. Notice the way in which the following passage flows outward from the specific to the general; how Scott seeks to discover the universal in the particular:

Those ruins don't look old. For an instant the traveller conjures images of flames, of silhouetted human shapes running distractedly, stooped under their burdens. But the moment of imaginative recreation is a brief one. The crippled dwellings and crumbled walls slide quickly out of sight and the panorama of wasteland, scarred by dried-out nullahs and rocky outcrops, appears again and expands to the limits of the blurred horizon where the colourlessness of sky and earth merge and are distinguished only by a band of a different intensity of colourlessness which, gazed at long enough, gives an idea of blue and purple refraction. Everything is immense, but - lacking harmony or contrast - is distinguished by its association with infinity.

(p.111)

The quest for balance between clarity and illusion

echoes Iris Murdoch's thoughts in her essay 'Against Dryness' published in Encounter (1961). One of her conclusions is that there is no possibility of exploring either truth or the imagination if a work of art is "crystalline", or infused with a quality of 'dryness'. This dryness ("smallness, clearness, self-containedness") denies what Murdoch sees as the chance through literature to "rediscover a sense of the density of our lives." The narrative technique of The Raj Quartet provides the framework which makes Scott's own exploration of this 'density' possible, without losing sight of its meaning, or 'clarity'.

The key to the balancing of clarity with illusion seems to be the demand Scott makes on the imagination of the reader. On a surface level, the imagination is needed to bring the characters, the historical background and the landscape to life. On a deeper level, and through a fuller exploitation of the imagination, it is possible to link the events of the narrative to the abstract imagery and symbolism crucial to the thematic side of Scott's "writing purpose".

The first words of the Quartet are in the form of peremptory command: "Imagine, then...". This is mirrored in The Day of the Scorpion (at the end of the passage describing Lady Manners) with the further command, "Picture her then", making the reader aware

that he is being made party to a hidden contract- he has to be prepared to use his imagination to unlock the full potential of the novels he is about to read. The connexions between the different levels of symbolism, both within the terms of the tetralogy itself, and outside (with India as a symbol for Scott's interpretative philosophy of life), are impossible to make without using the imagination. The fact that the Quartet works on both of these levels suggests that a balance has been successfully achieved.

As mentioned above, Scott was determined to engage with the world of 1942 to 1947 and to set it in the context of a wider history. "There are the action, the people, and the place", he writes on the first page of The Jewel in the Crown; "all of which are inter-related but in their totality incommunicable in isolation from the moral continuum of human affairs." This 'moral continuum' is ambiguous for it represents the state of British moral responsibility to India in its position as occupying power (which Scott was painfully aware had been neglected), and the higher concern of the moral continuum of human existence as a separate entity. Scott demands that throughout the flights of imaginative fancy, we must always keep one finger on these twin pulses of reality against which to measure the events of the Quartet.

The central image of the tetralogy is the rape of an English girl by a group of Indians. It is a more full-blooded treatment of similar issues raised by the 'non-rape' described in A Passage to India. Scott was conscious that the atmosphere pertaining to Forster's time was very different from that of the few years before Indian independence. The explicitly physical rape of Daphne is therefore a natural extension of the unrealized incident in the Marabar Caves. The flexibility of the rape image is central to Scott's desire for exploring abstract ideas through physical actions; he uses it to meditate (through the meditations of his different characters) on the whole question of British presence in India. The balance is geometrically maintained and the impulse to move outward from the literal to the figurative stems directly from the narrative itself with no explicit authorial prompting necessary:

There is that old, disreputable saying, isn't there? "When rape is inevitable, lie back and enjoy it." Well, there has been more than one rape. I can't say, Auntie, that I lay back and enjoyed mine. But Lili was trying to lie back and enjoy what we've done to her country. I don't mean done in malice. Perhaps there was love. Oh, somewhere, in the past, and now, and in the future, love as there was between me and Hari. But the spoilers are always there, aren't they?

(The Jewel in the Crown, p.462)

Guy Perron is probably the character most intimately caught up with the questions of balance in the Quartet. He is an integral part of the illusion through his contact with Merrick, Kumar, Rowan and Sarah, but tries to maintain his position as an outsider by his refusal to accept an army commission, not wanting to take on the burden of becoming a conventional sahib. His philosophical analysis of the Indian situation, prompted by his academic interest in the country and its history, provides the most explicit example of the balance between clarity and illusion:

The sad thing is that whereas in the English mirror there is now no Indian reflection..., in the Indian mirror the English reflection may be very hard to get rid of, because in the Indian mind English possession has not been an idea but a reality; often a harsh one. The other sad thing is that people like the Laytons may now see nothing at all when looking in their mirror. Not even themselves? Not even a mirror?

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.105)

This idea of possession and the distinction between idea and reality are two of Scott's obsessive concerns. In the above passage, the careful fusion of emotive response and objective rationality shows Perron's dilemma, that no matter how hard he tries to avoid being emotionally caught up in the machinations of the British raj, circumstance conspires against him.

He becomes involved when Merrick 'chooses' him as an assistant, and through his relationship with Sarah; thus he sees the sadness from both sides. Caught as he is between involvement and detachment, he proves the ideal medium for Scott's own thoughts on the insoluble predicament represented by the slow gathering of events that lead to the independence and partition of India.

"To sustain the illusion...you need to balance that with this concern for rhythmic shape and the general shape of the book as a whole." (7) This preoccupation with rhythm is an essential part of Scott's style as a novelist. The whole concept is bound up with the roundabout construction of the narrative in which themes and events are broached, then left for a while before being raised again and developed further in a different way. On the first page of the Quartet, Scott summarizes the whole plot in one sentence: "This is the story of a rape, of the events that led up to it and followed it and of the place in which it happened." The novel then develops in a very tangential manner with a long prologue about Miss Crane, which has the effect of misleading the reader into believing that the old missionary is the focus of the novel, and that she is the subject of the rape that is to overshadow the narrative. When the rioters stop the car she and Mr. Chaudhuri are travelling in, the expectations of rape are enhanced by the threatening language of the mob

leader:

The leader said he did not believe Mr. Chaudhuri. Mr. Chaudhuri was a traitor. No self-respecting Indian male would ride with a dried-up virgin memsahib who needed to feel the strength of a man inside her before she could even look like a woman, and what would Mr. Chaudhuri do if they decided to take the memsahib out of the car and show her what women were for and what men could do?

(p.67)

The immediate threat of rape only disappears when Miss Crane is left at the side of the road with the body of the Indian school teacher in her arms. Ahmed Kasim echoes Forster's sentiments when he tells Sarah that in India nothing is self-evident; this is echoed in the structure of the narrative, with the Miss Crane story serving only as an oblique approach to the central events of the first novel. Scott's description of her background and the rising unrest in Mayapore (which culminates in Daphne's rape) serves the dual purpose of establishing the social and political scenario against which the whole drama will be acted. Miss Crane takes her place as an important symbolic figure for whom the bloodshed and the violence represents the death of an India she considered herself married to, and which she decides to mourn by becoming suttee. Only when her own sad story has been established does the narrative proceed.

The rhythmical technique mentioned above of developing a situation long after it has already been touched upon recurs throughout the Quartet. For instance, the full implications of Merrick's choice of Kumar as a victim do not emerge in the first description we are given by Sister Ludmilla. We have to wait until the ex-officio examination of Kumar by Nigel Rowan and Gopal for a true insight into the full extent of Merrick's persecution of him. However, even this revelation is in two parts: firstly, in The Day of the Scorpion, the examination is seen through Lady Manners' eyes from the safety of the observation room; in the last novel, the same situation is recounted to Perron, but this time from Rowan's viewpoint as interrogator. This technique is used again with the meeting of Bronowsky, Sarah and Rowan in the Nawab of Mirat's special railway carriage: from Sarah and Bronowsky's viewpoint in the second novel, but over five hundred pages later, in the last novel, through Rowan's eyes. This method of writing adds to the structural shape by augmenting the integration of the separate novels into one literary concept; it also, through the addition of an extra dimension, enriches the situation under analysis by exploring more of its possibilities, adding to the fullness of the developing picture.

Another important aspect of the way in which Scott

attempts to add depth and understanding to the narrative is the provision of subtle parallels in the text of his own prose methods, whilst ostensibly describing something quite different. An example of this technique is found in the first novel when the stranger is exploring the MacGregor House. He notices the size of the rooms, and the idea occurs to him that "human thought is in the same danger as an escaped canary would be, wheeling up and up, round and round, fluttering in areas of shadow and in crevices you can imagine untouched by any human hand." (p.95) The narrative follows the same course as the frightened bird, running against walls, probing the darkness in a desperate search for the freedom of the outside air. However, this need to explore different perspectives brings the accompanying danger of the author intruding too much on the narrative, seeming too omniscient, something that would upset the balance Scott tries to maintain in his work. This is the basic reason for the introduction of the English stranger, with whose unassuming presence we come to share our discoveries and a natural developing sense of the elusive truth. Scott explained his thoughts in The Times interview mentioned above:

There is a bit of the author in all my characters. But there is also an almost invisible figure running through it, a traveller looking for evidence, collecting statements, reconstructing an event. It

doesn't matter to the reader. It does to me. I have a logical mind: I have to imagine this man collecting the information. Unless I can explain why the book is being written I feel too omniscient.

For this reason, Sister Ludmilla is described remembering the events of the Bibighar from the bed where she now lies, a blind old woman, eager to appease the curiosity of the stranger; Reid's memoirs are set out in unpublished book form (evidence in documentary form); and Robin White's account is presented as a series of "written and spoken comments" under the direction of the same stranger. This shared discovery adds to the strength of the illusion of reality in the novel.

The most obvious way to give events which are shrouded in the mists of the past the natural shape and rhythm of life is to elicit the testimony of eye witnesses. Through the enquiries of the stranger, various characters are invited to contribute: Sister Ludmilla's testimony is very important because of her intimate knowledge of the incident in The Sanctuary which sets the worlds of Kumar and Merrick in collision, and her later compliance with Daphne and Hari's secret meetings; the passages from Reid and White shed a different light on the historical context; but the climax to the first novel, and in a way of the

Quartet as a whole, is Daphne's journal giving the 'true' account of that fateful night in the Bibighar. Daphne's narrative is infused with a warm mixture of love, humour and poignant hopelessness. She displays an articulate awareness of things, both great and small, easily felt but not so easily expressed. For instance, she is sorry for the effect her behaviour has had on Lady Manners, sorry "for giving people who criticize you and Uncle Henry the last word, for seeming to prove to them that everything you and he stood for was wrong." Daphne also regrets that even her apology is inadequate because she cannot be there herself to make it seem "human and immediate". Alongside such insular considerations lies a perceptive awareness of the impossible situation she has found to exist in India. She sees the relationship between India and England as "based on a violation"—a courageous assessment for a girl who has just been raped herself. Daphne despairs of certain character traits in both nationalities: the arrogance of the British (which she has recognized in her own behaviour towards Hari after the rape - the arrogance of believing oneself to be 'right' all the time), and the "indifference of one Indian for another". The rape has alerted Daphne to the ironies around her, the hopelessness of the British presence in India and the unredeemable nature of her own relationship with Hari:

All that I saw was the danger to him as a black man carrying me through a gateway that opened onto the world of white people.

(p.437)

The growth of Daphne's despair, her search for similes to explain it more clearly, sets the tone for the rest of the Quartet, and voices (very quietly) Scott's apparently pessimistic view of the human condition. Her words as she runs from the garden, leaving Hari behind, echo those of Edwina Crane as she cradles Mr. Chaudhuri's body in the rain, creating a poignantly rhythmic parallel:

I said, "There's nothing I can do, nothing, nothing," and wondered where I'd heard those words before, and began to run again, through those awful ill-lit deserted roads that should have been leading me home but were leading me nowhere I recognized; into safety that wasn't safety because beyond it there were the plains and the openness that made it seem that if I ran long enough I would run clear off the rim of the world.

(p.436)

At the end of Daphne's journal and the three letters from Lady Manners to Lili Chatterjee, Scott brings us round in a complete circle to the beginning of the book: "Imagine, then..." The cyclic shape of the first movement is complete and the pattern is set for the remainder of the Quartet.

In another passage that is an obvious comment on

leaves her to make his first entrance alone, and Sarah sits in silence - waiting: "From somewhere in the forested slopes a coppersmith-bird began its insistent high-pitched calling, a monotonous tapping sound of which she was usually only subconsciously aware but whose single rhythmically repeated note, coming just now, seemed to be counting the seconds away for her."(p.130) Sarah dismisses the driver and walks after her father, and the bird begins again, catching her attention: "She knew nothing of its habits, little of the lives of wild creatures whose co-existence with her own species created a mysterious world within a world; or rather, worlds, a finite but to her uncountable number." These wild creatures seem to Sarah to be symbolic of the 'privileged' British in India, fighting to preserve their identity in the face of India's vastness, some of them crumbling in the face of the remorseless struggle for survival. The next time the bird sings is after Sarah and Perron have consummated their brief liaison in the Moghul Room, a song that ushers in a strangely musical parallel of Daphne and Hari's relationship. Through a trick of the light, Perron's hands seem brown and he suddenly understands the truth of the Bibighar affair:

They had emerged, erupted violently, from the shadows of the Moghul Room, attacked me, pulled me away, hit me in the face. Later when they had gone and we held each other again I said: Let me take you home. She said,

hole she had ordered dug. Presently she would return to the hospital where Susan was still in labour. But what was being perpetrated was an act of callousness: the sin of collectively not caring a damn about a desire or an expectation or the fulfilment of a promise so long as personal dignity was preserved and at a cost that could be borne without too great an effort .

(p.245)

The above quotation is an example of the way in which Barbie has alienated herself from the callousness that seems to pursue her throughout the novel. In her final illness, she is plagued by a gruesome image of the birds around the Parsee towers of silence, an image that reflects back to the death of the raj itself. Barbie is another symbolic character whose God has deserted her; but she is a symbol with a very human part to play. Her death is an indictment of the raj society and of her persecution by the memsahibs - but Scott tempers the sadness with a short epitaph:

Asleep, Barbie no longer dreamed. Her dreams were all in daylight. Do not pity her. She had had a good life. It had its comic elements. Its scattered relics had not been and now can never all be retrieved; but some of them were blessed by the good intentions that created them.

(p.396)

Scott's refutation of omniscience returns in the final novel where Perron and Sarah become the dominant personalities. Scott gives them both a chapter of first-person narrative, maintaining the balance by

placing their judgements on a personal level, at one remove from the author. Perron adds an extra dimension through a combination of close contact with other characters and his carefully thought-out historical philosophy. He is the medium through which the final rhythms of the Quartet are explored, while proving to be a natural source of refuge for Sarah - it comes as no surprise when we learn in Staying On, in what amounts to a literary aside, that they have married.

Sister Ludmilla summarizes the narrative technique of the Quartet when she says of the Bibighar that it is as if "time were telescoped and space dovetailed", of there being "no definite beginning, no satisfactory end". This confusion of time and space makes a return to the Quartet for a second and further readings an interesting experience; it becomes difficult to isolate each individual incident from the continuum of the first reading. The feeling is similar to that experienced by Sarah as she tries to remember the events of the summer after Susan's wedding: "She found it difficult later to remember things in the order they happened. There was a sense in which they became interchangeable."(The Day of the Scorpion, p.344) The effect of the first interrogation scene at Kandipat is different, for instance, when one knows what Rowan is feeling from the description in the last novel. The sense of discovery is lessened, but as if to

compensate, the awareness of depth and intensity is deepened. Molly Mahood is right when she describes how the rhythms of the Quartet are evoked in the Gaffur poem at the end of the last novel (8). The last stanza contains a symbolic transcription of the three main sacrifices of the tetralogy:

Fleeting moments: these are held a long time
in the eye,
The blind eye of the ageing poet,
So that even you, Gaffur, can imagine
In this darkening landscape
The bowman lovingly choosing his arrow,
The hawk outpacing the cheetah,
(The fountain splashing lazily in the
courtyard),
The girl running with the deer.

The bowman is Philoctetes, or Hari; the hawk evokes memories of Ahmed and his death on the train; and the girl is Daphne, running with the deer as she ran from the shadows in the Bibighar Gardens in the opening sentence of the Quartet. The tetralogy ends with the closing of a circle, bringing the rhythmic and structural shape of the work to a geometrically perfect conclusion.

CHAPTER THREE

THE USE OF SYMBOLISM IN THE RAJ QUARTET

"He woke while it was still dark, from a nightmare that had transformed him into a huge butterfly that beat and beat and fragmented its wings against the imprisoning mesh of the net."

(A Division of the Spoils, p.551)

In an essay about the historical validity of The Raj Quartet, Max Beloff includes the following perceptive generalization:

...the novelist has the freedom both to present the circumstances of the case, and through his personages to evoke either directly or through symbolic reference the complex of feelings, physical and moral, that go to make up the experience as a whole.

(1)

The above quotation could serve very well as a critical summary of Paul Scott's prose methods; a summary of the way in which he manages to extract the full potential from the freedom of the novel form. To steal a sentence from a Henry James essay about Joseph Conrad, Scott's style is evocative of "the way to do a thing that shall make it undergo the most doing", with every opportunity to develop a thought or idea realized to its sometimes exhaustive limits. Alongside the other narrative techniques outlined in the previous chapter Scott uses both overt and covert symbolism to embroider the structural framework and to exploit the narrative potential of the incidents he describes.

"This is the story of a rape", Scott tells us on the opening page of The Jewel in the Crown,

establishing the central symbol of the Quartet at the earliest opportunity. Having planted the seed in the imagination of the reader, he then proceeds to develop the idea throughout the four novels so that even five years after the event, the rape is still a strong presence in the minds of both reader and characters. The repercussions of this single happening stretch like tendrils, forwards, backwards and sideways in the narrative; as the literal significance of the rape fades with the passing of time, its symbolic implications multiply and clarify themselves.

Obviously, the question to ask is what does the rape symbol stand for; a clue to its significance on the broader level of the relationship between England and India is also provided on the first page:

...the affair that began on the evening of August 9th, 1942, in Mayapore, ended with the spectacle of two nations in violent opposition, not for the first time nor as yet for the last because they were then still locked in an imperial embrace of such long standing and subtlety it was no longer possible for them to know whether they hated or loved one another, or what it was that held them together and seemed to have confused the image of their separate destinies.

(p.9)

Here we have an image of confused passion, a relationship which is capable of oscillating wildly between the two extremes of love and hatred, but which

is neither love-affair, marriage nor rape - yet. This rape of a country, when it comes, is in the form of Merrick's obscene treatment of Kumar, and his interrogation of a captured I.N.A. soldier to the point where he commits suicide; it is there behind the ice-cold exterior of Mabel Layton and the contempt she has for everything she touches; behind the comment at the War Week Exhibition that "some wog contractor was putting on a show and making a packet". Daphne's rape is a kind of reversal of the historical rape of India, an Indian rejection of British supremacy and authority, historically expressed in the 'Quit India' campaign, but figuratively expressed in the Quartet in the most violent expression of resentment imaginable. Scott brings out the connexion between these two rapes, figurative and literal, showing how violence breeds violence, contempt breeds contempt: "I thought the whole bloody affair of us in India had reached flash point. It was bound to because it was based on a violation." The violation lies in the gratification without love, and the colonial simplicity of the "judicial robot" Daphne describes in her journal whose job is to govern fairly but which "can't distinguish between love and rape" because it is a "white robot" (my emphasis).

The aptitude of the rape symbol to describe the position of the British in India is again made explicit

by Daphne in her comment to her aunt that "there has been more than one rape" and how, although she herself was incapable of lying back and enjoying hers, Lili "was trying to lie back and enjoy what we've done to her country." Perhaps there was love to begin with in the early days, but as Daphne says, "the spoilers are always there, aren't they? The Swinsons. The bitches who travelled as far as Lahore. The Ronald Merricks." (p.462) However, as well as showing us the spoilers, Scott seeks always to maintain a balance in his novels and, unlike Forster for instance, shows us other members of the raj who worked hard, fairly, and well for the good of the entire society. Although the premise which puts these men in charge in the first place may be suspect, men like Sir George Malcolm, Robert Poulson and Captain Rowan do their best to use the situation in which they find themselves in a creative fashion. It is important that Rowan feels utter revulsion at what he learns of Merrick's behaviour from Kumar, especially at the sexual assault phase of the interrogation. Merrick reveals a keen perception himself of the enigmatic situation in India. He describes Daphne's rape as (in Hari Kumar's reported speech) "the liberal corruption of both his kind and my kind", but then seems to take this recognition as a pretext for exploring its possibilities - the possibilities of "the calm purity" of his own contempt. This idea of pure contempt is another returning echo of

the Quartet, in the appalling behaviour of Merrick during the Pinker affair and his treatment of Aziz when Mabel Layton dies; the attitude of the memsahibs in the shop where Hari tries to buy soap; and the Peabodys' treatment of Ahmed on the fateful train journey at the end of A Division of the Spoils.

The idea of rape as a symbol is advanced by the subtle beginning of the first novel. After the preliminary authorial comments ("This is the story of a rape") the book begins with Edwina Crane's story, which climaxes on the road to Dibrapur, with the apparent preparation, as discussed in the previous chapter, for the rape of the old lady. When this fails to materialize, and Mr. Chaudhuri emerges as the victim of a vicious attack instead, one is invited to reassess the rape concept. Although it is not as expected, a kind of rape has already taken place: a rape of kindness and love for a country, a rape of the trust between an English woman and an Indian man. Obviously the promised and literal rape does take place soon afterwards but the mind of the reader has, I think, already received the jolt that is necessary to extract what Scott means him to extract from the narrative of The Raj Quartet. One must look beneath the surface and swim in the waters of ideas and implications that the incidents of the tetralogy set in motion. The process is rather like Joseph Conrad's philosophy of life that

so interested Scott: "The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up."(2) If you are prepared to do this, there is a chance of discovering something of the truth which, to quote Conrad again, "like Beauty itself, floats elusive, obscure, half submerged, in the silent still waters of mystery." (3)

Sarah's involvement in the events of the rape through her visit to Lady Manners on the houseboat and her relationship with Ronald Merrick is of considerable symbolic importance itself. She is aware of the rape of India through her understanding of Merrick and through the excesses of her mother, and she becomes obsessed with the Bibighar affair and the image of Daphne. There is probably a suggestion of subconscious substitution in the way she finds pleasure in Ahmed's company, and tries to 'cross the waters' with that enigmatic gesture when she wheels her horse around to confront him. I think Merrick is closer than he knows when he confesses later to Sarah that he was worried in case the pattern of Daphne and Hari was about to be repeated. At the end of the Quartet, after Ahmed's tragic death, Sarah tells Perron that "Ahmed and I weren't in love. But we loved one another." Their a-sexual relationship seems to be a symbolic representation of the maximum possible between

English and Indian in the terms of the English occupation. The union, being a-sexual, is therefore sterile; the pressures on love are too great and the spoilers are too many. The awful thing is that, with the horrific final image of the massacre and the killing of Ahmed, Scott seems to suggest that maybe the chance has been lost for ever; he made his thoughts clear in the 1975 interview with The Times:

I do object to the sense that Britain came away with...that it had performed its task to the utmost. I do not see how you can rule for 200 years until midnight August 14, 1947: and then stop. We didn't divide and rule; we tried to rule divided. Perhaps we didn't care sufficiently to unite. In the end it was a tragedy in the classical sense.

The second symbol that is of obvious importance is the painting of 'The Jewel in Her Crown', an outdated allegorical representation of the man-bap idea for the relationship between Britain and India. However, beyond this primary symbolism lies a more figurative interpretation which holds more relevance for the people and events of the Quartet. Barbie Batchelor has a copy of the picture which she decides to show to a gathering of Mildred's friends at Rose Cottage:

'If you'd asked me to draw it from memory I couldn't have but one look at it now and one thinks of course! that's how they stood, that's how the artist drew them and left

them, caught them in mid-gesture so that the gestures are always being made and you never think of them as getting tired.

(The Towers of Silence, p.71)

The last two lines of the above quotation are a much more accurate reflection of the raj. The gestures are empty, never completed, a grand show for display purposes only with no relevance to the real world in which they are made. When Barbie tries to interest the ladies in her prize possession, she gets no response. Clarissa Peplow, "holding the picture like a looking-glass", has nothing to say because it means nothing to her; there is no sense of either responsibility or guilt; in short, there is no reflection. This reference to a looking glass looks forward to Guy Perron's comment in the last novel: "Getting rid of India will cause us at home no qualm of conscience because it will be like getting rid of what is no longer reflected in our mirror of ourselves." He goes on to say that people like the Laytons may eventually, with the dissolution of the raj, see absolutely nothing in the mirror at all - not even a mirror, as the hollow foundations on which their hollow lives have been built crumble and leave nothing behind. The total indifference Barbie meets with over her precious picture is a graphic illustration of this phenomenon at work.

Barbie points out that in her copy of the painting Queen Victoria looks rather startled, a direct effect of the reduction in scale from the large print she remembers from the classroom wall; but that is exactly what happens to ordinary people in India. Scott said that he found the East to be "full of... 'large countries' - in which a man feels rather small". In the big picture the Queen "looked terribly wise and kind and understanding," but in the reduction all of that is lost; this seems indicative of the reduction, in human terms, of so many characters in the Quartet, and thus of the destructive power of the Indian experience. In contrast to the indifference of the memsahibs is the quiet approval of Aziz. This is a reminder of the other side of Perron's theory, that the reflection of the Indian mirror will be very strong and hard to get rid of because of the reality in the Indian mind of British possession. This rather abstract concept, and the apparent connexion between the picture and the imperial mirror, is reinforced by Barbie's visit to St. John's church immediately afterwards. Mr Maybrick is playing the organ and Barbie sits down to listen:

She imagined Mr. Maybrick's red face and bald head reflected in the mirror above the keyboards. The mirror was a framed picture. Who is this? This is the Planter. The face of the Planter is reddened by the sun. Here is his lady. She shades her eyes from the light. She is of the North and ails in the climate. But keeps going. What is the Planter doing? He is showing the coolies how to pick only

the tender leaves. As he shows them God sings through his fingers. The leaves are green. When they are dried they will be brown. The music will be preserved in caddies. The Planter and the coolies between them will bring Tea to the Pots of the Nation.

(p. 75)

The teacher-like tone of the above monologue reinforces the parallel between the reflection and the picture, recalling the way in which Miss Crane used it as a teaching aid: "This is the Queen. That is her crown. The sky is blue." Barbie's admiration of the old missionary teacher is an important factor in determining the reason for her fascination with this out-of-date and indifferent work of art. It communicates something of the vibrance of India to her, and from her confused ideas about Mr. Chaudhuri and Hari Kumar, she begins to notice in the picture the absence of a mysterious and 'unknown Indian' who, as Barbie begins to realize, is symbolic of the sum total of her own life in India. His body lies in her mind's eye half way down Club road and she consciously re-enacts Miss Crane's guarding of Mr. Chaudhuri's battered remains in an absurd and touching charade. Then Barbie sees the body of this unknown Indian begin to move, and he begins to howl: "People would not have noticed", but Barbie does - she is aware of the cry from the heart, perhaps because she is insecure about her own position in India having no illusory edifice to cling to like the memsahibs. God has deserted her,

Edwina Crane does not reply to her endless stream of letters and Barbie has nothing. The unknown Indian still cries out to her, "soundlessly, begging for justice and not alleviation." Her Indian conscience becomes unbearably real, accentuated by the indifference of her compatriots, and the image of this Indian haunts her dreams: "In this dream his eyes were blinded by cataracts. He had a powerful muscular throat which was exposed because his head was lifted and his mouth wide open in a continuous soundless scream."(p.81)

'The Jewel in Her Crown' is one of those symbols which gathers significance as the story progresses, and as it passes from character to character. Towards the end of the third novel, Barbie makes a gift of the picture to Merrick and makes him take hold of it. She tells him that everything is in the picture except that one important thing - the unknown Indian. The reason for his absence is straightforward: the Indian is not there because Merrick has removed him. As Barbie tells him of the omission, a drop of sweat falls from Merrick's face onto the glass, showing the strain, both physical and mental, of holding with his artificial arm this symbol of man-bap and personal guilt. The picture is a visual representation of what Teddie died for, of what Merrick envies but affects to despise, of the

hollowness of the raj and an accusation of culpability. It carries with it the weight of the gesture Edwina Crane made when, after her illness, Clancy and the other boys came to tea again as they used to but never "so much as looked at old Joseph", her servant; unable to find the words to heal the old man's wounded pride, she takes the picture down from the wall and locks it away, "against the time when there might, remotely, be an occasion to put it back up again." Of course, that time never comes.

As well as objects, places are also important to Scott. For example, the pavilion in The Chinese Love Pavilion and the cage at Jundapur in The Birds of Paradise are both infused with a symbolic relevance to the events of those novels. In a similar vein, the gardens of the Bibighar and the MacGregor House have a bearing on the narrative of the Quartet, especially the opening novel in the sequence, The Jewel in the Crown. The symbolic relationship these two places have to each other is brought out in the description of their rather confused histories, first by Lili Chatterjee and then by Sister Ludmilla. Patrick Swinden (4) points out that the close association of one with the other is made explicit by their juxtaposition at the beginning of Daphne's story: "Next, there is the image of a garden: not the Bibighar garden but the garden of the MacGregor house: intense sunlight, deep and complex shadows." The

two gardens are similar, one more wild than the other, but the living roots of each are nourished by the necessary lees of decay. The sense of the past is therefore very strong, washed over by the cross-currents of love and hate, joy and pain, of black and white. The uneasy liaison between the races has been absorbed by the vegetation with the resultant emergence of hybrid bushes "that bear sprays of both colours". But because of the bloody past, both retain an aura of death and futility, omens borne out by the events of the first novel. The proof of history is that the connexion between the races ends in death, and Janet MacGregor's ghost is supposed to walk at night to warn others of the dangers of entering the flood that divides English and Indian. Daphne's courage takes her into these waters in true Conradian fashion, but when she has to run, she runs by instinct, "without any understanding of direction", leaving Hari behind. There is no room for him in the place of her refuge, no room for his own sake: "All I saw was the danger to him as a black man carrying me through a gateway that opened on to the world of white people." (p.437) The MacGregor and the Bibighar are "the place of the white and the place of the black", and no individuals have the strength to fight against these inevitable pressures of history.

The symbols I have discussed so far are all

explicitly revealed by the author himself, but the Quartet is also full of implicit symbolism. One of the more enigmatic symbols is that of fire, the 'destructive element'. The first powerful image of destruction by fire is the burning car as Miss Crane kneels on the road from Dibrapur cradling the body of Mr. Chaudhuri, a symbolic act in itself: "'It's taken me a long time' she said, meaning not only Mr. Chaudhuri, 'I'm sorry it was too late.'" For the first time Miss Crane has stepped outside the conventions of society and made a truly human gesture of love to an Indian. At last she has broken the long years of 'instruction', but too late: a reflection on the empty gestures and wasted opportunities of Indian history. Miss Crane's symbolic importance is broadened when she makes the supreme gesture of failure by becoming "suttee", the traditional Indian way for a woman to acquire grace through self-immolation on her husband's funeral pyre. Merrick brings out the symbolic significance of the act much later, in The Day of the Scorpion:

A symbolic act, I suppose. She must have felt the India she knew had died, so like a good widow she made a funeral pyre.

(p.407)

While rooting around in her belongings he finds the

painting, and the plaque which Miss Crane had taken off the frame, a gesture which divorces her life from the hollow intrusion of man-bap. Merrick makes the connexion between the deaths by fire of both Miss Crane and Teddie Bingham, but follows this with the spurious idea that they both died for the man-bap concept. There is a connexion, but Teddie died trying to keep it alive whereas the old lady died because she knew it was dead: a crucial distinction to make. It is also interesting that Merrick is so badly burned, scorched it seems, by the heat of some terribly destructive idea. Through his conversation with Sarah in hospital, and aided by Sarah's perceptive understanding of Merrick's character, this development is made clear:

Yes, I see a man who was in love with those legends, that way of life, all those things that from a distance seemed to distinguish people like us from people of his own kind, people he knew better. I see a man still in love with them but who has chosen to live outside in the cold because he couldn't get in to warm his hands at this hearth with its dying fire.

(p.405)

The fire is still hot enough to devour Teddie and Miss Crane, but Scott shows how the extent of Merrick's detachment results in his survival. Sarah recognizes Merrick's blindness to this aspect of his character, but also realizes that in her own experience, "truth is a fire few of us get scorched by." Merrick has been

scorched, but remains in ignorance of the scorching agent - a blindness paralleled by his total misconception of the Bibighar affair and the blindness of his own conscience.

This idea of death by fire is behind the dominant symbol of The Day of the Scorpion and Susan's sinister reconstruction of Dost Mohammed's scorpion trick. The myth is that the scorpion, when surrounded by a ring of fire, chooses to sting itself to death rather than die in the flames. Mabel, when asked by Sarah as a child, refutes the myth, thus confirming Sarah's doubts, but Susan's extraordinary ritual with the baby shows how the idea has remained lodged in a subconscious corner of her mind. She takes the baby, wraps it in the lace-butterfly shawl, surrounds it with a wide circle of burning kerosene and sits smiling at the flames. A naturally alarmed Minnie 'rescues' the baby (which was in no real danger anyway), but Susan remains, still staring, still smiling. . . . Scott brings out the symbolic significance of the episode, which so puzzles the station, in the third novel in a passage of studied understatement:

...back you came to the smile and through the smile to the uncomfortable feeling that Susan had made a statement about her life that somehow managed to be a statement about your own: a statement that reduced you...to the size of an insect; an insect entirely surrounded by the destructive element, so

that twist, turn, attack, or defend yourself as you might you were doomed; not by the forces ranged against you but by the terrible inadequacy of your own armour. And if for armour you read conduct, ideas, principles, the code by which you lived, then the sense to be read into Susan's otherwise meaningless charade was to say the least of it thought-provoking.

(p.296)

The statement is imbued with a sense of "unwanted years", and the place Susan chooses for her ritual is where Mahmoud has his bonfires where he burns the accumulation of those years. India has been for Susan an unwanted experience, and she wants her baby to be free from the suffering she herself has endured, a suffering which has left her with the feeling that there is "nothing to me at all. Nothing. Nothing at all." Her gesture with the ring of fire seems to suggest something else other than the destruction of a nightmare past; it is as if she is seeking a kind of rebirth for her child in the flames, an idea that hearkens back to the first novel and Sister Ludmilla's description of the dancing Siva:

You know of course the image of the dancing Siva? He of the two legs and four arms, dancing, leaping within a circle of cosmic fire, with one foot raised and the other planted on the body of ignorance and evil to keep it in its place? You can see it there, behind you on the wall, carved in wood, my Siva dancing. The dance of creation, preservation and destruction. A complete cycle. A wholeness. It is a difficult concept. One must respond to it in the heart, not the intellect.

(The Jewel in the Crown, p.152)

Sarah, on the other hand, is better equipped to cope with the pressures for she relies upon more than the plaster façades of the raj for her idea of self. It is important that after her school years, when ready to sail again for India, she takes the English relics of "a youth she did not understand" and throws them into an incinerator. She feels the heat of the flames on her skin and in her bones, but recognizes within these manifestations of her body, "that hard core of herself which the flames did not come near nor illuminate." Sarah interprets this as evidence of her life of darkness compared with Susan's life of dazzling light, but Scott means us to see the inner strength and resistance she has to the fires of the destructive element, a strength which her younger sister does not share. Sarah has more than the ordinary set of values and principles, more than the other members of the close-knit society of memsahibs have, to protect her from the Indian experience that threatens to destroy both Susan and her mother.

The destruction of Barbie and her death at the end of The Towers of Silence is an oblique parallel to Miss Crane's death in the first novel. Fire, the destroyer, is the most common denominator, the literal against the figurative, the link between an individual death and

the death of an age of innocence in the fires of Hiroshima: "They found her thus, eternally alert, in sudden sunshine, her shadow burnt into the wall behind her as if by some distant but terrible fire."(p.397)

In marked contrast to the fires of destruction and resentment is the symbol of the lace christening shawl, first mentioned by Susan in connexion with her baby's forthcoming baptism. Sarah, although she has not seen the shawl since she was christened in it herself, immediately suffuses it with the symbolism of "a relic the god in whom Sarah did not believe had charged her to preserve against the revival of an almost forgotten rite." This idea of a relic, of something from the past with no longer the same role to play as hitherto, is important and is developed later. When Sarah goes to Mabel and is shown the shawl for the first time, its sad beauty moves her - sad because of the way the lace butterflies are trapped in the web of fabric by the blind old French lady who made it: "Ah, oui, pauvre papillon. C'est un de mes prisonniers." The old lady's heart wept for the butterflies with a typical French emphasis, "because they could never fly out of the prison of lace and make love in the sunshine." (The Day of the Scorpion, p.367) Although beautiful and apparently alive, they are without a future and without even the scope to stretch their delicate wings; the relevance of the shawl as a symbol for the British raj

begins to emerge and to blend with that of the scorpion trapped in the ring of fire. Sarah, without being able to put her thoughts into words, feels that the use of the shawl would in some way be wrong: "she knew that she did not want it used for such a purpose, for that occasion. She knew, but could not have explained." It is particularly important that the baby is wrapped in the shawl when Susan places it in the ring of fire, prefiguring her mental illness with the gently rhetorical and poetic question to her child: "Little prisoner, little prisoner. Shall I free you? Shall I free you?"(p.493)

Barbie's relationship to the shawl is also important. She is herself trapped in the idea of God's indifference to her needs ("nous sommes les prisonniers du bon Dieu"), and so her acquisition of the lace through the kindness of Aziz is of symbolic significance. The nest of imprisoned butterflies is around her head when her overladen tonga crashes out of control, scattering Barbie's personal history over the road and plunging her into a blind yet far-seeing madness. She wears the lace "like a bridal veil"; the destination is the church; so the symbolic inference of marriage to a religious ideal which has paled (another echo of Miss Crane) is easily drawn. Barbie's idea of God no longer listening ties up with Edwina's conclusion that "There is no God. Not even on the road

from Dibrapur." The connexion is made explicit in Eustacia de Souza's greeting to Barbie during her final illness when she merges into the character of her 'friend' and loses her own identity: "Good morning, Edwina. Or are we Barbie today?"(The Towers of Silence, p.393)

The final images of Barbie's accident and her reconciliation with God are difficult to interpret; perhaps this difficulty is a sign that a rigidly symbolic interpretation is not valid. I think Scott blurs the edges of the figurative language deliberately, to show the confused ideas of an old lady in the crisis of a lifetime. Although confusing, the final effect is compelling, and the one image that does not escape is that of the butterflies:

Ah! she said, falling endlessly like Lucifer but without Lucifer's pride and not, she trusted, to his eventual destination. My eyeballs melt, my shadow is as hot as a cinder - I have been through Hell and come out again by God's Mercy. Now everything is cool again. The rain falls on the dead butterflies on my face. One does not casually let go. One keeps up if one can and cherishes those possessions which mark one's progress through this world of joy and sorrow.

(p.392)

The silver in the Pankot Rifles Officers' Mess is another slightly less obvious piece of symbolism, a symbol of the permanence and unchanging nature of the

values which adhere to the British raj. It is beautiful to look at, but of no use to anyone, locked up in the Mess out of the public gaze. Barbie goes to find Mabel to take her home after Susan's Pankot wedding-and-birthday party and finds her alone, standing in front of the silver cabinet, as though "in the presence of a reliquary":

She had become untouchable, unapproachable, protected by the intense and chilling dignity of the room in which (Barbie felt) some kind of absolute certainty had been reached long ago and was now enshrined so perfectly and implacably that it demanded nothing that was not a whole and unquestioning acceptance of the truth on which it was based.

(p.200)

This demand for unquestioning acceptance was one of the unpleasant manifestations of British rigidity and reactionary policies in India, an attitude Mabel fought against in her gesture over the victims of the Amritsar massacre. The myth of the raj is reflected in the icons it has thrown up around itself, and the static immobility of it all makes the old lady boil with frustration:

'I thought there might be some changes, but there aren't. It's all exactly as it was when I first saw it more than forty years ago. I can't even be angry. But someone ought to be.

(p.201)

It would be tedious to wade through the Quartet turning over all the symbols that lie scattered on the surface of the narrative like pebbles on a beach. The symbolism is an integral part of The Raj Quartet and to isolate and examine each individual example out of context gives a false impression. There is nothing heavy or artificial in Scott's style; he explains the important symbols in clear terms, but leaves the less grand images to wash over the reader as part of the whole reading experience. For instance, the scorpion in the ring of fire is rendered explicit, whereas the lace shawl is less clearly defined; the effect of the two symbols is therefore very different. Scott uses his characters to pinpoint the significance of certain events, such as Mildred's decision to pull up the rose bushes at Rose Cottage and lay down a tennis court. Barbie's dismay and mali's tears seem symbolic of the cleanly efficient desecration of India by the raj to the preclusion of natural growth, beauty and colour. The garden has ceased to be a place of life and death (like the Bibighar?) and is now "simply a place to pat a ball to and fro, to and fro", a veiled indication of Mildred's barren sterility as opposed to the fertility of Mabel's character. This gentleness can turn to bitterness, as M.M.Mahood (5) points out:

The death of (Panther) to the accompaniment

of Mildred's tipsy laughter, with Susan segregated from the child she has tried to kill (sic) and Sarah facing the loss of the child she longs to bear, is a bitter image of the end of Anglo-India: of the British as they were.

This mixture of subtlety and weight is one of the most important features of Scott's literary style.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PRESENTATION OF CHARACTER IN THE RAJ QUARTET

"...attempting always a wholeness"

(The Jewel in the Crown, p.152)

When investigating a work the size of the Quartet it is difficult to avoid breaking it down into each of its component parts to ease the process of critical analysis. To do this is to sever the structural links that make these pieces an integral part of a larger whole, thereby denying them their contextual relevance. I acknowledge this before committing the crime of examining in detail the individual brush-strokes and recurring colours that make up the verbal panoramic canvas of the narrative.

The single most important character from a structural point of view is Ronald Merrick. He appears in each of the four novels, and provides the most tangible link between the Bibighar affair and the Layton family. He resists categorisation and is one of the most strongly-drawn individuals in the tetralogy, providing an incisive lead into Scott's method of character presentation. In opposition to Merrick are placed three characters in particular: Sarah Layton, Guy Perron and Dmitri Bronowsky. Sarah acts as a character foil to Merrick through the way in which she thinks and feels about the Indian situation. Perron and Bronowsky between them share the task of acting as thematic

commentators, the mediums through whom Scott deliberately impinges on the narrative, be it either to clarify the complicated political situation against which the Quartet unfolds, or to highlight a new thematic development in the plot. In order to act in this objective way, they have to maintain an air of detachment from the main current of opinion in Anglo-India, and this is achieved in different ways. Bronowsky is aided by the obvious factor of his Russian ancestry combined with his eccentricity, his dignified homosexuality and his unique position as Chief Minister to the Nawab of Mirat. Through the emigré count's elegant voice and one good eye (with which he sometimes appears to see with more than double the pertinence of most characters), Scott deliberates a good deal on the political entanglements of the twilight years of the raj. Perhaps more than anybody else, Bronowsky represents an underlying current of calm, meditative reflection in the Quartet.

Guy Perron maintains his distance from the raj by steadfastly refusing to accept a commission, endeavouring to maintain "a far greater measure of freedom and better opportunities to study in depth human behaviour during an interesting period of history". This professional desire for detachment hampers the development of his relationship with Sarah because he is determined to avoid involvement with any

manifestation of the raj. Perron realizes only later that his initial assessment of Sarah as a typical young memsahib is wrong:

He was sorry for her. He felt she deserved better of life. But so many of them did. There was nothing he could do. Their lives were not his affair. He had his own to live. Their dissatisfaction, their boredom, the strain they always seemed to be under, were largely their own fault. The real world was outside. Impatient, he stood up. If you allowed yourself to sympathize too much they would destroy you. You would lose what you valued most. Your objectivity.

(A Division of the Spoils, p.100)

Another important character group is that of the memsahibs, that dauntless band of women, headed by Mildred Layton, who form the rock into which Anglo-Indian society has sunk its foundations. They provide a concentrated focus on the self-defensive instinct at work and the way in which it dries out the sap of humanity. They also serve as the foil against which another collection of women, distinguished by the way in which they have defected from the traditional pukka stance and established themselves as individuals, can act. This flouting of convention takes many different forms, but manifests itself most openly in the possession of a more complete understanding of humanity and the vital undercurrents of life that flow untapped behind the façade of 'keeping up appearances'.

The last group of characters with which I shall deal in detail is that of the people most easily classed as victims, whether victims of circumstance or of themselves. Daphne Manners, Hari Kumar, Susan Layton and Ahmed Kasim are the most obvious victims of the Quartet, being destroyed as a direct result of the insoluble conflict between their personalities and the inevitable tide of historical progression.

These categories are, of course, purely arbitrary, and some characters belong to more than one group; nevertheless I think that they are useful focal points from which to begin an exploration of character and Scott's method of character presentation.

Ronald Merrick

Where Merrick's concerned everything's connected.

(A Division of the Spoils, p.323)

Scott introduces the character of Merrick in a very oblique way, using the fleeting judgements of other characters to create a series of first impressions. These impressions are later consolidated when Merrick is placed directly in the mainstream of the narrative in the second novel, but only confirmed in A Division of the Spoils through Bronowsky and Perron's posthumous psychological analysis of "this

unusual man". This exhaustively roundabout method of character presentation is a comment on Merrick's character itself; a convoluted and tangential method of exploration is necessary to penetrate the protective chitin Scott has evolved around his most elusive creation. The contrast of this approach to that employed when describing the characters of Perron and Sarah is marked, mainly because of their lengthy passages of first-person narrative which give a clear insight into the way they think, feel and act. It is significant that with Merrick we are never told how he is thinking; we have to rely on the other characters' evaluations and balance these with our own judgement and what we learn of his actions elsewhere. Guy Perron, in conversation with Nigel Rowan, makes an interesting comment about the strength of Merrick's delusions concerning the British presence in India. Perron acknowledges Merrick's adherence to a rock-steady set of principles that support his "unassailable right to deploy things and people to his uttermost personal advantage and private satisfaction", and tells Rowan that Merrick considers people like themselves little better than scum:

He believes we've abandoned the principles we used to live by, what he would call the English upper-and-ruling-class principle of knowing oneself superior to all other races especially black and having a duty to guide and correct them.

(A Division of the Spoils, p.209)

Perron points out that the whole ethos of Merrick's perception of the British raj is based on what he calls "Kiplingesque double-talk" and is as such totally illusory; however, because he has spent too long inventing himself to fit the bogus image, he has insufficient "energy left to realize that as an image it is and always was hollow." As a man Merrick is consumed between his envy for the pukka raj and his contempt for what it is doing (or failing to do). Perron acknowledges the destructive and magnetic forces acting between Merrick and Kumar, and stresses how helpless the Indian was to avoid the white man's predatory revenge, revenge for the unacceptable combination of colour and breeding:

Poor Coomer obviously never stood a chance.
An English public school education and
manner, but black as your hat.

(p.209)

The single most shocking revelation about Ronald Merrick comes in the description of Hari Kumar's treatment in Kandipat gaol. The extent of Merrick's obsession is described, but the unacceptable aspect which emerges is the appalling length to which Merrick is prepared to go to explore its obscene possibilities. His behaviour towards Kumar is a degraded study in humiliation as Merrick attempts to prove the paramountcy of contempt as "the prime human emotion"

and that "a man's personality exist(s) at the point of equilibrium between the degree of his envy and the degree of his contempt." Merrick's own contempt is overwhelming and encompasses not only his feelings toward the coloured population of India but also, as Perron was suggesting, the "real white men" like Colonel Layton who "has everything Merrick covets" but who in Merrick's opinion, displays a lack of the necessary "nerve or guts to live up to it" through his ostensibly liberal outlook on the country and its people. Kumar embodies an unacceptable paradox for Merrick, and as such excites a different permutation of envy and contempt which finds expression in physical violence, sexual molestation, and psychological aggression. Sister Ludmilla voices her misgivings of this character clash early in The Jewel in the Crown, a prophecy which proves an accurate reflection of what is to come: "Only I had seen the darkness in him, and the darkness in the white man, in Merrick. Two such darkneses in opposition can create a blinding light. Against such a light ordinary mortals must hide their eyes."(p.146)

The effect of this outlook is to alienate Merrick from most sectors of Anglo-Indian society. Although alienated to a certain extent by the pukka British because of his humble origins, he exaggerates this with the crushing weight of his own antagonism.

The second most disturbing incident regarding Ronald Merrick is the Pinker affair, related by Sergeant Potter to Perron in A Division of the Spoils. Merrick's cynical exploitation of Pinker's homosexuality, and the elaborate precision of the web he weaves to ensnare the young man just to gain a temporary access to Susan Layton's confidential psychiatric file, is another example of his total disregard for human feelings when they stand in the way of something he desires. Perron expresses disgust at this ability to exploit without compunction and sees the Pinker episode as a demonstration of Merrick's sadistic and predatory instincts:

But once he got what he wanted - in the Pinky affair as in any other - he was no longer interested except to the extent that it pleased him to see his victim suffer. What he wanted in this case was not, I think in one sense, very important to him, but he had made up his mind to have it and had seen how he might get it. He had a talent, one that amounted to genius, for seeing the key or combination of keys that would open a situation up so that he could twist it to suit his purpose.

(pp.260/1)

One of the most revealing passages about Merrick's psyche comes in the second novel when Sarah visits him in hospital in Calcutta. He discourses at length on Teddie Bingham's fruitless attempt to bring the 'Jiffs' back to the fold, and Sarah thinks she can detect more

than a hint of envy behind Merrick's professed contempt for the man-bap ethos. Although he has ostensibly rejected the complex network of myth and legend that surrounds the pukka raj, and appears therefore to be something of an anti-romantic, it is all for the wrong reasons. His envy and alienation give rise to the rejection, and it becomes a clear example of 'sour grapes'. The way Sarah describes Merrick as choosing "to live outside in the cold because he couldn't get in to warm his hands at this hearth with its dying fire" (p.405) is important and highlights an important distinction between Sarah and the ex-policeman. Sarah realizes that the heat of the raj fires is diminishing and longs to "exchange the creeping cold for a chill reality", whereas Merrick seems impervious to these inevitable pressures of history. Bronowsky points out the similarity between Merrick and General Dyer (of the Amritsar massacre) in a characteristically oblique way, drawing attention to the unquestioned certainty they shared that their drastic actions were absolutely right. Merrick refuses to accept that the time of rule by force and domination is over, and people like Kumar and Pinker become his principal victims.

Scott, however, takes pains to portray Merrick as a man with a humane side to his nature. He possesses the human attribute of courage to a considerable degree, demonstrated by his attempt to rescue Teddie

from the burning jeep, and the positive way in which he seeks to overcome the disability of losing his left arm. He also has a curiously gentle side to his nature. The care Merrick takes over the evening he and Daphne spend together is quite sensitive in its attention to detail. He buys new bottles of drink, new bars of soap, and displays a passion for music (military bands admittedly) and art. He also takes up smoking during the time of the Quartet, but whether this shows the strain Merrick finds himself under or is just a further manifestation of the self-invented image he seeks to create is hard to say.

One of the most commonly-used adjectives to describe Merrick from the beginning is 'twisted'. Lady Chatterjee draws attention to the "permanent sneer in his eyes" and Sister Ludmilla describes him as working "the wrong way, like a watch that wound up backwards." This is balanced, however, by a curious knack he has of winning people's confidence, revealed in the way Daphne describes how easy it is to tell him things. His chatty, sympathetic manner makes her conclude (with what she considers to be a humorous over-statement) that he "must be a wizard at interrogation!" The full irony of this innocent assessment is not revealed until the Kandipat description in The Day of the Scorpion. Daphne is not fully taken in by Merrick's elaborate

performance during the evening of the proposal; she realizes that there is a "lack of real candour between him and whoever he's dealing with." Coupled with this recognition, Daphne feels an indefinable physical repulsion, a feeling shared by Sarah when she discovers that, in a curiously ambivalent way, Merrick appals her. However, despite this repulsion, as with Daphne, Sarah also feels something of the siren's lure of Merrick's manner, and when he leaves her on the balcony of the guest house after the appearance of the first fire-flies, she is puzzled because "by going he made her feel lonely." Nigel Rowan has a similar experience on the special train to Pankot when he finds himself alone with Merrick after a long talk with Perron all about Merrick's inhumanity:

...it struck him as being odd that the one man he might have expected to be a disruptive or abrasive presence was not, but seemed to fit in and to share with him this feeling of repose, or anyway of momentary relief from the pressures which had been piling up, undermining his confidence.

(The Day of the Scorpion, pp.213/4)

Rowan's wife, Laura, feels the same about Merrick, and tells him how she acquired her facial scar in the Japanese P.O.W. camp, something she finds impossible to tell anybody else, even her husband. There is something sinister about this feeling of ease Merrick inspires in people, rather like the effects of an anaesthetic drug.

Scott uses spider imagery to describe the burn scars that cover one half of Merrick's face, "the pink and white spider web of puckered flesh", as though he is inviting us to see some parallel between the numbing bite of the animal predator and the effect the ex-policeman has on people, all part of "the subtly balanced structure of mystification and intimidation which was what he erected to get what he wanted." Anything or anyone who gets in his way is liable to destruction.

It is no structural accident that Scott emphasizes Merrick's humanity immediately before the account of Rowan's ex-officio examination of Kumar and the damning revelations of the Kandipat affair. In conversation with Sarah, Merrick reveals his apparently genuine fondness for Daphne and discourses at length about how the British ruling-classes have adopted Indian indifference to human suffering (an indigenous trait first highlighted by Daphne). He harks back to the past, to a time when, as Merrick puts it, "you were master in your own bailiwick", a further example of his resistance to the flow of history. Merrick feels that what he calls the "rubber-stamp" mentality of so many administrators must be avoided, that "one ought to be involved", and involved as a "fallible human being". Unfortunately, Merrick's involvement becomes a personal crusade against everything Kumar represents. Sister

Ludmilla describes the first meeting of these two characters to the stranger and acknowledges that what had been set in motion "could not be stopped because of what Mr. Merrick was and what young Kumar was." As early as this first confrontation by the pump in the Sanctuary Merrick had "chosen the twisted tragic way."(The Jewel in the Crown,p.144)

An important element in Merrick's character is his homosexuality, and the way this governs his behaviour at various points in the Quartet. Scott introduces the idea very gradually through a series of individual signs that mean little in isolation but taken together build up to an understanding of the complete picture. The first of these 'hints' comes in the proposal scene after which Daphne is struck by the absence of any physical contact, not even a touch of the hand. She interprets this apparent coldness as sexual innocence, but adds the qualification that it can be seen as "ignorance and cruelty as well". Pandit Baba makes an unsupported assertion to Ahmed Kasim about Merrick's "cruelty and perversions", but the most effective and revealing piece of detective work, almost smothered in its own subtlety, is the probing by Bronowsky at the wedding reception in Mirat. Bronowsky is the only man able to assume the dominant role with Merrick in the whole tetralogy, and he nearly catches him totally off-guard:

'Tell me,' the count said in a low voice so that Merrick automatically bent his head closer. 'Who is the outstandingly handsome young officer with the dark hair, talking to the girl in blue?'

Merrick glanced quickly round the room.

Oh that, he seemed about to say, that is - But as if suddenly unsure of something- the name of a man, the colour of a dress, his questioner's intention, he looked back at Bronowsky and for a moment the question itself seemed to hang in the balance; and Bronowsky, observing the way the colour came and went on the ex-District Superintendent's cheeks, released his hold on his companion's arms and murmured: 'Well, it doesn't matter. Come, let's go in,' and led the way.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.211)

Merrick's own homosexuality puts the Pinker episode in a slightly different perspective and makes the whole affair more repellent, showing his willingness to exploit in somebody else a condition he recognizes in himself.

Sarah Layton is very helpful to Scott as a medium through which he can mould the reader's assessment of Merrick's complicated character. She seizes on the idea that Merrick is "obsessed by self-awareness", a sentiment echoed in the last novel by both Perron and Bronowsky in their evaluations of him as a "self-invented man". An important part of this self-invention is Merrick's repeated 'choice' of people for a curious mixture of persecution and companionship. Kumar, the Layton family, Halvidar Karim Muzzafir Khan

and Guy Perron are all among the chosen, and Perron thinks he has found a clue to the motive behind it all: "I believe he found it necessary to be close to someone whose antagonism he knew he could depend on and that without this antagonism he had nothing really satisfactory by which to measure the effect of his behaviour." (A Division of the Spoils, p.230) Teddie Bingham provides an interesting variation on this theme through the way in which, ironically, he is not chosen at all but is apparently forced on the ex-policeman by a series of coincidences. Teddie does the initial 'choosing' himself when he asks Merrick to stand in at the wedding for his jaundice-stricken best man, and this leads directly to the connection with the Layton family which culminates in Merrick's eventual marriage to Susan after Teddie's untimely death in the war. Merrick tries to explain to Sarah that he feels helplessly responsible for Teddie's death, and that there was nothing that could have avoided the fateful conclusion to their relationship:

'Oh, I'm sure there's something in it. You find you have - a victim. You haven't chosen him. But that's what he is. Afterwards he haunts you, just as if he were on your conscience. The irony is that you don't really have him there. You can question your conscience and come out with a clean bill. But he sticks, just the same. Teddy sticks. And that has a certain irony in it.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.382)

The irony is certainly there, but with a much more

pertinent application than that suggested by Merrick himself. It is remarkable how Merrick can put himself into a quiet agony of guilt over a quirk of fate for which he is morally blameless, and yet remain quite oblivious of any culpability at all over his treatment of someone like Hari Kumar. The main difference between these two situations is the presence or absence of control. If Merrick is in control of the situation, and therefore of his actions (as in the Kumar case), then he seems psychologically unable to doubt the validity of those actions. However, as soon as the element of control is lacking Merrick feels automatically vulnerable, and leaves himself open to invasions of doubt and mistrust, a character trait demonstrated by the Teddie affair. The whole episode is further evidence of Merrick's almost sublime selfishness.

Guy Perron thinks he can see a connection between Merrick's self-inventedness and his curious relationship with history, and explains to Nigel Rowan his idea of Merrick as "the man who comes too late and invents himself to make up for it." Even the artificial arm and the scarred face are, according to Perron, necessary to the creation so that "the world would notice, and pause". Bronowsky shares this opinion and is obviously fascinated by the enigma Merrick represents. The Russian count comes to respect Merrick's efficiency and employs him in Mirat to keep

the peace during the riots at the time of Independence. This arrangement also gives Bronowsky the chance to study his 'specimen' more closely and the time to come up with some interesting theories:

I believe he has a number of admirable qualities but none of them strikes me as likely to promote the cause of anyone else's happiness. Not even his own. He is one of your hollow men. The outer casing is almost perfect and he carried it off almost to perfection.

(A Division of the Spoils, p.171)

Scott uses other characters to broaden the reader's understanding including Teddie Bingham and Barbie Batchelor. The encounters Merrick has with these characters in particular endorses the original impression we are given of his unease with individuals on a personal level as opposed to the ease with which he handles people on a professional basis. This latter characteristic is amply demonstrated in the passage describing the lecture Merrick delivers on the Indian National Army (INA) to a hall full of officers and senior NCOs. It comes as no surprise that Merrick emerges as an expert on a subject still considered taboo, or quite simply ignored, by the vast majority of pukka British officers. He has a penchant for turning over stones and uncovering the unusual and the improbable, or for perverting the course of normality. Teddie's impressions of Merrick, described in The

Towers of Silence, accentuate the physical attraction of the man; his superb physique excites a considerable envy in his fellow officer who comforts himself with the snobbish reassurance that Merrick's origins are humble when compared to his own. The injuries Merrick receives while trying to save Teddie from the burning jeep are given an added poignancy when one remembers his previous impressive physical appearance, but Scott makes it clear that this mutilation and scarring of the body is an outward manifestation of Merrick's inner corruption: "the disfigurement of the left side in a curious way reflected something otherwise inexpressible about the right."(A Division of the Spoils, p.67) Merrick's courteous gesture to Barbie at Rose cottage, when he removes his hat, reveals the extent of his disfigurement and suggests the appalling truth that lies beneath the respectable exterior. In her madness, prelude to her death, Barbie marches into the rectory bungalow and claims to have seen the Devil. Absurd, but the old woman's hyperbole sets the mould around Merrick as the most explicitly evil figure in the Quartet.

In addition to the physical effect of Merrick there is something metaphysical about him that merely the mention of his name can activate. While Nigel Rowan is in conversation with Sarah Layton and Bronowsky he finds that the voicing "of the familiar name, Merrick, had the same disconcerting effect as a sudden change in

the intensity of light."(The Division of the Spoils, p.148) Rowan, Perron and Sarah all use the same word to describe Merrick: "appalling"; and in the light of his treatment of Kumar and Pinker, the description is rather apt.

The final piecing-together of the Merrick jig-saw puzzle is effected only after his death, leaving Bronowsky and Perron in particular to sketch their own definitions of his character. Bronowsky believes that Merrick even invented his own murder, the ultimate expression of creating one's own destiny, probably as the result of a homosexual affair he had begun with the young Indian boy called Aziz. Bronowsky maintains that the peace Merrick found with the boy was unsupportable because "to admit this peace meant discarding every belief he had." The affair had brought about in Merrick a "revelation of the connection between the homosexuality, the sado-masochism, the sense of social inferiority and the grinding defensive belief in his racial superiority."(p.571) The way out for Merrick was to create the arena for his own murder and to hope for a bloody revenge in Wagnerian style, "the raj emerging from the twilight and sweeping down from the hills with flaming swords-" (p.571) The failure of this to materialize is an oblique comment on the death of the

raj itself, bloody, bathetic and a prelude to a long period of uncertainty. Merrick's life revolved entirely around India; it was the only place where he was able to satisfy his lust for power and ambition, and attain a status he would have found impossible back in England. It is inevitable from a thematic point of view that Scott chose to end Merrick's life at the dawning of Indian Independence. Perron points out that Merrick's Christian name is of symbolic importance: "It means someone with power who rules;" but this power turns in on Merrick and makes of him a curious amalgam - a predatory victim to "the crumbling pillars of the edifice."

Sarah Layton

"I question everything, every assumption. I'm not content to let things be, to let things happen. If I don't change that I shall never be happy."

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.127)

Sarah is one of the most attractive characters in the whole Quartet; she has a quality of detachment from the accepted stance of Anglo-Indian society, emphasized by the voice of Lucy Smalley: somebody who "doesn't really take it seriously...Us. India. What we're here for. I mean in spite of everything. In spite

of her - well, what she was brought up to."(The Day of the Scorpion, p.135) According to the Pankot memsahibs, who are most distressed by their inability to pinpoint exactly what it is that makes Sarah 'different', she has trouble with men-friends because "after a while they get a horrible feeling she's laughing at them. At all of us." But Scott shows Sarah as being far from amused by the society which imprisons her:

She was herself because her sense of self, her consciousness of individuality was tenacious, grindingly resistant to temptations to surrender it in exchange for a share in that collective illusion of a world morally untroubled, convinced of its capacity to find just solutions for every problem that confronted it, a world where everything was accepted as finally defined, a world that thought it knew what human beings were.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.342)

The first time Scott introduces Sarah into the Quartet, he makes it clear through Lady Manners' first impressions that she is different from the rest of her family. The old lady realizes that there is something complicated behind Sarah's gesture in visiting her on the houseboat and asking to see the baby. Sarah's broodiness strikes her as "odd and intricate, not at all the result of simple self-absorption." It is obvious to Lady Manners that Sarah has assumed the responsibilities of her father during his enforced absence, an idea that is endorsed later in the second novel when we see her left, by her mother, to tell

Susan that Teddie has been killed. Lady Manners is touched by the fact that the flowers Sarah brings with her do not last, but the significance of her journey across the water is not lost. This gesture in the face of public opinion strengthens the link Sarah forges between herself and Daphne; in an oblique but tangible way Scott shows the similarity between Daphne's tragic immersion into the flood that separates the black from the white ("the dark currents of a human conflict") and Sarah's gesture in Srinagar. The symbolic crossing is mirrored in concrete terms when Sarah and Lady Manners

...found themselves on neighbouring houseboats in Srinagar, (and when Sarah) had herself ignored the barrier the conventional world put up, by crossing the few yards of water on a day when she was alone and could do so without causing fuss or offence, and visited that old and enigmatic woman.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.146)

The transience of the flowers is a symbolic comment on the fragility of an individual stand against the weight of raj society values, pretensions and prejudices.

Sarah's reactions against a claustrophobic society dates back to her childhood when she swears to make her life "of use to someone, somewhere." This early determination marks the beginning of the widening gulf separating Sarah from her sister; Susan is "capable of absorbing things into her system without really

thinking whether they were acceptable to her or not; whereas she herself absorbed nothing without first subjecting it to scrutiny."(The Day of the Scorpion, p.90) This self-questioning protects her from the pressures of the British raj which threatens Susan's destruction; Susan's mind is closed to anything alien to the rigid code of existence demanded by the pukka society, but Sarah leaves a way in for a refreshingly complete series of random possibilities offered by a life in Anglo-India in the few years before Independence. Perhaps the most obvious demonstration of this idea is the relationship Sarah cultivates with Ahmed Kasim. The relationship begins to take shape during the riding trip Sarah takes with Ahmed after the Layton's arrival in Mirat before the wedding, and reaches a preliminary climax of self-expression in her seemingly empty gesture of wheeling her horse around to confront the young Indian. Although unable to explain the reasons for her action even to herself, Sarah recognizes some wider relevance behind the curious manoeuvre:

...she thought that the world might be a more interesting and useful place to live in if there were more such empty gestures as the one she had apparently made. They were only empty in the sense that there was room in them for meaning to be poured.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.128)

Scott often seems to use his characters like

reactive chemicals, placing them in careful opposition to each other to produce a calculated effect. The meetings between Sarah and Merrick, for instance, are revealing about both characters, particularly through the way in which they react to each other. When talking to Merrick at the Mirat guest house, one aspect of Sarah's character reveals itself in a way that surprises her. Certain phrases Merrick uses makes her conscious of their different social backgrounds and she is frightened to realize "that she could respond, as automatically as Aunt Fenny, to the subtler promptings of the class-instinct." This kind of sobering self-discovery is all part of the terrible dissatisfaction she feels, both about her own character and the social situation of which she is a part. An irony of her position is that no matter how hard she fights against the pressures of the situation, there is the danger of appearing to be what Sarah calls "a hard-bitten little memsahib interfering in other people's lives to stop herself shrieking with the boredom and frustration of her own."(The Day of the Scorpion,p.380) It is this kind of fear that leads Sarah to adopt a more defensive stance for her own protection and self-respect; she may despise many of the aspects of her way of life and background, but she has nothing with which to replace them. Sarah worries a lot about becoming like her mother, and fights against the physical manifestations of this tendency such as

"that characteristic downward-curving smile that Sarah was afraid she might acquire, having once or twice got a glimpse of herself in a mirror smiling in that way." Even her way of sitting is becoming noticeably like that of Mildred, and the positive decision to change the angle of her body serves only to accentuate the similarity:

She had sat up, put her glass down, leant forward and folded her arms, but that was becoming a habitual attitude too, and just as defensive.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.118)

However, there are some things about her mother that Sarah is able to admire - the silence that surrounds the subject of Sarah's abortion for instance. Sarah is hurt by it, but sees the point because she recognizes that this silence and apparent indifference is her mother's only chance to hang on to the composure and fortitude necessary to maintain the 'standard' or what she calls "the angel's face in the dark". Sarah follows her example and carves "angel faces of her own and only at moments of acute distress had impulses to tear the fabric of the roof and expose the edifice to an empty sky."(The Day of the Scorpion, p.131)

Sarah becomes increasingly aware of the biting paradox that surrounds the rapidly collapsing raj and the increased effort on the part of its society to keep

up appearances as though nothing were happening. The realization of how little people like the Layton's actually 'matter' is a strong contributory factor to Susan's mental illness, and Sarah sees a possible explanation in the fact that people quite simply "don't really believe in it any more." Sarah is not prepared, however, to join this collective conspiracy of pretence and illusion, but the price she pays for her individuality is high:

Sarah tapped ash carefully into the glass ashtray and felt put off by the sight of the stub of her previous one, marked red by her lipstick, a sign of her personal private life, her none-too-hopeful message in a bottle cast back up by an indifferent tide on an island on which she sometimes felt herself the only one who still wanted to be rescued.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.149)

Scott uses the same technique for revealing certain angles of Sarah's character as he uses for Merrick: the opinions and meditations of other characters, especially Nigel Rowan and Guy Perron. Rowan first sees Sarah while in the company of Bronowsky in the Nawab's private railway-carriage, and makes an observation that seems to invite comparison between the girl in front of him and old Lady Manners: "Her face had to be studied before it revealed its natural and incontrovertible logic, and then one felt instinctively that it would endure, that in old age it would be marked by the serenity of understood

experience and the vitality of undiminished appetite." (The Day of the Scorpion, p.147) This assessment is an indication of Rowan's astuteness of mind, and so Scott achieves the double benefit of throwing light on both characters in the same situation with one narrative progression. Rowan is also right in his guess about Sarah's views of Hari Kumar as somebody who "couldn't have existed without our help", an opinion he himself had forged during the Kandipat gaol examination. The empathy that develops between Sarah and Rowan is one of the most interesting and poignant interludes of the concluding novel in the Quartet, but their relationship becomes another casualty of exposure to Ronald Merrick.

The relationship which stems from the eclipse of Nigel Rowan is the liaison Sarah has with Guy Perron. There is something rather abstracted about the consummation of their affair in the Moghul Room which seems to suggest that Sarah is sublimating a whole spectrum of other emotions. Perron describes the impressions he has of Sarah's reticence as though she were obsessed with a series of illusions that might belong as a prisoner belonged "to a cell his imagination had escaped but whose door he was not permitted to open." (The Day of the Scorpion, p.335) The sublimation appears to be focussed on Ahmed Kasim with whom Sarah has been forging a tender but uneasy relationship. The similarities between Sarah and Daphne

are stressed repeatedly, and Merrick believes he can see a repeat of Daphne's tragic love-affair with Kumar about to take place before his eyes. He is mistaken because he under-estimates the extent of Sarah's reliance on her social background; she is unable even to contemplate a physical parallel of Daphne and Hari's relationship because a white girl in love with an Indian is, as Sarah says, "not part of what I comprehend". However, her psychological preoccupation touches Perron as he looks at his own hands and sees them turn brown under a trick of the light, fusing together the images of Kumar, Ahmed and Barbie's mysterious 'unknown Indian'.

From the moment of her seduction by Clark in Calcutta, a symbolic awakening fated to end in disillusion, Sarah begins to develop a strong sense of her own sexuality which tempers her outlook on the world. Sarah's "growing understanding of the complexity of physical needs and physical responses" guides her thoughts about her parents, especially the suspicion that her mother has had an affair during Colonel Layton's absence. Her behaviour to Perron on his return to India in 1947 is interesting, being much more restrained than Perron might reasonably have expected. When Sarah invites him to go riding one morning, she changes her mind and takes Perron to watch Ahmed hawking instead, an alternative demonstration of the

love that can find only abstract modes of expression. Another thing that puzzles Perron is Sarah's altered attitude to India itself, a place from which it seemed she could not wait to escape in 1945, but where she says she has been very happy since:

The only answer seemed to be: in love with the land itself, after all; yes, in love with that, and content to be here whatever happened. A strange but perhaps logical reversal of her old attitude.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.496)

Scott makes it clear that this reversal is a temporary state of mind, "an illusion of serenity, of entering a period of life which by contrast with the one just ended might be described as free, uncluttered, open at last to endless possibilities." This illusion, fed by the place Sarah has found in Mirat with Ahmed, Shiraz and Bronowsky, is shattered by the murder of Ahmed on the train to Ranpur. Her optimism disintegrates, the "brave little memsahib act" on the station platform disgusts her, and Sarah begins to sound like Susan when Perron asks to see her again, replying with a pessimistic "What is there to see?" It seems that Sarah's last chance for true happiness has died with Ahmed, leaving her to follow the more predictable course of an eventual marriage to Guy, and a life of

provincial obscurity in post-war England. This ending to Sarah's story is in some ways unsatisfying; it seems odd to leave unanswered so many questions about a character who has shared the tetralogy's empathic focus for so long, and only to reveal the fact of her marriage to Perron in the form of a literary aside in the pages of Staying On. However, this pattern of uncertainty is found again over the question of what happens to Hari Kumar, and is part of the overall scheme Scott has evolved for the Quartet. The currents of life are awash with unanswered questions and uncertainty, and it is only to be expected that Scott would wish to inject a little of this into his most complex and expansive literary creation.

Commentators

Guy Perron

"Perron sat down and composed himself, to let the tide of India flow over him, presently it would ebb and leave him revealed: a visitor who was excluded from the mystery, the vital secret."

(A Division of the Spoils, p.496)

Scott presents Perron as an obvious focus for reader-identification and as the source of most of the

Quartet's humour. However, because Perron makes his first appearance in only the last of the four novels, he never quite attains the status of Sarah. It is important to the structure of the tetralogy that Perron is presented as a professional historian through whom many of the political and historical consequences of the events described are analyzed. He is introduced whilst delivering an unsuccessful lecture to a hall-full of bored troops, trying to interest them in the political and territorial ambitions of Mahdaji and Daulat Rao Sindia. The Welfare Officer misinterprets the tumultuous reception at the end of the lecture (caused by an allusion to a particularly alluring and energetic lady-warrior) as evidence for some cultural success, a reaction which elicits Perron's sense of humour:

...a belief of which Sergeant Perron did not disabuse him because he had decided quite early in his military service that for life to be supportable officers had to be protected from anything that might shatter their illusion that they knew what the men were thinking.

(A Division of the Spoils, p.9)

He has also developed what is deemed a formidable parade-ground style to "minimize the risk of his B.B.C. accent (as fellow-NCOs called it) and his cultural interests giving them the impression that he was a

pansy."(p.10) These two extracts on first acquaintance set the tone for Perron, his sense of humour acting as a further distancing agent from the raj enabling him to see the absurdity of it all very clearly. However, the cynical flippancy of many of his judgements is juxtaposed with the typically serious thoughts of the professional historian. For instance, his search for the continuum he is sure exists in India elicits the following meditation:

'Two continua, perhaps, in this case? Ours, and the Indians'? An illusion that they ever coincided, coincide? A powerful illusion but still an illusion? If so, then the raj was, is, itself an illusion so far as the English are concerned. Is that what she meant when she said she did not think India was a country one could be happy in?'

(A Division of the Spoils, p.105)

The first meeting between Sarah and Perron shows the affinity they share, perhaps born of the fact that neither of them really belongs. Perron recognizes that Sarah is different: "her manner had lacked that quality - elusive in definition - which Perron had come to associate with young memsahibs." When he meets Merrick for the first time, Perron joins Sarah in being 'appalled' by his behaviour, in this instance towards Havildar Karim Muzzafir Khan. Merrick's choice of Perron as military companion soon begins to take its toll, and Perron's behaviour in the governmental coach on the train to Pankot is slightly perplexing to Rowan

as his wit becomes increasingly strained, almost desperate, along with his intake of alcohol. The longer Perron stays in India the more bitter he becomes, especially towards his superior officer, culminating in the theory he shares with Bronowsky about Merrick being a self-invented man. His bitterness extends outwards to the raj itself and combines with his naturally inquisitive intelligence to produce an interesting verbal conceit of the railway compartment as a symbol for the English mentality in India:

'Of our isolation and insulation, our inner conviction of class rights and class privileges, of our permanence and our capacity to trim, to insure against any major kind of upheaval affecting our interests, and of course of our fundamental indifference to the problems towards which we adopt attitudes of responsibility. A moral responsibility would be too trying...'

(A Division of the Spoils, p.208)

As with Sarah, the lengthy passage of first-person narrative given to Perron is very revealing about character motivation and make-up. He makes an intelligent guess about how his nearness to Merrick and the consequent antagonism "was like an acid, acting on a blank photographic plate which had been exposed to his powerful and inventive imagination." Although sorely pressed at times, Perron never loses his ability or inclination to comment on everything around him. He is a compulsive collator of detail, with a sponge-like

ability to soak up atmosphere but still to tune in to the undercurrents of meaning beneath the surface. The meal he has with the Layton family provides an interesting passage of description, especially in the way Perron views Mildred Layton. He tunes in immediately to what he defines as her "vigorous sense of history", and feels the pull of her sexuality which he believes might have led to an "unnecessary complication" had Mildred not 'switched herself off' from him. Through the use of this first-person narrative, Scott shows the reader a completely new angle on Mildred, and one with a large degree of credibility; while ostensibly developing one character he again sheds new light on another.

Perron's nose for atmosphere shows itself again when Sarah takes him round Rowan's bungalow in Mirat. He feels immediately oppressed by the gloomy weight of the masonry, surprised by Sarah's apparent indifference. Perron couples this sensitivity with the marvellous quality of being 'interesting'. Scott endows him with a penchant for things as diverse as Emerson and Conan Doyle; he is good with men, women and children, and possesses a generosity of spirit that is most appealing, off-setting the danger of sometimes appearing too cynical, and revealing itself here over the relationship he suspects to exist between Sarah and Ahmed:

...he thought that between Ahmed and Sarah there was a special kind of empathy, the kind that two people betray in small gestures and in the way they have of dealing with one another in public. Well, if that was how the land lay he could only wish her good luck, slightly deflating though it was to his own ego.

(A Division of the Spoils, p.519)

Right until the end of the Quartet, Perron retains his sense of perspective and passes comment on the history he sees being created around him. He notices how the solidarity of the English is disappearing with the advent of Indian Independence because "the need for it has gone", and makes the interesting and self-confessedly ambivalent gesture of going to find Hari Kumar in the squalid back-streets of Ranpur. He fails in his quest, but commits the haunting words of 'Philoctetes' to memory as a last sad tribute to the memory of the past and of a lost opportunity. It is an important structural decision to give the last passage of the Quartet to its most measured commentator with the words of the Gaffur poem he also has by heart - a beautiful evocation of some of the principal images in the tetralogy.

Dmitri Bronowsky

"'But mysteries are no bad thing, especially for the young. They warm the powers of perception and in themselves can be quite beautiful.'"

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.467)

At first sight, the character of Bronowsky seems little more than an absurd caricature; a homosexual, pink-cigarette smoking, eye-patched and limping emigre Russian count, consumed with the intricacies of an elaborate little game of creating a ruler-statesman out of a "tin-pot autocratic native prince". However, Dmitri Bronowsky is much more complicated than the above outline would suggest. Scott raises him from the level of caricature through the exposition of a fertile, creative and brilliantly perceptive mind, using the absurd outer casing as a foil to his honed intelligence.

Bronowsky's homosexuality is important to the plot of the Quartet and is introduced with a poignant sensitivity by the author. Scott describes the "bitter-sweet region" mapped by Bronowsky's inclinations, "explored by his imagination, but never - for many years - entered into." The sadness lies behind the fact that the young men who attract him are wholly

masculine and therefore attracted only to women; the "man he could embrace was not the man for him." Through the experiences of some of Scott's other characters (with one significant exception), we learn that Bronowsky is a man in whose company it is a real pleasure to find oneself. Sarah, Rowan and Perron all testify to this effect, leaving Merrick as the only person to feel intimidated by his natural curiosity. At the wedding party, Sarah is fascinated by the count; his eye-patch seems to her like "the round bulging eye of a nocturnal creature" and the contrast between this other-worldly quality he possesses and the warmth of his manner sets up an interesting tension. The conversation he has with Merrick is a crucial section of the Quartet, a confrontation between the two 'controllers' in which Bronowsky emerges as by far the stronger. It is the only time that Merrick is placed in the position of the manipulated instead of the manipulator; Bronowsky passes off his skilful probing of the murky depths of Merrick's delusions as part of his "natural curiosity", but Merrick is shaken to the core.

Bronowsky's façade is the screen from behind which he operates so subtly and skilfully. Sarah senses the element of a game when meeting him again on Ranpur station:

She had a sense of charade which probably emanated from him because she had had it on the morning of the wedding when he joined the group on the lawn of the Mirat Gymkhana club; a sense of charade, of puppet-show; of dolls manipulated to a point just short of climax.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.456)

The outer shell is very much part of a self-conscious pose behind which Bronowsky operates. His assessment of Merrick as a self-invented man comes so near to the mark because of what he is himself. Sarah again provides an important insight into his complicated character:

...for the first time she noticed how concentrated, how single-minded, a one-eyed man had to be, how deprived he was of the tragi-comic human right to laugh on one side of his face and cry on the other, like the king in the fairy tale. She felt pierced, as if by a singularity of purpose and intent. But that was a mystery too. Perhaps it was beautiful. She did not know.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.467)

Although Bronowsky has a keen eye for social criticism, he has an enormous capacity for personal respect. Knowing what he does about Merrick does not prevent him admiring the man's genius for administrative organization and consequently employing him in Mirat to control the 1947 riots. In conversation with Perron, Bronowsky reveals his detailed theories of

Merrick's character and still emphasizes the sadness of his strange and somehow pathetic bid for recognition through death. The objectivity Bronowsky displays throughout the tetralogy is assisted by his alien cultural background, which also enriches the texture of the narrative itself. He is the penetrative and quiet philosopher of The Raj Quartet and one of the most singularly fascinating characters of the work.

The Harpy and the Saint

"Well, what are we to make of that? That she enjoyed it?'...And then the woman smiled and said in a loud voice, 'Personally, if it had happened to me, I would have had a public abortion outside their bloody temple and thrown the filthy muck to the pi-dogs. Or made them stuff it down their priests' throats.'"

(The Jewel in the Crown, p.161)

Paul Scott describes two broad categories of women in the pages of the Quartet: those who immerse themselves in the social environment, fostering the self-propagating network of illusion and self-deceit; and those who decide to fight against the tide, turning their backs on convention, bravely striking out in their own individual way. The above quotation is an example of an extreme memsahib reaction to Daphne's decision to keep her baby, and vindicates Lady Chatterjee's use of the word 'harpy' to describe these

female pillars of the raj society. However, Scott does more than just present the hard glittering exterior; he examines the psychology of these women and creates a convincing explanation of why normal people are sometimes in a situation where their behaviour becomes strikingly and abnormally cruel:

Their illusion is, perhaps, that they have no illusions. They look at India and, ignoring the fact that we were directly responsible for it for a hundred years, find it revolting. The Americans call this kind of revulsion Cultural Shock. I call it fear. I know that it is easily caught, and that the quickest remedy to mask the symptoms is prejudice, and the illusion of one's own superiority.(1)

Perhaps of all Scott's character groups, the memsahibs are most captive to a collective self-image. In a letter to her aunt, Daphne speaks about the ease with which it is possible to slip into that "inbred little cultural circle of English women - men, too, but particularly women - abroad in a colony."(The Jewel in the Crown, p.114) This self-congregating instinct stems, as Scott suggests, from a mixture of the need for something known and dependable and the cast-iron belief of racial superiority - a belief so firmly entrenched in the European mentality that even Daphne catches herself showing it after the rape in the Bibighar when she and Hari are left alone:

I never gave him the chance because even in my panic there was this assumption of superiority, of privilege, of believing I knew what was best for both of us, because the colour of my skin automatically put me on the side of those who never told a lie.

(The Jewel in the Crown, p.452)

Daphne believes the women to be worse than the men because the concept of physical superiority is unnatural to them. Whereas men can feel physically superior without unsexing themselves, women (according to Daphne) cannot:

...what happens to a woman if she tells herself that ninety-nine per cent of the men she sees are not men at all, but creatures of an inferior species whose colour is their main distinguishing mark? What happens when you unsex a nation, treat it like a nation of eunuchs? Because that's what we've done, isn't it?

(The Jewel in the Crown, p.427)

Scott steps into the memsahib mentality from time to time and delivers a delicately ironic treatise on the world through their eyes, particularly on such earth-shattering events as Susan's engagement and 'the trouble with Sarah'. Their energies are ploughed into trivia as the illusion of social stability is woven into a dense and stifling cocoon. Human emotion and pathos is locked behind the manner which is "a shade too self-assured", the voice which is "a shade too loud" and the mouth which is set "a shade too grimly".

Mildred Layton is representative of those memsahibs for whom the strains of maintaining their social position and responsibilities prove too much to cope with; the damage begins to manifest itself in her growing alcoholism and forgetfulness and in the crushing weight of her bitterness. Scott shows how Mildred persists in alienating human emotions, denying herself the joys of a relaxed relationship with her daughters, allowing herself instead to enter into a parody of a love-affair with Kevin Coley, spitting like a wild-cat when her conduct is questioned by Barbie Batchelor. The strain of being "always on show" has dried the sap of humanity from her body, leaving only a brittle shell of social convention behind, eclipsing the warmth she once had and of which Perron believes he can still see vestigial traces. Scott makes us see the pathos of her situation by showing the obvious pain she suffers while maintaining her position in Pankot. His comment on Mildred after her defeat over the question of whether the family was going to move to Rose Cottage or stay at the 'grace and favour' has wider implications: "...she had been hurt more deeply than she may have admitted even to herself". Barbie Batchelor becomes the focus for Mildred's considerable store of frustration and disappointment, a persecution which only abates when the old lady has finally descended into senile oblivion, with only Sarah to remember her. The way Mildred digs up the roses at the

cottage to lay a tennis court (which is hardly ever used) is a manifestation of her disrespect for the memory of Mabel and her total disregard for other people's finer feelings.

The principal foils to the hard-core memsahibs are Miss Crane, Sister Ludmilla, Lady Manners, Mabel Layton and Barbie Batchelor. Barbie and Sister Ludmilla are different from the other three because they never consider (or are allowed to consider) themselves a part of the raj mentality, the former through her growing inability to compromise her conscience to the evidence of injustice and discrimination she sees around her, and the latter through her self-ostracization in the Sanctuary. Sister Ludmilla performs the role of astute social commentator in the first novel, alienated by her devotion to caring for those unfortunates, black and white, forgotten by society. She is able to provide intelligent analysis of Daphne and Hari Kumar's relationship with each other because of the friendship she cultivates with the young English girl - two unusual people reaching out to each other across the symbolic waters dividing the black from the white. Scott takes pains to stress Sister Ludmilla's deep fund of humanity which she balances with her commitment to Christianity:

If God is never happy what chance of happiness is there for us? Such long dolorous faces that we pull. Never a smile when we say our prayers. How can one bear the thought of Eternity if in Heaven it is not permitted to laugh? Or come to that, permitted to weep? Is not our capacity to laugh and cry the measure of our humanity?

(The Jewel in the Crown, p.129)

Sister Ludmilla is detached enough to investigate the elusive truths behind the illusion of the raj. In old age her sight fails, but with this blindness comes a blessing in disguise, the sharpening of her powers of recollective perception which enables her to form a complete picture from the jig-saw quality of events as they happened twenty years before.

Barbie, from a thematic standpoint, is a more important character, emphasized by the way Scott presents The Towers of Silence almost exclusively from her point of view. This comes as something of a surprise to the reader because up to that point she has been only a small presence on the periphery of the narrative; but it is typical of Scott's literary technique that he should deliberately shift the point of perception to shed further light on events already described. This structural decision is a harbinger of the Smalleys' prominence in Staying On and shows the potential for development of even the most minor of characters.

Barbie becomes a character symbol of the invisible British conscience haunted by the image of the 'unknown Indian', "his eyes blinded by cataracts...his head lifted and his mouth open in a continuous soundless scream."(The Towers of Silence, p.81) Barbie becomes obsessed with this confused mixture of Hari Kumar and Miss Crane's Indian schoolteacher, combining this with the despair she feels for the deafness of God. This aspect is another symbol of a Godless generation, deserted and left out in the cold, an idea which will be discussed in the next chapter. The unfolding of Barbie's character is in many ways an analysis of despair, showing its depth and immensity as her world collapses around her. Thwarted by the sterility of her life, Barbie channels her considerable capacity for love and affection into an innocent pretence over Sarah and Susan:

She thought of these girls as her own girls, born of her womb, dramatically separated from her but now living near her in ignorance of her maternal claims. It was a harmless act of self-deception and hurt nobody, except perhaps herself.

(The Towers of Silence, p.168)

Barbie's harmlessness, however, is no protection from the blind savagery of the forces which destroy her, all the while maintaining the cold façade of respectability. Barbie's reaction is to move in a blaze of public and colourful optimism, clad in a dress of

heliotropic brilliance. While choosing the cloth, she muses on the derivation of the word 'heliotrope', 'helios' meaning sun, and 'trepo' meaning to turn. The idea of Barbie as a plant which turns its flowers to the sun is obviously a concept Scott means us to consider, holding her position until she is found at the end of the novel with her shadow "burnt into the wall behind her as if by some distant but terrible fire", symbolic of the losing human relationship with the atomic bomb.

Scott is a skilful creator of old women, and sections of the narrative are a marvellous charter of approaching senility. The onset of old age and death makes Barbie's search for God a desperate venture, especially when faced with the terrible possibility that both her friends, Miss Crane and Mabel, are suffering eternal torment. Emerson and his essays come to her aid but prove no comfort in the long run, his ideas spinning her on a wild wheel of confusion. Barbie does have a very perceptive mind when it is allowed the peace it needs to ponder the significance of the world around her. She feels sorry for Sarah, aware of her confusion, and pinpoints something of the young woman's dilemma, "poised between the old (world) for which she had been prepared, but which seemed to be dying, and the new for which she had not been prepared at all."(The Towers of Silence, p.278) Barbie reaches a

crisis of alienation when even Sarah begins to misunderstand her, and she is driven to seeking identification with a little homeless Indian boy; together they are, in Barbie's words, "les prisonniers du bon Dieu". Evidence of the boy's loyalty to her in his childhood world of fantasy brings tears to the old lady's eyes.

The main narrative purpose Barbie serves is to shed new light on what we already know from the previous novels, especially the relationships between the different members of the Layton family during the critical phase of Susan's marriage, widowhood and childbirth. The fact that she is destroyed by the crumbling edifice of a doomed society throws a shadow of pessimism across the whole spread of the narrative.

Lady Manners (whose name is an obvious character-pointer) and Mabel Layton have one important thing in common, and that is the way they both belonged very much to the raj before making a conscious decision to turn their backs and walk away. After the Bibighar affair, Lady Manners feels bound by loyalty and love to look after Daphne's child and immerse herself in a dignified and silent understanding of an alien country. As she prepares to leave Srinagar, the hawkers come round her house-boat to tempt her into making a final

purchase. She allows herself to be tempted, and gives her custom to a man who sold her something three years before, watching "his touchingly dishonest eyes whenever he looked up to emphasize the truth of the lies he was telling her."(The Day of the Scorpion, p.51)

Mabel's 'back-turning' took place many years earlier at the time of the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre when she refused to contribute to General Dyer's pension fund, and instead sent one hundred pounds to the fund for the Indian widows and orphans. From that moment on, her life becomes internalized as she refuses to pander to social convention, ending her days tending the roses in the garden of Rose Cottage in a "celebration of the natural cycle of seed, growth, flower, decay, seed."(The Towers of Silence, p.207) The irony of her situation is left unstated, whereas Lady Manners underlines the irony of her own by placing an announcement of the birth of Parvati underneath the notice of Daphne's death in the paper; she also takes pains to observe the tradition of signing the book at Flagstaff House in Pankot, while remaining incognito on the Indian side of the hill. The most significant thing she does is to effect Kumar's release from gaol, insisting on hearing the full examination by Rowan and Gopal. The account of the Bibighar affair she hears in the prison confirms what she has already learnt from

Daphne's journal, and strengthens her resolve to end her association with a regime that has caused herself and other innocent people so much suffering:

But it isn't the best we should remember...We must remember the worst because the worst is the lives we lead, the best is only our history, and between our history and our lives there is this vast dark plain where the rapt and patient shepherds drive their invisible flocks in expectation of God's forgiveness.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.315)

Victims

The two most obvious victims of the Quartet are Hari Kumar and Daphne Manners, identified as such by Lady Manners as she watches Kumar weep for her niece in the Kandipat gaol:

She opened her eyes again. The twin rivulets gleamed on his prison cheeks, and then the image became blurred and she felt a corresponding wetness on her own - tears for Daphne that were also tears for him; for lovers who could never be described as star-crossed because they had had no stars.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.302)

Daphne describes in her journal how the black man-white girl relationship remained taboo, and how this put her and Hari outside the protection of the raj over the rape. In addition to being black, Hari's main problem is his complete loss of identity on arrival in India, a loss so complete that he becomes invisible even to his best friend. He is unable to speak the language, feels an Englishman's sense of disorientation at being suddenly immersed in an alien culture, but is unable, because of his colour, to take advantage of the few measures white people take to preserve their sense of identity. Scott's choice of name for Hari Kumar is very

important - 'hari' is Sanskrit for 'Vishnu', as in 'harijan', people of Vishnu, or untouchable; Scott therefore gives an inherent indication of Kumar's destiny, a social outcast in a foreign land: "his father had succeeded in making him nothing, nothing in the black town, nothing in the cantonment, nothing even in England because in England he was now no more than a memory."(The Jewel in the Crown, p.254)

The relationship between Hari and Daphne is evocative, if not symbolic, of the relationship between India and England, especially in the way it tries to cross the colour bar and is crushed underneath the weight of prejudice and discrimination. Hari's fading into obscurity at the end of the tetralogy is the only logical thing that could happen to him, living on the memories of an impossible dream that only ever really lived in the vitality of his father's illusion. The only identity he does possess in India is given to him as a prisoner, as Gopal observes, and what happens to him after his release proves that outside the walls of his confinement there is nothing at all.

Susan Layton is a victim from the other side, a victim of the "crumbling pillars of the edifice". Her life is wound about the very foundations that are collapsing, and she finds increasingly that she has nothing left to hold on to, lacking the inner strength

of her elder sister. Perron is struck by the thought that Susan, as a victim, was "ready-made", and is appalled at the idea of her impending marriage to Ronald Merrick. However, by this time the real damage has already been caused, and life for the younger Layton girl becomes more and more a naked question of survival. There is an echo of Hari's acknowledgement that he amounts to "nothing, nothing, nothing" in Susan's outburst to Sarah in the second novel: "You wouldn't understand. How could you? You're not like me. Whatever you do and wherever you go you'll always be yourself. But what am I? What am I? Why - there's nothing to me at all. Nothing. Nothing at all."(p.342) Susan begins to suffer because she loses the knack of hiding (from herself as well as others) what she really feels, and the raj has no time for that at all. The madness of her actions with the baby is a sublimation of her own desire for escape and freedom; through the fire of death and creation she longs for her baby to have a real chance of a meaningful existence somewhere else.

Ahmed Kasim is an example of a physical victim of partition, a horrible paradox when one remembers that Independence was supposed to solve the problems and calm the troubles, instead of acting like the opening of what Scott calls 'Pandora's Box'. The irony is that Ahmed has rejected political and religious

discrimination, and refuses to tempt providence through more than a platonic relationship with Sarah. He seems to suppress feelings of this kind, giving them release through the flight of his beautiful hawk, which he does not always flight at prey unless, as Scott suggests, "he himself were the prey". His Muslim background catches up with him, and he spills his blood in a pointless, symbolic dismemberment at the side of a railway-line - a symbol of disintegration alongside a symbol of progress illustrating the actual stagnancy of the supposed release of a continent. All that is left to mark the end of his life is "a bottle of whisky, perhaps, and a clove or two of garlic." (A Division of the Spoils, p.593)

If Scott complained that Forster's presentation of the raj was marred because it lacked the dimension of work, he certainly avoided a similar mistake in his own novels. Characters like Nigel Rowan and Sir George Malcolm are portrayed as efficient cogs in the machinery of the British Indian Administration, under whose terms their existence is defined. Rowan serves clearly a broader narrative function than this might suggest; his presence in The Raj Quartet shows, especially over his reasons for rejecting the prospect of marriage to Sarah, the difficulties encountered when trying to reconcile a life of administrative control with the normal spectrum of human emotional needs. This

problem is shown from the Indian side as well, primarily through the character of Mohammed Ali Kasim (MAK). He feels very strongly the conflicting pulls of conscience and family, but, encouraged by his wife, rejects the political overtures of the British and goes to gaol again for supposed adherence to views he does not really believe in. MAK's 'problem' is his inability to compromise his intelligence, his beliefs and his loyalties, all of which he places above the cynical political machinations of Anglo-India. The passage which describes the meeting of MAK with his eldest son, Sayed, is an interesting conflict of two loyalties. Sayed has been captured by the British fighting for the INA and believes passionately in the partition of India. His experiences have bred in him a cynicism that his father finds impossible to condone, but Sayed is insistent that the present state of affairs demands a different approach than was possible in the past:

'I have seen too much of life. It is no good relying on the British who themselves have no principles that can't be trimmed to suit them. In any case, they are finished. They are no longer of importance and will drag us down with them if we aren't careful. They are only interested in themselves and always have been.'

(A Division of the Spoils, p.432)

Although this is unacceptable to MAK, his sense of responsibility as a father and his love for his son

lead him to give Sayed the benefit of his legal skills to construct some form of defence for the forthcoming trial. This family loyalty, illustrated again by the attitude of MAK's wife to her husband's political stand, contrasts markedly with the petty deceitfulness of Mildred Layton over her sordid affair with Captain Coley. The mutual love and respect which binds the Kasim family together as a unit adds to the poignancy of Ahmed's sacrificial death; they emerge as one of the most admirable creations of the Quartet and a fitting place to end a discussion of Scott's characterization techniques.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INDIAN METAPHOR

"Novels, of course, are not written by prophets, nor for the purpose of prophesy, but deep penetration into the heart of a matter may well lead a later generation of readers to observe that something was once said and thought and portrayed that seems only just now to have entered human affairs in the form of a familiar circumstance,"

(1)

"It is necessary all the time to have the truth of things clearly in mind..."

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.113)

In his essay entitled 'India: A Post-Forsterian View', Paul Scott endorses Walter Allen's definition of the novel as "an extended metaphor for the novelist's personal view of life."⁽²⁾ This extravagant claim throws new and interesting light on Scott's own novels, confirmed by Scott himself with this statement from the same essay: "The India in the novels I write about India is used as a metaphor for mine...it helps me to express the fullness of what I'm thinking and feeling about the world I live in."⁽³⁾

Scott explains how his view of the philosophical emptiness of his society (outlined in the same essay) stems from the failure of a post-war Britain to realize its considerable potential, bringing about "a realization that in most cases the opposite of what had been worked for had been achieved, and in other cases, where a hope had been fulfilled, to a suspicion that the fulfilment revealed flaws in the arguments in favour of it."⁽⁴⁾ The particular examples cited by Scott as evidence for this condemnation of his society are the ending of the Europeanist ideal with the Berlin Wall, the collapse of world-citizenship into a proliferating nationalism, the end of colonialism in partition, and the death of liberal humanism giving rise to black tyranny and white backlash.

The peculiar aptitude of India for such an ambitious metaphor lies firstly in the physical factor of its size. Scott stresses repeatedly how "the sense of immensity...blankets the mind with an idea of scope so limitless that it is deadening. Here on the ground, nothing is likely, everything possible."(The Jewel in the Crown, p.208) Scott seizes on this connexion between India's size and the idea of uncertain potential, and establishes the narrative background as a vast panoramic canvas against which to set the character microcosms and the rich confusion of textures, colours and emotions that make up The Raj Quartet.

It is obvious from the essay I have already mentioned above that Scott feels his life to be surrounded by an atmosphere of disintegration and decay, an inexorable progress which undermines the inherent potential of his society. However, there is a real danger of over-simplification when trying to apply an author's claims about his work to the work itself. The actual working of the metaphor is subtle and sometimes difficult to identify, but is quite blatantly not a straight substitution of the disintegration of the British raj (into partition and chaos) for the failure of the good in society to materialize into long-term benefit and philosophical prosperity. The crumbling edifice described by Scott is much more like

the demolition of an old and unstable building to make way for a new and safer construction. The new building fails to materialize, and one is left to pick over the piles of rubble in a fruitless search for what was once promised, but now lies forgotten and buried in the chaos beneath one's feet.

When Scott returned to India in 1964, he was appalled to see that the necessary influx of European (mainly British) technical experts had led to a modern equivalent of the old raj sahib and memsahib mentality of insular and preclusive solidarity. The illusion of superiority was still self-propagating, and although the backcloth was cosmetically different, the essential situation was the same: "Indians and English just get on with their jobs, with more suspicion of each other than respect, and more respect than affection."(5)

Scott conveys this feeling in the Quartet by infusing it with a similar atmosphere of failure and missed opportunity. Miss Crane is the first fully developed point of character reference in the tetralogy, and, from the metaphorical point of view, the ending of her story takes on a far greater symbolic significance than is at first apparent. Left alone on the road, with only the dead body that was once Mr. Chaudhuri for company, she turns to walk away, apologizing aloud for the fact that there is nothing

she can do; but then she changes her mind:

A hundred yards past the car she stopped. 'But there is,' she said, and turned and walked back until she reached Mr. Chaudhuri's body. She sat down in the mud at the side of the road, close to him, reached out and took his hand.

'It's taken me a long time,' she said, meaning not only Mr. Chaudhuri. 'I'm sorry it was too late.'

(The Jewel in the Crown, p.69)

The old lady herself has an idea of the wider implications of her actions, and makes clear her awareness through the traditional gesture of friendship, goodwill and peace: the holding of hands. The one problem is that one of the hands is dead; the gesture has come "too late" and is as empty as the vast Indian plains, a symbol of the whole spectrum of wasted opportunity and squandered hopes of British India. It is characteristic of Merrick that he should interpret Miss Cranes's actions as another example of man-bap, but Barbie makes it plain to Sarah that, in her opinion, it was something quite different - despair, and a recognition, not a manifestation, of the illusion:

For a moment Sarah looked stricken by the bleak word as if it was the last one she had expected; but then she smiled briefly in recognition. 'Yes,' she said. 'That makes sense'.

(The Towers of Silence, p.276)

A similar feeling is engendered by the failure of Daphne and Hari's relationship to survive within the iron confines of Anglo-Indian society. The ironic and perhaps tragic aspect of the affair is how the very strength of their love for each other exacerbates the situation. Daphne makes Hari swear himself to silence for his own protection, and he holds to his word with such tenacity that his own position is made much more untenable, primarily through the inhuman persecution by Merrick. These first two narrative strands of the Quartet end in a similar confusion of unrealized potential and waste, and Scott pursues this theme as the tetralogy progresses. Susan and Teddie's marriage is devoid of reciprocal love; Sarah is callously seduced, made pregnant and is forced to have an abortion; Barbie is denied a proper place in the Layton family and is hounded to her death by Mildred; and Sarah again has the pain of a potentially fulfilling relationship twice snatched from her grasp, once with Nigel Rowan and again with Ahmed Kasim. However, the most powerful image of the cynical abuse and abnegation of human love and dignity comes with the description of Mildred Layton's affair with Kevin Coley, when they are caught by Barbie in a "human parody of divine creation":

It was not the stark revelation of the flesh that caused Barbie to gasp and cover her mouth for in her own body she guessed the

casual ugliness that might attach to a surrender to sensuality. What filled her with horror was the instantaneous impression of the absence of love and tenderness: the emotional inertia and mechanical pumping of the man, the cries coming from the woman who seemed driven by despair rather than longing, or even lust. It was as though the world outside the subterranean room was dying or extinct and the joyless coupling was a bitter hopeless expression of the will of the woman for the species to survive.

(The Towers of Silence, p.307/8)

This sense of sterility is paralleled by a complex thematic structure of illusion and obscured reality, both self-fostered and sub-conscious, which heralds the perpetuation of another of Scott's early themes, but in a more significant way. The idea of emptiness and illusion as soul-mates in Anglo-Indian society shows Scott's belief in the philosophical vacuum of his own. Once again, it is a theme introduced early in The Raj Quartet through the character of Miss Crane, although she emerges as out-of-the-ordinary for having thrown off the shackles of her illusion (a possible love-affair with an unavailable young man), recognizing it for what it is: "a mere illusion that never stood a chance of becoming real for me."(The Jewel in the Crown, p.17) The problem is that even when the illusions are recognized as such, there is nothing to fill the gap which they leave behind: "Now that I've banished the illusion from my thoughts I can see them for what they are, what they have always been, empty, starved, waiting to be filled."(p.17) The absence of an

alternative explains the way in which certain of the Quartet's characters cling to their illusions with an intense and jealous possessiveness, hard at first to understand. Susan Layton, for instance, is so successful at endowing her illusions with the aura of reality that she manages to deceive everybody but Sarah. As the exterior mask takes shape and hardens, the true substance of Susan's character diminishes until all she has left is the shell of her own creation. At the wedding, Sarah becomes aware of the inner battle Susan is fighting to fend off the threats to her illusory happiness, a battle fought with a single-minded determination:

...a tense, febrile assertion of her rights to her own illusion which Sarah, now that she understood, admired her for, loved her for, because she judged the amount of courage it took to close the eyes to the destructive counter-element of reality that entered any state of intended happiness.

(The Day of the Scorpion, p.183)

The shell acts as an armour against the corrosive effects of the Indian experience, but when it proves inadequate, the collapse is frighteningly complete. Susan's decline begins after the death of Teddie, who unconsciously assumed the role of one of the most important props in the structure of her illusion when he became her husband; the façade cracks and Susan is

terrified to discover that there is nothing left beneath. The nightmarish quality of her desperate cries that she amounts to nothing, and Sarah's frantic attempts at consolation, prefigure the final mental collapse - Susan's pathetic gesture with the circle of fire in an effort to free her baby from the confines of the society that has destroyed her image of herself. It is significant that Susan can begin to rebuild from the inside, under the guidance of Captain Samuels (the Jewish psychologist), only after the exterior mask has been completely destroyed; she is able, quite simply, to begin again.

If we accept India as the basic metaphor for post-war English society, as Scott invites us to do, the way in which the country itself seems to foster illusion is obviously very important. Sarah, for example, feels the pressure of the environment while standing with her mother and aunt near the lake at Mirat, gazing over the water, "letting that milky translucence work its illusion of detaching her from her familiar mooring in a world of shadow and floating her off into a sea of dangerous white-hot substance that was neither air nor water."(The Day of the Scorpion,p.158) The feeling is repeated on Ranpur station, as she recognizes how easy it is to misinterpret information monitored by the senses : "What you see is a trick, everything here is a trick."(p.465)

Sarah is the main character through whom we see how hard one has to fight to avoid being consumed by illusions and unreality.

A very important thematic obsession in all of Scott's novels is the relationship between a man and the work he does. This idea broadens in a typical way into an examination of the quest for an honourable place in the world and the search for a sphere of existence in which life can be justified, in the terms of the here-and-now, as a worthwhile experience. All the pre-Quartet novels investigate the claim that without work the vessel of life has no ballast, from Johnnie Sahib and the difficulties encountered by one officer in taking over the job of another, to The Corrida at San Felú and Thornhill's struggle with the literary work which leads him to an ambivalent death. This discussion of the work ethic combines with what Scott calls the "pertinence" of Anglo-India to present a metaphorical portrayal of his whole life philosophy:

...what, presumably, it is metaphorically used to do is to convey a view of the life we live nowadays as offering few rewards to the man, or woman, who feels he must do work of some positive value, not in the context of society as such - there are plenty of opportunities there - but in the context of the philosophy on which that society bases its aspirations.(6)

In The Raj Quartet, Ronald Merrick is the

important representative of those people who worked in India during the last years of British rule and who, in Scott's words, "felt in an old-fashioned sense that they were doing their jobs because the human soul and society needed it. They could almost feel that they were sacrificing themselves."(7) In the light of Scott's last sentence, it is interesting to reconsider the implications of Merrick's death and Bronowsky's interpretation of his psychological state. Bronowsky believes that this amounts to a death wish in the hope that his sacrifice would elicit some sort of splendidly spectacular vengeance, but instead the truth is suppressed and the story of a riding accident perpetuated.

Merrick immerses himself in his work, first as a policeman and then as an army officer, to try to re-establish a situation which belongs to the past - the physical and psychological suppression of the native Indian to the status of a medium for the expression of white dominance (as revealed in the description of Kumar's treatment at the hands of Merrick while in Kandipat gaol). The fact that he is fighting against the tide of history, encountering opposition from his own side of the 'line', feeds his already considerable fund of contempt which he expresses for everything he sees

around him. Merrick's later obsession with the I.N.A. is another example of his efforts to impose the conditions of 'the situation', but this fails because of the political complexity of post-war India and the consequent elevation of the I.N.A. cases to the temporary position of heroes of convenience. Scott therefore manages to show the unexpected failure of the work ethic even when it is exploited in an evil and retrogressive way; it still fails to provide Merrick with adequate rewards in the terms of a philosophical perception of his society.

Another character who seeks justification for the terms of her existence in India through the sphere of work is, once again, Miss Crane. Although her circumstances are very different to those of Merrick, the psychological dissatisfaction is very similar. She is aware that her presence in India and the position she holds in Anglo-Indian society can only be justified if she remains "conscious of a duty to promote the cause of human dignity and happiness", and this she endeavours to do. The dream ends in violent disillusion with her confrontation on the road from Dibrapur, and drives her to the symbolic creation of a funeral pyre for the twin deaths of the country she thought she knew and the scale of

values against which she measured the terms of her own existence. The fact that she considered herself married to both of these things explains the bizarre suttee-like nature of her death in the traditional manner of the Indian widow.

If Miss Crane provides the most extreme example of dissatisfaction, the feeling is shared by many other characters. Barbie Batchelor, for instance, feels stricken with doubt over whether or not, in the years of working for the mission, she managed actually to bring any children to God, or if the time and effort of her life were wasted. Sarah feels a burning desire to be more useful, but her plans to move away from Pankot and the family, to move closer to the war-effort, are frustrated by events beyond her control: the death of a brother-in-law, or the birth of a child. Leonard Purvis is driven to suicide by the army's refusal to make use of his intellectual potential; and Perron absorbs some of this frustration, indulging in an excess of alcohol when placed under the jurisdiction of Ronald Merrick. Even the political administrators of Anglo-India are limited by the promise of Indian Independence; although it is the end to which they have been working, after the event, apart from a brief handing-over period, there will no longer be a career for them. When Scott describes how Colonel Grace is running courses for

officers who are thinking of staying on, it is to point out how he runs against the tide of inevitability rather than to illustrate any sensible preparations for the future. Another irony is that those who despise the attitude of people like Merrick, "the people who felt that to have such a colony and such power was morally wrong", are unable to work for anything positive either. As Scott says, "when the great liberal drive came to an end, there was a kind of moral vacuum" (8). They work to bring about an end to the state of affairs in which they can justify their own existence; although an understanding of the sweep of history is morally better than blindness, the results in terms of India are distressingly similar.

Scott sees his essentially negative philosophy as potentially dangerous for a society if adopted by all its members, but as he points out in the essay published by the Royal Society of Literature, those who choose not to accept it have nothing more tangible to put in its place. The old-fashioned attitudes of the liberal progressive and the illiberal reactionary, belonging to a previous age of colonial expansionism, still hang over the new society and blur the focus of "where we stand in relation to any given problem":

This ought, perhaps, to be encouraging. It

suggests that a problem is seen now, by a greater number, as arising out of the complexity rather than the simplicity of human affairs. Faced by that complexity we begin at last to ask ourselves of what human beings are really capable. The dark ages, when man feared God, are over; and so at last is the Renaissance, when men emulated God. No longer believing in God, except as a kind of spare time relief worker who can be co-opted, at moments of acute stress, along with other splendid volunteers - no longer believing there is a God to fear or a God to emulate, we're up against the apparent rock-terminus of defining what, in heaven's name, we are.

(9)

Religion and the whole question of the existence of God is an important part of the philosophical structure of The Raj Quartet. It comes as no surprise that Sarah Layton is one of the first characters seriously to consider the validity of this particular sociological and psychological support, moving away from most of the other members of her society who accept the tenets of Christianity mindlessly, in a spirit of self-anaesthetization against the pain of disillusion. Sarah fights a constant battle to keep her individuality alive beneath the pressing weight of convention and expectation, but it receives most of its free expression in the form of internalized meditation. Stimulated by Merrick's confessional monologue from his hospital bed, she drifts into thoughts of her own which tarnish further the brilliance of the Indian reflection:

'There are times,' Sarah said, 'when I don't know what a human being is.' Times - she told herself - when I look up and see that heaven is empty and that this is an age when all of us share the knowledge that it is and that there has never been a god nor any man made in that image. It is an intensely bleak discovery because it calls our bluff on everything.

(The Day of the Scorpion ,p.222)

The 'everything' in Sarah's mind must include the whole theoretical concept of colonialism. Any qualms of conscience which were raised by the economic exploitation of newly-discovered lands were quieted by the panacea of the crusade for the spiritual and moral improvement of the native. If this reasoning is annulled suddenly by a negation of the Christian religion, when far too late to heal the wounds of imperialism, the justification for what appears now as a whole catalogue of crimes against humanity disappears with it. Although the material 'benefits' of western culture remain, the snowballing problems of the modern world (symbolized in the Quartet by the Hiroshima bomb) raise the idea, for what is really the first time, that perhaps the original status quo of the colonies was more valid in ethical terms, and was certainly of more practical use to the country in which it originated. Scott uses the Indian parallel to reflect back on post-war Britain and the impossible task of suddenly having to justify, in purely secular terms, over a thousand years of cultural and philosophical heritage.

This theme is pursued in the text through Barbie Batchelor's growing despair about her relationship with God, and the terrible suspicion that He may have deserted her, thereby abnegating the accumulation of a life-time's work in India. She prays with a weary persistence and a resignation born of long-felt disappointment:

She prayed for longer than usual, hoping for a revival of that lost sense of contact. But it did not revive. She could feel the prayers falling flat, little rejects from a devotional machine she had once worked to perfection. The prayers hardened in the upper air, once so warm, now so frosty, and tinkled down. But she pressed on, head bowed in the hailstorm.

(The Towers of Silence, p.31)

However, the most explicit and pessimistic renunciation of God is voiced by Miss Crane, significantly one of the most religiously committed characters in the tetralogy. Her expression of disillusionment parallels the personal acquaintance she has with the failure of the work ethic. The statement in question comes from Miss Crane's suicide note, and, as Merrick tells Barbie, convinced the inquest of her insanity. Barbie's reaction is of great importance to the overall thematic scheme of the narrative:

"There is no God. Not even on the road from Dibrapur."

An invisible lightning struck the verandah. The purity of its colourless fire etched shadows on his face. The cross glowed on her breast and then seemed to burn out.

"Not even on the road from Dibrapur?"

He nodded.

For a moment she felt herself drawn to him. He offered recompense. He looked desolated as if Edwina's discovery were a knowledge he had been born with and could not bear because he had been born as well with a tribal memory of a time when God leaned. His weight upon the world. He needed consolation.

She became agitated. She felt for the gold chain and found it but it seemed weightless.

(p.386)

Scott's description of Barbie's response is full of a rich symbolism which contributes to the bleakness of the ending to The Towers of Silence. The knowledge of Miss Crane's discovery has the profound effect of dismantling the bonds which hold the disparate strands of Barbie's life together, a process symbolized with the image of a broken trunk and the scattering of a life-time's relics over the deserted Club Road in the rain.

Although Scott makes it clear that, in his opinion, religion has failed, especially with reference to Anglo-India at the time of Independence, he illustrates the continued survival of the Church of England in India with a sustained sense of irony. The exterior manifestation of form is prevalent, but as empty as the Indian sky and as barren as the plain, a hollow offering to the perpetual demands of social duty and convention.

The Raj Quartet ends in disintegration, prefigured by the article entitled 'Pandora's Box' which Perron discovers in the Ranpur Gazette. The pressure of the raj on India has kept the lid of the box tightly shut, but the evils, which are present in any society, have "not died of asphyxiation, but multiplied". Scott highlights the disintegration with a series of contrasts. The hideous demonstration of racial hatred (one of the more obvious 'evils') which claims Ahmed's life is enhanced by an earlier and poignant image of a Muslim child and a Hindu child watching together Sarah and Colonel Layton's picnic through friendly and inquisitive childhood eyes. This innocence is destroyed by the scramble which surrounds partition, and dissolves into inevitable bloodshed. The description of Ahmed with his hawk is an image of control and perfection, and contrasts vividly with the chaos which surrounds the last few pages of the tetralogy; however, the hawk has sharp talons and a wicked beak, which demand expert handling and patient care if they are not to pose a threat; we are not allowed to forget the dreadful potential for harm which seems always to lie just beneath the surface in India.

For Scott's ambitious metaphor to work at all, he has to work very hard at creating the illusion of life in the pages of his work. The Quartet hums with a multiplicity of characters, classes, ordinary people,

destinies, hopes, roles, jobs, and most of the elements of the ordinary lives of unremarkable human beings. He does not often over-simplify the moral questions which he considers; there are 'good' whites (Lady Manners, Sarah, Daphne) as well as bad, and there are 'bad' blacks (the 'Red Shadow', the rioters, the rapists) as well as good. The balance is delicately maintained and the richness of the narrative is one of its most obvious attributes.

The Quartet fades to a close with the images of Philoctetes and Gaffur, and Hari's words take on the additional significance of metaphor themselves, extending beyond his own personal experience, outwards to the whole spectrum of the British in India, and Scott's metaphoric portrayal of life itself:

'I walk home, thinking of another place, of seemingly long endless summers and the shade of different kinds of trees, and then of winters when the branches of the trees were so bare, that recalling them now, it seems inconceivable to me that I looked at them and did not think of the summer just gone, and the spring soon to come, as illusions; as dreams, never fulfilled, never to be fulfilled.'

(A Division of the Spoils, pp.597/8)

Scott is conscious of having no answers to provide a positive alternative to fill the gaps left by his negation of established values. "Novelists don't know answers", he wrote, "they pose questions in an oblique way." (10)

CHAPTER SIX

STAYING ON - A LOGICAL CONCLUSION?

"She had a faraway look in her eyes as if looking back into places she'd walked in her long-ago shoes."

(Staying On, p.28)

Staying On is the last novel Paul Scott wrote before his death in 1978, and although it is similar in many structural ways to his previous work, it is quite strikingly different in effect from anything else he produced in twenty-five years of writing. The physical background of India, although modern day (1972), is the same, many of the techniques used by the novelist are the same, but the narrative is wound much more tightly around a smaller and more concentrated thematic core. One of the greatest differences between this novel and the earlier work is the presence of a highly developed sense of comedy; the tone of the narrative oscillates with controlled abandon between the two opposite extremes of comic (sometimes almost farcical) hilarity and a figurative landscape of such spiritual bleakness that it is practically unrivalled by any of the other desolate images in Paul Scott's fiction. Staying On is a novel of moods, of eccentric wit and cruelty, of love and selfishness, of neglect and despair; it stands as a postscript to the Indian theme and represents a final

and definitive embodiment of Scott's literary and philosophical credo.

The principal characters of the novel are Lucy and Tusker Smalley, who first appear in The Raj Quartet as people of little importance. The only thing which seems to distinguish Lucy as an individual from the other ladies of Pankot is her knowledge of shorthand which, although not quite pukka, is useful enough for her to gain election to innumerable committees where her willingness to please is exploited to the full. In Staying On, however, she and Tusker are gently placed centre stage as part of the periphery game Scott enjoys playing with his characters.

Before going any further, it is important to clarify the relationship between the Quartet and this final novel, because the cross-references are many if unobtrusive. The most interesting (although in many ways totally irrelevant) development comes in the form of a letter from Sarah, which belatedly ties up the open ends of the Layton story with the revelation of her own marriage to Guy Perron, Susan's third marriage to a doctor, and of the death of her parents. It is typical of Scott that he should let this information almost slip out through the backwaters of a different novel rather than provide a more conventional and concluding chapter to the previous work. This aspect of

his narrative technique is an essential part of the carefully engineered illusion of reality Scott succeeds in creating. There are other passing references to events which were described first in the Quartet: Lucy's only moment of glory amongst the assembled ranks of the memsahibs, for instance, when she identified the trouble with Sarah as a disinclination to take things seriously. Another example, and something which is commented on repeatedly in the earlier work, is the frequent sight of the Smalleys waiting for a lift at the end of any social function, as though they were of too little significance even to be acknowledged by a tonga-wallah. Lucy sheds some light on this little mystery on the last pages of Staying On:

'Tusker and I went everywhere by tonga in the old days. But I'm afraid he was really rather naughty because he used to pay the wallah off when we arrived, in the hope that we'd get a lift home in someone's staff car, either that or somehow the wallah misunderstood and didn't come back at the right time. I remember one party when we seemed to be absolutely stranded. Perhaps that was symbolic, Mr. Turner. I mean everyone else gone and just Tusker and me, peering out into the dark waiting for transport that never turned up.'

(pp.254/5)

Patrick Swinden is right to draw attention to the fact that the Laytons and the Smalleys still survive alongside each other in Staying On in a photograph taken at the Laytons' farewell party. He draws a

parallel between the two-dimensional photograph and the way in which the events of the Quartet are now seen, "flattened out, tidied up, and diminished...It was as if we were looking...through the wrong end of a telescope."(1)

Staying On begins in a similar way to the Quartet with a clear statement of a situation, the circumstances of which are to be examined in retrospect with a characteristic disregard for linear chronology. On the first page of The Jewel in the Crown we are told that "This is the story of a rape, of the events that led up to it and followed it and of the place in which it happened." The opening words of Staying On are equally to the point, and are delivered in a casual, almost conversational manner which sets the novel's tone, but contrasts rather grotesquely with the content of the statement:

When Tusker Smalley died of a massive coronary at approximately 9.30a.m. on the last Monday in April 1972 his wife Lucy was out, having her white hair blue-rinsed and set in the Seraglio Room on the ground floor of Pankot's new five-storey glass and concrete hotel, the Shiraz.

(p.5)

The next paragraphs develop this absurd image juxtaposition - Tusker lying dead in the garden of The Lodge, and Lucy having her hair done in the artificial

surrounds of the Shiraz hotel only a few yards away -
with a persistent and understated sense of humour:

If Tusker had been found at once, then, and a message sent across, Lucy would have had the news at just the moment any woman would subsequently have to think of as the most inconvenient at which to hear she had become a widow. At 9.30 she was going under the dryer.

(p.5)

The terrible irony of Scott's suggestion that Tusker's death should cause Lucy 'inconvenience' becomes clear only much later when the full implications of the event, and the sledgehammer blow it represents to her existence, are made explicit. Swinden (2) emphasizes this important narrative technique of bathing a desperately serious situation with an almost absurd degree of humour. A good example is the account of Tusker's first illness three months before his death. In a mild state of panic, and in the early hours of the morning, Lucy summons Ibrahim, their personal servant, from his bed where he is closely engaged with Minnie from Smith's Hotel next door:

'Coming, Memsahib!' he cried when he realized who it was. The overstatement of the week. Withdrawing, stifling Minnie's anticipated shriek of outrage with one hand, he hissed in her ear, 'Be quiet. Intruders.' Then covering Minnie with one blanket he wrapped another round himself, groped his way in the dark to the door and unbolted it. Memsahib's torch blinded him.

(pp.44/5)

This atmosphere of crazy unreality persists as Ibrahim has to rescue Tusker from his undignified perch on one of the twin thunderboxes in the bathroom before putting him to bed and keeping a protective and touching watch from the living-room.

The structural route to this flashback is staggered, and is achieved largely through an exploration of Ibrahim's memory. The illness is referred to for the first time in the terms of its importance in Ibrahim's knowledge of the English vernacular; the memory of Tusker's performance is still fresh in his mind:

'Bugger hospital,' Tusker had shouted. 'Come to that, bugger bed. Ibrahim'll look after me, so will Lucy if she can get her arse off the chair.'

One of the pleasures of working for Tusker Sahib was the further insight it gave him into the fascinating flexibility of the English language. Since his youth in Mirat, since his boyhood even, it had never failed to stun him with its elegance. Only those few months in Finsbury Park, London N, had caused him any disquiet. The language had sounded different there. But the place was stiff with Greeks.

(p.21)

The narrative then begins a preliminary revelation of the early recuperation period before a second, but this time detailed description of the initial attack, outlined above. The time-slip is achieved through a

narrative device used repeatedly by Scott in The Birds of Paradise - the use of an object and its associations with the past to provide a bridge across the gulf of time. In the earlier novel, the shape of Melba's cage and its similarity to the cage in Jundapur acts on William Conway's imagination to span a gap of thirty years; in Staying On, Scott uses Ibrahim's most treasured possession to effect the flashback: the tunic he inherited from his father and which he last wore while accompanying Tusker and Lucy to Ladies' Night at the Pankot Mess, on the eve of Tusker's attack. It is the interlude between this first attack and Tusker's death (three months later) which forms the major part of the narrative, embellished with occasional forays into the more distant past, mainly through the eyes of Lucy. This retrogressive exploration of a previously established situation is a process with which we are already familiar, found before the Quartet in novels such as The Corrida at San Felú, The Chinese Love Pavilion and The Birds of Paradise. The emphasis remains on the close relationship of the past and the present, or in Swinden's words, how "the present activity of the novel subsists precariously on the shifting detritus of the past."(3)

Scott enriches this basic narrative form of Staying On with certain thematic and structural ideas which have also occurred earlier in his fiction. In

fact, throughout this last novel, Scott seems to be reminding the reader constantly of the themes that he has been working on before, sometimes ushered in beneath a repetition of a visual technique or a subsidiary theme. For instance, sound is a very important medium for Scott, especially as a catalyst to the reconstruction of memories and past moods. When Lucy pays a visit to the little local churchyard, she hears the unmistakable sound of the coppersmith bird, the same sound Sarah Layton heard years before on the day of her father's return to Pankot. As Lucy listens to the bird "beating out its endless saucepans in the smithy of the great pine-clad hills", another sound intrudes on her ear, the 'snick-snick' of Joseph's shears, which whisks her back across the years to the time of her father and her childhood in England:

How strange, Mr. Turner. What is that sound? It's not the coppersmith. It reminds me of Saturdays in the summer at home, the sound that father made, cutting the hedge to the accompaniment of that other sound, click-cluck, which was the sound the twins made playing cricket on the vicarage lawn with their sleeves rolled up and smelling odd when you got close to them with the tray of lemonade mother made me squeeze and strain and take out to them...I used to sit...listening to father clipping the hedges on Saturday afternoon which was when he practised his sermon. Snick-snick. Then click-cluck, the sound of the boys playing cricket and mother's voice egging them on. She kept wicket. She had very large hands...Snick-Snick

(pp.114/5)

This is closely allied to the musical cadences which emerged in the analysis of narrative technique in The Raj Quartet. Scott brings the musical theme into his last novel, most notably the use of musical notation to highlight the comedy of certain scenes. During the first church service taken by Father Sebastian, for instance, Scott describes Susy Williams' enthusiasm for the hymn 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and the way "she tended to ignore the p and the cr and the f and play everything ff..." He gives the text of the penultimate verse, and in brackets by the side, to re-emphasize the vigour of Susy's playing, the ff sign again. This almost 'tongue-in-cheek' type of humour covers a lot of this last novel, and the music idea is repeated when Mr. Bhoolahoy racks his conscience inside the Pankot church (of which he is a stalwart member), accompanied by the sound of Joseph and his shears again. The noise begins "(pp)Snick-snick" graduates to "(p)Snick-snick" and culminates with "(cr)Snick-snick" which brings Mr Bhoolahoy out of the church in a panic (believing Lila his wife's gangs of demolition men to have arrived already to begin work on his beloved hotel) right into the arms of Lucy Smalley.

The presence of comedy in the work is important because it contrasts so vividly with the bleakness of the ending, and also helps with the problem of

re-examining important themes in a different way. In the Quartet, for example, the failure of the work ethic is examined with intense seriousness, showing how it can destroy peoples lives and leave them bereft of hope. Staying On deals with the same theme through the failure of Mr. Bhoolabhoy's efforts to continue his modest hotel business in the face of his wife's monstrous ambitions. Her utter domination of her husband is very funny, although from Mr. Bhoolabhoy's point-of-view, the humour hides something rather insidious, and something which is a very long way from comedy. Lila Bhoolabhoy is symbolic of a new kind of Indian, representative of cynical expansionism at the expense of tradition and human consideration, showing "no interest in any religion, in any kind of hereafter, only in the here and now and in how this might be arranged to her advantage".(p.25)

Religion is also important in Staying On, but the emphasis remains on the outward manifestations of faith (most importantly the church itself) rather than any philosophical considerations. The implication is that the meaning behind the ritual has lost its relevance; the important things are no longer the search for faith (as demonstrated by Barbie, for instance), but the mending of an organ or the colour of a face.

In a novel of such concentrated focus, the use of

changing perspective is an important narrative feature, and is used by Scott in Staying On with regular effectiveness. There are three main points of view in the novel: Lucy's, Mr. Bhoobhoy's and Ibrahim's. Perhaps surprisingly, Tusker's direct contribution is limited to one passage about the existence or otherwise of the mali, a reasonably long demonstration of the notes he persists in making in the margins of his library book, and the letter he writes to Lucy. However, despite this apparent reticence on Scott's part, Tusker remains the central character around whom, in narrative terms, the other characters revolve.

The crux of the novel is the relationship between Tusker and his wife, and more precisely how this effects and moulds Lucy's perception of her life. Lucy has lived through a stream of disappointments and disillusion, stemming from the time of her childhood when she was a victim of persecution at the hands of her twin brothers. With true British understatement, she acknowledges her disappointment after writing her letter to Sarah: "I have had rather a sad life, Lucy told herself... 'A life like a flower that has never really bloomed, but how many do?'" (p.82) But a more precise evaluation of her history and Tusker's effect on it comes in the long scene when Lucy demands a clear statement of what is to happen to her should Tusker die and leave her "alone and weeping amid the alien corn."

She seizes on the time, years before, when Tusker denied her the chance to appear in the local dramatic society's production - always a secret ambition - as indicative "of the way you have always deprived me, yes, deprived me, of the fullness of my life in order to support the smallness of your own."(p.106)

The sense of life's failure to fulfil its promise begins as early as Lucy's wedding-day, when the future of a life in India as the wife of a British Army Officer lay stretched before her with a sense of limitless potential: she remembers being a little embarrassed by her office-friends, and explains her feelings to the imagined projection of Mr.Turner, the young Englishman soon to visit Pankot:

And then Mr.Turner, they were disappointed because I think they'd expected Tusker to be in uniform, even though none of us had ever seen him in uniform, except in a photograph he gave me and which I showed them. I think they expected the two of us to come out of the church with all his fellow officers standing making a little roof of crossed swords over our heads. For all I know they might have expected to meet a Maharajah too, with pearls looped round his neck and the Star of India in his turban. And oh, I suppose in a way that is how I'd imagined it too.

(p.162)

The 'Mr.Turner' game is part of what Lucy calls her "tendency to imagine, to fantasize, to project" (p.162), and is a further manifestation of

her loneliness; the long, imaginary conversations vary the monotony of Lucy's day. Another fantasy is the erotic picture of Toole (the thick-set chauffeur employed by her Uncle Percy) which Lucy carries around in her head, encouraged by Tusker's lack of imagination as a lover. This dreamy side to Lucy's life is endorsed by her love of the New Electric Cinema and the illusory world of Hollywood films. She periodically assumes the characters of her favourite film-stars, and is frequently observed by Ibrahim, when she believes herself to be alone, doing her Bette Davis impersonation, "strutting up and down, arms folded, wagging her old bottom, muttering in that unmistakable voice."(p.35)

Although the emotional climate of Lucy and Tusker's relationship is one of petty irritability, highlighted by occasional minor explosions, the sun does still shine, albeit weakly, from time to time. Tusker pauses on their way back from church on Easter Sunday from his stomping walk to allow Lucy to catch up "so that they could cross the road safely together", and there is also the oasis of a day on Tusker's birthday. However, from Lucy's point of view, the climax is the letter she persuades Tusker to write, containing the financial details she requires but representing much more than that - "the only love

letter she had had in all the years she had lived."(p.233) The trouble is that it is not a love letter in the usual sense; it is devoid of passion and proceeds with dry, unemotional, inhibited embarrassment. At the end of the letter, the reader is suddenly aware that this is as far as Tusker has ever got in the life of his emotions. It is a dreadful comment on the failure of human relationship, just as the stopping to cross the road is pathetic in this respect. It falls so far short of what it should be. When compared to the usual level of communication between Tusker and herself, the words seem to sing to Lucy and make her almost girlishly excited. It is ironic that Tusker's death comes almost immediately after the only emotional boost the relationship has received for a very long time, no matter how over-due and inadequate it might be.

As demonstrated above in the example of Lucy's "Bette Davis bit", Ibrahim acts frequently as a window through which we observe the action of the novel, taking advantage of his position as household servant to watch without being seen:

Just as he was about to leave the bungalow to work out how much percentage it would be reasonable to claim for himself before handing the balance to Joseph he heard the gramophone start up. He peeped in. Mem sahib was backing gracefully away from the machine, gently turning and twisting her body, her

arms round an invisible partner, balanced a little precariously on the soles of her long-ago shoes.

'Oh how my heart has wings.'

(p.73)

Ibrahim provides Scott with the opportunity to show an interpretation of the Indian psyche in a humorous but sensitive way. The linguistic mistakes he makes are an obvious source of comedy ("You reeker!" as his idea of Tusker's Greek exclamation, for instance), along with the open admiration he has for all the old style raj qualities he observes in his master and mistress; the majestic way in which Tusker gets drunk, for example, and the way he begins to fall physically apart in a manner typical of the English, "with all their customary attention to detail, as if fitting themselves in advance for their own corpses to make sure they were going to be comfortable in them."(p.29) Ibrahim enjoys an old-style privilege with Tusker and Lucy, being entitled to his moods and opinions, though he sometimes goes dangerously close to the edge:

'Mecca,' Ibrahim said, letting his shoulders droop as if exhausted by the very thought of such a journey. 'Muslim old people's excursion. Twilight coach trip. Depart Harringay 0800, with packed lunch of curry puffs and crates of Watney's Pale. Sing-song all the way to Southend and back and Kiss Me Sailor hat. What is Sahib taking me for? Day-tripping bugger-fellow?'

(p.37)

Ibrahim is also a self-appointed English language expert, well-versed in the idiosyncratic ways and customs of the English; he delivers lectures to Joseph about what to expect from close contact with these two museum relics from the raj, especially over the question of being "given push":

'If it is a day when the Sahib does not know what time of day it is, he may say, Ibrahim, bugger-off, let me see no more of you. You are sacked, fired, given push. So I shrug, I say, "If God so wills." Then I wait for Memsahib to return. I say, Memsahib, I am leaving. It is Sahib's hukm. So she goes to him and says, "Tusker, how can we manage without Ibrahim?" To her also he says bugger-off.'

'What is this buggeroff?'

'It is a very old English phrase meaning jeldi jao. Like-wise piss-off. These are sacred phrases, Joseph, never to be used by you or me when speaking to Sahib-log but I will teach you some of them.'

(p.64)

Ibrahim, along with Mr. Bhoolahoy, is the main source of humour in Staying On, but he is in no way diminished, or made an object of ridicule. He has a highly developed sense of dignity, and the image of his huddled body by the dying embers of the fire the night after Tusker's death is a source of solace to Lucy in her rediscovered and terrible loneliness.

The close relationship between Mr. Bhoolahoy and Tusker stems from the fact that the genteel Indian is Tusker's drinking companion and confidant, to whom

Tusker tells the most outrageous stories and whose company helps to relieve the tedium of a trivial and irascible existence. These evening interludes are also an escape for Mr. Bhoolabhoy; an escape from the domination of his enormous wife and her bullying of him with an insidious mixture of sex and verbal chastisement as he goes about his business of running Smith's Hotel. Lila Bhoolabhoy's involvement with the Shiraz consortium of businessmen leads eventually to the selling of the hotel behind her husband's back, a move which means the end of the Smalleys' lease in The Lodge, and an insufferable burden of embarrassment for poor Mr. Bhoolabhoy. Lila blackmails him over his unlikely adultery with Hot Chichanya and the illicit delights of double-lotus, and forces him to write the letter to Colonel Smalley which brings about Tusker's final heart-attack and death; a high price for Mr. Bhoolabhoy to pay.

The flashback of the narrative catches up with the present (the day of Tusker's death) in the penultimate chapter of the novel. Scott uses the extreme device of an exact repeat of dialogue first presented over two hundred pages earlier to bring the reader back to a structural awareness of the time-scale. The realization that Tusker's death is very close highlights the poignancy of Tusker's letter to Lucy, where he tries so hard and so unsuccessfully to express his emotions.

While she is under the dryer in the Seraglio Room, Lucy's memories of the letter spark off a barrage of questions which she knows will never receive an answer and which should not really be asked at all; questions that spring from the half-answers Tusker has given her:

How will you remember me? What is your image of me? Does it amount to anything at all? You say I have been a good woman to you. But what does that mean? What does Luce mean? Is it an endearment? Or just shorthand? I'm sorry. I mustn't ask silly questions any more. The years of asking questions are over. You have written me a love letter and I kept it under my pillow all night long.

All night long.

(p.246)

Tusker's death, when it comes, leaves Lucy in a state of utter and complete isolation, and in a position of severe poverty. Money is important in this novel, especially the questions of greed, misuse and corruption. Scott makes an interesting point by showing Ibrahim's corruption which, from a moral point of view, is no different from that of Mrs. Bhoolahoy, although he causes no harm, of course, whereas she is responsible for the death of Tusker and the wretchedness of her husband. Tusker's own misappropriation of his army money shows a selfishness in his character which contributes, no matter how much he tries to compensate, to the final bleakness of Lucy's position. Lucy's realization that her worst

fears have been fulfilled elicits another passage of further questions - questions which complete a picture of understated despair, and which hover in the air over the empty horizons of Scott's last survivor:

But when we went to parties, Tusker, just before we went in, you always took my arm. You helped me down from tongas and into tongas. Waiting on other people's verandahs for tongas, then, too, you took my arm, and in that way we waited. Arm in arm. Arm in arm. Throne by throne. What, now, Tusker? Urn by urn?

It's all right, Tusker. I really am not going to cry. I have a performance to get through tomorrow. And another performance to get through on Wednesday. And on Thursday.

All I'm asking, Tusker, is did you mean it when you said I'd been a good woman to you? And if so, why did you leave me? Why did you leave me here? I am frightened to be alone, Tusker, although I know it is wrong and weak to be frightened -

-but now, until the end, I shall be alone, whatever I am doing, here as I feared, amid the alien corn, waking, sleeping, alone for ever and ever and I cannot bear it but mustn't cry and must get over it but don't for the moment see how, so with my eyes shut, Tusker, I hold out my hand, and beg you, Tusker, beg, beg you to take it and take me with you. How can you not, Tusker? Oh, Tusker, Tusker, Tusker, how can you make me stay here by myself while you yourself go home?

(p.255)

The bleakness of the ending to The Raj Quartet, and of many of its other dark images, is echoed in the above quotation and by the concluding tenor of this last novel. The great difference is that of scale: the massacre of hundreds of Muslim Indians on a train has become the body of one old man lying in a bed of canna

lilies; the image of an old woman holding the hand and crying over the body of a dead Indian is mirrored by an old man's tears as he sits on the lavatory, unable because of his pride to mention the question of the new mali to a friend; and instead of the broad dilemma of an entire society of ruling-class Anglo-Indians with suddenly no-one and nowhere to rule, we are given the picture of one old lady left completely alone, the last example of "the usual load of old rubbish from yesterday's leftovers."(p.77) Scott appears to be pulling together the complex network of exploratory themes and ideas that forms his interpretation of the British in India, and through them, an interpretation of his world, into a simple, comic and deeply sad final novel. The overall view of history that emerges is tragic, an analysis of the inevitable vacuum of unfulfilment. Staying On is full of broken dreams; progress is seen as ugly, at the expense of beauty, blocking out the sun and casting a long, dark shadow over the lives of those people who live (and die) with it. The underlying pessimism of Scott's beliefs emerges from beneath the wit and the humour. "We must remember the worst," says Lady Manners in The Day of the Scorpion, "because the worst is the lives we lead, the best is only our history." Scott seeks to explore the "vast dark plain" which he discovered between our history and our lives "where the rapt and patient shepherds drive their invisible flocks in expectation

of God's forgiveness." (The Day of the Scorpion, p.315)

When accepting the Booker Prize for Staying On, Scott made the following announcement: "I have finished with India for ever. It just needed some little valedictory thing." A few months later, Paul Scott died, almost as though, with the conclusion of his literary quest, there was nothing else to add.

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