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## Tapestry With Images: Paul Scott's Raj Novels

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

### **Tapestry With Images: Paul Scott's Raj Novels**

*Eva Brann*

*The Raj Quartet*, by Paul Scott: volume 1, *The Jewel in the Crown*, 462 pp., \$16.00; volume 2, *The Day of the Scorpion*, 484 pp., \$17.00;

volume 3, *The Towers of Silence*, 392 pp., \$16.00; volume 4, *A Division of the Spoils*, 599 pp., \$18.00. *Staying On*, by Paul Scott; 216 pp., \$15.00. University of Chicago Press, 1998.

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It is the shame of contemporary publishing that the best of books are allowed to go out of print and its redemption that some brave press eventually brings them back. Paul Scott's Raj novels have been practically unobtainable for many years, but in 1998, just twenty years after his death, the University of Chicago Press has reissued them in a text that seems identical with the handsomely bound William Morrow edition of 1978.

*Raj*, cognate with German *Reich*, is Hindi for "rule," *imperium*. It refers to the British colonial rule over India, its imperial institutions, its resident English society, and its subject population. Scott's Raj books are certainly about British India, and yet it seems inadequate to call them political or historical novels, for in them things happen in the way real life gets itself lived—from the inside out. Souls precede society.

It is nevertheless appropriate that each of the four hefty paperbacks of the Chicago edition has wrapped around it a detail from R. D. Mackenzie's genre painting celebrating in an imaginary Indian setting **[End Page 181]** the proclamation of Edward VII as Emperor of India. Inside the series a similar picture, entitled "The Jewel in Her Crown," plays an emblematic role. It depicts Queen Victoria, Edward's mother, enthroned and attended by representative Indian figures, as Disraeli displays a map of India, having just persuaded the queen to accept the title "Empress of India." The year is 1877, nearly twenty years after the rule of India had passed from the East India Company to the British Crown, following the great Sepoy Mutiny. In this imaginary picture an Indian prince is offering the old queen a fine gem, but the jewel of the title is meant to be India herself.

Here are the novels that constitute the *Raj Quartet*: *The Jewel in the*

*Crown* (1966) recounts an interracial love affair between Daphne Manners and Hari Kumar, and the repercussions of the rape of Daphne in the Bibighar Gardens in Mayapore on August 9, 1942. It is a moment when the Raj feels once again threatened by the disturbances consequent on Gandhi's "Quit India" campaign. Hari is framed, arrested, and interrogated by a personage who will haunt the *Quartet*, District Superintendent of Police Ronald Merrick. The "imperial embrace" in which Britain and India are locked has become personal.

*The Day of the Scorpion* (1968) is named after the feared arachnid that hides in British boots and is popularly thought to sting itself to death when surrounded by fire; in fact it merely arches back on itself from desiccation. In this novel an old Raj family comes newly on the scene, the Laytons of Pankot, an imaginary hill station. Now an army captain, Merrick, a self-made man of the lower middle class, begins to insinuate himself subtly and fatally into this family. We learn in a searing session with the incarcerated Hari what they do not know, that Merrick has tortured and molested him. Susan, the younger Layton sister, driven by a sense of her own nothingness, marries one Teddie Bingham, a colorless and conventional officer in the prestigious Pankot Rifles. Merrick, though he loses an eye and a hand in trying, unsuccessfully, to save Teddie's life, is indirectly the cause of Teddie's death in the jungle. Sarah Layton, the older sister, comes to the fore as the morally fine-tuned mainstay of the family.

*The Towers of Silence* (1971) takes its name from the Parsee towers where the bodies of the dead are left to be picked clean by vultures. Kipling vividly remembered such places of dreadful purification near his childhood house in Bombay. These towers, however, are in Ranpur, where Barbie Batchelor is confined to a sanatorium...



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