Paul Scott (1920-78) may be best known as the author of the quartet of novels that gave us the Granada television series *The Jewel in the Crown*, broadcast in 1984. As these two expertly edited collections of his letters show, Scott proves to be a writer of great sensitivity and subtlety, one who strained for accuracy in his fictional depiction of the final days of the British Raj. For this reason alone, he deserves wider recognition for his craft. The letters continually illuminate details of his work as a novelist, his self-conscious and perceptive evaluations of his and others’ work, and the experiences that shaped his fiction.

It’s revealing to read in a 1953 letter to literary critic Oliver Stoner, for example, that Scott sees his fiction to be chiefly concerned with how ‘men & women ... are increasingly aware of the absence of roots, increasingly aware that whatever “place” they’ve made for themselves is artificial’ (Vol. 1, 89). I take this to mean, in his view (which I find compelling), that his own Anglo-Indian characters struggle with the sorts of bewildering changes in their sense of location that all modern individuals must face.

As a literary agent and editor, Scott worked with many writers, including Graham Greene, M. M. Kaye, Arthur C. Clarke, and Muriel Spark, and his letters concerning them and Britain’s fictional output in the post-war years are richly revealing. As editor Janis Haswell observes in one of her several informative introductions throughout these volumes, ‘As an agent, Scott was above all a reader who was particularly skilled in recognizing a publishable book and also in diagnosing what would be required, in terms of revision’ (Vol. 1, 60). Scott’s unique (for a writer) insight into the broad canvas of editorial work in the 1950s through 1970s, alongside his own struggles to make his own mark on this canvas, reminds us of the contingencies – personal and social, economic and political – that influence the production of art.

Haswell’s thorough introductions, in conjunction with Scott’s own letters, point to certain experiences that appear to have deeply informed Scott’s life and fiction. These include his ambivalence regarding sexuality (though gay, he married and had two daughters), his visits to India, and his friendships, both in Europe and India. Late in life, for instance, he states, ‘I cannot change my nature, or demonstrate affection’ (Vol. 1, 322), a poignant confession in an intolerant era. (An unspecified demotion in rank while in army service, at the age of 20, hints at a sexual crisis.) Just how this shaped his writing is debatable, but his sensitive portrayals of both men and women in *The Raj Quartet* may owe something to his sexual awareness. His own demotion, too, may have helped open his eyes to the injustices of British rule in India. He detests, for example, the English couple he meets in Bombay, at ‘Luhu’ (presumably Juhu) Beach, who are there for ‘commercial’ reasons and whose crass racism and ‘icy’ airs ‘made my blood boil’ (Vol. 1, 314).

India naturally takes centre stage after Scott revisits the subcontinent at this time (1964) and in subsequent years to understand the country he was writing about. In the process, as his letters show, he found that India had, despite his initial hesitancy, become a familiar friend.

Readers of this journal will wonder about the ultimate standing of Scott’s literary output. He wrote in a period that has since been termed, at least in relation to the British,
‘imperial nostalgia’, which M. M. Kaye’s novels reflect, for example. The contrast of this attitude to that of Indian writers, such as R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao and, later, Salman Rushdie and Anita Desai, is stark, as innumerable postcolonial critiques have shown. Scott’s fiction, however, manages to avoid his peers’ predisposition to mourn the end of the Raj (even if the television version of his work sometimes slips into this tone). For this reason, his work will stand, and his literary reputation will continue to be well served by scholars like Haswell.

The only quibbles about these volumes concern the Subject Index, which could have been fleshed out to include, for instance, literary themes, historical events, and biographical topics that scholars would find especially helpful.

It has to be said that these letters are not artful, nor were they meant to be: Scott’s professional side doubtless informed his mostly functional epistles. The letters nonetheless offer us a valuable biographical window onto Scott’s work methods and ideas, as well as the everyday life of a postwar English writer. Those interested in Scott, and in postwar fiction more broadly, will find much to appreciate in Janis Haswell’s admirably annotated volumes.

Alan Johnson