

# THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

It is a nice irony that television should begin transmitting simultaneously two such different epic series, both based on novels about India, as *The Far Pavilions* and *The Jewel in the Crown*. But stranger than fiction is the fact that the same man, Paul Scott, made both series possible: as the author of the Raj Quartet, on which *Jewel* is based, and as the unseen mentor of M. M. Kaye, who admits that, without Scott's advice, she would 'still be struggling somewhere half-way through *The Far Pavilions*.'

The four novels in the Raj Quartet were published between 1966 and 1975 and altogether run to nearly two thousand pages in paperback. When this lovingly reconstructed edifice of British India was finished, a reviewer was tempted to compare it to a long train journey in India, with Scott frequently halting the train to discourse on everything from the Club to Gandhi. To read the entire Quartet is more like doing a very complicated jigsaw puzzle. Events do march towards their historical conclusion, but one absorbs them through a multiplicity of viewpoints (including that of an unseen 'researcher' figure) which flash back and forth in time, across a period from 1942 to the early 60s. Scott brilliantly adds perspective after perspec-

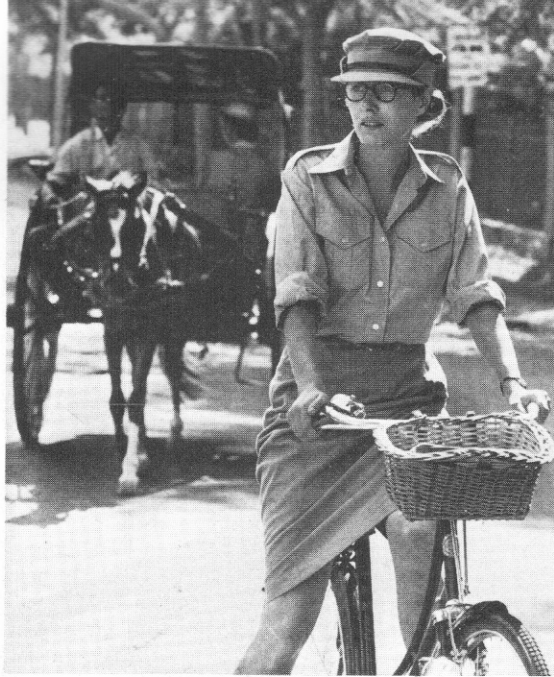
## ANDREW ROBINSON

tive on the same events seen through different attitudes, in a search for truth which gives the Quartet its many tones of voice. One confidently trusts that all the information will eventually fall into place, interlocking to make the complete picture. Scott does not disappoint one—he keeps one enthralled—but nor does he give all the pieces one needs. One cannot define properly the magic of India that envelops his characters, any more than the reluctant memsahib Sarah Layton can come close to her own father on his return from prisoner-of-war camp in 1945: 'In India, yes, one could travel great distances. But the greatest distance was between people who were closely related.'

Scott's view of the twilight years of the Raj is panoramic, but it focuses on the reactions of the British in one part of Northern India to the rape of an English girl, Daphne Manners, in mid-1942, by an unknown group of Indians. To her compatriots, to varying degrees, she was suspect from the start, having conceived an affection for an Indian, Hari Kumar, who was entirely educated in English private schools and hates his own Indian roots: a love impossible to fulfil and

sustain under the pressures of the colonial relationship. The imposition of British rule on India, however theoretically justifiable in the minds of even the more liberal of the British, contained the seeds of its own destruction.

It is the gradual souring of the British belief in their own moral superiority which so fascinates Scott. According to Christopher Morahan, the producer and one of the two joint-directors: 'The tension between those who thought they knew best and those who didn't want to be told what was best for them brought about the end of the Indian Empire.' In the view of Sir Denis Forman, Chairman of Granada Television and guiding spirit of the series, the British as colonial masters did not have the Latin American ability to relax and become part of a country, nor the Dutch and French capacity to remain tyrants. 'The British tried to find a way into a country through its fabric; it was a noble ideal but it was pathetic, because it could never succeed.' *Jewel's* other director, Jim O'Brien, identifies strong echoes of Empire in Britain today and adds that Scott's story is about 'flies caught in amber'. 'The struggle of his characters is their inability to cope with a changing world; that's the real drama. Scott didn't attempt to come to a



Susan Wooldridge as Daphne Manners.



Granada's transport in India.

conclusion; he realised how complex it was.'

Publication of the *Quartet* did not bring Scott, who died in 1978, the recognition he deserved. Part of the reason must be the peculiar demands made on the reader by his style. O'Brien comments: 'It was because he was working in a particularly confined area of storytelling. Also he wasn't a modernist at all.' Popularity came to Scott only in the last year of his life with the award of the Booker Prize to the *Quartet's* small epilogue, *Staying On*. 'Simply the most moving novel published in 1977,' according to the chairman of the Booker judges, Philip Larkin.

It was of course the success of *Staying On* for Granada as a television play, with Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard, which persuaded Forman that they should tackle the *Quartet*. 'The novel has tended to shrink, except in popular fiction, so that it was good to find one on a majestic scale.' He is quite willing to compare it to *War and Peace*: 'The interaction of the British Raj and Indian culture provided the same basic theme as the Napoleonic Wars and the idea of courage and cowardice in *War and Peace*... You may not care about the fate of India and Britain but you do care about the characters, as in *War and Peace*.' Forman, like Scott, saw military service in India, though after the end of the war. 'I felt I had a special relationship with the books and with Scott.'

Would the formidable bulk and literary style of the *Quartet* actually allow television adaptation? 'One of my concerns was whether it would be susceptible to continuous narrative without filleting it to the extent that it was no longer the book one knew and loved.' With the aid of sheets of wallpaper covered in events from the books, Forman broke the novels down, in parallel with Irene Shubik, the producer of *Staying On*. 'It was an exercise to ensure that before spending five million pounds, there was a reasonable chance of telling a story. I wasn't sure: I'd do exactly the same to *War and Peace*.'

It became fairly clear that an adaptation was feasible, but those involved in its execution are under no illusions about the demanding television they have produced, and the consequent risk of failure. The scriptwriter, Ken Taylor, to whom the breakdowns were passed, was constantly aware of Scott's shadow, but says: 'You can't be snooty about popularisation. The justification must largely be that you bring the book to numbers of people who wouldn't otherwise have read it.' Morahan, declaring his faith in Renoir's belief that everyone has his reasons, comments firmly: 'We're not going to tell people what to think. We've attempted to do justice to every character. But we are also trying to tell a story that could interest as many people as possible.'

O'Brien draws an interesting comparison with *Heat and Dust*. 'It is a much more beautiful film than ours. But it had a lot of sentiment. Our sentiment belongs to the period. What worried me about *Heat and Dust* was that you had two apparently conflicting ages, but they both had the same sentiment—there wasn't an abrasion, there was a nominal difference. Jhabvala wasn't really modern in the modern sequences—so that it didn't really work. Ivory's an archaeologist making films about things gone by—but I still love his movies.' Of *The Far Pavilions* he says with considerable feeling: 'I wish them well. But I think it is the point when I retire from the industry if I find that *Far Pavilions* does well and we do badly. I'll go back to ghetto theatre, if the conclusion is that *Far Pavilions* is a better story.'

The compression of the *Quartet* into 52-minute episodes suitable for television was in many ways the hardest task of the whole production. Taylor's scripts seemed right to Forman from the first reading. O'Brien comments that Taylor's solution was to concentrate on the 'characters rather than to reconstruct the novels. Taylor basically agrees: 'The two things that appeal to me are character and narrative. Scott's a marvellous storyteller. You read the characters and

you live with them. And he does this with people you would think would be very dull intrinsically. Isn't that a marvellous ability? During the war I met such girls in India and they were awfully boring—ghastly little memsahibs. In Scott, each one is an individual, they're all interesting.'

The reduction of an extraordinarily complex narrative to a roughly chronological progression was much more feasible than Taylor expected. 'Working on the books I became in awe of their structure. What is amazing is that he never slips up. I thought that when you take them apart and reconstruct them as a conventional chronology, then you'd be in trouble. Not one error! I didn't ever seriously doubt that we would have to restructure as a chronological narrative. I then realised that we would need flashbacks, voice-over which would preserve something of Scott's technique. The big gamble was whether we would keep the echoes of the rape going right through the story—so that although Daphne and Hari are gone, we'd never lose them. Scott has a resonance of counterpoint, and I just prayed that we could manage to find enough ways to keep that resonance going.'

When Taylor began work, Forman and Shubik had already agreed that Daphne Manners and Hari Kumar must be off the stage by the end of three episodes, 'otherwise there was a very serious danger of the audience not wishing to relinquish those characters.' At the outset Taylor was uncomfortably aware of how much would be left out in adaptation; during the writing, 'It was a desperate struggle. I wanted more elbow room all the time.' At an early stage it was clear to him that the usual 13-episode structure would have to be abandoned, but it was not known exactly how many there should be. Taylor eventually produced fourteen episodes, which expanded to fifteen on shooting. 'There's a speed at which scenes can be played. You can knock out the words but you can't knock out the space between the actions. There were a lot of very intense scenes.'



Sir Denis Forman, Christopher Morahan.



Shooting at Udaipur. Jim O'Brien in peaked cap.

Much of the dialogue was effortlessly transferred from the novels. Taylor himself recalls the slang and intonations of the time, both British and Indian, from his own experience there and from the tunes of those years running in his head while writing. 'Scott must have done it too. Perron sings "Do I worry?" in the bath as he observes the feet of Merrick's dreadful bearer visible under the door. "Do I worry?" he says, "You can bet your life I do," as he pulls open the door.'

Scott's story is played out against a political and historical canvas, highly integrated with the personal, and wider than the series can attempt to describe, but it has to show enough for the related behaviour of the characters to make sense. Lack of audience familiarity with the events of 1942-47 in India is sometimes a worry, and Taylor says: 'I just hope they will understand.' Some of this understanding will come from the use of newsreels throughout the series—from Pathé, the National Film Archive and the Imperial War Museum—'as a kind of punctuation,' to quote Morahan. 'It arose initially because one editor asked me what the Battle of Burma was about? What did Nehru do? We came towards archive footage naturally as a pithy and genuine narrative device, and then we discovered other potencies. We "discovered" the affinity with Scott's textual style. But the most important reason was to give the story a context to do with time: to relate what happens within the film, which is a representation of the past, to the past's view of itself.'

Forman, who saw such newsreels at the time, says that 'any intelligent person was insulted by the newsreels.' In making the series, some forty years later, he was really shocked by their patronising smugness: 'I felt it was a way of enlarging the feeling in the series. My instinct told me we've got to try it. The idea is not to chart events but to give the viewer a feeling of how the British saw the British during the war.' In one of Morahan's favourite lines a commentator announces proudly, over the grimy faces of Brits in Burma, 'There are plenty of coloured

boys out East who can lend a hand'—a view shared by some of Scott's characters. Morahan invokes 'a kind of Brechtian alienation process' in explanation: 'Perhaps, by looking at the newsreel and the story in juxtaposition, you're able to use your own mind. Don't lose yourself entirely in the story and believe that it is happening. Remember that the atmosphere in which it took place was the atmosphere in which the newsreels were written.' In this way, a long-forgotten ceremony in which King George pins a VC on a simple Gurkha soldier, gives a new dimension to the shifting perceptions of the traditional paternal relationship between officers and men in Scott's story.

In their search for potent images, the directors have discovered them both in the content of Scott's work and in its style. The *suttee*, or self-immolation, of the failed missionary Miss Crane in her blazing garden hut; the dancing Siva image that takes possession of Daphne Manners' imagination; the repeated brooding view of Hari Kumar behind bars; Daphne Manners returning after her death in childbirth; all these images try to reinforce Scott's rather bleak, uneasy view of the British in India, the pattern behind all the madness and brutality.

Before embarking on this series, Morahan had no personal interest in India, though family connections do exist. He has worked in television and theatre since the early 50s and was an associate director at the National Theatre at the time he read the *Quartet* and heard of Granada's interest in the idea. He started initial planning on the production in the summer of 1980, by which time the scripts were in progress. Interestingly, at that time, Granada were considering the series for video and film, 'as a solution to long distances and big crews,' to quote Forman. Morahan was not in favour. 'When I returned from India, I suggested that sensibly Granada shouldn't just go to India for the locations and do the interiors in the studio, they should take a leaf out of *Staying On* and conceive the

whole series as film.' Ray Goode, *Jewel's* lighting cameraman, also responsible for *Brideshead*, entirely agrees: 'Mixing video and film is not satisfactory—*Hard Times* was spoiled by this.'

O'Brien joined the project rather later than Morahan. His professional background is in relatively fringe theatre and in directing plays for television with a strong social comment. He had not met Morahan before. 'Some people consider us quite a remarkable combination—but not a love-match. We always operate on the basis of concern only for what we are doing. It's a relationship in which neither of us holds back. We learnt in the casting period, when we argued violently, and we took the extraordinary option of working on alternate episodes.' This was arranged before they agreed to work together. 'It seemed very important that we should force ourselves to rub up against each other as much as possible. I'd never want to work with actors I wouldn't have cast.' This has actually meant that Morahan has directed the even-numbered episodes and O'Brien the odd-numbered.

They edit their own episodes and then swap notes on each other's work. 'I think Christopher has given me more support, which is right. He is senior and he is the producer. I'm usually grateful for not having to worry about that.' Both directors agree in their respect for Forman, who has remained closely in touch with the project throughout, including viewing all the rushes in England while the team waited anxiously each day in India. Without his backing, O'Brien points out, 'Any company would have said forget it. He is profoundly fond of the work and has put in an awful lot of effort to make it possible.'

The planning of *Jewel* drew quite heavily on the experiences of *Staying On*: 'It found its way into the bloodstream of Granada,' according to Forman. 'The lessons were fairly primitive ones. Food: we had to take our own kitchen. Health: we had to take our own doctor. Don't shut people up in two hotels twenty miles apart. But the main lesson was that it was possible to take a big crew to India,



Wedding party; in the background the Lake Palace at Udaipur.

feed it and water it and get high quality film back.'

Morahan made three reconnaissance trips to India, with varying numbers of colleagues, before he was able to tell Granada what the series would cost: about £5½ million, 'more than Granada wanted.' Forman did not seriously consider co-production: 'If one wants freedom of action, one can't go around consulting other people. One has to be in sole command.' After the series was made, it was bought by Mobil for Public Broadcasting in the United States. The budget was not generous but in fact the team came back from the four months' shooting in India in May 1982 on time and slightly under budget.

One of the toughest problems had to be the analysis of suitable locations in India and the consequent decisions as to where to shoot: in India, or, bravely in some cases, in England with both exterior and studio sets. Scott's towns, basically in Northern India, are not immediately identifiable and Morahan tried to guess where they were, 'There was some similarity between Mayapore and Cawnpore. For Pankot, the closest hill-station is Naini Tal.' In the event, the locations used were in Udaipur, Mysore in the South, Simla and of course Kashmir. 'We wanted to find an India which hadn't been changed. Udaipur and Mysore were Princely States up to 1947; they weren't industrialised and much of the detail is largely unchanged. In Udaipur nothing quite fitted but we were inspired. It seemed to have a great deal of unchanged urban quality, also countryside of really ravishing beauty and a number of palaces—a magnificent city altogether.' There were still large gaps. Mysore eventually provided the MacGregor House that was missing from Udaipur. Naini Tal was abandoned and Rose Cottage nearly built in England with its garden in India; finally it was all located near Simla. Mirat and Mayapore were created from a mixture of the locations.

The music for *Jewel* is of particular interest. The composer is George Fenton, who worked with Ravi Shankar on

*Gandhi*. O'Brien finds it a fascinating challenge: 'What I've learnt from George is that the thought you bring to the music is every bit as important as what you compose. It's not a mechanism for coping with a slow scene.'

Fenton is conscious that East-West musical fusions—not especially those for film—have not so far been successful. 'The reason is that Indian classical music is like jazz—in that it's an established ritualised system, yet something happens when a great musician plays. In his first concerto, Shankar hasn't given himself room to express the raga. The right framework will allow Indian instruments to speak with their own voice. One difficulty is that nearly all the music is devotional and so it is difficult to get tension into it; everybody sounds too involved. The excitement is very innocent and there is little threat. Consider the "roosting" quality of a drone; when the friendly drone begins, you feel all right.'

There is a fine, poignant scene that illustrates Fenton's preoccupations well; it is between Hari and Daphne quite early in their relationship, as they shelter from the monsoon in the ruined pavilion where they will much later make love, and Daphne will be raped. It is the first theme of the series. 'It's a cor anglais, not an oboe. Particularly when it is played higher up, it has a quality that is not quite as familiar, as labelled as an oboe. Oboes are so pastoral and have so many associations. The cor anglais is playing a raga. Although the strings move, basically they are droning. The cor anglais is played by someone who has studied Indian music. I wrote it with a very odd time signature, in Western terms, so that it sounds as if it's playing rather freely. It's not *alop* but it has an exploratory sense about it, searching for the melody. I hoped that the specific sound, and certain specific phrases in it, would transmit itself as a melody and become a tune for the audience, without them realising it is a raga.'

Fenton also has ideas about the use of the *sarangi* in the West, with its 'crazy, screaming sound' used to such emotive

effect in Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (scored by Ravi Shankar incidentally) some twenty-five years ago. 'The sound is alien because of the scales but it is less alien than it used to be. The reason is that certain of its qualities are similar to those of electric guitars.'

Western music will also make its presence felt, in military music and in pieces 'that express the English wherever they are—like Elgar.' But Fenton does not plan to give the score a recognisable, period sound. 'The best way to avoid cliché is studiously to remain ignorant about what the clichés are.' Such a comment might serve to describe the philosophy of those making the series. In Forman's view, 'If it's profitable, enjoyable and worthwhile, then we've won.' In O'Brien's, 'Our project doesn't have ambitions as a great work of art. It does have ambitions as a good story.' Morahan comments simply, 'I hope Scott would like what we have done.' So perhaps he and his vast creation should have the last word on the character present in every scene of the series: India.

India exerted an enduring fascination; he was hooked, a wanderer in search of a home. Shortly before he died, he wrote this about such feelings: 'I have never seen Ooty, or Lucknow, or the view of the snowcapped peaks from Darjeeling. But these are merely sights and I am no sightseer. My inclination is by no means to stay put but to seek here and there abroad occasions and conditions of that kind of repose which is at once to do with feeling at home and feeling oneself on the brink of understanding that there is really no such place except in the warmth of human exchange, because a land and its artifacts are inanimate and each of us settles the question of their beauty or ugliness and fitness to live in or with, for himself.' The same feeling, translated from a morning raga, may be found on the final page of *The Jewel in the Crown*: 'Oh, my father's servants, bring my palanquin. I am going to the land of my husband. All my companions are scattered. They have gone to different homes.'