

History and Existentialism in the *Raj Quartet**

Paul Ludwig

This lecture is going to be about History, a discipline we don't teach at St John's, and Existentialism, a school of thought we don't recognize at St John's, all in a series of novels, the *Raj Quartet*, that are not on the St John's list of Great Books. Students who are already swamped with work and busy parents alike may be forgiven for thinking that a major project of reading about the last days of British rule in India is not in their immediate future—let alone the *Raj Quartet*'s four massive volumes averaging four hundred pages each. Nevertheless, I hope to tempt you, as India has seduced many a Western adventurer before you, into reading at least the first volume, entitled *The Jewel in the Crown*, which stands on its own as a separate novel. I secretly know that if you read the first one, you will get hooked. Students will then get in trouble with the Dean or with the Director of the G.I. as they attempt to fit in, between tutorial and seminar, a little side reading on the second volume, *The Day of the Scorpion*. How can I justify leading you so far astray? Luckily, modern technology comes to our rescue: there is a movie version. And this is one case in which watching the movie is not a sign of intellectual shallowness. The title of the movie is identical to the title of the first volume, *The Jewel in the Crown*, although it is important that you should know the movie covers the events of all four novels, the whole *Raj Quartet*. You can find the videotapes in our College library, as well as in many catalogue companies who sell BBC shows to us Americans. The movie is so good, that it is hard to realize—while watching it—how much better the books are. When it first aired as a television serial on weekday evenings, the streets of

*Friday Lecture delivered at St John's College, Annapolis, on November 5, 2004 (Parents' Weekend).

London were deserted, so they say, as they had not been since the Blitz. Everyone was indoors watching it on TV. For those wary of the production values of 1970's BBC broadcasts (everything looked like Doctor Who) the production of *The Jewel in the Crown* aired in 1984 and caught the wave, as it were, when British film-making was coming into a kind of ascendancy in their absolute fidelity to historical period. So if you are pressed for time, as you are, and if you want to take a short rest from reading, you're in luck. If you get hooked, though, and find you have to start reading the books, don't say I didn't warn you.

The movie version captures only a small portion of the drama of ideas, but it captures amazingly well the drama proper (the story-line), the characterizations, the mood, and what I can only call, the *wonder*. I will try to convey some of each of these, and while I want to focus on the drama of ideas, therein lies a problem. If you really wanted to learn about the history of the British in India, you could learn more accurate information faster by going to a history book. And if you really wanted to learn something about Existentialism, you could read a philosopher. In fact, some philosophers on the Program, namely Kierkegaard and Heidegger, have been labeled Existentialists by academics at other, more shallow institutions. So what I said at the beginning was not strictly true. We do study "Existentialists" at St John's, we simply do not want to prejudice our reading of them by calling them that. And even though Existentialism is said to have influenced a lot of literature—Dostoevsky is supposed to be another "Existentialist"—surely reading novels is a backwards kind of way to get into Existentialism. Another, deeper problem, is that a very respectable opinion, probably held by quite a number of you, goes something like this: "novels are works of art; they don't intend to foist ideas on us. Trying to derive philosophical ideas from stories is like milking a billygoat; you treat the story as something that it's not and hence inevitably fail to appreciate it for what it is." One of my warmest memories of being a freshman tutor is of sitting around after an archon meeting chatting informally with other younger tutors

about the *Odyssey*, when someone made the mistake of wondering what a certain incident in the *Odyssey* was really about. Our archon, a senior tutor and an excellent reader of literature (but he shall remain nameless), interrupted the conversation, saying “Anyone who thinks the *Odyssey* is *about* something, is a jackass!” It was a great way for a young tutor to come to realize that there was more than one opinion about how to read at St John’s. “Poetry asserts nothing.” That is the classical expression of the senior tutor’s sentiment. My own opinion is that poetry, literature, can make assertions, and that the classical statement, “poetry asserts nothing,” was partly intended to defend poetry, to screen poetry from censorship, by pretending that poetry has less to say than it really does. And indeed, the author always can hide behind his characters and say: “I wasn’t the one saying that—one of my characters said it.” Sometimes the author might be saying that in all truth. But other times, we don’t have to believe him. I admit, though, that this opinion of mine partly derives from weakness—I need a good story to keep my attention from flagging. History does not do it for me unless it is written by a master at narrative. And I am so lazy that I learn philosophy better from literature and only later go to the philosophers themselves to compare notes and decide if I have learned anything solid. So a novel has to be a good yarn before it can teach. It has to be good poetry first. And if that is all you want in a novel, you, too, have come to the right place. The *Raj Quartet* has all that you are looking for, and more. So before getting into history and philosophy, let me start by showing that Paul Scott, the author of the *Raj Quartet*, can write. For me, *wonder* is the primary experience of reading the *Raj Quartet*. So let us start with some of the wonder.

Before looking at the first passage, I should say just briefly that I did not discover this wonder on my own: I had people who showed it to me. The *Raj Quartet* has been on a kind of informal St John’s reading list among tutors for many years. And this is proof that St John’s tutors do not only read great books. One rather basic reason why tutors read other books is that we could never find other great books if we never read anything

but what someone has alleged to be great. In the opinion of the tutors who preceded me and showed me the wonder of the *Raj Quartet*, the *Raj Quartet* is a great work of world literature, as great as, hold onto your hats, *War and Peace*. Two of my predecessors were our former college librarian, Kitty Kinzer, and a tutor, Beate Von Oppen—her niece recommended the *Jewel in the Crown* to Beate as something to read during an airplane journey: that is how chance can put you on to something important. Study of the *Raj Quartet* became formal at Annapolis two years ago, with a faculty study group of thirteen tutors, funded by a grant from Ambassador Adolph Schmidt. So what I said earlier about the *Raj Quartet* not being on the Program is only true in a literal-minded way. Two of the faculty members of that study group have since passed away, and they are the same two who introduced these books to the College: Kitty Kinzer and Beate Von Oppen. I would like to dedicate this lecture to them.

So first: the wonder. I will read three very brief passages from the first volume, *The Jewel in the Crown*. They are printed in your handout, and I apologize in advance if I butcher them. The main story is set in 1942, but the three passages are historical flashbacks to several earlier Indias. The first passage is about *native* India, divided into many small kingdoms: the Brits are already in the land, trading and defending their trade with armies, but there are many kingdoms they have not taken over yet (some of which in fact they would never take over). What I like about the first passage is the way the Indian names for trees somehow still convey something to us, even though most English-speakers have heard of maybe one or two of these trees, at most. This is the first passage on the handout¹:

¹ Paul Scott, *The Raj Quartet*, Volume I, *The Jewel in the Crown* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1966] 1998), pp. 67-8. The succeeding volumes, also published by University of Chicago Press in 1998, with their original dates are as follows: *The Day of the Scorpion* (1968), *The Towers of Silence* (1971), and *A Division of*

The [MacGregor] house stands in the middle of the garden, protected from the outside world by close-formed battalions of trees: neem, pipul, gol mohur, tamarind, casuarina and banyan; it goes back to the eighteenth century and was built by a prince who conceived a passion for a singer of classical music. To build a house and install a woman in it is an expensive way to beg her favours. It was said that he came to visit her morning and evening, and that she sang to him . . . and that he became enamoured finally only of her voice and was content to listen while she instructed the pupils he permitted her to receive. Scheherezade told stories to postpone the hour of her execution. The singer sang to guard her honor. When the singer died the prince grieved. People said he died of a broken heart. The house was deserted, closed. Like the state it decayed, fell into ruin. The prince's son succeeded to the gaddi. He despised his father for his futile attachment to the singer. He would let no one live there. He built another house nearby, the Bibighar, where he kept his courtesans. He was a voluptuary. He emptied the treasury. His people starved. An Englishman at his court was poisoned and so the new prince was deposed, imprisoned, his state annexed [by the British], and his people were glad of it until time lay over the memory of the old bad but not the badness of the present. The decayed house of the singer was rebuilt by a red-faced Scottish nabob called MacGregor who feared God and favoured Muslims, and was afraid of temples. The story goes that he burned the Bibighar to the ground because he said it had been an abomination.

the Spoils (1975). Henceforth the volumes will be referred to as *Jewel*, *Scorpion*, *Towers*, and *Division*.

At least one hundred years separate this India of the Maharajahs, the Indian princes--father, son, singer and courtesans--from the India where MacGregor, a merchant and a "collector," is carving out a fortune and acting as the de facto ruler of Mayapore. The only thing you need to know about the second passage is that even by MacGregor's time, English womenfolk have not come to small interior states like Mayapore yet—white women are found only in the big British-built coastal cities like Calcutta. The British tell themselves that MacGregor destroyed the Bibighar—which literally means "house of women"—because keeping a house full of courtesans was immoral. But a little later in the novel we learn a different version of the story. Competing perspectives, we shall find, are going to be typical of the *Raj Quartet*. Here is the second passage on the handout²:

But then this was the European version of the tale. . . . [MacGregor] burned Bibighar, not, according to the Indian version, because it was an abomination in his eye and the eye of the Lord . . . but because he fell in love with an Indian girl and lost her to a boy whose skin was the same colour as her own. There are two versions of the Indian account of the burning of Bibighar. The first is that he discovered that the girl and her lover met in the Bibighar, and that he then destroyed it in a fit of jealous rage. The second is that he told the girl she would have to leave the MacGregor House and live in the Bibighar. He took her there and showed her the repairs he had made to it and the furnishings and clothes he had bought for her comfort and enjoyment. When she asked him why she must leave the MacGregor House, he said: Because I am going to Calcutta to bring back an English wife. So that night she stole away with her true lover. When he

² *Jewel*, pp. 140-1. Spoken by the character known as Sister Ludmila.

found that she had gone, he ordered the Bibighar to be burned to the ground, and then utterly obliterated.

Not only are there two versions of the story, British and Indian—there are two versions of the Indian version! Like a good historian, the author, Paul Scott, tries to tell all sides of the story. Like Herodotus, Paul Scott knows that truth is hard to get at, and what people say about an event comes to be as important as the event itself. People's versions take on lives of their own. Now, in reality, of course, Scott himself is making up all three versions. He is showing us what doing a history *would* be like, rather than showing us a real history. You may have noticed that I have broken my promise and started talking about history already, when I was supposed to be only showing that Paul Scott is a good writer. And Herodotus, whom I mentioned, is clearly a program author, so what I said at the beginning about St John's not teaching history was not strictly true. That would be the third untruth I have told tonight—so far. Not only do Johnnies read some historians, but Johnnies are constantly learning to act as historians themselves—historians of intellectual history—by interpreting the evidence of original sources: and in roughly chronological order, to boot. But what Johnnies emphatically do not do is to try to place authors into the context of what other historians have alleged about their times: the political, social and economic history of their times that may—or may not—have influenced the author's ideas. Our philosophy is: better to err on the side of allowing the authors to be too original than to chop them down to size to fit a prejudgment about their alleged context. One of the philosophies of history presented in the *Raj Quartet* will explicitly disagree with the St John's philosophy. The Existentialist philosophy of history partakes of what is known as historicism. Historicism in its most extreme form doubts whether *any* originality is possible; it understands us all to be products of our social, political and economic contexts. So, I apologize for dragging philosophy and history into it ahead of time, but these get so intertwined with literary art in Scott's novels that it is hard to talk

about his art without saying what the novels are *about*, getting into their *ideas*. The narrator of *The Jewel in the Crown* initially appears to be an omniscient narrator: he seems like Paul Scott himself. But in fact this narrator is gradually revealed to be a historian (himself with a limited viewpoint) who has returned to India in 1963, long after Independence was granted by the British. This unnamed historian has come back to learn about what happened in those last days before Independence, specifically what happened on a mysterious night in 1942, when an Englishwoman was raped during political unrest.

The narrator's use of competing perspectives, British vs. Indian, Indian vs. Indian—a technique sometimes called Perspectivism—goes together with another narrative technique, which I will call the Telescoping of time. In the brief passages we are reading, four different time-periods are present. We have already talked about the eighteenth century Indian princes and the nineteenth century merchant-imperialists, but I left out a sentence in which the historian in 1963, visiting the MacGregor house as part of his investigation, hears a young girl taking classical music lessons; she is singing the same songs now, in 1963, that the classical singer sang to her prince in the eighteenth century. Eighteenth century, nineteenth century, 1963: these are all frame and background for the story proper, which takes place in 1942. Like a telescope closing up, time past and time future are always present—in the *Raj Quartet*—in time present. And the fascinating thing, the wonder that sends a shiver up the spine, is that many of the same sorts of occurrences are repeating themselves in all four time periods. Not just the music: an illegitimate love affair is veering toward tragedy in three of the four periods.

Consider the third passage on the handout. Here we are back in the India of the princes again, when the voluptuary son gets the last word over his father. Don't blame me for taking these passages out of order: Scott himself deals with these occurrences out of order. He wants us to go back and ponder the earlier ones armed with what we know from the later ones. Recall that the singer's house fell into ruin, after her death, before

MacGregor came along to rebuild it, but the Bibighar, the “house of women” or prostitutes, flourished. This is the third passage on the handout³:

In those days, when Mayapore was a kingdom, on that side of the river there were no other buildings, and so those two houses were marks on the landscape, monuments to love, the love of the father for the singer and the love of the son for the courtesans, the son who despised his father for an attachment which, so the story goes, was never consummated. Day by day I think the son climbed the tower of the palace or to the highest room in the Bibighar to survey that other house, the singer’s house, to glory in its decay, and said to himself, *Such is the fate of love never made manifest.*”

The tale of the last days of Britain’s India empire is going to be the tale of a love never made manifest, an erotic attraction to India that could only be consummated in a kind of rape but could never dare to admit to itself that it might be love, for that would have led to an open embrace or dalliance that would have put the English and the Indians on an equal footing, undermining the ethical pretext of the “civilizing mission” that had become the way the British justified their empire to themselves. Surprisingly, Paul Scott or his narrator is not on the side of the father who did not consummate his love, but on the side of the voluptuary son, who at least made his love—such as it was—manifest. So: Scott can write prose with a touch of poetry. But can he spin a yarn? Let us look briefly at the story-line.

1942. An English girl has come to live in the MacGregor House. Her name is Daphne Manners. She has lost her family in the Blitz, and has been driving an ambulance during the bombing of London. She comes to live in India with an Aunt,

³ *Jewel*, p. 139, another of Sister Ludmila’s musings. Emphasis in original.

Lady Manners, the only family she has left. The story of Daphne's revulsion with all things Indian is too detailed to go into, but it is beautifully told. She initially stays with her Aunt, the widow of a Governor, in the predominantly Muslim city of Rawalpindi. Just when she thinks she might be growing to like India a little bit, she journeys to predominantly Hindu Mayapore where her Aunt's Indian friend—also a titled Lady—Lady Chatterjee, widow of an Indian who was knighted for his service to the Raj, lives in the MacGregor House, one of the only Indians on the British side of the river. Mayapore is now split into the British town north of the river, and the Indian town south of the river. Daphne's descent into ever-greater alienness, first into Islam and from there into Hindu territory is accompanied by extreme revulsion, not only or primarily with the poverty and living conditions but with the utterly alien cultures, what the locals consider good food, and the ways of life and death.

The MacGregor House is one of the few places in Mayapore where Indians and British mix socially and only then at carefully contrived drinks parties. Daphne brings with her progressive liberal notions about the meaninglessness of racial distinctions as well as an unprejudiced heart that attempts to find the human in the other. But she finds her fellow Brits in India to be living in a land that time forgot; their attitudes toward race and their resistance to eventual self-rule for India are essentially nineteenth century hold-overs living on into the twentieth century. Daphne is determined to appreciate and eventually love every aspect of India that she possibly can, and we gradually realize that this girl who is too tall, clumsy, average-looking, near-sighted, and naive has capacities for cultural assimilation which give her what can only be called moral grandeur. If Daphne were ever to fall in love, she would make her love manifest.

She falls in love with a young Indian named Hari Kumar. And here is the first twist: Hari, too, has just come to India. He grew up in England, son of an Indian father who admired British ways, assimilated, made and lost a fortune, committed suicide, and left his eighteen-year-old son stranded at his elite English boarding school with no

money. Hari, too, has just come to live with his Aunt, and Hari is, if anything, more revolted by India than Daphne was. This is because Hari is, if anything, the most English character in the book. In everything but skin color: in attitudes, outlook, character, he is utterly English and utterly at sea in India. He is so English that he is even upper-class (thanks to his boarding school education); he shares the hauteur of the ruling British but in India he can never be one of them. Somewhere on the ship over to India, it happened. Although Hari had scarcely noticed he was brownskinned before (he had white friends, he was accepted in England), at some point near the Gulf of Suez, his fellow British passengers began to exclude him and socialize only among themselves, with their fellow whites. People who would never have felt that way at home, became, as India approached, frightened or racially conscious for the first time, and joined ranks against him, expecting that he too would now join his own kind. But Hari has no kind, unless it is the British themselves, for Hari is as far from an Indian as it is possible to be. And this is one of the historical and academic glints that decorate and inform the novels, because Hari Kumar (in England he was called Harry Coomer) is one of the “brown-skinned Englishmen” whom the historian and planner of empire Thomas Babington Macaulay envisioned in a famous speech before the British parliament on how Indians should be educated: to create “a class of persons Indian in colour and blood, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect . . . who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern.”⁴ Paul Scott merely takes Macaulay at his word and shows us such a person. But what will happen to such a person if the British ever decide to leave India? Not British enough for the British, not Indian enough for “the millions we govern,” Hari is destined to be forever a loose end in the incomplete project of empire.

⁴ Compare *Jewel*, p. 248, with *Division*, p. 301. See also John Keay, *India: A History* (New York: Grove Press, 2002), p. 431.

Did I start philosophizing again? Sorry. With these novels, it's hard not to. When Hari finally scrapes up courage to cross the river into the British town, he feels like he has come home: clean lines, uncluttered streets, ordered civic life. When he enters a pharmacy, his heart leaps up to discover brand-name items that he is used to. (If you have ever been lonely in a foreign country, you will know how much those commercial items can mean to a traveler). But when he attempts to purchase a bar of soap, he encounters only contempt and prejudice, particularly when the memsahibs (white ladies) hear him speaking (aping, as they see it) upper-class-accented English. An Indian does not belong in the British town, unless he is the servant of a white. Hari literally becomes a man without a country, or without a community. Hari concludes (*Jewel*, p. 242):

his father had succeeded in making him nothing, nothing in the black town, nothing in the [British] cantonment, nothing even in England because in England he was now no more than a memory

This language of nothingness will loom very large. For nothingness (as in Jean-Paul Sartre's title *Being and Nothingness*) is just what an Existentialist thinks we ought to think about ourselves. That we are nothing, on our own, nothing but a web of influences, totally determined by our backgrounds: our genes, our race, our religion, our upbringing, our height and sex even. There is no escaping those determinants, or at least: no way to be *certain* we have free will. Every choice we make can be traced to those all-powerful factors. So philosophy is going to be right up front in the story-line.

O.K., maybe I should drop even the pretense of "just telling the story." It can be done, but *I* can't do it. As you have probably guessed by now, Hari and Daphne will become illegitimate lovers. They meet at a racially mixed party at the MacGregor House. They have trouble from the start—not because of the outward pressure from the different

communities they belong to, the English and Indian communities, both of which consider interracial love to be taboo. That is the least of their problems. Their problems are internal: the communities they both come from—their backgrounds—have predisposed them (it is so unconscious that it is like a genetic predisposition) to accept the taboo. Theory alone, theory that racial distinctions are meaningless, is not enough. It is very hard to put the theory into practice. Part of Hari's situation is that "a dark-skinned man touching a white-skinned woman will always be conscious of the fact that he is—diminishing her."⁵ When Hari begins to fall in love with Daphne, he deliberately attempts to put her off, warn her away from him, by behaving on one of their illicit dates the way he imagines a middle-class Indian male would behave. Since the English won't let Hari be English anymore, since he must be Indian, he will behave like the English stereotype of an Indian male: outwardly polite, but underneath selfish and aggressive, eating with his fingers, treating the servants like dirt, making the girl conform to his wishes, playing Indian music which he hated (and expected her to hate) on the gramophone. But he underestimates Daphne, who by this time has come to love many aspects of India: she particularly likes Indian music, which she says is the only music in the world that is conscious of breaking silence. Daphne does not mind Indianness if Hari wants to be Indian; she is only worried why he is acting so strangely.

When a moment comes in their relationship when Hari should touch Daphne, she recalls (*Jewel*, pp. 410-11):

He was afraid to. He was too conscious of the weight that would have made touching a gesture of defiance of the rule . . . , and he didn't have that kind of courage, and so I was deprived of my own. The defiance had to come from him first, to make it human, to make it right.

⁵ *Scorpion*, p. 217, spoken by the villain Merrick.

For Daphne to provide the defiance of the taboo would further unsex Hari (*Jewel*, p. 411): a ruling memsahib taking a hapless Indian by the hand. Hari and Daphne are stymied by their awareness that a brown man with a white woman must be “taking advantage of her” in some way or another. A general thesis put forward by less liberal-minded Brits is that “an Indian will always take advantage of an English person who is friendly.” And there is some truth to the thesis, since indeed the ruling caste of whites always does hold the keys to all advancement for a ruled caste of browns. It follows that Indians always want something. It also follows that any union between the two of them must be exploitative.

One night—a dangerous night because there is civil unrest in Mayapore: Gandhi and the Indian National Congress party leadership have been interned by the British because the British, after all, have a war to fight with the Japanese, and Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement is not helping—on that night, the night of the civil unrest, Hari and Daphne are sitting together in the deserted Bibighar garden. The ruined “house” of women where love was at least made manifest is gone, only a garden remains, which has become a kind of informal public park.

Daphne takes Hari’s hand briefly to light her cigarette (*Jewel*, 416):

After a while he said, “What were you trying to prove? That you don’t mind our touching?”

I said, “I thought we’d got beyond that.”

“No,” he said, “we can never get beyond it.”

The “gesture of defiance” that needed to come from Hari finally materializes when he takes away her cigarette (which he considers a disgusting, Indian-made cigarette). He grabs her wrist and throws the cigarette away. “That catching hold of my wrist was like

the impatient gesture of a lover. For him it was like that too.” Once the boundary is crossed, their desire breaks through the dam.

Unbeknownst to the couple, a group of Indian men, rioters who have come in from the country during the political unrest, are watching them in the darkness of the garden. For these men, a taboo is broken when they see a black man touching a white woman. They catch the couple unawares, forcibly restrain Hari, and rape Daphne. Hari himself is now a prime suspect in the rape because no one will believe that an English girl was in the garden alone with an Indian, consensually. What will happen to Hari?

Enter the philosopher, stage left. The British District Superintendent of Police, Ronald Merrick, who hauls Hari in for questioning, and subjects him to brutal torture, attempting to extract a confession, also proceeds to give a philosophic account—a reasonable explanation—to Hari: an explanation of all the problems that Hari has been experiencing and thinking about since he came back to India and especially since he met Daphne. “Wait,” you’re saying, “a philosopher who tortures? I don’t remember Socrates ever doing that.” But this is a very different kind of philosophy, a philosophy that recognizes no distinction between contemplation and action. Merrick wants Hari to confess to the crime, a crime he knows Hari did not commit. Or does Merrick know it? It turns out that, for Merrick, there may be no firm link between committing a crime, and being guilty for it.

Contrary to the reader’s expectation of ordinary police corruption or ordinary racism, Merrick proceeds to reveal to Hari a full-blown philosophy of history and human agency. You will notice that this lengthy philosophizing is integrated into the story-line. I did not put it there. Oh, I admit that we readers do not actually learn everything that was said in that jail cell until the second volume, *The Day of the Scorpion*, over a year later when Hari is interviewed, still in prison. But that just gives you incentive to read volume two, and not stop at volume one.

Hari later recounts how Merrick began to talk. Merrick's philosophy is a philosophy of the so-called "situation." "He said history was a sum of situations whose significance was never seen until long afterwards because people had been afraid to act them out" (*Scorpion*, p. 297). "They preferred to think of the situations they found themselves in as part of a general drift of events they had no control over . . .". The *raj*—British rule in India—has felt itself swept along by just such a current or drift since well before the onset of World War II: attitudes are changing and British power in India is unraveling. History itself seem to be drifting in the direction of liberation, and *raj* functionaries both of the civil and the military passively assume there is nothing they can do to stem the tide. Tonight, a white and a brown, Merrick and Hari, find themselves in position to reaffirm the *raj*'s power. To prevent their moment together from sinking into the general drift, Merrick believes both he and Hari must avoid the passivity of the aforesaid *raj* whites, those who "couldn't face up to their responsibility" for their situations. Curiously, the passive majority are probably correct about the hopelessness of taking control of the moment, in Merrick's view: "He didn't think he could go so far as to say you could change the course of events by acting out situations you found yourself in . . .". At most Merrick and Hari will have the satisfaction of knowing they did all they could to stem the tide of the liberalizing drift: "you'd . . . take what steps you could to stop things drifting in the wrong direction, or an unreal direction."

Merrick insists Hari should take responsibility. "That's what you've got to admit . . . your responsibility for that girl getting [raped]. If you were a hundred miles away you'd still be responsible" (*Scorpion*, p. 298). Surely this is a very odd notion of responsibility that Merrick has. But Merrick practices what he preaches: he, too, is willing to take responsibility for a something he didn't commit. Merrick says he will take responsibility for the liberal whites' misrule, even though Merrick himself has obviously contributed nothing to the *raj*'s drift toward liberalization and eventual liberation. Precisely taking responsibility for situations that are *not* one's fault is what Merrick

recommends. This notion of “responsibility” is unusual, and its usage goes back to a philosopher other than the fictional Merrick but one equally controversial (drum roll, please): the philosopher Martin Heidegger.

Merrick’s philosophy conforms point by point with *Being and Time*, Division Two, Chapter 2: “Dasein’s Attestation of an Authentic Potentiality-For-Being, and Resoluteness” (there’s a mouthful), especially section 60. Now I am going to do what you “poetry-asserts-nothing” types feared. I have perfectly good words on the page of the novel to interpret, but instead of letting them speak for themselves, I am going to drag in a philosophical text. But my claim is that we are driven to it. It’s not that the novel cannot speak for itself. (It does speak for itself.) Rather, the novel is giving us a chance to enrich our understanding of philosophy, too—we have the chance to go back to Paul Scott’s own sources and learn what he knew. And, in keeping with my own personal lazy way of learning philosophy, I feel driven to confront Merrick’s “Existentialism” with that of a known “Existentialist,” just to see if I’m learning anything solid. I should also add that the Heidegger connection is not my own discovery. Another of my predecessors at St John’s, Eva Brann, has pointed out the Heideggerean roots of Merrick’s philosophy in the course of publishing numerous articles on the *Raj Quartet*. After one of our study group meetings, Beate Von Oppen was telling me about how the *Raj Quartet* found its way to St John’s. “I was the *first*,” she said, in her part German and mostly British accent. “Then Eva *eclipsed* me.” In the scholarly literature on the *Raj Quartet*, no one has yet made the Heidegger connection, so St John’s is ahead of the curve on that one. One scholar did notice similarities with Jean-Paul Sartre, so I will have more to say about Sartre later.

But first, Heidegger. Heidegger defines the term “Situation”⁶ as “definite factual possibilities” that are disclosed when a person becomes resolute. This is the fourth passage on the handout. The only thing you need to know is that “Being-There” (Dasein in German), is Heidegger’s special word for *human* being: the kind of beings that are “there” in a fuller, more fundamental way than animals or things are “there.” And yes, the Peter Sellers movie “Being There,” which some of you have seen, is a reference to Heidegger’s theory. The novel by Jerzy Kosinski that the film was based on (the novel was also called *Being There*) was a parody of Heideggerean existentialism. Here is the fourth passage on the handout:

In the term “Situation” (“situation”—‘to be in a situation’) there is an overtone of a signification that is spatial. . . . [S]uch an overtone is also implied in the ‘there’ of Dasein [Being-There]. Being-in-the-world has a spatiality of its own Dasein ‘makes room’ in so far as it factually exists. . . . Just as the spatiality of the “there” is grounded in disclosedness, the Situation has its foundations in resoluteness. The Situation is the “there” which is disclosed in resoluteness—the “there” as which the existent entity is there. It is not a framework present-at-hand in which Dasein occurs, or into which it might even just bring itself. Far removed from any present-at-hand mixture of circumstances and accidents which we encounter, the Situation *is* only through resoluteness and in it.

⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, [1927] 1962), p. 299 (pages cited refer to the marginal pagination, i.e. to the original German text). The German for the capitalized English “Situation” is *Situation*, for small-case “situation,” *Lage*. Emphasis in original.

The inauthentic grasp of a Situation is that a Situation is a “mixture of circumstances and accidents” that we encounter. When Merrick says that most people prefer to think of Situations as part of a general drift of events they have no control over, he refers to this inauthentic grasp. Merrick’s term “unreal,” as in “drifting in . . . an unreal direction” corresponds to Heidegger’s terms “inauthentic” and “ungenuine” (Heidegger, p. 297).

For Heidegger, our understanding of historical significance results from *resoluteness*. What does he mean by resolute? We resolve on a course of action, we make a decision, a resolution (like a New Year’s resolution), and we stick to our decision, come what may. The resolute individual has made an unalterable decision—oddly, for Heidegger, a decision without grounds. Ordinarily, we let the facts determine what we should resolve to do. We work within the framework of possibilities permitted us by facts. Heidegger reverses this: rather than letting the facts determine what we should resolve to do, “[r]esoluteness does not first take cognizance of a Situation and put that Situation before itself; it has put itself into that Situation already. As resolute, Dasein is already *taking action*” (Heidegger, p. 300). Such taking action exposes for the first time the “facts,” or as Heidegger would say, the “facticity” with which a person must work. “*The resolution is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factically possible at the time.*” (p. 298; emphasis in original) Analogously, Merrick emphasizes “enactment” as the only way of knowing the facts about what the historical situation is. Enacting this particular situation—Merrick means playing at master and slave—is the way to understand its significance. Ordinarily, we might want to examine the facts first: are brown people really the slaves of whites? Is Merrick really Hari’s master? But no (Merrick and Heidegger say) disclosing facts like those always presupposes a stance, a decision you have made, a resolution. In modern parlance, this Heideggerean idea has trickled down into our ordinary speech and way of looking at things: we call it “commitment.” How you view the facts depends on your prior commitment. The Liberal commits himself to finding the races equal; when he examines

the evidence, he finds it supports his commitment. The racist commits himself to finding the races unequal; when he examines the evidence, he finds it supports his commitment. In the Existentialist philosophy, the prior decision lights up the world, reveals the facts for the first time. There are no pure or uncommitted facts. Ordinarily, Merrick says, the significance of Situations is “never seen until long afterwards because people [have] been afraid to act them out.” And later: “It wasn’t enough to say he was English and I was Indian, that he was a ruler and I was one of the ruled. We had to find out what that meant.” (*Scorpion*, p. 298)

Now we are in a position to think more about Merrick’s radical new concept of guilt: that we should all admit guilt precisely for those things we’re *not* responsible for. For Merrick, accepting responsibility is the inner truth of taking action, or enactment. Hari ought to take responsibility for the rape of Daphne, even though he didn’t commit it, because the rape of Daphne by some Indians somewhere is symbolic of the situation in which all Independence-minded Indians and all liberal whites *everywhere* conspire to create: the liberal whites by their egalitarian behavior are practically assuming that Hari can have their womenfolk; and Hari, by acting in kind at their invitation, is practically assuming it too. The real situation (in Merrick’s view—and we have already seen the evidence for his view) is that no black man can touch a white woman without feeling the sense that he is violating her. Their sexual union must always be a rape, even if neither party wills it to be such. The best Hari can do is face up to this situation.

The same sense of guilt or responsibility is also the inner meaning of resoluteness for Heidegger. Resoluteness is defined as the “*self-projection upon one’s ownmost Being-guilty . . .*” (Heidegger, p. 297; emphasis in original). Guilty of what, for what? Merely guilty—primordially so, Heidegger says. “‘Being-guilty’ also has the signification of ‘being responsible for’ [“*schuld sein an*”]—that is, being the cause or author of something. . . . These ordinary significations of “Being-guilty” . . . can go together and define a kind of behaviour which we call ‘*making oneself responsible*’ . . .”

(p. 282; emphasis in original). Conscience proclaims us guilty, and conscience is the manifestation of care or of solicitous, concerned being in the world. Whenever we care for or feel solicitous toward other people or things, we feel a call of conscience which does not have a specific grounding in any act we may or may not have committed.

Heidegger's (and Merrick's) notion of guilt now becomes slightly more plausible. Particularly when we suddenly realize that we have been carelessly accepting a situation made by others, i.e. not exercising our human freedom, we feel guilty. If we realize we have been drifting with the current (remember, the liberal members of the *raj* were letting themselves drift), we suddenly feel guilty; if we then use that guilt to become resolute, to say, I'm not going to drift anymore, I'm going to be a free chooser, and make my own way in the world, then we are close to becoming resolute the way Heidegger wants us to. Close—but we're not quite there yet. For this is the truth about facticity, i.e. the set of facts (sex, height, biographical givens, social roles, customs ingrained in us by our peculiar sect or nationality): none of these facts were acts of our own free will, we made none of them but rather are stuck with them, and we are seemingly *determined* by them. We are "thrown" into them, and our natural mode is to get lost in them, not to exercise our determining freedom. But herein lies the rub: there is no evidence we can ever get free of them. There are no facts, prior to making a commitment, that show us that we have free will. On the contrary, the facts all add up to show us that we have no free will, that the only choices we make are really predetermined for us by our genes or by the way our moms brought us up or by the things our dads told us. Merely rebelling against our mom or dad is no escape: then you're simply reacting against them and letting them determine you in a way equal, but opposite, to the way they would have determined you directly. The *only* way in which we can get outside of the facts that determine us is to *make them our own*. Admit responsibility for them, admit guilt precisely for facts not of our own making. That is the only way out. Step one: come to admit that you are totally indebted—to your sect, your nation, your genes—feel these facts as debts, things lacking.

Realize you are a nullity, a nothing. Step two: take responsibility for these facts (even though they are not your fault), make them my own, make them your fault. Heidegger calls this “Being-the-basis of a nullity” (p. 283). “Being-a-basis” means *never* to have power over one’s own Being from the ground up (p. 284). In understanding the call of conscience, in taking responsibility, Dasein listens “*to its ownmost possibility of existence*. It has chosen itself” (p. 287; emphasis in original).

A Heidegger scholar has ventured an example: existential guilt is indebtedness to culture (among other factors), his example is: being brought up feminine.⁷ A woman may feel she has no possibilities she can truly call her own: every role is preordained for her by the culture. To have none of one’s own possibilities is to be a *nullity*. However, she can take over these public, pre-scripted roles *in her own way*, making them her own. She achieves this by accepting responsibility for them, thereby becoming the basis for (i.e. the author of) her own nullity. Embrace your nothingness. This is the only way out. This is an exercise of freedom—the *only* freedom open to you or her or anyone. In much the same way, Merrick wants Hari to accept responsibility for the facts that make him what he is: black, dependent, inferior, coddled by a white elite, attracted to a white girl—a rapist whether virtually or actually. This is the only freedom open to him. When Hari “fails” to live up to this freedom, Merrick claims he has more contempt for him than ever. Hari is merely pretending the world does not exist (*Scorpion*, p. 304).

Now before getting back to the story-line—we will get back to it soon: if the “poetry-asserts-nothing” people in the audience can stay awake just a little longer—we will visit one more philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, whose more popular, not to say vulgarized, rendition of Heidegger’s ideas helps make them easier to understand. There

⁷ Dreyfus, Hubert L., *Being-In-The-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990).

is in fact no evidence that Paul Scott had read (or read about) the philosophy of Heidegger. “But there it is,” you will say, “that is just what we were worried about: you have dragged in a philosopher to distort a literary text, a philosopher the author didn’t even read.” Yes, but: there is evidence that Paul Scott read and grappled with Jean-Paul Sartre. In fact, Scott devotes several pages to wrestling with what he explicitly calls Sartrean “engagement” with the “historical situation” in an important non-fiction essay in which Scott explains why he writes at all.⁸ So even though Sartre is not mentioned by name in the *Raj Quartet*—it would have been anachronistic since *Being and Nothingness* first appeared in 1943, too late for the 1942 Indian milieu in which Merrick gives voice to its major tenets, Scott himself was reading Sartre in the 1960’s and 70’s when he was writing the *Raj Quartet*, and he made the ideas a part of his art. In addition, the same ideas were around even in 1942 albeit in a more thoroughgoing, and less popular, form than Sartre’s. Heidegger’s *Being and Time* had been first published in 1927 and republished in 1935. It will probably remain forever a matter of debate what influence, if any, Heideggerean existentialism wielded over the rise of Nazism and fascism in Europe. But Paul Scott, Heideggerless or not, was smart enough to see that a philosophy that was Left-wing in Sartre, could just as easily be Right-wing as it had been in Heidegger, and so he made Merrick into a kind of British fascist. To claim even more for him, Paul Scott’s power of imagination was so great that he often extrapolates from Sartre, happening upon formulations that seem to owe more to their original source in Heidegger, in much the same way that the Greekless Shakespeare took liberties with North’s translation of Plutarch, making changes that coincided with the original meaning.

⁸ Scott, “Literature and the Social Conscience: The Novel,” in Paul Scott’s collected lectures and essays: Shelley C. Reese, ed., *My Appointment with the Muse. Essays, 1961-75* (London: Heinemann, 1986).

Quickly Sartre. Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* provides concrete examples where Heidegger was studiously abstract. For both Heidegger and Sartre, human being has no fixed essence but only an existence: a "standing out" (Latin: *ex stare*), hence the term "existentialism." Humans "stand out" from the way things "are" in favor of the way things *might be*. Heidegger calls it "projecting possibilities." Sartre emphasizes the negative; he calls it "nihilation": annihilating the actual in favor of the possible. Both Sartre and Heidegger seek a way out of the determinism inherent in the assumption that man's nature is essentially fixed, and that he is part of a causal chain. While Heidegger thinks the resolute individual can add nothing but a style or manner to the role which history has prescribed for him or her (all you can do is "make it your own"), Sartre by contrast holds that man has "absolute freedom," albeit sometimes within very narrow bounds—precisely the bounds of the historical situation.⁹ A master and a slave have very different facticities. One seems to have unlimited scope of freedom, while the other seems to have little scope at all. Sartre would not disagree. But within these vastly differing scopes, the freedom that both master and slave can exercise is absolute. No one forces the slave to continue being a slave: he can resolve to make a break for freedom, risking death, at any time he chooses. He may, of course, not succeed, but the choice will have been his own in a way precisely equivalent to the way his master's choices are *his* own. Even if escape turns out to be impossible, his freedom to make the attempt was absolute. The "Situation" restricts the range of his choices, but it does not so pre-determine the outcome of the choice or choices left to him as to vouchsafe to him foreknowledge of this outcome. Here is the crucial part: the slave can never *know* his escape attempt is doomed until he has made the attempt, i.e. committed

⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), especially pp. 6-35.

himself. The one, absolute choice that we all have, that remains no matter how strict our circumstances, is the choice whether to commit suicide or go on living: to be or not to be), but that one choice is absolutely free. So for Heidegger, there is basically no such thing as freedom, while for Sartre, freedom is absolute. One more example: consider a man who wishes to climb a rock but says, "That rock is unclimbable." His statement exposes him as the kind of being who attempts things, like climbing. That is, he projects possibilities out ahead of himself ("I *might* be able to climb the rock."). Otherwise put, the man mentally "annihilates" the unclimbed rock—he imagines it as climbed. That is, he negates the unclimbedness of the rock. Now, the true fact about the rock's unclimbability can never be known until the man actually *resolves* or decides to attempt to climb the rock. Resolutely trying, he may fail, but whether he succeeds or fails, he will have exercised his human freedom. If he were to decline to climb the rock on the grounds that he somehow "knows" in advance that the rock is unclimbable, he would be in what Sartre calls "bad faith." Only in resoluteness can any such "fact" about the rock be disclosed (Sartre, pp. 482, 488-9).

Now, I promised that Merrick's philosophy would have explanatory power: that it would give a reasonable (if existentialism can be called reasonable) accounting to Hari of the problems Hari has been experiencing and thinking about since he came to India, or at least since he fell in love with Daphne. And so it does. Merrick claims that if Hari will only take responsibility for the rape, Hari's whole situation will be revealed to him, and he will at last understand it. In this Merrick turns out to be correct. When asked in his later prison interview whether he might indeed have tried to take advantage of Daphne sexually, Hari confesses (*Scorpion*, p. 250):

'I may have done for all I know. My behaviour at that time left a lot to be desired.'

‘I’d forgotten how to act in that kind of company. Or if I’d not forgotten, trying to act as I remembered I should act seemed—artificial.’

Hari was half-way to being an Indian, or half-way to being his stereotype of what an Indian was. We recall that Daphne herself admitted that Hari had to get mad and grab her wrist, get rough, throw her cigarette away by force, in order to find strength enough to break the taboo against interracial touching. Hari’s confession that he might indeed have tried to take advantage of Daphne sexually is corroborated by what actually occurs in their first and only sexual union, in the deserted Bibighar garden the night of the political unrest. As Daphne herself recounts, Hari cannot initially act out or “enact” their union as anything other than the very rape which the taboo says their union must be (*Jewel*, p. 417, emphasis added):

There was nothing gentle about the way he took me. I felt myself lifted onto the mosaic. He tore at my underclothes and pressed down on me with all his strength. *But this was not me and Hari.* . . . [H]e made me cry out. And then it was us.

“But this was not me and Hari”—the sentence is important, because it shows that Daphne does not wish to believe for a moment that Merrick’s racial situation is in fact all-determinant here. But our novelist is toying with just how close to being correct, if not entirely correct, Merrick is. Daphne’s assertion that this was not the real Hari sounds like—or takes the form of—a characteristically pathetic rationalization by a white girl who has fallen in love with an Indian only to find herself taken advantage of. Hari and Daphne are in a communal vacuum: he because he is a black Englishman whom Englishmen shun, she because she is crossing the color line. Paul Scott wishes to show

just how difficult it is to create a sense of self beyond these racial selves that their communities have constructed for them.

After the “real” rapists leave them, Daphne in her delirium thinks she is alone, having “this idea that Hari had gone off with them because he had been one of [the rapists].” The communal ideology is strong enough to make Daphne subconsciously adhere to the scenario for which Merrick asks Hari to take responsibility. Like Daphne, Hari accepts Merrick’s version of the situation—for a few hours. Merrick pretends during the interrogation (a policeman’s trick) that Daphne went ahead and incriminated Hari. Merrick offers to let Hari confess to a lesser charge and avoid punishment for rape, for surely he can prove that Daphne agreed to meet him, that she wanted him? Merrick is correct in his assessment of how Hari will feel at Daphne’s betrayal. Hari later realizes to his humiliation that he actually believed Merrick was telling the truth and that Daphne had given evidence against him. But we the readers know that Merrick’s lie corresponds to a kind of reality. Daphne did betray Hari in her mind, however briefly. Just as Daphne had believed, briefly, that Hari was one of the rapists, so Hari, for a few hours, believed that Daphne, as an English girl, would consider him, an Indian, one of the rapists. And, we know as well, their sexual union was a rape, if only for an instant. It all fits into a seamless “situation.”

After more torture, Merrick offers Hari water and helps him drink it. Then Merrick tells Hari if he were honest he would admit he was grateful for the water and would thank Merrick for it. He gives Hari another drink. ““After a bit I heard myself say [thank you]”” (*Scorpion*, pp. 300-1). Merrick says they both “know” where things stand now. In other words, by enacting the situation of master and slave, Hari has learned something about himself, just as Merrick said he would. Enactment is disclosive. During the night, Hari wakes up and calls for help. ““The name I called was Merrick.””

Only because Merrick is no longer in the cell with him, no longer there to “help” the dependent Indian, does Hari have time to reason things out. Hari first decides to

confess to the rape charge. That is the attractive course because he could add thereby something of *his own* to his enemies' attempt to destroy him. Destroying himself would be the only course left in which he could "exercise his own free will" (*Scorpion*, p. 302). He is now at the level of Sartre's suicide: to be or not to be. Then Hari comes once again to realize his own nothingness. "I thought, well anyway what's going to be destroyed? Nothing. An illusion of a human being [A] nonentity . . .". Hari now has the two principal components of Sartre's existentialist philosophy: free will and nothingness.

When Hari finally revolts against Merrick's Situation, it could easily seem to the reader that Scott has taken pains to show the victory of liberalism or humanism over the existentialist philosophy of the situation. For example, Hari in his prison cell comes to the realization that (*Scorpion*, p. 302; emphasis in original):

. . . no one had any rights in regard to me. I was the only one with rights. . . . I wasn't to be categorized or defined by type, colour, race, capacity, intellect, condition, beliefs, instincts, manner or behaviour. . . . So who had the right to destroy me? *Who had the right as well as the means?* The answer was nobody. I wasn't sure that they even had the means.

This reads as a classical liberal, modern vindication of the rights-bearing self. It would be easy to assume from this that a rights-based liberalism here wins out over Merrick's existentialism.

But it is only in and through an existentialist engagement with the situation that Hari achieves this vindication of his own rights and individuality. He asserts: "[T]he situation about Hari Kumar was that there was no one anywhere exactly like him. So who had the right to destroy me?" Part of his reasoning is as follows: "I saw . . . something Merrick had overlooked. That the situation only existed on Merrick's terms if we both took part in it. The situation would cease to exist if I detached myself from it"

(*Scorpion*, p. 303). Hari has realized that the master-slave dialectic needs a slave: that is why Merrick has been so motivated to reduce him to slavery, so that Merrick himself can be elevated to mastery—what he regards as his proper position. Take away the slave and you take away the master-slave situation. But when Hari says Merrick's situation ceases to exist, he does not intend that no Situation of any sort exists any longer. On the contrary: Hari refers to "the situation" many times throughout his prison interview, endorsing the concept in his own right and without irony, sometimes infuriating his interrogators with his mystifying assertions about what "the situation" is and what it entails. When they try to prevent him from talking about the situation, Hari says that it is impossible for him to forget the situation (*Scorpion*, p. 283). He says (*Scorpion*, p. 292; emphases added):

... you begin to see that I am the least important factor and that without intending to you're asking questions about what *I call the situation*.

That's why you're annoyed and accuse me of lying, because the *situation* threatens to be more than any conscience can cope with.

Hari's silence, his refusal to participate in Merrick's version of the situation, not only incriminates him but also contributes to the prosecution of the five other prisoners innocent of the rape in the Bibighar garden. When this is pointed out to him, Hari replies: "Yes, I had to consider that. It was part of the situation." When Hari's testimony is finished, he notes with irony that the clerk had been sent out of the room during the part that incriminated Merrick. He suggests, "That's part of the situation too, isn't it?" (*Scorpion*, p. 305)

Hari has been converted to existentialism by Merrick lock, stock, and barrel. He merely disagrees with Merrick over what the situation is. Or rather, Hari's resoluteness subjectively discloses a situation different from the situation disclosed by Merrick's

resoluteness. Let us look closer at the situation as disclosed to Hari. He finds the tin mug that Merrick gave him water out of. He puts a towel around his middle, covering his naked, lacerated body. He walks up and down his jail cell, holding the tin mug. Like his Hindu grandfather, who had become “*sannyasi*”—disavowing all responsibilities in his old age to take up a beggar’s cup and go out into the world to acquire merit—, Hari now reminds himself of the “good Indian” his relatives have been trying to make him become since his return to India. The idea of *sannyasa*—the disavowal of all responsibilities—connects for Hari with the idea that Hari is not answerable to anyone but himself: since he has no responsibilities, no one has any claims over him. “No one had any rights in regard to me.” He comes to a decision to be silent, confessing nothing. Hari vindicates his existential freedom: “it seemed like a way of proving the *existence* of Hari Kumar . . .” (*Scorpion*, p. 303; emphasis added).

It is crucial to see here that Hari does not truly become an Indian. (“I don’t know whether that made me a good Indian,” p. 303). He, an Englishman, does not appropriate Indian values such as *sannyasa* in any direct or simple way. Rather, he takes from *sannyasa* only what he needs and only what the historical situation permits him to take. His appropriation of Indian cultural values is momentary, transient, and opportunistic, and it takes place in and through a Liberal philosophy of rights that is not Hindu but comes from John Stuart Mill and the tradition Hari learned in England. Nevertheless, the existentialist would say that Hari’s appropriation of Indian cultural values is as authentic or genuine as it could be: the situation disclosed to Hari what there was to appropriate, and he appropriated it.

Well, I’m almost done. But here, at the end of the lecture, we have come to what I consider to be the core of the *Raj Quartet*’s philosophical concerns, and what Paul Scott admits in his lectures and essays is his philosophical purpose in writing the kind of “moral dialogue” that we have been reading here. (I should stress that the wording of the following questions is my own wording, not Scott’s wording, but I claim they are his

questions.) Can someone from one culture genuinely come to understand and embrace the people and place of another culture, or must members of one culture always appropriate “the other” in a mode determined by the culture they come from? That is to say, can Daphne really embrace Indianness and understand it? To what extent does a culture constitute (and therefore determine) the self that belongs to it, and to what extent is the self free for self-fashioning? Remember that one culture, one community is about to abscond: time is running out on the *raj*. A legion of characters in the novels we have not examined find themselves suddenly without roles when their society absconds. Scott portrays characters struggling to find a core of moral agency or individuality in themselves that has not been constructed for them by their history. That is, they seek a self that is properly their own. They struggle to come to terms with the sheer extent of moral determinism that comes of their involvement in a great historical process (the retreat from empire and the Indian Independence movement). Only through historical theory can they explain their conundrums to themselves and to the reader. The *Raj Quartet* presents several such historical theories (I have concentrated on only one.) Paul Scott elsewhere expresses distaste for the historicist philosophy of history known as existentialism. He clearly was ambivalent about it, since existentialism contributed to the moral depravity of Merrick. Yet it also contributed to the existential freedom of Hari. Somehow despite his distaste for it, existentialism spoke deeply to Paul Scott when it came to the philosophic wonder implicit in the questions he posed.