

The F. R. Scott Library

by Bruce Whiteman

The distinguished poet F. R. Scott (1899-1985) taught law at McGill from 1928 until his retirement in 1968, and was Dean of the Faculty of Law from 1961-64. In the fall of 1988 his widow, the painter Marian Scott, donated to the University Scott's personal library of literature and general books. The books now form part of the Canadian literature holdings of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. The article describes the Scott library and some of the unusual and valuable books contained in it.

L'éminent poète F. R. Scott (1899-1985) a enseigné le droit à McGill de 1928 à 1968, date à laquelle il a pris sa retraite. De 1961 à 1964, il a été doyen de la faculté de droit. A l'automne 1988, sa veuve, le peintre Marian Scott, a fait don de sa bibliothèque personnelle à l'université, laquelle réunit des ouvrages de littérature et d'intérêt général. Les livres font désormais partie du fonds de littérature canadienne du département des livres rares et des collections spéciales. Cet article décrit la bibliothèque de Scott et certains des ouvrages insolites et inestimables qui en font partie.

You scatter these sources abroad, and who then shall use them?
Oh, I am told, they will have a small place in some basement.
Gladly some alien shelves in a distant library
will give them safe shelter.¹

The lines above were written by F. R. Scott at the time of his retirement from the Faculty of Law of McGill University in 1964. His prediction was partly right and – happily – partly wrong; for although his “sources,” as he called his books and files, do now have safe shelter in a library, it is a library that is neither alien nor distant. Over the past three years the Scott library has returned to McGill through the generosity of his widow, Mrs. Marian Scott, and Scott’s question as to “who then shall use them” can be confidently answered: students and scholars of Canadian literature will find his library a rich resource, and Scott scholars will find it invaluable.

Although it is Scott’s personal library, donated

to the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections of the McGill University Libraries in August of 1988, that I would like to describe here, his books in fact came to McGill in two lots. The first, representing his legal and political interests, was given to the McGill Law Library shortly after his death in January 1985. It is comprised of the books that he kept in his Law Faculty office, together with a quantity of office files and teaching material. The library which he kept at home bears witness to the other half of his life, and is made up primarily of literature, with an emphasis naturally on English-Canadian and Québécois poetry. English and American poetry is well represented, as are general fiction and belles-lettres, and there are also books on social issues, politics, Burma (where Scott went in 1952) and other subjects.

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The heart of the Scott library, however, is the extensive collection of Canadian poetry in both languages, though in terms of numbers the English surpasses the French. A good deal of Scott's early work appeared in the *McGill Fortnightly Review* (1925-26) which he helped to found,² and his earliest appearance in a book was in the seminal anthology *New Provinces*, which Macmillan of Canada published (at the poets' expense) in 1936. Yet largely because of the Depression, Scott's first book did not appear until 1945 when the Ryerson Press issued *Overture*. His last book was appropriately enough *The Collected Poems*, published in 1981 and winner of the Governor-General's award. The Canadian poetry in his library is strongest for the period of almost 40 years spanned by his own first and final collections. There are some surprising omissions, such as the books published in Montreal by John Sutherland's important First Statement Press between 1945 and 1951; but these aside, the library attests to a poet who bought and read with some assiduity the poetry of his own time and place.

As one might expect, the Scott library is rich in presentation and association copies, and it is some of these that I would like to mention individually. One of the earliest is a copy of Leo Kennedy's collection *The Shrouding* (1933), which is inscribed "for Frank Scott:—| editor, proofreader,—| obstetrician! | Leo Kennedy | Dec | 33." This is by no means the only book in the library that testifies to Scott's assistance to other poets. His copy of the first edition of Leonard Cohen's first novel, *The Favorite Game*, is inscribed "For Frank Scott | who has led us all | into a strange community—| with affectionate admiration | Leonard Cohen | Foster Poetry Conference | October 14, 1963." A copy of poet Seymour Mayne's first book, *That Monocycle the Moon*,³ with Scott's name painted on the rear wrapper, is inscribed "For F. R. Scott, | poet of ye olde garde, | who taught me | how to be sharp—| Seymour Mayne, | May 21 | 64." On a lighter note, though still indicative of the respect that Scott elicited from his colleagues, is copy of Louis Dudek's *Technology & Culture* (1979) which has tipped in a note addressed to "Dear Great Father-Figure." Other interesting copies include the following: Ron Everson's *Blind Man's Holiday* (1963) with a charming note laid in describing the book as "a handy size for putting under the leg of a teetery

table, or to put a mug of hot buttered rum on;" Doug Jones' *Phrases From Orpheus* (1967) with a long inscription and a typed poem laid in entitled "Some Words for the Wine on the Occasion of the Seventy-Second Birthday of Frank Scott, (August 1, 1971);" and a copy of Peter Stevens' anthology, *The McGill Movement: A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott and Leo Kennedy*, with Scott's trenchant comment on the half-title: "A four-legged animal. | Where's the Klein leg?"⁴

Among the uninscribed books are a number of scarce and rare ones. There is, for example, a copy of Ralph Gustafson's second book, *Alfred the Great* (1937), the publisher's stock of which was mostly destroyed in the Blitz. A. J. M. Smith's *The Worldly Muse: An Anthology of Serious Light Verse* (1951) is unexpectedly rare for a similar reason: a warehouse fire shortly after publication ruined the bulk of the edition. There are copies of Al Purdy's rare first book, *The Enchanted Echo* (1944), of Elizabeth Smart's famous novel *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down And Wept* (1945), of the first edition of Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1947), of Gwendolyn MacEwen's first chapbook *The Drunken Clock* (1961), and of the only broadside issued by Contact Press, Kenneth McRobbie's *Jupiter C For the Missile Age* (1958, inscribed to Scott from McRobbie).

Passing to French-Canadian literature, mention might be made of Scott's own *Poems of French Canada* (1977). The library naturally contains a copy of the signed, specially-bound issue of the book, Scott's copy being number one (of 38) and amusingly inscribed on the front flyleaf, "FRS | to | FRS." Scott's collection of Québécois poetry contains a number of presentation copies. This is hardly surprising, as Scott was an industrious translator and one of the few Canadian poets of his generation with friends in both "solitudes." His reputation among the Francophone poets was high, at least until he came out publicly in favour of implementing the War Measures Act during the Quebec Crisis of 1970, and Jacques Ferron was perhaps alone in considering him an interloper. Ferron put an ambivalent Scott character into several of his books. In *Le ciel du Québec* he appears as Frank Anacharsis Scott, and in *La nuit* he is Frank Archibald Campbell;⁵ nevertheless, of the several Ferron books in Scott's own collection, two are inscribed to him "avec mes



**F.R. Scott, 1939. Charcoal drawing by Fred Taylor. Print Collection,
Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.**

respects.”⁶

Scott worked closely with Anne Hébert on the translation of some of her poems, and their collaboration resulted in *Dialogue sur la traduction* (1970). Scott’s copy of Hébert’s *Kamouraska*, probably her best-known novel, bears a warm inscription: “Cher Frank Scott ce livre de | fureur et de neige, en souvenir | de “nos dialogues” | En toute amitié | Anne Hébert.” Other interesting associations are inscribed copies of the first edition of Gabrielle Roy’s *Bonheur d’occasion* and various books by Roland Giguère, François Hertel, Alain Grandbois, Rina Lasnier, Gilles Hénault (“Pour Frank Scott | qui appartient à la | grande famille | internationale des | poètes”), and Jacques Godbout. A particularly nice book is a presentation copy of St-Denys-Garneau’s *Regards et jeux dans l’espace* (1937), the poet’s only book and one of the first books of modernist poetry in Québec. One of the rarer titles in the library (though in this case uninscribed) is Paul-Marie Lapointe’s first collection, *Le vierge incendié*, published in the same year (1948) and by the same publisher (Mithra-Mythe) as the *Refus global*.⁷

Before leaving the Canadian literature portion of the library, brief mention should be made of some interesting translations in Scott’s collection. There are a few curiosities here, such as a Romanian translation of Hugh McLennan’s *Barometer Rising* and a Dutch translation of John Glassco’s version of Aubrey Beardsley’s *Under the Hill* (with a happy birthday inscription from Glassco to Scott in Dutch!).⁸ Copies of most of the available translations of Québec literature into English are present, e.g., John Glassco’s version of *The Journal of Saint-Denys-Garneau* (1963, inscribed to Scott). Among the rarer items are copies of the four mimeographed pamphlets of translations of work by Lapointe, Giguère, Saint-Denys-Garneau and Hénault issued privately by the English poet Gael Turnbull from Iroquois Falls (where Turnbull was practising medicine) in the summer of 1955. There is also a copy of Turnbull’s version of Jacques Prévert’s *The Moon Opera*, one of 50 copies mimeographed in January, 1955.

Scott’s reading ranged far beyond Canadian literature, of course, and his library reflects this. Of English and American literature there are

many of the standard works of the standard authors, as well as good runs of a number of writers whom Scott particularly liked. There are first editions of books by W. H. Auden and D. H. Lawrence,⁹ some early books of Dylan Thomas, and a copy of the signed, numbered edition of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932). Among American poets are to be found copies of Ezra Pound’s *Exultations* (1909), all four volumes in dust-jackets of the first edition of William Carlos Williams’ long poem *Paterson* (1946-1951), and the scarce first edition, printed in Germany, of Charles Olson’s *The Maximus Poems 1-10* (1953). The American poet best represented is ee cummings, of whose books Scott owned nine first editions, including *The Enormous Room* (1922), the privately printed *&* (1925), and the signed issue of the play *Him* (1927).

Scott was not a collector in the bibliophilic sense. He bought books mainly to read them. Neither does he seem to have annotated his books a great deal. Some books have desultory notes or markings and, occasionally, these are of significant interest. For example, he has made some corrections to the text of an interview/discussion among four of the editors of *Preview* magazine. The legendary quarrel between *Preview* and *First Statement*, its rival magazine in Montreal in the 1940s, comes up for discussion. Neufville Shaw remarks,

But remember the First Statement people were here, in this house [i.e. Scott’s home]. They came here once, and they were shown into another room; they were put below the salt as it were, and we were like oil and vinegar. One layer sat on top of the other.¹⁰

Scott has marked this passage in his copy of *Canadian Poetry*, and has written in the margin: “Nonsense –! [sic] I took them to the back room to give them drinks.” Though comparatively small in number, such annotations and marginalia as Scott made are historically valuable. That the library will be kept together will enable such material to be found and used with some ease.

F. R. Scott was certainly one of the most important Canadian poets of his generation, in

addition to being an important legal and political figure. His entire active career as a teacher was spent at McGill University, and it is therefore fitting and satisfying that his books should find "safe shelter" in the McGill University Libraries. The Canadian literature holdings of the McGill Libraries have been substantially enriched by the gift of Mrs. Marian Scott, and scholars and students will have reason to be grateful to her for many years to come.

Notes

1. F. R. Scott, "On Saying Goodbye to My Room in Chancellor Day Hall," in *The Collected Poems of F.R. Scott* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981), 218.

2. The Scott library does not include a run of the *McGill Fortnightly Review* nor of *Preview* (1942-45), the little magazine edited by Patrick Anderson with which Scott was closely involved. Runs of both, however, are in the collections of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections (hereafter RBSC).

3. Mayne attended McGill, and this poem won the Chester Macnaghten prize for creative writing in 1962. The typescript is in RBSC (folio PS8235.C6C45 1962).

4. The reference here is to poet A. M. Klein, whose involvement in the McGill Movement Stevens ignores in his book.

5. Scott marked several passages in his copy of *La nuit* (Montréal: Editions Parti-Pris, 1965), including one on page 109: "Il ne me restait plus qu'à croire en Dieu lui-même: je n'étais pas pressé. Il me restait aussi à comprendre Frank: je n'y tenais guère. Il me suffisait comme épouvantail. Je ne lui en voulais même pas. Et je ne pouvais croire qu'il fût le diable. Sans Dieu, pas de diable, mille regrets, cher Lucifer écossais, petite jupe et grandes jambes poilues. Il était tout simplement ridicule, le pauvre; je tenais cependant à rester poli; après tout, j'étais son invitée."

6. These are *L'Amélanchier* (Montréal: Editions du Jour, 1970) and *Le Salut de l'Irlande* (Montréal: Editions du Jour, 1970).

7. As part of the Scott library, Marian Scott donated to RBSC her copy of the *Refus global*. Mrs. Scott is a well-known painter, and was associated with Borduas in the 1940s.

8. Hugh McLennan, *Barometru în urcare* (Bucaresti: Editura Univers, 1971) and Aubrey Beardsley and John Glassco, *De Venusberg* (Amsterdam: N.V. Uitgeverij De Arbeiderspers, 1971).

9. "D. H. Lawrence had a considerable influence. I have still got a very good collection of first editions of his novels because I read them as they came out, and his poetry too." Michael Heenan, "An Interview with F. R. Scott," *Canadian Poetry* No. 19 (Fall/Winter 1986): 94.

10. "Four of the Former *Preview* Editors: A Discussion," *Canadian Poetry* No. 4 (Spring/Summer 1979): 103.

