**Scott, F. R. (Francis Reginald) (1899-1985)**

F.R. Scott was a prominent 20th century Canadian poet, social activist, and intellectual. Scott challenged the style and activities of traditional Canadian poets of his time, and ushered in a new age of Canadian MODERNISM in poetry through his involvement with the Montreal Group (a collaboratory of young writers who met at McGill University in the 1920s) and *The McGill Fortnightly Review*, which he founded with A.J.M. SMITH in 1925. His poetry is characterized by its leftist politics, frequent SATIRE, social views, and an EXPRESSIONISTIC attention to Canadian landscape that aligned Scott with the Group of Seven artists instead of his literary predecessors, the Confederation Poets. Scott also wrote extensively on Canada, democratic socialism, law, and the Canadian Confederation. He remained a potent figure of Canadian arts and politics until his death on 31 January 1985.

Scott was born on 1 August 1899 in Québec City. His early career was punctuated with accomplishments; Scott was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University (1920-1923), taught at Lower Canada College upon his return to Canada, entered Law School at McGill University (1924-1926), and began teaching law at McGill University in 1928. In 1931-1932, Scott founded the League for Social Reconstruction with Frank UNDERHILL. He also participated in the drafting of the Regina Manifesto (1933), and was active in the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), which later developed into the New Democratic Party of Canada (1961). After moving away from his public leftist leanings, Scott became Dean of Law at McGill University from 1961-1964. Among various awards and distinctions, Scott was a member of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, and won both the Governor General’s Literary Award for Non-fiction with *Essays on the Constitution* (1977) and for Poetry with *The Collected Poems of FR Scott* (1981).

In 1936 public notice of Scott’s poetry significantly increased with the publication of an anthology of Canadian modernist verse entitled *New Provinces,* anonymously co-edited by Scott, Leo KENNEDY, and A.J.M. Smith. Scott published *Overture,* the first collection of his own poetry, in 1945*.* Scott was noted for his satire and his blatant distaste for traditional, Romantic or Victorian styled Canadian writers. “The Canadian Authors Meet,” from *Overture*, encompasses this sentiment as Scott poignantly critiques, “O Canada, O Canada, O can / A day go by without new authors springing / To paint the native maple.” In 1957 Scott and Smith co-edited another more satirical anthology, *The Blasted Pine.* In his workScott frequently employed the form of the “trouvaille” or found poem, a genre whereby the poet takes previous works, public documents, or conversations and situates them in such a way to exemplify or produce a specific meaning. Scott even constructed “The Robinson Treaties,” a trouvaille made out of treaties from the Indian Act that exposes the injustices of those negotiations.

Criticism on Scott surrounds his assertions that the Canadian landscape was a blank slate to be inscribed, as articulated in the frequently anthologized “Laurentian Shield.” Although Scott was a predominant intellectual prone to speaking out against inequality or injustice in social institutions, his views towards the landscape may potentially deny the significance of the population of First Nations peoples who inhabited Canada pre-settlement and pre-colonization. Regardless, Scott remains a significant voice of social change in Canadian politics and stylistic change in Canadian poetry.

**Paratextual Information:**

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<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/frank-scott>

(image credit: Library and Archives Canada/PA-1162815)

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<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/canpoetry/scott_fr/index.htm>

(image credit: Lois Lome)

**List of Select Works:**

Poetry

*Overture*. Toronto: Ryerson,1945. Print.

*Overture* is characterized as comprehensive, rich, and variable, but frequently bitter or overly critical. It includes the frequently anthologized poem “Laurentian Shield.”

*Events and Signals.* Toronto: Ryerson,1954. Print.

Post-World War II, *Events and Signals* presents a less biting and more compassionate collection of poems than *Overture.* The focus is on utopian ideals and more optimistic affirmations.

*The Eye of the Needle: Satires, Sorties, Sundries*. Montreal: Contact,1957. Print.

*The Eye of the Needle* is a collection of Scott’s satires, and includes the mock elegy for Prime Minister Mackenzie King (“W.L.M.K.”).

*Signature.* Vancouver: Klanak,1964. Print.

The poetry collection *Signature* includes Scott’s popular poem “A Lass in Wonderland,” a satire about the obscenity trial over D.H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* that Scott won in 1962.

*Trouvailles: Poems from Prose.* Montreal: Delta*,* 1967. Print.

*Trouvailles* is a collection of Scott’s “trouvailles” or found poems, poems that are re-situated or re-contextualized excerpts from other written works or dialogues.

*The Dance is One.* Toronto: McLelland and Stewart,1973. Print.

*The Dance is One* is a collection of Scott’s poetry and includes the “Letters from the Mackenzie Rivers” poems, written in 1956 and based thematically on a trip with Pierre Trudeau.

*The Collected Poems of F.R. Scott.* Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1982. Print.

In the later years of his life, Scott decided to summarize each of the three major areas of work in his life (poetry, law, and politics) in distinct volumes. This collection represents the poetry volume.

Non-fiction

*Canada Today: A Study of Her National Interests and National Policy*. Toronto: Oxford UP,1939. Print.

This volume is a survey of Canada, its domestic policy, and its relations to other states in the Commonwealth. First written at the request of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs for the Second British Commonwealth Relations Conference in 1938.

*Essays on the Constitution: Aspects of Canadian Law and Politics.* Toronto: U of T P, 1977. Print.

*Essays on the Constitution* is the second volume in a set of work aiming to summarize Scott’s life work, and represents the law area of Scott’s oeuvre.

*A New Endeavour: Selected Political Essays, Letters, and Addresses.* Toronto: U of T P, 1986. Print.

*A New Endeavour* is a posthumous collection of Scott’s non-fiction writings edited by Michael Horn that includes Scott’s political writings and marks the third, and last, of a set of a summative collection of Scott’s works.

Anthologies

*New Provinces: Poems of Several Authors*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1936. Print.

Co-edited anonymously by Scott, A.J.M. Smith, and Leo Kennedy, *New Provinces* is often hailed as the first anthology of Canadian modernist poetry.

*The Blasted Pine: An Anthology of Satire, Invective, and Disrespective Verse, Chiefly by Canadian Writers.* Toronto: Macmillan, 1957. Print.

*The Blasted Pine* is an anthology of satirical Canadian poetry also co-edited by Scott and Smith. It includes the work of Scott, Smith, A.M. Klein, P.K. Pratt, Irving Layton, Stephen Leacock and Alexander McLachlan.

**References and further reading**

Djwa, Sandra. *A Life of F.R. Scott: The Politics of the Imagination.* Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1987. Print.

Djwa is Scott’s primary biographer, and *A Life of F.R. Scott* is the major biographical work done on his life and work.

---. “F.R. Scott: Biography.” *Canadian Poetry Online*. University of Toronto and University of Toronto Libraries, 2000. Web. 20 April 2012.

Canadian Poetry Online is housed at the University of Toronto Libraries and includes a large collection of poetry from 19th century and contemporary Canadian poets. “F.R. Scott” is a short biography on Scott’s life, taken from the entry by Djwa in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature.*

---. “‘Nothing By Halves’: F.R. Scott.” *Journal of Canadian Studies*. 34:4 (1999/2000): 52-69. Print.

This article incorporates writings from Scott’s personal diaries as well as interviews with Djwa to illuminate Scott’s role as a specialist on the BNA Act, as well as his relations with Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.

“F.R. Scott.” *15 Canadian Poets x 3*. Ed. Gary Geddes. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2001. 92-102. Print.

*15 Canadian Poets x 3* is an anthology of forty-five Canadian poets including Scott, Margaret Atwood, Leonard Cohen, Irving Layton, Michael Ondaatje, Al Purdy, and Miriam Waddington. The “F.R. Scott” section includes a brief biography and twelve of Scott’s poems.

“F.R. Scott.” *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada.* 1st ed. 2002. Print.

*Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* is a comprehensive encyclopedia of all things relevant to literature in Canada. The “F.R. Scott” section is lengthy and balances Scott’s poetic, personal, and political work.

Moss, Laura. *Leaving the Shade of the Middle Ground: The Poetry of F.R. Scott.* Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier UP, 2011. Print.

*Leaving the Shade of the Middle Ground* is a collection of Scott’s poetry selected by Moss. Moss also supplies a foreword, biographical note, and nuanced introduction to the selection.

Richardson, Keith. “Frank Scott.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia / The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada.* Historica Dominion, 2012. Web. 20 April 2012.

*The Canadian Encyclopedia / The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* is an online reservoir of information about Canada. “Frank Scott” is a short biographical entry focused on his work in Canadian politics.

Scott, F.R. and Michiel Horn. *A New Endeavor: Selected Political Essays, Letters, and Addresses.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1986. Print.

A posthumous collection of Scott’s non-fiction writings edited by Michael Horn, *A New Endeavour* includes Scott’s political writings and marks the third, and last, of a set of a summative collection of Scott’s works.