

**Evan Gottlieb, *Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. Pp. 187. £21.99. ISBN 9781441120229.**

*Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory* is the latest contribution to a growing and impressive body of monographs that, over the last two decades, have shaped our appreciation of the critical versatility of Walter Scott's oeuvre. It is, moreover, the first book-length study to do so by examining Scott's fiction in juxtaposition to multiple schools of contemporary continental and Anglo-American philosophical thought. In each of the five chapters, Gottlieb examines two Scott novels in light of at least one major contemporary theoretical concept, illuminating and interrogating both in the process. Key recurring themes in Scott's fiction are convincingly (re)articulated in the idiom of contemporary theory (as modern subjectivity, hybridity, performativity, historicity, governmentality, hospitality and community); interesting points of confluence are evoked between Scott novels not routinely paired for discussion; and critical dialogue is created between thinkers who in some cases have publicly descried the theoretical position of the other, but whom Gottlieb identifies positively as sharing an 'explicit political commitment' (9). This affords fresh insights into Scott's novels and uncovers stimulating continuities between a diverse array of critical concepts and thinkers.

Gottlieb begins his study by examining notions of modern subjectivity as articulated in two of Scott's best-known novels, *Waverley* and *Ivanhoe*, in conjunction with the work of the Slovenian social theorist, Slavoj Žižek. Gottlieb employs Žižek's Marxist-inflected, psychoanalytical theories of subjectivity to suggest that, even as the central protagonists of these novels both ultimately appear to be 'firmly enmeshed in their respective symbolic orders' (30), the unsatisfactory ending of each novel problematises such a construct. This aptly illustrates the capacity of Scott's work to challenge contemporary theoretical thought.

Constructions of modernity are inevitably intertwined with Scott's preoccupations with historical and sociopolitical processes, and these thematic concerns inform chapters 2 and 4. Chapter 2 examines *The Antiquary* via the work of German historian, Reinhart Koselleck, on historicity, and *Redgauntlet* is read in conjunction with the Mexican-American contemporary philosopher Manuel DeLanda's realist ontology of historical change. Chapter 4 discusses *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* in relation to Michel Foucault's ideas on governmentality and 'biopolitics' (definable as 'a politics that attempts to exercise direct control over the lives and deaths of its subjects', 85); and then undertakes a fascinating analysis of sovereign power in *Quentin Durward* in light of Giorgio Agamben's paradigm of biopolitics.

Chapter 5 picks up on the fourth chapter's concluding assertion that Foucault and Agamben identify pessimistically with the processes of modernity. In this fifth chapter, Gottlieb deploys the ideas of a host of critics on hospitality and community: Alain Badiou, Theodor Adorno, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jacques Rancière are just some of the key thinkers invoked, but extended treatment is reserved for Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida. Gottlieb traces abuses of hospitality and challenges to the fabric (the very concept, even) of community in *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *Chronicles of the Canongate*. He then makes fascinating application of these theories to his analysis of the narrative framework that binds the superficially disparate tales in *Chronicles* together, arguing convincingly that Scott's novel both identifies and exemplifies a democratised, literary hybridity made possible by sociopolitical changes ushered in during the nineteenth century.

Literary hybridity is explored more fully in the book's third chapter, which couples the ideas of Judith Butler and Homi Bhabha on hybridity and performativity. Gottlieb traces cultural, sexual and textual hybridity in his considerations of *Rob Roy* and *The Talisman*, and demonstrates how Scott frequently invokes borders and oppositions only to dissolve and deconstruct them.

Gottlieb's conclusion is deliberately open-ended, and his parting consideration of

Scott in relation to posthumanism opens up intriguing new avenues for contemplation and for classroom discussion. As with those chapters that precede it, this chapter boldly widens the parameters of the discussion by introducing acutely contemporary topics such as biotechnology, cybernetics, genetic decoding and globalization, and serves as reminder of the startling relevance of Scott's fiction to the topical issues and concerns of our own day.

The various pairings in this study yield thought-provoking and rewarding readings both of Scott and of the selected works of contemporary theorists and critics. The interconnectivity of theories and novels (theories explored in one chapter could be readily applied to novels considered in other chapters, and unrepresented Scott novels substituted for those included), further suggests afterlives for Gottlieb's study through the multiplicity of applications that could be developed from this critical starting point. At the outset, Gottlieb states that his aim is to provide readers with a 'greater understanding of the complexities and pleasures of *both* the *Waverley Novels* *and* contemporary theory' (10). Thanks to the persuasive arguments presented in this study, and the sheer energy and enthusiasm that Gottlieb brings to his subject matter, this goal must be easily realised. Not only does Gottlieb have something genuinely new to offer both Scott scholars and contemporary theorists, his palpable enthusiasm for his subject makes this study a joy to engage with.

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