Caroline McCracken-Flesher and Matthew Wickman, eds., *Walter Scott at 250: Looking Forward*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. Pp. xi + 227. £75. ISBN 9781474429863.

Daniel Cook, *Walter Scott and Short Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. Pp. 200. £75. ISBN 9781474487139.

As 2021 marks two hundred and fifty years from the birth of Sir Walter Scott, it is not surprising that there have been numerous publications and events about The Great Unknown. Two of these are the focus of this review.

Walter Scott at 250: Looking Forward is a collection of ten chapters by established Scott scholars: Ina Ferris, Penny Fielding, Ian Duncan, Anthony Jarrells, Celeste Langan, Alison Lumsden, Fiona Price, Caroline McCracken-Flesher, Susan Oliver, and Matthew Wickman. As the title suggests, the book is concerned with how Scott is a 'theorist of tomorrow' (5), presenting ways in which his work intersects with twenty-first-century concerns and trends. Although each chapter stands alone, cohesion is created through the authors' links to relevant issues, and the use of key clusters, which are outlined in the introduction.

The first cluster focuses on time and space, opening with Ina Ferris' discussion of unclosing the past in Scott's oeuvre, which 'makes visible what has been smoothed out or over in the historical past [and] directs attention to its compaction' (17). Penny Fielding similarly considers time, arguing that Scott draws attention to the fissures in the idea of stadial time through his use of the future anterior. She shows through a close reading of *The Bride of Lammermoor* that this novel suggests 'history is not something given, but an epistemological-temporal structure that depends on continual reinterpretation of the past imbricated in conjectures about the future' (42). The third chapter in this cluster is by Ian Duncan and considers anachronism, arguing that there are three types of anachronism in Scott's 1814-1819 novels: necessary, comic anachronism, which 'brings history home to the "eternal or existential present"' (60); an uncanny mode created by 'anachronism's alienating, dislocating force' (60); and 'a critical and utopian mode of anachronism' which 'unspools into utopian longing' (60-61). The reader is the primary force of these three modes, thus ending the cluster on time in the present moment of reading.

The next two chapters focus on value. Anthony Jarrells opens by noting that Thomas Piketty's bestselling *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* considers fiction by Honoré de Balzac and Jane Austen, but not by Scott, and thus concludes that meritocratic values were undermined by early nineteenth-century commercial society. If Piketty had considered Scott, Jarrells argues, his conclusions may have been different. Many of Scott's characters, Jarrells contends, 'achieve success through study and effort […]. At the same time, however, Scott connects this success […] back to property and rank, justifying the latter, we might say, in the process' (71). Celeste Langan compares a debt-laden Scott to contemporary knowledge-workers, producing page after page of text. By comparing Scott's journal to his *Life of Napoleon*, Langan demonstrates the links between Napoleon as military-leader, Scott as writer, and academics as textual producers.

Alison Lumsden and Fiona Price consider textual excess in Scott's work. Lumsden shows how the paratextual notes to Scott's poetry are an important part of his discourse with more in common with modern hypertexts than Romantic annotation, concluding that, 'the notes to Scott's poems call into question the authority of discourse itself and the possibility of its completion' (122). Price considers performance, arguing that 'Scott's work reveals how the performance of gender structures political life, shaping our imaginary of how power should – and does – operate' (138). Caroline McCracken-Flesher investigates the roles and lives of Abbotsford's female inhabitants, challenging the erasure of these women by visitors,

concluding that, 'Watching visitors' resistance to the female presences at Abbotsford gives us those women's unique gift: the gift of questioning our own positioning, our own assumptions, our own identities in formation' (156).

The final two chapters are concerned with Scott's role in the Anthropocene. Susan Oliver considers the representation of species loss and human exile across Scott's work. Finally, Matthew Wickman discusses 'How Scott brings the "unthinkable" to consciousness – the narrative techniques whereby he renders the unimaginable more palpable to us' (185), which provides us with ways to think about unimaginable issues such as the climate crisis.

All ten chapters in this book are well-written, well-developed, and interesting. They open up new ways of thinking about Scott, and highlight connections to twenty-first-century life that may initially seem unrelated. It is therefore an important book, not only for Scott studies but for literary studies more generally.

The second book in this review, Daniel Cook's *Walter Scott and Short Fiction*, provides an extensive exploration not only of Walter Scott's short fiction, but the form and development of the short story in Scotland. Working chronologically through Scott's short fiction, Cook interrogates the form of each text, showing us examples of when Scott wrote, amongst others, compressed novels, short stories, and anecdotes (which Cook interestingly positions as a forerunner of flash fiction). Genre is also of concern to Cook; he outlines how Scott used and subverted elements from genres including the Gothic, fairy tales, and historical fiction. A third aspect of Cook's exploration is the way in which Scott used short fiction to raise questions about story and authorship. Scott's short fiction, Cook argues, comes to the reader mediated through layers of tellers, making it impossible, in many cases, for the reader to establish whose words they are reading. Claiming that 'For all their diversity in style and content, Scott's short stories, like many of his novels, typically turn back to fundamental questions about the status of taletellers in the modern world. Who tells stories, especially in a commercialised world of print? Who hears – or reads – them, and why?' (158-9), Cook shows how a good understanding of Scott's short fiction enables a wider comprehension of the major themes of Scott's work.

Walter Scott and Short Fiction is a highly readable monograph that does not assume knowledge of either Scott's short fiction or the history of the short story. Along with his arguments surrounding form, genre, and metafiction, Cook provides synopses of the texts that he discusses. Some of these, such as 'Wandering Willie's Tale,' 'The Two Drovers,' and 'The Surgeon's Daughter,' are likely to be familiar to readers. Others, such as 'The Fortunes of Martin Waldeck,' and *Bizarro* are probably less so. Regardless of whether they are well-known or obscure, Cook considers each piece of fiction in depth, providing context about its sources, writing, and publication, discussing it in relation to its form, and explaining what happens in it while bringing to the fore relevant points about its shifts in genre, the way it subverts the reader's expectations, and how it engages with questions of authorship and narrative relatability. The final chapter, 'Afterword: The Modern Scottish Short Story', provides a pertinent and far-reaching overview of Scottish short fiction from Scott to the present day. In addition to tracing elements of Scott's influence, it makes a strong case for an increased recognition of Scottish contributions to short fiction.

Cook's monograph is an excellent contribution to the study of early nineteenth-century short fiction. It employs theories of the short story and its tributaries with context on the background of each text studied and detailed close readings. The overall argument that Scott uses short fiction to engage with questions of '"storiness"' (9), narratability, and authorship is a well-argued addition to the current state of Scott studies.

These two books are part of an increased interest in The Great Unknown that coincides with his two hundred and fiftieth birthday. As Walter Scott's popularity with general readers has waned over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it would be easy to see him as an author with limited relevance today. However, both these books have firmly situated Scott in

the middle of issues that affect life, literary and otherwise, in 2021. These books argue that Scott shows us the importance of not smoothing over history, of recognising value, and of the effect of the Anthropocene. In terms of literature, they argue that Scott demonstrates the importance of slow reading and defies the idea that a literary text could be one complete, self-contained, unproblematic whole. They are therefore both excellent additions to studies of Scott and Romantic literature.

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