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WALTER SCOTT AT 250

Alison Lumsden & Kirsty Archer-Thompson

August 15, 2021 marked the 250th anniversary of Walter Scott's birth. This milestone offers an opportunity both to reflect on the current state of Scott Studies and to consider how the field might develop. The 2021 International Scott Conference, hosted by the University of Edinburgh, invited consideration of this from a scholarly perspective, while a WalterScott250 National Partnership and cultural events programme co-ordinated by the Abbotsford Trust provided the opportunity to consider this question from a more public-facing viewpoint. This paper reflects on the state of Scott studies at this juncture, the scholarly directions in which it might develop, and ways in which the relevance of Scott's work may be re-discovered and re-invigorated for contemporary audiences.

Scott's footprint as a writer and cultural icon is far from static but has evolved significantly over the past two hundred years. To look to the future of Scott studies and understand the ways in which his literary and wider cultural legacies may be relevant to the wider critical and public debates of the twenty first century, we must first look backwards and reflect on how and why modern preconceptions of Scott have developed. In this, his anniversary year, one question that has been posed repeatedly is how a writer who was once everywhere, both in popular consciousness and in the physical markers that liberally pepper our landscapes, cities and towns, came dangerously close to becoming the "Great Unread"?¹

In part this trajectory of "decline" can be traced by looking at the ways in which Scott's life and work have been commemorated at other anniversaries since his death in 1832. Scott was, of course, lauded and adored during his lifetime as the "Minstrel," "The Great Unknown," and "The Wizard of the North"; his poems and novels sold in unprecedented numbers, and adaptations quickly followed, expanding his reach well

¹ One question asked repeatedly during the anniversary year has been "Why does no one read Walter Scott?" Even though rhetorical, expecting refutation, the perception is clearly widespread.

beyond those who read his work in its original format. On his death in September 1832, wreaths were laid in Trafalgar Square, flags were flown at half mast, commemorative pageants were performed and poems were penned. Scott was a man of towering celebrity in life, perhaps one of the first people who we can claim became an icon through a brand of publicity culture that we would still recognise today, and his inevitable transition towards cult status began at his death: John Gibson Lockhart's *Life* (7 vols, 1837–1838) cemented an idea of the author and man that was to have a far-reaching influence, and the completion of Edinburgh's Scott Monument in 1844 enshrined his reputation in physical, if somewhat grandiose, form.² However, questions about Scott's legacy were posed from an early date: reviewing Lockhart, Thomas Carlyle suggested that even in Scott's lifetime there was a "considerable opposition party" to the miracle of the Waverley Novels, and he famously accused Scott of "writing impromptu novels to buy farms with," thus stigmatizing his motivation as financial rather than literary.³

These tensions are also evident if we consider the nature of the celebrations that took place in 1871 to mark the centenary of Scott's birth. Commemorations of literary figures perhaps have their origin in David Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769, but the more immediate Scottish precedent is the Robert Burns centenary of 1859, which encompassed hundreds of events from the humble to the genteel.⁴ Building on this success, in 1871 a national centenary celebration was organised to commemorate the literature and legacy of Walter Scott. A comparison of the two events is fascinating, as it in many ways reinforces the origins of a gulf between Scott and Burns and their respective cultural currencies that persists today. On January 25, 1859, workers across Scotland enjoyed what amounted to a national holiday.⁵ This was an initiative that seemed out of reach or somehow inappropriate for Scott, despite the prevalence and

² J.G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 7 vols (Edinburgh: R. Cadell, 1837-1838).

³ Thomas Carlyle, unsigned review of Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, *London and Westminster Review*, 28 (January 1838): 293-345, quoted here from John O. Hayden, ed., *Walter Scott: The Critical Heritage*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1970), 345-373 (371). This source cited below as *Critical Heritage*.

⁴ See Nicola J. Watson, *The Author's Effects: On Writer's House Museums* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁵ See, e.g., James Ballantine, *Chronicle of the Hundredth Birthday of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh and London: A. Fullarton, 1859); Leith Davis, "The Robert Burns 1859 Centenary: Mapping Transatlantic (Dis)location," in Sharon Alker, Leith Davis, and Holly Nelson, eds, *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 187-205; Christopher Whatley, *Immortal Memory: Burns and the Scottish People* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2016), 76-92.

popularity of his published works and their many adaptations. If Burns was positioned as a man for *all* the people, the ever-accessible Ploughman Poet, the tone of Scott's centenary celebrations was altogether more highbrow. Alongside a summer exhibition of associated artworks and original manuscripts at the Scottish National Gallery, opening on August 15, 1871, to those with a spare shilling in their pockets, there was a 200-strong parade through the city centre, with participants dressed as characters from the Waverley Novels. In a deliberate echo of the celebrations of George IV's visit to Scotland in August 1822, stage-managed to a considerable extent by Scott himself, the centenary programme incorporated a performance of what had become known as Scott's "royal play," *Rob Roy*, at Edinburgh Theatre Royal. But perhaps the event that reinforced the elite veneer of the anniversary most of all was the lavish banquet at the Corn Exchange attended by all the great and good. Sister banqueting events were scheduled in Glasgow and in New York, where communications were received between celebrants in different time zones via telegram, courtesy of the transatlantic cables laid in 1865-1866. Scott's centenary dinner was, therefore, one of the first international events that we might define as an experience shared by an audience in an approximation of real time, allowing for toasts and votes of thanks to traverse the Atlantic in minutes rather than weeks. All of this activity ensured that Scott's profile remained high throughout the 1870s and resulted in a blossoming desire to see his home at Abbotsford. In July 1873, the Thomas Cook travel company brought a group of almost 150 American educators to visit Abbotsford as one of Britain's must-see places.⁶

However, the nature of the 1871 celebrations, only two generations on from Scott's death, suggests there was already a growing undercurrent of feeling that Scott and his works were no longer representative of the times. Once capturing the popular imagination, Scott's works were already being positioned as nostalgic forays for older readers and safe texts for schoolchildren; worse still, often Scott's creative output was read in ways which stripped it of its complexity, with his alleged love of chivalry and his sense of "patriotism" being appropriated for shoring up concepts of

⁶ This reference is direct from the visitor books of Abbotsford, Z.AT.052, now in the ownership of The Abbotsford Trust. For fuller discussion, see Alastair Durie, "Tourism in Victorian Scotland: the Case of Abbotsford," *Scottish Economic & Social History*, 12.2 (2010): 42-54; Caroline McCracken-Flesher, "Six Degrees from Walter Scott: Separation, Connection and the Abbotsford Visitor Books," *Yearbook of English Studies*, 47 (2017): 19-35, and "Where We Never Were: Women at Walter Scott's Abbotsford," in McCracken-Flesher and Matthew Wickman, eds, *Walter Scott at 250: Looking Forward* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 142-160.

Empire. While Scott's engagements with the medieval past and questions of national belonging are in fact highly nuanced, this version of his work took hold in the Victorian consciousness and is captured in Mark Twain's famous 1883 critique of Scott, when he claimed that Scott "did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote."⁷ Twain, of course, saw the *Waverley Novels* as the root cause of a raft of pathetic romanticism and sham medievalism, a feudal agenda that he felt had turned back the clock and halted progress in what he regarded as the American deep south.

Given these interpretations of his work it is hardly surprising that Scott's cultural currency continued to decline with the impact of the First World War and its aftermath, when public distaste for pageant, chivalry and theatricality was at its height. In 1924 Virginia Woolf boldly claimed that Scott, who had been so influential for the development of the European novel, had completely "ceased to influence other writers."⁸ In addition, the aesthetic demands of Modernism did not lend themselves to Scott's more discursive style; E.M. Forster dismissed Scott as a writer suitable only for children, while F.R. Leavis excluded him from his great tradition on the basis that he had been popular and that he is grounded in a bad "romance" tradition.⁹

Nevertheless, in spite of this growing critical scepticism, the bicentenary of Scott's death in 1932 saw a spate of new biographies and the first volumes of H.J.C. Grierson's magisterial edition of Scott's letters.¹⁰ Some celebrations took place in Edinburgh; a voluntary

⁷ Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), ch. 46, quoted from *Critical Heritage*, 537.

⁸ Virginia Woolf, "Sir Walter Scott: *The Antiquary*" (1924), in her *The Moment and Other Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1947), 32-37 (32). For Scott's influence on European literature, see Murray Pittock, ed., *The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

⁹ See E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1927). In *The Great Tradition* F.R. Leavis asserted: "Scott was primarily a kind of inspired folklorist ... not having the creative writer's interest in literature, he made no serious attempt to work out his own form and break away from the bad tradition of the eighteenth century-romance." See F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), 14n.

¹⁰ H.J.C. Grierson, ed., *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, 12 vols (London: Constable, 1932-1937); Grierson concluded his work with his biography, *Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (NY: Columbia Univ. Press; London: Constable, 1938). Other biographies appearing around this point include Donald Carswell, *Sir Walter: a Four-Part Study in Biography* (London: John Murray, 1930; US title *Scott and his Circle*, Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1930); and John Buchan, *Sir Walter Scott* (London: Cassel; New York: Coward-McCann, 1932).

committee working on behalf of the City Council attempted to raise £5000 via public subscriptions to cover the costs of a 200-strong theatrical masque at the Usher Hall, services of commemoration at St Giles Cathedral and Dryburgh Abbey, and a gallery exhibition. The words spoken by the character known as the Spirit of the pageant in the show at the Usher Hall, played by Sheila Logan, are telling:

You who are the people of Scotland, do you want to know the block from which you are hewn? No living man has drawn you such a portrait of yourselves as has Walter Scott.¹¹

Scott is positioned here as having provided a foundational concept of the Scottish nation, but his significance is seen as lying in the past rather than the present. Indeed, within certain sections of Scottish society Scott was seen as increasingly problematic, and the writers of the Scottish Renaissance dismissed the literary legacy he had left them. Hugh MacDiarmid suggested that Scott reinforces a subservience to an English tradition and set of values, and described the centenary celebrations as a “farce,” noting in an essay written specifically for the occasion that “No intelligent person can have witnessed the Edinburgh procession in connection with Scott’s centenary without a sense of shame.”¹² Edwin Muir dismisses Scott along with Burns as a “sham bard of a sham nation.”¹³ As James Robertson comments, “as the 20th century progressed, [Scott] seemed to become less relevant, and more out of step with the times, more associated with privilege, wealth and discredited romantic nationalism than was good for his reputation.”¹⁴ A tension between an important and intellectually stimulating version of Scott and a relevant and popular one was thus established.

¹¹ See <https://historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1229/>.

¹² C.M. Grieve, “The Scott Centenary,” *The Free Man*, 1 (October 1, 1932), 5, reprinted in Margery Palmer McCulloch, ed., *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918 – 1939* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), 125 – 26 (125).

¹³ Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) argued that “The movement to reinstate Scott in critical esteem ... must therefore be regarded as one designed to conserve and reinforce certain elements in English culture, while taking it for granted that Scotland and England have identical cultural interests”: Hugh MacDiarmid, “Conclusion II,” *Contemporary Scottish Studies* (London: Leonard Parson, 1926), 114-115; reprinted in McCulloch, 110-111 (110); Edwin Muir, “Scotland 1941,” in *Complete Poems of Edwin Muir*, ed. Peter Butter (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1991), 100.

¹⁴ James Robertson, “Learning to Love Sir Walter,” *Scottish Review of Books*, 28 (October 28, 2009), at: <https://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/2009/10/learning-to-love-sir-walter/>. This is a version of Robertson’s presidential address to the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club.

However, the 200th anniversary of Scott's birth, in 1971, still warranted celebration. The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club held a number of events and an extensive exhibition was mounted by The Court of Session, The Faculty of Advocates and the National Library of Scotland, with the aim of "showing something of Scott's life, work, background and influence," and noting the "spirit of historical romanticism which was so important a part of Sir Walter's legacy to Scotland."¹⁵ The anniversary saw a series of other commemorative events and a great deal of media coverage focused on introducing Scott to the public anew and, perhaps most noticeably, defending his legacy (particularly in the US where his descendant Patricia Maxwell-Scott embarked upon a promotional tour). It was clear that while Scott was worthy of commemoration he was also in need of rehabilitation.

This sense of a need for rehabilitation was also evident amongst the Scott scholarly community. Writing in 1970, John O. Hayden, editor of the Scott *Critical Heritage* volume, saw signs of "a revival of serious critical interest" in Scott that began to "question some of the orthodox positions."¹⁶ In 1971 the first international Scott conference was held in Edinburgh. Papers from this conference were published as *Scott Bicentenary Papers*, and the titles illustrate the kind of issues then engaging the scholarly Scott community; Scott and Scotland (David Daiches), the Journal (Eric Anderson), Scott and Turner, Scott and the Picturesque, The King's Visit, Scott and Germany, Scott in Hungary, Scott and Italy.¹⁷ J.H. Alexander spoke about Scott's poetry and medievalism, and David Hewitt asked what should be done about Scott's letters. Was a new edition needed? Undoubtedly yes, but, as papers on Scott's manuscripts in the Edinburgh libraries by Alan Bell and on the manuscript and proof sheets of *Redgauntlet* by G.A.M Wood indicated, there was perhaps a more pressing need for a new scholarly edition of Scott's fiction.¹⁸

The bicentenary conference, then, arguably began a scholarly rehabilitation of Scott that has continued over the past fifty years and set the template for a new era of Scott scholarship, one involving modern

¹⁵ *Sir Walter Scott 1771 – 1971: A Bicentenary Exhibition* (Edinburgh, 1971), 6.

¹⁶ John O. Hayden, "Introduction," *Critical Heritage*, 22.

¹⁷ Alan Bell, ed., *Scott Bicentenary Essays: Selected Papers read at the Sir Walter Scott Bicentenary Conference* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973). Cited below as *SBE*.

¹⁸ In addition to the Edinburgh Scott editions discussed below, this renewed engagement with primary documentary research underpinned several major individual projects such as, e.g., Claire Lamont's edition of *Waverley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), William B. Todd's *Sir Walter Scott: A Bibliographical History* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll, 2008) and Jane Millgate's *Millgate Union Catalogue of Walter Scott Correspondence*, online from the National Library of Scotland at: <https://digital.nls.uk/catalogues/walter-scott-correspondence/>.

textual analysis of Scott, and a re-examination of his work in narratological, Scottish and international contexts. However, a paper by Edgar Johnson acknowledged that this intellectual rehabilitation of Scott would only be meaningful if Scott was also seen as relevant. He noted that Scott is not simply enshrined in the past as a once-significant novelist but, through the form of the historical novel, he provides windows, or “openings” to illuminate current concerns: “Under his gaze the corners of time are not quaint and obscure crannies; they are light-filled openings into meaning and enlargements of understanding and the spirit.”¹⁹ It is clear that any rehabilitation of Scott was to be grounded not only in his legacy but in his relevance for contemporary audiences and current critical concerns.

The concept of a regular international Scott conference also originates from this point and the conferences that followed offer punctuation points in the recent history of Scott criticism. They have been held in Scotland at Edinburgh (1971, 1991 and 2021) and Aberdeen (1982, 1995 and 2014), in Canada at Alberta (1988), in the United States at Eugene, Oregon (1999) and Laramie, Wyoming (2011), in Germany at Konstanz (2003), in England at Oxford (2007), and in France, at the Sorbonne in Paris (2018), demonstrating growing academic interest in Scott beyond Scotland; European and North American destinations show the international nature of the field and capture the extent to which it has benefitted from this engagement.

While proceedings have not been published from every conference, those that have been appeared offer a useful snapshot of how scholarship has developed. The papers from the 1982 Aberdeen conference were published as *Scott and his Influence*. By this point the idea of a new edition of the Waverley Novels was firmly on the table. Prompted by the conference theme several of the papers explore Scott’s work in relation to other writers: Scott and Racine, Scott and Dryden, Scott and Byron, Scott and Maria Edgeworth, Scott and Galt, Scott and Dickens, Scott and Hogg, Scott and Emily Bronte, Scott and Thackeray, Scott and George Eliot, Scott and Ibsen, Scott’s influence on Canadian novelists, Danish writers and Norwegian fiction. The sense of Scott as central to the development of world literature was being rediscovered and offered a new way of interrogating his legacy. Some of the papers also begin to explore Scott in ways beyond the national and narratological frameworks in which he had been situated. Papers on Scott and politics, Scott and religion, Scott as folklorist, Scott and the theatre, and Scott and opera give some indication of how vast the field of Scott studies would become, and indeed, of its

¹⁹ Edgar Johnson, “Scott and the Corners of Time,” *SBE*, 37.

potential for interdisciplinary study. In their foreword the editors of the volume, Alexander and Hewitt, write: “We very much hope that future readers of Scott, and of books on Scott, will be able to trace new developments in Scott criticism back to this conference.”²⁰ Re-reading some of the papers published here in recent months, it is evident that this is the case. As Tom Crawford indicates in his introduction:

Every major critical trend is represented in the present volume—traditional historicism, the charting of influences, mainstream formalism ... structuralism, “deconstruction,” and feminism are apparent in some papers, while Scott continues to be studied as a major cultural figure influencing European thought and taste ... Everywhere there are signs of a new professionalism, which augurs well for the academic study of Scott in years to come.²¹

In 1991, after a trip across the Atlantic to Alberta, the Scott conference came back to Edinburgh where the theme of Scott and theory took centre stage. While Crawford puts “deconstruction” in inverted commas, by the early ‘90s, it, and theories associated with it, were at the centre of much literary criticism. As the papers published from this conference, *Scott in Carnival*, demonstrate, this marked a pivotal moment, and in many ways laid the foundation for the shape of Scott studies in recent years.

The 1991 conference marked a new confidence in Scott criticism. The preface to the collection notes:

Participants were invited to consider new critical approaches to Scott, and around half of them responded by invoking Mikhail Bakhtin to a greater or lesser extent. The conference had in consequence something of a carnival atmosphere.²²

There is indeed something celebratory about these papers, which include topics such as Scott and feminism, Scott and postmodernism, Scott and Empire and the implications of this in a post-colonial era; Scott and the Gothic; Scott and dialogism; Scott and new historicism. Above all this conference reinforced the idea that Scott is an author whose work is sufficiently robust that it can be read in a myriad of interpretive frameworks. Scott, it was clear, is an author who must be taken seriously, an author who could be re-situated within the challenges thrown down by the move towards theory that by the early nineties was underpinning and transforming the discipline. Moreover, while the 1991 conference was

²⁰ J.H. Alexander and David Hewitt, “Preface,” in *Scott and His Influence: The Papers of the Aberdeen Scott Conference* (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1983). Hereafter *Influence*.

²¹ Thomas Crawford, “Introduction,” in *Influence*.

²² J.H. Alexander and David Hewitt, “Preface,” in *Scott in Carnival: Selected Papers from the Fourth International Scott Conference Edinburgh 1991* (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993). Hereafter *Carnival*.

attended by many of those who had helped shape Scott studies from 1971 onwards, they were now joined by new voices: Ian Duncan, Ina Ferris, Penny Fielding, Fiona Robertson, Caroline McCracken-Flesher, all of whom were to go on and develop the ideas first laid out here into important studies there were to shape our modern understanding of Scott's writing.

A paper by Jill Rubenstein closes the volume of the 1991 essays: "Scott Scholarship and Criticism: Where Are We Now? Where Are We Going?" In this essay Rubenstein sums up how far Scott scholarship has come from the "defensive" position of 1971. Rubenstein notes an "encouraging indicator of maturity" marked by the fact that Scott criticism "no longer assumes a defensive stance."²³ She comments on the many theories that had been used to examine Scott at the conference and suggests they represent a growing recognition of a more problematic Scott, an author who challenges any easy relationship between discourse, history and truth and one who can be read in terms of the limits of language, and the consequent "fragmentary nature of historical truth." What has emerged, she suggests, is a Scott whose novels are "reflexive," "self-conscious," and "more or less experimental." "We are," as a consequence, she concludes, "justified in celebrating the Author of Waverley today as a literary figure whose moment has once again arrived."²⁴

So what form has this "arrival" taken over the past thirty years? Of course, one of the most significant events in Scott studies since 1991 has been the publication of the 30-volume Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels (1993-2012), with David Hewitt as general editor-in-chief. EEWN belies the old idea that Scott was a sloppy writer who did not pay much attention to what he was doing, and it has also freed Scott from the burden or screen of his own later paratexts and prefaces, which were published separately as vols 29 and 30. While EEWN could be accused of replacing Scott's paratexts with its own, the general editor David Hewitt's rightful insistence on "hierarchies," so that Scott's text comes before anything his editors say and that he gets to say it in a bigger font, has ensured that Scott's own words (now restored as much as they can be) are placed centre stage. The textual and explanatory notes and editorial essays are there for readers if they wish to read them, and if they choose to do so they find an author who to create his stories is drawing on a dazzling array of knowledge and an astonishing body of literature. All those in the EEWN team have been gratified to see this material used by recent criticism. As David Hewitt notes in his General Introduction, all those engaged in work on the edition, with it "have found their enquiries fundamentally changing

²³ Jill Rubenstein, "Scott Scholarship and Criticism: Where Are We Now? Where Are We Going?," in *Carnival*, 594-600 (594). Hereafter Rubenstein.

²⁴ Rubenstein, 595, 599.

their appreciation of Scott,” an experience shared in by other critics and readers who engage closely with the edition.²⁵

Indeed, the past thirty years have seen an astonishing burst of critical activity. As noted earlier, many of those who gave papers in Edinburgh went on to publish book length studies, and the critical approaches that were emerging there have transformed understanding of Scott. In one of the most recent essay collections, *Walter Scott at 250: Looking Forward*, Caroline McCracken-Flesher and Matthew Wickman sum up the trajectory of this criticism:

the 1990s traced Scott’s unappreciated impacts ... Assisted by that monumental work, the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels ... with the turn towards the twenty-first century the critical eye recognised an inventive author and a complicated person. Scott more and more has been seen as a self-aware, pre-postmodern author, prone to question and disturb form and history, the teller and the romance ... Increasingly ... we realise that some of Scott’s supposed flaws actually stand as critiques of under-interrogated literary and historical canons ... numerous scholars are reworking Scott’s relation with Romanticism. New vats of theoretical encounter stand open.²⁶

What McCracken-Flesher and Wickman argue is that, through the lenses of post-structuralism, deconstruction, feminism, new historicism, intertextuality and other theoretical approaches (as mapped by Evan Gottlieb’s 2013 *Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory*), critics have found a Scott that is *critically* relevant for their moment: a Scott that emerged as “reflexive,” “self-conscious,” and “more or less experimental,” and, as a consequence, a Scott who problematises the legitimacies of the past and their relationship to authority and who recognises the tenuous relationship between discourse and truth.²⁷ What were seen in earlier times as Scott’s flaws have come to be understood as the reasons for celebrating his work; the messiness of politics, of Scott’s personal circumstances and of the past which he depicts is what has attracted Scott critics in recent years. His acknowledgement that there is no one final or definitive version of the past is cause for celebration, his suspicion of anyone who is certain that they are in the right (Balfour or Clavers, Fergus or David Deans) is a rightful

²⁵ David Hewitt, “General Introduction,” to the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels. On the critical implications of close textual scholarship, see also Alison Lumsden, “Textual Messages: Scholarly Editions and Their Role in Textual Criticism,” *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 39 (2013): 15-21.

²⁶ *Looking Forward*, 3.

²⁷ Evan Gottlieb, *Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Revisionist readings of Scott can also be found in Susan Oliver, ed., *Walter Scott: New Interpretations: Yearbook of English Studies*, 47 (2017).

challenge to dangerous doctrines and grand narratives. His refusal to tell readers what to think but to *make* us think has been the very thing that has made him critically attractive.

It is these qualities too that have made critics suggest that Scott is a writer who is not simply caught in the past but, on the contrary, one who, by writing texts *about* the past, is never stuck in a present moment that would become irrelevant. His “open-endedness” is, to use Caroline McCracken-Flesher’s term, what makes him capable of constant re-circulation, or, as Ann Rigney puts it, he is “portable,” his ideas capable of being transported from one period to another, one set of social circumstances to another.²⁸ It was this lack of specificity that made Scott so open to translation and adaptation in the nineteenth century, and it was this quality, too, which made him capable of reassessment within the “vast vat” of theories that have spread through the wider discipline in the last thirty years.²⁹ This is far removed from the version of Scott that was being rejected by the late Victorians and Modernists, and, in critical terms at least, it seems as though a rehabilitation of Scott has taken place, and one that recognises the ways in which his work speaks to the philosophical and theoretical concerns of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

More recently, attention has also turned to Scott’s poetry, and the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott’s Poetry, to be published in ten volumes, is well underway.³⁰ Scott’s poetry has generally been less subject to the revisionist readings undertaken in relation to his fiction, and so, for some, it has remained evidence for Scott’s construction of a romantic and redundant version of Scotland, somehow caught in the past and concerned

²⁸ Caroline McCracken-Flesher, *Possible Scotlands; Walter Scott and the Story of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁹ For an excellent account of Scott in relation to adaptation, see Daniel Cook and Lucy Wood, eds, *Reworking Sir Walter Scott: Studies in Scottish Literature*, 44.2 (2018). The work on Scott within a range of critical frameworks is too extensive to itemise here but apart from those studies referenced elsewhere works by Ian Duncan, Ina Ferris, Penny Fielding, Catherine Jones, Andrew Lincoln, Susan Manning, Fiona Robertson, Matthew Wickman and others have helped revitalise thinking on Scott.

³⁰ Two volumes have been published to date: Ainsley McIntosh, ed., *Marmion: Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott’s Poetry*. vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018) and P.D. Garside and Gillian Hughes, eds, *The Shorter Poems: Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott’s Poetry*, vol. 7 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020). Major funding has been awarded by the AHRC to publish a further five volumes.

with issues that are located there.³¹ However, Scott's poetry also contains, as Tara Goshal Wallace puts it, a "consciousness of multiple historical moments," and it both expresses and enacts the formulation upon which the entire project of his fiction rests.³² Moreover, if Scott's poems, like his historical novels, can be simultaneously about the times in which they are set and the times in which they are written, they also fold time forwards towards ourselves as modern readers. Recent reappraisals of Scott's poetry suggest such revisionist readings. *The Lady of the Lake*, for example, asks complex questions concerning the nature of the state and the diversities within it. Traditionally the poem is often read as expressing the uneven movement of history towards modernity that nevertheless manifests Scott's almost sub-conscious hankering after some kind of Burkean chivalric idyll. However, closer examination of its internal dynamics, power structures and ending suggest more complex dynamics at play. Consequently, *The Lady of the Lake* can be read as asking questions similar to those recently recovered in his novels: how does the nation state deal with the diversities within it? Who wins and loses in the power dynamics between dominant and minority cultures? Who gets to control the narrative of nationhood in such circumstances, and who, inevitably, is excluded from it? Indeed, what is the price of assimilation?³³ And if these questions are being posed in the narrative of the poem, they are reinforced by Scott's notes to it.³⁴

There is, then, clearly much to celebrate about the critical rediscovery of Scott and the rehabilitation of his work since his last major anniversary in 1971. Moreover, the last decade has also seen Abbotsford transition from a family home into a heritage site under a charitable Trust and staffed by professionals, who are researching and reinterpreting the significance of Scott's "palace of the imagination" and its relationship to his writing. From the research perspective, a major outcome of this development has been the cataloguing of Scott's library, which has opened up new possibilities in Scott scholarship and enhanced ways of exploring the connections between

³¹ Among notable exceptions, see, e.g., Andrew Lincoln, *Walter Scott and Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) and Susan Oliver, *Scott, Byron and the Poetics of Cultural Encounter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005).

³² Tara Goshal Wallace, "Competing Discourses in *Ivanhoe*," in *Carnival*, 294.

³³ For a discussion of his novels in these terms, see Alison Lumsden, "Inclusion and Exclusion in the British State: Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and *The Fortunes of Nigel*", in Gerard Carruthers and Colin Kidd, eds, *Literature and Union: Scottish Texts, British Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 147-164.

³⁴ For recent revisionist readings of Scott's poetry, see Alison Lumsden and Ainsley McIntosh, "The Narrative Poems," in Fiona Robertson, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 35-46; Alison Lumsden, "Scott and the Art of Surplusage: Excess in the Narrative Poems," in *Looking Forward*, 109-123.

Scott's collections, and built and planted legacies and his creative work. For example, a project currently exploring Scott's chapbook and popular print collections has revealed the ways in which Scott draws on such material for creative inspiration while Lindsay Levy's study of his library demonstrates the synergies between its contents and his wider creativity and understanding of history and culture. Susan Oliver's study of Scott's ecological impulses considers Scott's planting activities in innovative ways while the on-going work of the staff at Abbotsford continues to reveal new intersections between his home and his creative output.³⁵

However, the work of the Abbotsford Trust also affords the opportunity to explore Scott's legacy in far more comprehensive and accessible terms than those explored by traditional literary criticism and scholarship. It invites direct engagement with the built, material and natural heritage of Scott's beloved home and muse, and it provides a reminder of Edgar Johnson's suggestion that Scott's true significance lies in his on-going relevance for both a modern readership and a range of wider audiences. Researching and diversifying Scott's audiences and widening public understanding of his life and legacy lies at the heart of Abbotsford's ten-year plan, which in turn has informed the shape of the WalterScott250 celebrations. This has been underpinned by a framework of five themes, identified by the Trust as keystones in re-interpreting Scott for the twenty-first century: Living History, Wellbeing, Belonging, Storytelling, and the overarching need to re-situate what has at times been an unfortunate perception of his legacy within the popular consciousness. These themes both arise out of and intersect with recent developments in Scott criticism and are worth considering in more detail.

Scott believed that the material culture of the past could bring history to life, and the enduring popularity of museums and heritage sites suggests that this concept is firmly embedded in our cultural engagement with the past. Ready access to things created, used and lost in past lives was essential to Scott's inspiration and to his success as a writer of historical fiction. Scott was, to use a contemporary concept, a passionate advocate of

³⁵ On the Abbotsford Library catalogue, see Lindsay Levy, *A life in books: Walter Scott's library at Abbotsford*. (PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow (2014), and: <http://www.advocates.org.uk/facultyof-advocates/the-advocates-library/abbotsford>. The Abbotsford Library Chapbook and Popular Print Project is led by Gerard Carruthers and Alison Lumsden in partnership with the Abbotsford Trust and is funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh. On the links between Scott's reading habits and his creativity, see also J. H. Alexander, *Walter Scott's Books: Reading the Waverley Novels* (London: Routledge, 2019). On Scott and environmental issues, see Susan Oliver, *Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland: Emergent Ecologies of a Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

experiential learning: encouraging people (and especially the young) to visit battlefields, landmarks and ruins, to explore the features of their landscapes, and to imagine their many histories playing out there. Learning Outside the Classroom, often spoken of in educational circles, was intrinsic to his creative methodology and to the ways in which Abbotsford itself was conceived and developed. As the current project to edit *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* demonstrates, he was also a romantic collector, interested in hearing lost or vanishing voices and songs, preserving languages and folk customs, in conserving historic buildings and reimagining them in art, and in collecting and perhaps even wearing historical clothing, arms and armour.³⁶ All of this underlines his commitment to sensory engagement with the past, the most critical aspect of living history and re-enactment as we understand it today.

Scott had the foresight to appreciate that the present is merely history in the making, and he encouraged his friends to draw parallels between contemporary events and those in times past, using his home and collection of museum objects as a springboard for stories of the past and about his own times.³⁷ Ultimately, through the costumed splendour of the Waverley Ball phenomenon and King George IV's visit to re-enactments of his novels on the stage, Scott enabled the version of living history we might recognise in the medieval fayres, jousts, battle re-enactments, and traditional craft and trading camps, now featured in the event programming at many historical sites, with seemingly limitless success. One of the legacies Scott offers is the opportunity to revisit the past via this lens. Abbotsford's own 250th birthday celebrations drew on this concept, taking their inspiration (like so many other Scott celebrations) from *Ivanhoe*. Drawing the public to Scott's home with a weekend of jousting, costume and battle re-enactment is both in the spirit of Scott's understanding of the past, and it was used to spark new imaginary journeys with an author with whom visitors might not otherwise have engaged.

In his personal writings, Scott also left an extraordinarily rich body of material to mine regarding his inner world. He believed that to live well, and to safeguard mental and physical wellbeing, a person should always be able to access and enjoy the natural world. Two hundred years ago, Scott recognized the benefits of physical activity and open air, and the opportunities for conversation and creativity that such activities offer. His

³⁶ The Walter Scott *Minstrelsy* Project is led by Sigrid Rieuwerts, at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz: for information, see <http://walterscott.eu/>.

³⁷ For example, the hallway at Abbotsford juxtaposes objects from varied periods: the Waterloo wall faces suits of medieval armour; a cast of the skull of Robert the Bruce sits at one end of the fireplace and that of a soldier who fell at Waterloo at the other.

childhood experience with polio shortened his right leg and demanded he use a walking stick, but his disability was never permitted to define him. In his later years, he weathered the stings of bereavement, financial hardship, depression and ill health with an indomitable spirit sustained by walking his woodlands and caring for his trees. In the journal he kept between 1825 and shortly before his death, Scott talks candidly about his own mental health and coping mechanisms. Scott, then, as Susan Oliver's work implies, offers us a way of considering the connections between walking, the natural world, mental health and creativity. This aspect of Scott informs the construction at Abbotsford of a mindfulness garden, and in a separate project being taken forward by Aberdeen University in conjunction with Hillgoers and the charity Black Dog Outdoors. It also informed Scottish Opera's project, "Sweet Sounds in Wild Places," which aims to harness the powers of music and creative writing to empower women struggling with personal life challenges.³⁸

The issue of Scott and belonging is in some ways a more familiar one; the ways in which he imagines Scotland in his work have been well rehearsed. But Scott was deeply receptive to the stories and experiences of other cultures and times. He travelled rarely, and regretted this in later years, but took comfort in the fact that his learning and collecting had helped keep his horizons broad. This sense of the ways in which we carry multiple concepts of identity and belonging with us has underpinned much Scott criticism in recent years and has been recognised as intrinsic to his work. Scott was aware that one could be both Scottish and British, that allegiances to politics or religion can cut across and intersect with loyalties to nationhood; he would always consider himself a Scottish Borderer, wedded to the land that was part of his creed and home to his reiver ancestors, the notorious Scotts of Harden. When he started to design the interiors of his baronial home at Abbotsford, he overtly celebrated his own roots and those of others descended from the people of the Borders, placing Abbotsford at the metaphorical heart of the region. However, the border is itself a debatable land, a place of intersections, and throughout his prolific writing career, he endeavoured to show that while a sense of place creates distinctive cultural identities, regional character and traditions can co-exist alongside one another peacefully, creating rich archaeologies of what it means to belong. Similarly, throughout his work he is also concerned with those who do not traditionally belong or who are excluded from conventional narratives; his writing is full of those at the edges of society and thus asks penetrating questions about the ways in which our social hierarchies are constructed and the problems inherent in the

³⁸ For details of all Scott 250 projects visit <https://walterscott250.com/>.

exclusion of certain groups.³⁹ The complexities of the ways in which Scott's work and legacies can prompt us to think about belonging are captured, for example, in a project developed by Teatro di San Carlo in Naples, "Lucia di Lammermoor torna in Scozia," which traces both the origins of *The Bride of Lammermoor* in Scotland and its resonances in Italy.

Scott's greatest gift, however, was for storytelling. While Modernist critics may have been dismissive of this aspect of his work it was probably what most appealed to his early audiences. In his private life and social engagements, he was recognised for the same craft, and it was the dramatic tone of his voice, the animation of his face and the sparkle in his grey eyes that enraptured his audiences. To quote a contemporary, to hear Scott speak was like the intoxicating feeling of drinking champagne without ever feeling worse for wear. Abbotsford captures the power of such storytelling; as his own account of the building and design of it, *Reliquiae Troscosienses* suggests, his home is a three-dimensional example of his vast storytelling capabilities, where the antique, modern and imitation co-exist in unlikely harmony; decisions in design, decoration and craftsmanship are all intended to stimulate conversations, raise eyebrows and communicate messages on a number of levels, just like a text.⁴⁰ Scott liked nothing more than to offer tours of his home and his favourite local landmarks and use them as an opportunity to tell his favourite stories and to bring history to life. He was a tour guide *par excellence*. As Scotland enters a national year of storytelling in 2022, this aspect of Scott is ripe for rediscovery. WalterScott250 projects such as that led by the Scottish Poetry Library already demonstrate the ability of Scott's work and wider legacy to inspire new creative work.⁴¹

Walter Scott is undoubtedly one of the most influential and relevant cultural figures of the last 200 years. His legacy still looms large in the spheres of architecture, international literature, tourism, lexicography, sustainability, biodiversity and landscape design. Across the globe, there are places named after or connected with the man or his literary output. Scott's impact on architecture was quite simply monumental; he almost single-handedly re-invented the Scots baronial architectural style and his home at Abbotsford became a key catalyst in the Medieval Revival and the

³⁹ See Lumsden, "Inclusion and Exclusion in the British State."

⁴⁰ Walter Scott, *Reliquiae Troscosienses or the Gabions of The Late Jonathan Oldbuck Esq. of Monkbarns*, ed. Gerard Carruthers and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press in association with The Abbotsford Library Project Trust, 2004).

⁴¹ This project is described at: <https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry-ambassadors/poetry-commissions-walter-scott-250/>.

Arts and Crafts movement. His poems and novels put Scotland's landscapes and her people on the map in some of the earliest tourist guidebooks to Scotland, and the appeal of viewing these places and landmarks through Scott's prism remains undiminished and intoxicating. But his legacy is far greater than the sum of its parts. For a voice from the past, Scott speaks to us intelligently about a whole host of contemporary issues, from national identity and devolution to gender equality, industrialisation and revolution. Scott was a historical writer who looked to the past, and, crucially towards the future, embracing progress whilst fiercely protective of the social values he felt were under threat in an uncertain world.

There is then much to celebrate at this Scott anniversary; there is an invigorating and exciting body of criticism, the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels is complete and the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott's Poetry well underway. The celebrations of Scott and the direction they have taken under the leadership of Abbotsford build on these critical developments and prompt new ways of considering his legacy and discovering a re-invigorated relevance in his wider interests and concerns. However, "relevance" is not a stable category and challenges remain and new opportunities to re-think Scott's legacy emerge. Jill Rubenstein ends her 1991 article asking "Where do we go from here? Are we hapless proponents of an exhausted culture, burdened with just one more 'dead white Eurocentric male,' as the most radical of the canon revisionists might have it?"⁴² It is clear that her questions have taken on new urgencies in relation to the directions which literary scholarship is now moving. Since 1991 the whole discipline of English literary studies (and indeed the Humanities more generally) has been re-interrogated in ways that we could not have begun to imagine then. The political opportunities uncovered by the Black Lives Matter movement and the concomitant potential to decolonise activities within the academy alongside the pressures wrought by climate change call for new ways of thinking through our approaches to Scott. As Deirdre Osborne notes:

Like all universities in Great Britain, my university is faced with a generation of students who are demanding changes to the ways in which curriculum, pedagogy, governance and student well-being address the inherited consequences of British imperial rule and ongoing inequalities for minoritised groups.⁴³

⁴² Rubenstein, p.599.

⁴³ Deirdre Osborne, "From Institutional Exclusion to Institutionalisation: 'Decolonising' Literary Curricula," *Wasafiri*. 34. 128-132 (129).

Clearly this offers both challenges and opportunities for those working in the Romantic period, as recognised by “The Bigger 6 Collective,” formed in 2017 to challenge structural racism in the study of Romanticism:

We endeavour to effect structural changes in our discipline and institutions by promoting scholarly and creative work by historically and marginalized people, those excluded from the Romantic canon, and those excluded from the field of Romanticism. In so doing, we unsettle Romanticism, build from it rather than within it, and establish lines of radical inquiry that lead, we hope, to politically urgent thought and insurgent actions.⁴⁴

This is important and long overdue work but what might be the shape of a “building from within” in the field of Scott studies and what can be recovered concerning our understanding of his work as a result of it? How can Scott scholarship build on the critical work that has taken place over the past fifty years to reposition our understanding of Scott alongside these issues?

One starting point may be to approach the kind of challenges posed by Rubenstein with humility, a response advocated in many of the conversations that surround de-colonisation. It is, after all, indisputable, that we *are* in thrall to a “dead white Eurocentric male”; that is, after all, what Scott is, and we should perhaps be prepared to feel the discomfort attached to this and to recognise that the things we might wish to celebrate in Scott, can potentially also be seen as areas of dis-ease in these new contexts; his global popularity, for example, may simply be seen as an act of colonisation; the ambiguity and indeterminacy we have celebrated may be read as a failure to pin himself to the “right” side of history, and his decision to write about the past may be simply a culpable silence about the issues of his day. In terms of climate change, Romantic literature more generally potentially comes under similar criticisms; its anthropomorphic relationship with nature and landscape is clearly problematic in terms of the immediate pressures on our planet and their implications, particularly when we remember that the negative effects of our globalised capitalism are likely to be felt most immediately by those who benefit least from it.

But out of this discomfort we can also be prompted to find new ways of considering Scott and how through him we might think our way through some of these challenges. In his essay “Black Romanticism; A Manifesto,” Paul Youngquist argues that the issue with Romanticism as a paradigm of knowledge lies in the fact that in spite of its alleged affinities with the revolutionary concerns of equality, liberty and fraternity it constructs the idea of a normative category of “Man” against which black people are seen as inferior: “The Man in Romanticism devalues its subnormal others,” he

⁴⁴ See <https://bigger6romantix.squarespace.com/>.

writes, “even when acknowledging them.” He goes on to note that one corrective to this is to mobilize that which challenges the norm, perceived by him as alternative Romanticisms that reinvigorate the original political purposes of writers from the period.⁴⁵

In many ways the Scott that has been recovered by critical activity over the past thirty years already makes this sort of challenge; as noted earlier it has been recognized that Scott’s work frequently gives voice to those at the margins of society and not only does it let these voices speak, it often uses what they say to subvert conventional authority. Indeed, throughout his work Scott challenges the normative account of man offered by some of his Romantic contemporaries, and his “portable” quality means that we can apply his insights to the societal inequalities we must address today. We must acknowledge Youngquist’s point that “however revolutionary [the] hopes of Romantic writers, their project of human liberation failed to materialize in any future that includes our present” and take care not to suggest that Scott can automatically speak for other minorities.⁴⁶ But we can also acknowledge that much of what we have already re-awakened in our readings of Scott offers a way to pivot our critical activity towards these new inflections. They can offer readings that foreground the extent to which Scott does *not* collude with the normative pressures of Romanticism but offers more subversive readings of the Enlightenment discourses which at one level underpin his work. Such approaches must be taken sympathetically, and it is a heartening feature of recent criticism that such new inflections are already beginning to take hold.⁴⁷ To some extent the papers given at the Twelfth International Scott Conference illustrate this new turn in Scott scholarship. For example, Sarah Sharp’s paper on “Reading Scott and Imagining Settler Colonial Identity” begins to unpick the complex ways in which Scott’s legacy was used in the discourses of emigration.⁴⁸

However, the more public-facing ways in which Scott is being celebrated at 250 may also encourage us to inflect our engagement with his legacy slightly differently. Paul Youngquist notes that one of the problems identified by de-colonisation lies with the fact that however much the

⁴⁵ Paul Youngquist, “Black Romanticism: A Manifesto,” *Studies in Romanticism*, 56.1 (2017): 3-14 (5).

⁴⁶ Youngquist, 4.

⁴⁷ See for example Tara Ghoshal Wallace, “The Elephant’s Foot and the British Mouth: Walter Scott on Imperial Rhetoric,” *European Romantic Review*, 13 (2002): 311 – 24.

⁴⁸ Many of the 2021 papers are online at: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/english-literature/events/international-walter-scott-conference/conference-programme-walter-scott>.

academy may have theorised nothing in the real world has actually changed. A recent symposium on de-colonising the curriculum organised by the English Association approached this problem in a slightly different way but grappled with the same underlying issue; as Anthea Garman noted, recent events have made her realise that she had separated the minds of her students from their “embodied selves” and that the academy must somehow “root things back down in to embodied existence.”⁴⁹ Comments like these suggest that in recent years at least literary criticism may have become detached from the experience of general readers in problematic ways. Indeed, whatever the advantages of theoretical approaches to Scott studies, and they have been many, their disadvantages are, of course, that they privilege the intellectual over the social, the mind over the body; the danger of an overly theoretical approach may be to turn the “Great Unknown” into the “Great Unknowable,” no more than a figure in the carpet who fascinates our minds but is detached from society. In spite of all the critical activity that has surrounded Scott in the last fifty years, there is little evidence that the popular conception of him as elitist and irrelevant has changed. However, Abbotsford’s chosen themes are underpinned by that Scott scholarship and may remind us that the version of Scott it has rediscovered may, indeed, be employed to provide “light-filled openings” that can illuminate current concerns.

In thinking through these issues, the opening chapter in *Scott and his Influence*, from the 1982 conference, offers an interesting point of reflection. Richard Waswo’s “Scott and the Really Great Tradition” argues that Scott is the writer most relevant for dealing with the predicaments of our times which Waswo defines as “conditions that directly affect the structure and texture of our individual daily lives.”⁵⁰ As its title implies this essay asks why Scott was rejected by Leavis and others and suggests that a significant factor was Scott’s interest in “social association in collective action” rather than the privileging of personal, emotional relations. This, Waswo argues, rendered Scott’s work obsolete in a tradition where “self becomes an absolute in a vacuum,” where it “soars above all the relations that would drag it down (family, race, religion, education, class, politics, work).” He goes further, and suggests that Scott’s insistence on the social rather than the personal posed a threat to the power structures that were developing in the nineteenth century. Scott, he suggests, “reminds us that ‘identity is always social.... the external is not divorced from the internal but a part of it.’” It is these qualities, Waswo

⁴⁹ Paper at the English Association Conference “De-Colonisation and Discomfort,” June 18, 2021, available at: <https://englishassociation.ac.uk/decolonisation-and-discomfort/>.

⁵⁰ Richard Waswo, “Scott and the Really Great Tradition,” in *Influence*, 1-12 (10).

argues, that make Scott the novelist we need at times of social predicament since he offers “a wider contemporary public a collective and social vision of life that is more applicable to our contemporary predicaments than the private vision of the tradition that replaced him.” “Only social association in collective action can avail against [the] present threats to our collective, and hence individual, survival.” Scott’s value, he concludes, lies in showing us that at times of crisis change is possible.

A lot has happened in Scott criticism since 1982. The theories of the 1980s and 90s provided us with a rich opportunity to rediscover Scott. But Waswo’s essay reminds us that within that rehabilitation there is also the potential to find a version of Scott that is more immediately and transparently relevant to the predicaments that society faces today. This is evident in the ways in which Scott’s 250th anniversary celebrations have built on the criticism of the past fifty years to offer a more relevant and less elitist version of Scott. It may be that the times not only invite but require that we inflect our critical attention towards that outward looking Scott and the Scott that can be read in these collective and social ways, a Scott relevant for the conditions that impact on the texture of our everyday lives, the Scott that helps us understand how the power structures that no longer serve us can be challenged, dismantled or reconstituted.

There is, indeed, evidence that this is the direction in which Scott studies may be heading. Later theoretical approaches, such as those outlined by Evan Gottlieb, attempted to foreground something that speaks to Scott’s relationship to society. In more practical ways, as the editorial policy for the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott’s Poetry was being developed, what most surprised the editorial team was the realisation that while the novels are the products of the quintessentially Romantic and anonymous Great Unknown the poems are produced in intensely social environments, with Scott discussing the poems with friends and responding to their suggestions. The edition is, consequently, underpinned by this more sociable Scott who recognises the benefits of collective endeavour. Recent work at Abbotsford, by overtly reinserting an embodied Scott of flesh and blood into our discussions, also takes our thinking about him towards a more sociable vision; work such as that by Caroline McCracken-Flesher on Abbotsford’s visitor books remind us that it is at the heart of a social nexus. It is also clear that this more immediately sociable, or socially relevant, version of Scott is gaining renewed attention in criticism; Susan Oliver’s new book on *Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland*, and Matthew Wickman’s book chapter “Redgauntlet: Speculation in History,

Speculation in Nature,” begin to confront the environmental crisis and how Scott speaks to it.⁵¹

It is of course impossible to predict how Scott studies will develop over the next ten years, let alone the next fifty. It is clear that literary studies generally will face new challenges and that the study of the literature of the past will have to confront these in particularly urgent ways. However, we are confident that Scott studies can respond, and, indeed, recognise the opportunities that such challenges provide. Scott, after all, rose to the challenges of the difficult times he found himself in and can still tell us much about how to respond to our own. His work and legacy has been re-invigorated many times in the past 250 years, and, while he has from time to time gone out of fashion, the portable quality of his work has meant that he has also been rediscovered, perhaps at the times when society most needs the ideas that are captured in his writing. Perhaps he is indeed, then, once again a writer for whom the time has arrived, and one who can open new windows of understanding in these times of collective predicament.

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⁵¹ Susan Oliver, *Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland*, cited above; Matthew Wickman, “Redgauntlet: Speculation in History, Speculation in Nature,” in *Looking Forward*, 181 – 197.