

12-15-2018

## Introduction: Reworking Walter Scott

Daniel Cook  
*University of Dundee*

Lucy Wood

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>

 Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Cook, Daniel and Wood, Lucy (2019) "Introduction: Reworking Walter Scott," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 44: Iss. 2, 3–9.  
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol44/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in Scottish Literature by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu).

## **INTRODUCTION: REWORKING WALTER SCOTT**

*Daniel Cook and Lucy Wood*

In two years' time, on the fifteenth of August 2021, Walter Scott turns 250. Edinburgh, the world's first designated UNESCO City of Literature, will lead the celebrations with a series of public events and publications in honour of one of Scotland's most noteworthy authors. In a sense, this work of commemoration began long ago. Waverley, Edinburgh's main railway station, remains the only station on the planet to take its name from a literary character—in this case the eponymous hero of Scott's first novel. Near the station stands the Scott Monument, the world's tallest shrine to an author, in which Scott and his beloved hound Maida have been regally rendered in thirty tons of Carrara marble. They've been sitting there, in Princes Street Gardens, overlooking countless passers-by, since the 1840s, barely a decade after the writer's death. And though the monument pays tribute to Scottish literature more broadly, with the heads of sixteen other Scottish writers such as Ramsay, Smollett, Fergusson, and Burns appearing at the top of the lower pilasters, in both size and prominence of position the colossal figure of Scott overshadows them all.

A stone's throw away in Parliament Hall one finds another statue of Scott, this time seated in his common "legal" posture, in a nod to his work as Clerk of Session at Edinburgh's courts of law. Further up the Royal Mile you can find the very press on which the Waverley Novels were printed, now housed at the Writer's Museum, together with Scott's walking stick and slippers. You can even wet your whistle in a number of pubs which take their names from Scott's life and works, from The Abbotsford Bar on Rose Street to The Antiquary in Stockbridge. Sir Walter Scott is the first name to greet thirsty international visitors to the city, as Wetherspoons have named their Edinburgh Airport bar for the author. South of the city, between Galashiels and Melrose in the Scottish Borders, stands Abbotsford, Scott's story in stone and home for many years. The house remains a living museum of his life as a successful writer, family man, and man of the law, combining his legal responsibilities in the city

with his local work in the Borders as Sheriff-Depute of Selkirkshire. Following the death in 2004 of Dame Jean Maxwell-Scott, the last descendant to live at Abbotsford, the estate came under the care of The Abbotsford Trust. After a multimillion pound refurbishment, the house was reopened to the public in 2012, thus reaffirming a tradition of public access which had, astonishingly enough, begun as early as 1833.

As even this brief excursion through some of the many sites of Edinburgh and the Borders may suggest, one doesn't have to look too hard to find something of Scott in Scotland. Nor is it difficult to find something of Scott elsewhere in the world. His name and influence are mapped, quite literally, all across the globe. In the United Kingdom, streets from as far apart as Glasgow, Liverpool, and Portsmouth are named after his novels and his characters; further afield, there are cities and towns across India, Australia, America, and Canada, as well as many other countries, which are named in honour of the author and his works. Nor do these works linger in name only. One can find Scott's writings in a wide variety of editions and languages. Within just a few years of Scott's death, publishers sought to produce new editions of the works to meet the demands of an increasingly eager readership. Almost two centuries later, most of Scott's novels are available to buy in high-street stores or independent bookshops all around the world. Furthermore, his works are still considered worthy of grand iterations, such as the recent Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels, commenced in 1993 by a team of prominent Scottish literary scholars and completed in 2012 under the leadership of David Hewitt. As well as appearing in an array of editions offering scholarly apparatus, notes, illustrations, and other additional material, Scott's texts have also been translated into a number of languages both within and beyond his own lifetime. Whilst nineteenth-century translators were swift to render Scott's works into French and German, more recently several of his novels have appeared in Japanese, Vietnamese, and Korean. Since 2010 The Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction has championed novels written, following Scott's example, at least sixty years since the historical events they describe. A truly international prize, its winners so far include Tan Twan Eng, Robert Harris, Sebastian Barry, and Hilary Mantel.

Beyond books, Scott's works have been reworked into numerous art-forms, from opera and theatre to film and visual art. Since their first publication, Scott's novels and narrative poems have provided both inspiration and material for many playwrights and librettists from across the globe. For many people, the gothic novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* might be better known as *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Donizetti's *dramma tragico* with Italian-language libretto that premiered in Naples on 26 September 1835, a little over three years after Scott's death. European audiences for this version of the opera dwindled by the 1840s but, arriving

in America, it became a staple of the Metropolitan Opera's repertoire for most of the next century. This opera isn't alone: Jerome Mitchell has found no fewer than ninety operas inspired by Scott over the two hundred and fifty years since his death.<sup>1</sup> Though that adaptive process is less obviously visible today, there are still notable exceptions, such as performances in Edinburgh and Glasgow in 2004 of Sir Arthur Sullivan's 1867 orchestral reworking of *Marmion*, using a reconstructed score by Robin Gordon-Powell. More familiar to modern audiences than operatic reworkings, perhaps, would be film adaptations of Scott's novels, such as the tremendously successful 1995 film *Rob Roy*, starring Liam Neeson as the titular character (even if the book and the movie share little beyond a title). Beyond *Rob Roy* it is surprisingly difficult to ascertain Scott's true position in the film industry; indeed, not for nothing is he often referred to as the Great Unknown of cinema. According to the IMDB, Scott ought to be credited with a decently sized body of sixty-eight films or TV series produced since 1909. Most recently (if we discount the films based on the operatic adaptations), he is acknowledged as a writer of a six-part serial titled *Ivanhoe* (1997, directed by Stuart Orme), alongside Deborah Cook—as well he should be, for the episodes follow the text of Scott's novel fairly closely.

Despite an enduring architectural presence in public monuments, houses, and museums, and despite the existence of books, operas, and films which owe their existence to Scott, it is certainly plausible to argue that Scott's authorial reputation among the general public has long been on the wane, meaning less to a modern readers than to audiences one hundred years ago. Scott's heyday has been dubbed the "Scott Century," running from the first appearance of *Waverley* in 1814 to the centenary of the author's death in 1932; indeed, Ann Rigney suggests that Scott's "cultural power lasted at most until World War I when, as if symbolically to mark the end of an era, some of the fonts for his collected works were melted down for munitions."<sup>2</sup> After all, Edinburgh *Waverley* Railway Station and the Scott Monument, the two most visible reminders of his importance, were both Victorian creations. Nor perhaps was Scott's readership greater than during that time: giants of that age including Queen Victoria herself, and Scott's fellow literary celebrity Charles Dickens, confessed to being avid Scott fans. Nineteenth-century readers could also enjoy pictorial

---

<sup>1</sup> Jerome Mitchell, *Walter Scott Operas: An Analysis of Opera based on the Works of Sir Walter Scott* (Tuscaloosa AL: University of Alabama Press, 1977) and *More Scott Operas: Further Analyses of Operas Based on the works of Sir Walter Scott* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 16.

representations of Scott's novels and poems as leading artists such as John Everett Millais (1829-1896) produced striking works depicting Scott's characters and scenes, such as his portrait "Effie Deans" (1877), from *The Heart of Midlothian*, and the dramatic presentation of Edgar Ravenswood and Lucy Ashton in his "The Bride of Lammermoor" (1878), from the novel of the same name.

Whilst Scott certainly enjoyed an abundance of Victorian reworkings in architectural, artistic and musical form, in more modern media he has fared less well. In comparison to his fellow nineteenth-century authors, Scott's novels have been relatively neglected in cinema and television, where writers such as Dickens and, most notably, Scott's near contemporary Jane Austen have enjoyed substantial and ongoing representation and adaptation. In print, and in comics especially, Scott has fared much better, as discussed in Chris Murray's essay later in this collection.

Recent critical scholarship has regenerated interest in Scott by producing new editions and shedding new light upon the life and writings of the author. As previously mentioned, this important work includes the timely publication of the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels, which provides readers and scholars alike with an extensive critical framework. Edinburgh University Press have now undertaken to publish a parallel series, the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott's Poetry, under the leadership of Alison Lumsden. The first volume to appear, Ainsley McIntosh's edition of *Marmion*, came out in June 2018. This series is especially welcome, and long overdue, for, before he became a bestselling novelist, Scott the poet dominated the literary marketplace of the early years of the nineteenth century. *Marmion* alone ran to four editions, comprising more than 11,000 copies, when it first appeared in 1808; and yet, until now, no major edition of Scott's poetical works has appeared since 1904.

Leading scholars continue to demonstrate the importance of Scott's writings; and many focus upon Scott's own proclivity towards reworking genres, styles and forms, as well as the tendency of writers and artists to rework Scott's material in turn. A recent example of such scholarship is Fiona Robertson's edited collection *The Edinburgh Companion to Sir Walter Scott* (2012), comprising twelve essays on topics that explore Scott's creative engagement with everything from ballads to national history, concluding with Nicola J. Watson's chapter dedicated to Scott's afterlives.<sup>3</sup> Robertson's earlier monograph *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (1994) examines in detail Scott's relationship with eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Gothic fiction,

---

<sup>3</sup> "Afterlives," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Fiona Robertson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 143-55.

presenting shared narrative strategies and techniques among the works. J. H. Alexander's *Walter Scott's Books* (2017) reveals the sheer inventiveness of the intertextuality riveted throughout the Waverley novels. Ian Duncan's *Scott's Shadow* (2007) expertly repositions Scott within a thriving publishing scene in Romantic-period Edinburgh. Andrew Lincoln's *Walter Scott and Modernity* (2007) argues that, far from rejecting modernity, advancement, and change, Scott uses the past as a means of confronting moral, social and political issues faced in the present. Extending this approach, Evan Gottlieb's *Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory* (2013) places Scott alongside contemporary thinkers on a range of philosophical debates, from subjectivity to posthumanity. Murray Pittock's edited volume *The Reception of Walter Scott in Europe* (2007) shows the extraordinary reach of Scott's writings across the continent over a long period of time, tracing Scott's impact and influence across a vast spectrum of forms including translation, literary genre, politics, art, and opera. Gottlieb and Duncan's collection *Approaches to Teaching Scott's Waverley Novels* (2009), meanwhile, offers diverse new ways in which Scott might be kept alive in the classroom.

One of the most pertinent studies of Scott to appear in recent years, Ann Rigney's *The Afterlives of Walter Scott* (2012), explores both the vast reach of the writer's cultural legacy, while also making the case for the shaping influence of collective forgetting, as much as that of remembering, when it comes to authorial reputations. Rigney argues that Scott's influence and importance "lives on in multifarious and unacknowledged ways as a component of contemporary culture, albeit no longer a dominant one and not easy to isolate from other influences."<sup>4</sup> Stuart Kelly points out in *Scott-Land* (2010) that Scott's influence cannot be limited to books and those who have read them. On the contrary, he argues, hardly anyone reads the novels, though most English speakers will have a passing familiarity with the characters and iconography found in them. Robert Mayer's *Walter Scott and Fame* (2017) takes a similar line of reasoning, though he grounds it more profitably in Scott's own authorial practices. Scott, Mayer contends, positioned writers and readers in a dynamic, often fraught, and essentially modern connection, which needs to be understood in terms of the new culture of celebrity that emerged during Scott's working life.

As he nears his 250th birthday, then, where does Scott stand now? Is the author who was once shrouded in mystery as "The Great Unknown" now indeed unknown again; or is his cultural legacy so deeply rooted that we must look far below the surface in order to truly ascertain his ongoing influence? Do the millions of people who walk along Princes Street every year and take photographs of, and perhaps even climb, the Scott

---

<sup>4</sup> Rigney, *Afterlives*, 224.

Monument, know his works? One can find his wise words at Edinburgh Waverley, appearing on brightly coloured boards all around the station; yet the W.H. Smith's by the main departure board does not sell editions of his prose or poetry. Are the bustling commuters who catch glimpses of the words on the walls reading Scott, or does Scott predominantly reach a modern audience through architecture, art, and fragmented phrases?

This special issue comprises thirteen newly commissioned essays and an Afterword, based on conference papers delivered at the University of Dundee in April 2017. Together, the essays address many of the questions of the preceding paragraph, and explore a myriad of ways in which Scott and his works have been reworked into new forms, for new audiences, and at different times. Sponsored by the Royal Society of Edinburgh and Dundee's Centre for Scottish Culture, the conference brought together scholars from around the world, from as far afield as the US and South Korea, and at all stages of the academic career. In addition to standard papers, the conference included a hands-on "Scott and Comics" session, during which artists and scripters on the *Reworking Walter Scott* comic produced for the occasion by Dundee's Ink Pot Studio demonstrated the process of adapting into graphic form episodes from Scott's life and works (chiefly from *Ivanhoe* and *The Bride of Lammermoor*). More information about this project can be found in the "Afterword."

Before that, we have four subsections in which contributors consider pertinent facets of Scott's afterlives. In "Scott and Theatre," Mary C. Nestor considers the popular dramatisation and legacy of one of Scott's most iconic narrative poems, *The Lady of the Lake*. Barbara Bell, a leading authority on the staging of Scott's plays, or adaptations of Scott's works in the theatre, looks at the first scenic realisations of Scott's work in terms of a new appetite for realism in Scottish performances. Closing this section of essays, Paula Sledzinska considers the role of national drama in the construction of Scottish identity in the nineteenth century. In the first essay of "Scott and History," Lucy Wood considers Andrew Lang's reading of a landscape reinvigorated by the antiquarian aesthetic of Scott's writing. Next, John Williams reviews Scott's revisiting of literary tropes including that of the *doppelgänger*, comparing the "doubled" approach to history presented by the paired characters of Jonathan Oldbuck and Edie Ochiltree. Combining the well-known name of Scott with another famous figure, Robin Hood, Stephen Basdeo traces the influence of Scott on Thomas Miller's *Royston Gower; or, The Days of King John* (1838), a Chartist Robin Hood story. The section titled "Scott and Others" comprises David Selfe's essay on the editorial liberties taken in the textual afterlife of the ballad of Thomas the Rhymer. Juliet Shields, explores the ways in which Flora Annie Steel's representation of conflict and historical change in nineteenth-century Punjab resonates with Scott's representation of the

Jacobite conflicts of eighteenth-century Scotland. Camilla Cassidy unpicks the links between Scott and another keen student of cultural memory, George Eliot. Finally for this section, Céline Sabiron offers new insights into Scott's tales of parroting and pirating with a fresh look at the French author and translator Amédée Pichot. The closing section, "Scott's Afterlives," includes Fiona Robertson's thoughtful new essay on Scott, Hawthorne and allegories of the heart, along with George S. Williams's insights into the compelling connections between Scott and Poe. The section concludes with Chris Murray's history of Scott comics.

The editors wish to take this opportunity to thank all of our contributors and conference delegates, and the journal editors Patrick Scott and Tony Jarrells, for making this collection possible. We would also like to thank Alison Lumsden in particular, for her timely plenary lecture on her team's ongoing work on the Edinburgh edition of Scott's poetry. We look forward to the publication of the edition, as well as the appearance of more Scott scholarship beyond his 250th birthday.

*University of Dundee*  
*Abbotsford Trust Affiliate*