According to the Introduction to this volume written by editor Glenda Norquay, this particular companion differs from other anthologies of critical scholarship on Scottish Women writers in offering “more focused thematic groupings and, of course, a broader chronological spread overall” (p.3). In this regard, this text does indeed organize itself according to various themes: spirituality, private writing, and genre fiction among them. Particular perhaps little-known female writers are brought to light through detailed research into seldom explored areas of scholarship. Chapter Six, “Janet Hamilton: Working-class Memoirist and Commentator,” is a key example of the widening of scope achieved by the choice of essays. The details of Hamilton’s life and perhaps unlikely involvement with nineteenth century Scottish print culture provide help provide a ‘rounding out’ of existing scholarship on the historical inclusion of women as authors and critics.

Most of the chapter titles alert the reader to the content and its thematic emphasis. One exception to this might be found in the final two essays: ‘Twentieth Century Poetry’ and ‘Contemporary Fiction.’ In the limited scope of a single chapter, the writers attempt to address such potentially daunting topics as contemporary fiction and twentieth-century poetry by narrowing the focus to particular authors. While the treatment of these few authors is engaging and informative, it might have been more effective in a text of this nature to make these final chapters as thematically focused as the
others, including the chapter titles. There are entire volumes written on both contemporary fiction and poetry, and also on such Scottish literary luminaries as Kathleen Jamie and Liz Lochhead; a student new to the study of Scottish women’s writing might perhaps find the focus of these final two chapters a bit misleading.

One advantage of this text is the inclusion of a great deal of apparently well-researched information on female writers who were not published, but nevertheless have left artefacts in the form of letters, journals, and other domestic documents. In order to gain a complete view of the contribution of female writers in Scotland’s history, the scholars contributing to this volume have given us valuable additions to existing knowledge, presented in a thematic format. Suzanne Gilbert’s essay entitled ‘Orality and the Ballad Tradition’ brings to light some contributions of previously buried female musician’s and song writers; she also makes important connections between the oral tradition in Scotland and later literary print culture. In a similar way, Gaelic culture as represented by women is explored, or at least touched upon, in several chapters, encompassing various time periods from early Highland life to the use of Gaelic and/or Scots by contemporary writers.

Overall, the contributors rise to the task of integrating female writers, published or not, into the general scheme of Scottish literature from Pre-Enlightenment oral tradition through the present day. Even the most experienced literary scholar will likely find new names and new information that adds to the formulation of a more complete picture of Scottish writing by Scottish women, while the beginning scholar will be provided with an intriguing thematically-oriented collection of essays.

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