

**Daniel Grader, ed., *The Life of Sir Walter Scott by John Macrone*. Intro. Gillian Hughes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013. Pp. 168. £65. ISBN 9780748669912.**

Daniel Grader's edition of John Macrone's *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* (2013) is an interesting – and in some ways indispensable – addition to the wealth of materials already written on the 'Wizard of the North', despite the peripheral nature of Macrone's incomplete manuscript and its chance discovery. The latter was unearthed by Grader as he was working on the Galt collection at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. He came across a file described in the library catalogue as 'an unpublished manuscript concerning the life of Sir Walter Scott assumed to be written by J. Galt, 1837'. The researcher could nevertheless instantly testify that it was not in Galt's handwriting, and the existence of Macrone's manuscript was confirmed by Douglas S. Mack's edition of James Hogg's *Anecdotes of Sir W. Scott* (1983).

The rationale behind Grader's edition of Macrone's text is to provide the reader with a more subversive inbetween-the-line discourse on Scott's life. He modernised the writing and expanded the abbreviations to make the text readable, but he did not modify it. Macrone had indeed never met Scott: his sources are all secondary, gleaned through his discussions with Scott's friends (James Hogg) and acquaintances (Sir Egerton Brydges). The biography thus tends to be limited to a few anecdotes more or less happily strung together. And yet, Grader still deserves the gratitude of any Scott specialist for bringing this original manuscript to the public eye. Of course it does not replace the official biography written by Scott's son-in-law John Gibson Lockhart (1837–38) which remains the benchmark for any deep insight into the author's life, or the contemporary biography by William Hazlitt (1825), as well as more recent ones by Arthur Melville Clark (1969), David Daiches (1971), Carola Oman (1973), and John Sutherland (1995). However, Macrone's manuscript provides the reader with an alternative discourse through his more intimate and original anecdotes (114) that fills in the blanks left by the more canonical – and absolutely essential – biographies cited above. It brings out more private facets of Scott's life and his family thanks to Macrone's interviews of men who had known Scott since his schoolboy years in Edinburgh.

In terms of structure, the book starts with a short biography of publisher John Macrone (1–48), retracing his meteorite-like career from 1831 until his death in 1837 (he 'blazed comet-like for a mere six years and then disappeared', 49). He strikes the reader as being a skillful opportunist who felt at ease among the Scottish literati. He had always wanted to become famous through literature: Scott's death in 1832 provided him with a subject. Even though he had never met the author, he had become acquainted with Scott's close friend of twenty years, James Hogg. Yet, the latter already worked with Lockhart, Scott's legitimate biographer, and he also wanted to publish his own memoirs entitled *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott* (1834). Macrone had to give up his project, and in 1833 started a business partnership with Hogg's publisher, James Cochrane, before going into business of his own in 1834.

One may regret the choice of a thematic arrangement, rather than a chronological one, even though the shortness of the period studied certainly accounts for this decision. Yet, this structure leads to a lot of flashbacks and flashforwards which may confuse the reader following Macrone's partnerships (with Hogg, Cochrane, and then Sir Egerton Brydges) one after the other, even though some of these relationships happened simultaneously: 'having now exhausted our knowledge of Macrone's married life, we must return to his professional activities in St James' Square' (28). This structural choice also leads to a few repetitions, all the more so since Grader's rather lengthy introduction is then followed by Gillian Hughes's essay entitled 'The Afterglow of Abbotsford: John Macrone, Celebrity Culture, and Commemoration' (49–59). In this essay, Hughes takes up some of the details already mentioned by the editor – like the anecdote concerning Lady Scott's opium addiction (7; 53) – but she

very aptly and usefully puts Macrone's life in the context of the Victorian age of capitalism and celebrity culture, and provides us with a critical reading of Macrone's character that reinforces the image of the publisher as an illusionist, an opportunistic master trickster.

This unconventional biography brings to the fore interesting anecdotes which could interest Scott specialists or researchers focusing on John Macrone. It is not an essential read but a pleasant one, which has the merit of bringing two meteorites, Macrone and Scott, into the limelight again.

*Céline Sabiron*  
*Lorraine University/Oxford University*