

Posing as the ultimate Scottish Songster: James Hogg's 'Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd' or Hogg GOLD!

By Kirsteen McCue

of [Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd](#) included what had already been popular and what have posthumously proved to be his most popular songs Donald McDonald , Bonnie Prince Charlie , Flora MacDonald s farewell , The Skylark and his most Burnsian song When the kye comes hame . And, like Hogg s wonderful X-factor ballad competition in [The Queen s Wake](#) (1813), it shows just how diverse his songs could be love songs (sad and happy, pastoral and lamenting), comic, bacchanalian and social songs, political songs, songs

tradition.

And there's even more evidence that this was indeed the case in the early 1830s for Hogg. Within a year of the appearance of *Songs*, Hogg completed the third and final version of his *Memoir*, and it's in this last autobiography, which appeared in [Altrive Tales](#) in 1832, that Hogg really establishes his place as the ultimate Scottish songster. He tells the long story of his introduction to the work and figure of Robert Burns, noting that the inspirational story of the ploughman poet was enough to open his own eyes to the possibility of literary fame and fortune. And notably, he sets himself up as Burns's successor in song for shepherds, he argues, have more time than ploughman to write good songs!

While we are not blessed with many reviews, critical reception of *Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd*, would thus have pleased Hogg greatly. On 8 January 1831 there's a very early review in the *Edinburgh Literary Journal or Weekly Register of Criticism and Belles Lettres*. It refers in its first paragraph to the extensive and well-merited popularity of Hogg's songs. Quoting several of the key songs mentioned above in full, it draws attention to the spirit-stirring humour which the Scotch people are fond of mingling with their patriotism (with Donald McDonald) and the tenderness and simplicity of *The Broom sae green* or Hogg's overall versatility as songster. It concludes:

This volume of *Songs* cannot fail to find its way over the whole country; and on the shelves of many a library in the recess of many a lowly window on top of many an antique chest of drawers, it will take its place side by side with the *Poems of Burns*.

Hogg could easily have written this himself! But that said I'm obviously hoping that the 1831 reviewer's conclusion will be true when this little collection appears once again in the coming months.

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