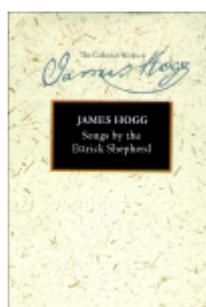


# 'James Hogg: Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd' and 'James Hogg: Contributions to Musical Collections and Miscellaneous Songs' both edited by Kirsteen McCue

## Review by Lucy Macrae



In January 1831, William Blackwood published James Hogg's *Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd*, a selection of 113 songs which aimed to gather together, in Hogg's own words, his 'best songs'. A small, hand-picked assortment drawn from a vast and varied corpus of work that spanned thirty years, this would be Hogg's second and final song collection (the first, *The Forest Minstrel*, had been published over a decade before, in 1810). Edited by Kirsteen McCue of the University of Glasgow, the two latest offerings from the Stirling/South Carolina Research Edition of The Collected Works of James Hogg consist of the first scholarly edition of this collection alongside a companion volume, *Contributions to Musical Collections and Miscellaneous Songs*.

Published without musical notation, Hogg's headnotes to each song in *Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd* directed his readers to the musical collections and song-sheets where the tunes could be found. In producing the two volumes, the editorial intention has been to remain faithful to the original arrangement of *Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd* as a text-only volume, whilst emulating the experience of Hogg's readers in 1831. Taken together, these two volumes form a detailed and fascinating resource, the painstaking research process richly illustrating the musical and cultural contexts of Hogg's prolific song-making.

As well as the editorial introductions and notes presented in both volumes, the new edition of *Songs* includes an essay on the genesis of the text by Janette

Currie. Currie also contributes a comprehensive glossary of Hogg's Scots and English words which appears in both volumes. The editorial introduction to *Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd* provides a comprehensive discussion of the context in which Hogg compiled the collection and his editorial policy, while the introduction to *Contributions to Musical Collections and Miscellaneous Songs* considers Hogg's broader role as song-writer and musician, alongside the place of his songs in the musical collections and song-sheets that appeared during Hogg's lifetime.

Almost certainly inspired by Walter Scott's concurrent 'magnum opus' editions, Hogg's decision to push for publication of his collected songs at this time was influenced by a variety of factors which McCue discusses in depth. Hogg's desire to prove a worthy literary successor to Burns is well known, and the 'neat volume' he persuaded Blackwood to publish was clearly designed to place the Ettrick Shepherd on an unequivocally equal footing with the Heaven-Taught Ploughman. As both McCue and Currie make clear, financial necessity played no small part in Hogg's desire for the song collection of 1831 to be compiled, printed and published quickly. Following an outright rejection of his application to renew the lease on the large and costly farm of Mount-Benger in Yarrow early in 1830, Hogg was facing mounting debts and an unsympathetic landlord in the 5th Duke of Buccleuch, who had threatened to forcibly auction off Hogg's entire stock and effects to raise the money owed. Excerpts from Hogg's correspondence discussed in McCue's introduction are testament to his tenacity in negotiating the deal with Blackwood, and the evident anxiety he felt over the timescale. These stresses and strains do not seem to have affected his memory or his creativity, however, as he tells his publisher that should Blackwood reject any of the songs proposed, he, Hogg, as a dozen or so more in waiting. Like his mother Margaret Laidlaw before him (who so famously, by Hogg's account, gave Walter Scott a good talking to on the literary appropriation of oral tradition), Hogg presents himself as a living miscellany of song.

However, financial pressure was not the only impetus for the collection, and one of the most fascinating aspects of the collection McCue draws attention to is Hogg's drive to 'reclaim' his legacy, an ambition which went hand in hand with his pride in his own background and the songs' almost undetectable absorption into contemporary oral performance culture. This aspect of McCue's thought-provoking discussion of this dichotomy within Hogg's work provides an intriguing

perspective on both the collection's compilation and the headnotes he provided for the songs. Undeniably delighted that songs such as "Donald MacDonald", "The Broom Sae Green" and "Caledonia" were sung far and wide around the hearth, in the parlour and on the stage, Hogg was nevertheless eager to assert his authorship of the songs that had been taken up so enthusiastically by singers throughout Lowland Scotland and further afield. ("Scotia's Glens", for example, was, according to Hogg's headnote, immensely popular amongst Scottish soldiers in India.) In a letter to William Blackwood prior to the collection's publication, Hogg recounted how over the past twenty years he had observed his songs becoming 'highly popular and no author known', while in the headnote to "Donald MacDonald", Hogg's first song that he chose to open the collection, he observes that 'after it had run through the Three Kingdoms, like fire set to heather, for ten or twelve years, no one ever knew or enquired who was the author'. Through publication of a 'cabinet' edition of these songs with his authorship clearly proclaimed, Hogg plainly wished to re-dress the balance.

The new edition of *Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd* has drawn on the text of the volume's first edition of 1831, which is shown to be remarkably similar to the fair copy which was Hogg's final manuscript. This is indicative of the speed of the publication: having opened negotiations with William Blackwood in April 1830 Hogg pushed for a publication date of Christmas 1830, and despite inevitable delays (including being laid up for some weeks in November with a terrible toothache), the volume was published in January 1831 to extremely favourable reviews.

Clearly laid out, glossed and annotated with editorial notes which cover the creative context, publication history and musical context of the material, the collection's songs themselves leap from the page in all their varied glory, from laments to love lyrics, roistering drinking songs to hymns, lullabies to pastoral lays and rousing nationalistic and Jacobite songs. Hogg's headnotes are a delightful reflection of his characteristically potent blend of humour, bravado, assumed modesty and pawky plain-speaking. Querying the popularity of "Bonny Prince Charlie" for example, he exclaims '[T]here can be no dispute that it is one of my worst'; by contrast, on hearing "Flora MacDonald's Farewell", he notes that 'I could hardly believe my senses that I had made so good a song without knowing it.' Songs made for particular singers did not always meet with approval; a peeved Dr Clarkson of Selkirk, for example, protested that Hogg's own version of "The

"Souters o' Selkirk" was far too short ('it was not well begun till it was done'). The headnotes are also full of information as to the performance context of the tunes as sung or played. The lyrics of "O, Jeanie There's Naething to Fear Ye!", which Hogg informs the reader 'were the most popular I ever wrote' were inspired by the beautiful playing of the old air "Over the Border" by one Patrick Maxwell during one of many evenings Hogg whiled away in his company. Hogg's connections to oral culture, his own musicianship and his home-grown audience are constantly affirmed. On singing a version of "When the Kye Comes Hame" at a wedding, he recalls, 'I was once singing it at a wedding with great glee the latter way, ("when the kye come hame",) when a tailor, scratching his head, said "It was a terrible affectit way that!" I stood corrected, and have never it so again.'

Beneath any degree of assumed persona, the headnotes reflect Hogg's pride in the oral tradition in which he had been raised, his self-belief and his recognition of his own value, addressing a literary circle that recognised his singular talents and yet treated him with what McCue eloquently terms 'genteel condescension'. At all points Hogg reminds us that these are songs primarily to be sung, a point enthusiastically reinforced by McCue's sensitive handling of the material. This is also evident on turning from the songs to their musical counterparts in the extensively researched and beautifully laid out *Contributions to Musical Collections and Miscellaneous Songs*. This volume contains extensive information on each of the thirteen musical collections Hogg contributed to, alongside facsimile copies from the collections themselves and other song-sheets that appeared in Hogg's lifetime. It is a powerful reminder of the sheer scope of the musical material Hogg put his words to. As a prolific contributor to the collections of Alexander Campbell and George Thomason, the prevalence of Scottish Gaelic and Irish melodies in Hogg's songs is particularly noticeable, while the extent of his contributions and collaborations is shown in surprisingly diverse publications such as *German Hebrew Melodies* of 1817. Created under the influence of Byron, this collection was the result of Hogg's collaboration with the London composer and pianist William Edward Heather.

The creation of these two volumes was evidently a formidable editorial task, but the results are comprehensively researched, detailed, open and refreshingly unaffected in approach. As a pair, these companion pieces will appeal to readers and singers alike, and should be particularly attractive to those who, like the songs' creator, take an active interest in the overlapping spheres of print and

performance culture in which Hogg himself was an enthusiastic and opinionated participant.

*James Hogg: Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd* (2014) and *James Hogg: Contributions to Musical Collections and Miscellaneous Songs* (2015) both edited by Kirsteen McCue are part of the [Collected Works of James Hogg series published by Edinburgh University Press](#).

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