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s my work on the new edition of James Hogg's final collection of songs comes to an end, I'm spending a while thinking about just why Hogg's songs meant so much to him, and what purpose his hands-on involvement in the production of this volume really serves at this late point in his career.

Hogg's last little text-only collection of songs appeared in January 1831 (after a very quick publication process) and pulled together 113 songs from across a thirty-year period, many of which had been circulated in song sheets or musical collections across Great Britain, and, probably unbeknown to Hogg, also in Europe and America. Setting out, as he explained to his publisher William Blackwood, to include the songs which 'have been popular in the first place' (Hogg's letter to Blackwood, 20 October 1830) Hogg also stated, with characteristic modesty, that the volume wouldn't even contain a third of his songs, and that if Blackwood wished to delete any from the projected list, Hogg would certainly be able to replace them with even better ones! His 'gold album' of Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd included what had already been popular and what have post-humously 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 celebrating the best qualities of the Scottish nation and character and several from his beloved Ettrick.

Unlike his earlier collection The Forest Minstrel (1810), which was clearly divided into set categories of songs (Love, National, Humour-
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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