



Bold, V. and Gilbert, S. (2012) *Hogg, Ettrick and oral tradition*. In: Duncan, I. (ed.) *The Edinburgh Companion to James Hogg*. Series: *Edinburgh companions to Scottish literature*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, pp. 11-20. ISBN 9780748641246

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/65953/>

Deposited on: 29 June 2012

CHAPTER ONE

Hogg, Ettrick, and Oral Tradition

Valentina Bold and Suzanne Gilbert

(10) James Hogg's work is embedded in the oral traditions of Selkirkshire and, specifically, in those of the Ettrick valley and its environs. This chapter explores the interface between Hogg's knowledge of, and familiarity and fondness for, traditional cultural practices and ways of communication. Hogg's attitude to traditional culture was ambivalent, partly because of his desire for personal and economic success; his reliability as a source on folk culture has been questioned in the past, and reassessed. What cannot be questioned is that all his writing draws on a rich seam of song, beliefs, and anecdotes from Ettrick. Moreover, Hogg himself has entered into the traditional culture of Scotland in a literary way, through his (active and passive) inclusion in the 'Noctes Ambrosianae' series of *Blackwood's*, and into the oral traditions of Selkirkshire. All these aspects are considered, making reference to a variety of literary sources, and to Ettrick-made field recordings from the 1980s.

Ettrick life, c.1770–1830¹

Hogg spent most of his life in the isolated, neighbouring valleys of Ettrick and Yarrow, within the region traditionally known as Ettrick Forest. This 'assemblage of hills'² is intersected by *hopes* (small valleys, enclosed by hills) and two major rivers: Ettrick and Yarrow. St Mary's Loch, about three miles long, lies to the East, with the smaller Loch of the Lowes beyond. During the Middle Ages, the Forest was a favoured royal hunting ground; from 1324 to 1455 it was governed by the Douglas family, almost as personal property. Crown hunting rights were protected, and it was administered by forest law.³ Hogg draws on this medieval background for tales such as 'The Hunt of Eildon' (1818) and 'The Profigate Princes' (1817). The Borders was a buffer zone during frequent wars with neighbours to the south, and a general atmosphere of unrest was compounded by raids, feuds, murder, cattle and sheep stealing, at least until the late sixteenth century (sheep stealing into the nineteenth century). The Covenanted period provided a dramatic interlude, which was long remembered.

(11) In Hogg's lifetime the valleys were inaccessible. During the winter, the valleys could be cut off for months by snow. Locals often ignored the roads,

which were useless in poor weather, and took direct routes – in the *Brownie of Bodsbeck*, Jasper and Catherine travel to Dunse Castle, ‘over hill and dale, as a shepherd always does, who hates the *wimples*, as he calls them, of a turnpike. He takes such a line as an eagle would take, or a flock of wild geese’.⁴ The only substantial bridges were at Ettrickbridge and Deuchar but there were smaller bridges, such as the one crossing Altrive Lake above Eldinhope. Hogg’s wife’s fall over this bridge in November 1833 probably inspired Julia Mackenzie’s fall in *Tales of the Wars of Montrose*.

Then (as now), the area was sparsely populated. In 1790 the population of Yarrow and Ettrick was estimated respectively at 1230 (584 male, 646 female) and 470 (222 male, 248 female).⁶ The Scotts of Buccleuch held 75 per cent of the land, and the main economic activity was sheep farming. The land was poorly suited to arable farming, with a few subsistence crops: barley, oats, pease, turnips, potatoes.⁷

This was a period of dramatic agricultural change. Arable land and pasture were increasingly separated, and ploughed fields subdivided. Enclosure progressed on both – substantial stone walls being built on farms nearest to Selkirk; hurdles or nets in other places. Some improvements were enforced by landowners. On the Buccleuch estates, for instance, crop rotation was regulated in the 1778 conditions of lease. Large-scale tree planting was carried out – 2000 acres of woods were planted in Selkirkshire, including one hundred of natural wood (oak, ash, birch and hazel), most on the Buccleuch estates as well as at Torwoodlee, Yair and Hanginshaw in Yarrow, with recent planting often enclosed by dykes, to prevent sheep from eating the trees. Drainage and fertilisation techniques were improved on arable land and pasture; and several watered meadows were created.⁸

Agricultural life was harsh, with labourers working from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the summer, with an hour each off for breakfast and at midday. Wages were low – by the 1790s male farm servants earned £6–7; females £3 10s. to £4 a year; day labourers 8*d.* a day and skilled workers 15–20*s.* per day. The previously communal lifestyle changed as new equipment was introduced. Instead of groups of both genders using sickles in bandwins (bands of reapers) at harvest times, the introduction of the scythe meant smaller teams with the active role performed by men; the two-horse swing plough ended the need for large ploughing teams and again men were in command with women increasingly

relegated to ‘menial tasks such as weeding and hoeing (in company with children), gathering and stacking’.⁹

Local enthusiasts such as Lord Napier ensured that emerging ideas entered the Forest. Circulating libraries at Hawick and Selkirk played a major role along with new agricultural societies – such as the Hawick and Kelso

(12)

Agricultural Society, and the Pastoral Society of Selkirkshire (founded 1818; after 1906 the Yarrow and Ettrick Pastoral Society) whose members included Lord Napier and Walter Scott.¹⁰ Hogg was President of the smaller Crookwelcome Club, in Yarrow and Ettrick, founded in 1801; it valued the crops and livestock of the Forest, and held hearty dinners – on one occasion twelve members shared seven bottles of whisky made into toddy.¹¹

Traditional expressive culture remained relatively unchanged until the agricultural revolution of the late eighteenth century. The coming of widespread literacy, at approximately the same period, did change local attitudes towards traditional culture: oral history, for instance, was no longer treated with the same respect when written accounts were available. Nevertheless, a wide range of expressive culture was performed in a variety of contexts. There were spontaneous performances of proverbs and anecdotes, as they suited immediate occasions; premeditated song and tale sessions in the public context of the inn and the home. Evenings, especially in winter, were passed with a mixture of song, story and conversation. No doubt, as now, performance styles were as varied as the performers, providing a resource for Hogg to adapt in his own narratives, in poetry and prose.

The Ettrick Bard

Into this traditional culture Hogg was born in 1770, the second of four sons of Robert Hogg, a small tenant farmer, and Margaret Laidlaw. Although hard farm work governed his early life, the young Hogg showed an appetite for reading and a talent for expression, no doubt inspired by the singers and storytellers within his family. As Elaine Petrie has observed, Hogg’s family was steeped and skilled in song, singing, and ballad-making.¹² His maternal grandfather William Laidlaw (Will o’ Phaup) was a tradition-bearer of renown who passed on his repertoire to his children Margaret (Hogg’s mother) and William (Hogg’s uncle). As he grew up, Hogg was also in contact with good singers on his father’s side of the family, including his cousins Thomas and

Frank Hogg. The letters of Margaret's oldest son William reveal the function of ballads in her day-to-day life: '[O]ur mother to keep us boys quiet would often tell us tales of kings, giants, knights, fairies, kelpies, brownies [. . .] These tales arrested our attention, and filled our minds with the most dreadful apprehensions.' William describes the songs and tales as being sung 'in a plaintive, melancholy air' and their influence on his brother James's mind as 'altogether unperceived at the time, and perhaps indescribable now'.¹³ Hogg's earliest compositions were songs. Having obtained a fiddle at age fourteen, he developed a regional reputation as a songwriter and singer, becoming known as 'Jamie the poeter'. Like Burns and others before him, he appropriated traditional tunes to which he joined his own words;¹⁴ and some

(13)

of these, such as 'The Mistakes of a Night', found their way into the *Scots Magazine*. But it was Walter Scott's drive to collect ballads for the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–3) that suggested new connections between the world of Ettrick and a new world of literary pursuit. Scott had been travelling throughout the Borders countryside in search of these ancient narrative songs. '[I]n defiance of mountains, rivers, and bogs, damp and dry, we have penetrated the very recesses of Ettrick Forest', he wrote to a friend: 'I have [. . .] returned *loaded* with the treasures of oral tradition.'¹⁵ Hogg assisted Scott with locating traditional material for the *Minstrelsy*, ultimately providing variants of eleven ballads and directing him to many others known by family members.¹⁶ The best known of these is his mother's ballad of 'Auld Maitland', not for the song itself but for the anecdote that became associated with it, of Hogg's mother rebuking Scott when he visited her to obtain the ballad:

there war never ane o' my sangs prentit till ye prentit them yoursel', an' ye hae spoilt them awthegither. They were made for singing an' no for reading; but ye hae broken the charm now, an' they'll never be sung mair. An' the worst thing of a', they're nouter right spell'd nor right setten down.¹⁷

Hogg wrote his account many years after the event it describes. His retrospective and strategic deployment of the anecdote, which was published in 1829, 1832 and 1834, critiques the antiquarian endeavour as a whole: for its printing of what had been transmitted orally over centuries, for hastening what was perceived as the inevitable death of oral tradition, and for not even transcribing the material correctly.¹⁸

In later life Hogg lamented the loss of traditional expression and practices, as in the essay 'On the Changes in the Habits, Amusements, and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry', published in the *Quarterly Journal of Agriculture* in the early 1830s: 'On looking back, the first great falling off is in song. This, to me, is not only astonishing, but unaccountable. [. . .] Where are those melting strains now? Gone, and for ever!' For this he blames Scott:

The publication of the *Border Minstrelsy* had a singular and unexpected effect in this respect. These songs had floated down on the stream of oral tradition, from generation to generation, and were regarded as a precious treasure belonging to the country; but when Mr Scott's work appeared their arcanum was laid open, and a deadening blow was inflicted on our rural literature and principal enjoyment by the very means adopted for their preservation.¹⁹

By this time Hogg had come to distrust the antiquarian search for the 'real', original object of antiquity and the seeming disdain for practitioners of living tradition.

(14)

Hogg's construction was representative of the culture in which he was raised, and which he sought to protect. His perspective might be aligned with Ruth Finnegan's definition of tradition, not as an antique object or antiquated practice, 'not as a piece of dead baggage from the past but [. . .] something constantly in change and continually needing to be actively renewed'.²⁰ Or in John Miles Foley's words, tradition is 'not a static and unreactive monolith' but 'a dynamic and processual force',²¹ created and perpetuated, and best understood, by its practitioners in the community; it invokes 'a context that is enormously larger and more echoic than the text or work itself, that brings the lifeblood of generations of poems and performances to the individual performance or text'.²² Hogg's project was concerned with the wider question of cultural difference and friction, and his use of oral tradition was part of a larger strategy. Beyond self-promotion, he sought to protect the traditional culture which he believed was under assault in the contemporary drive to modernity.

Poetry

Hogg's strategic deployment of tradition is evident throughout his career, in every genre; and given his roots in songs and ballads, it is understandable that his poetry would draw heavily on this cultural legacy. Hogg's selfpresentation as a 'mountain bard', assuming that prophetic voice in the title

of his book, marks a crucial distinction from Scott's 'minstrelsy', characterised as 'relics' of an ancient group of courtly poets introduced by an antiquarian editor. In *The Mountain Bard* (1807) Hogg's role is as a modern bard of his native region, whose intimate personal knowledge of oral tradition qualifies him to continue the ballad tradition of which Scott is merely a collector. 'I confess', he wrote, 'that I was not satisfied with many of [Scott's] imitations of the ancients. I immediately chose a number of traditional facts, and set about imitating the different manners of the ancients myself.' Accordingly, the first section of *The Mountain Bard* is headed 'Ballads, in Imitation of the Ancients', a clear echo of the section of the *Minstrelsy* entitled 'Imitations of the Ancient Ballads'.²³ Implicit in his assertion is an argument for the distinctiveness of oral art forms, which only someone steeped in the tradition can authentically translate.

As a mountain bard, Hogg adopts the role of spokesman for the people of Ettrick, and he invites comparison with the recent manifestations of bardic poetry in the work of Robert Burns, and in James Macpherson's Ossian poems. *The Mountain Bard* opens with an epigraph that invokes Macpherson's 'Songs of Selma' in calling for 'tales of other times' to be renewed.²⁴ Hogg draws upon many ballad narratives: for example, 'Sir David Graeme' expands the brief, grim, evocative narrative of 'Twa Corbies'. Hogg (15) recycles songs and ballad narratives in many of his poems, heavily in *Mador of the Moor* (1816), where songs such as 'Waly, Waly, Gin Love Be Bonny' and 'Charlie is My Darling' are quoted extensively and the story alludes to motifs from 'The Maid and the Palmer' and 'The Cruel Mother'. The poem's recurring motif of disguise and revelation is underscored by Hogg's allusions to another traditional ballad family, including 'The Jolly Beggar' and 'The Gaberlunzie Man'.²⁵ 'Kilmeny', from *The Queen's Wake* (1813), invokes a number of ballads, among them the fairy abduction narrative of 'Thomas the Rhymer', in its lament that 'Kilmeny on earth was never mair seen'.²⁶ *The Queen's Wake* features a song contest in which bards from across Scotland (and one from Italy) compete for the harp of Mary Queen of Scots. The significance of traditional continuity is underscored in the narrative links between the songs, as in the commentary that follows the song of the aristocratic Highland bard Gardyn, whose harp 'of wonderous frame' is engraved with 'his lineage and his name', and who ultimately wins first prize. Hogg praises 'many a song of wonderous power', still 'Well known in cot and green-wood bower, / Wherever swells the shepherd's reed / On

Yarrow's banks and braes of Tweed'.²⁷ However, as Douglas S. Mack argues, Hogg complicates the received, antiquarian account of an aristocratic practice by 'envisaging rival aristocratic and non-aristocratic versions of the traditional bardic culture of pre-Union Scotland'.²⁸ The Bard of Ettrick, who wins a 'consolation prize', 'turns out to be the embodiment of an ancient oral popular culture that speaks in and through those eloquent and powerful songs of the people, the traditional oral ballads of the Scottish Borders'.²⁹

Queen Hynde (1824) draws structurally on Ossianic epic, conceived as having deep roots in traditional Gaelic culture, in order to trace a similar vision of pre-Union bardship in the Highlands. Hynde's palace of Selma derives from the Selma of *Fingal*; the poem is divided into six books, like *Fingal*; and both poems narrate the defeat of invading Norsemen by a Scots-Irish alliance.³⁰ And yet the poem insists on modernity. The epic past is framed by the Ettrick Shepherd's contemporary addresses to the Maids of Dunedin, in which he at once exhorts his audience (figured as female readers of sentimental novels) to empathise with the beleaguered Queen Hynde and makes fun of them:

Maids of Dunedin, in despair
Will ye not weep and rend your hair?
Ye who in these o'erpolished times,
Can shed the tear o'er woeful rhymes;
O'er plot of novel sore repine,
And cry for hapless heroine.³¹

(16) Instead of containing traditional narrative in scenarios of impotent heroism, elegy, or melancholy, Hogg unleashes it – exuberantly, energetically, unabashedly – into the present.

Prose

Hogg made rich use of Ettrick tradition in his prose, while exploring new narrative forms. *The Shepherd's Guide* (1807) is an evocative resource on husbandry and country life; *The Shepherd's Calendar*, first published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1823–8), explores agricultural practices, social lives, and related beliefs in the medium of fiction. Together, they offer a wealth of subtle commentary on everyday concerns in Ettrick. Life for the shepherd was unremitting: going round the hill twice a day, or three,

if the sheep were prone to casting (awalding, or falling on their backs). His collie dog was indispensable: 'a shepherd may be a very able, trusty, and good shepherd without a sweetheart [. . .] But what is he without his dog?'³² There were compensations – socialising at harvest and clipping (shearing) time in mid-June, 'every young shepherd's sweetheart [. . .] helping him to clip, or holding the ewes by the hind legs to make them lie easy'.³³ Otherwise, it was relentless: transporting animals for September sheep sales; smearing (treating fleece with tar and grease to protect it against parasites) in late October and, in late November, putting tups (rams) to ewes (ten days later to the gimmers, young ewes); in the spring, lambing. Harsh winter weather was the bane of the sheep farmer, as shown in the 'Storms' sequence.³⁴ In 1772, snow lay from mid-December to mid-April; the sheep were so weakened they could not be moved to lower, safer pastures.³⁵ The worst storm Hogg ever saw occurred on 24 January 1794, blowing 'with peculiar violence' between Crawford-Moor and the Border. Seventeen shepherds died; 'one farmer alone, Thomas Beattie, lost 72 scores and many others in the same quarter from 30 to 40 scores'.³⁶ Unlike today, with transportable block feeds, entire flocks could be lost over a winter, as happened to Hogg in 1808.³⁷

Until the foundation of the Gamgee and Dick veterinary colleges in the 1840s, and the availability of commercial treatments, remedies were passed on by self-taught experts, drawing on resources to hand, including foodstuffs and plants. Hogg is often critical of contemporary husbandry. Regarding lambing (10–20 around April in Ettrick), he condemns pulling wool away from the ewe's udder (thought to assist suckling) as unnecessary and cruel.³⁸ He rejects the practice, too, of milking ewes after weanings, to make cheese (alluded to in Jane Elliot's 'The Lament for Flodden'). This was becoming less common as farmers, like Hogg, realised it weakened the ewes.³⁹ Hogg is sensitive to animals' feelings too, such as the 'fondness' shown by ewes to lambs, even the 'spare' (orphaned or twin) lambs they accept, wearing a dead infant's skin.⁴⁰

(17)

Hogg thought deeply about how to diagnose and treat varieties of illness. For instance, he identifies four types of the braxy, an intestinal illness which affected hogs or young sheep, and suggests specific cures for them: for water braxy, bleeding; for the others, forcing the sheep to run to heat up, then bathing them with warm water for eight to ten minutes, before injecting water gruel and water, or another softener.⁴¹ Hogg also inserts anecdotes, such as one about a shepherd who thought his sheep were dying when they had been

afflicted by the 'staggers', a non-fatal ailment in which they fall into fits after feeding on broom, and cut the throats of four before his master stopped him: 'his master asked him, in a rage, "How would you like, if people were always to cut your throat when you are drunk?"' ⁴² Hogg's standard cure is gruesome: using an awl or large corking pin to pierce the softened skull if water had settled there or, if the skull felt soft at the forehead, 'thrusting a stiff- sharpened wire up each nostril, until it stops against the upper part of the skull'.⁴³ Doing this, Hogg boasts, he had 'cured many a sheep to different owners'.

There are traces of a peculiarly Ettrick ethos in the central tale of *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* (1818). Set in the neighbourhood of Chapelhope and Riskenhope farms, 'The Brownie' mixes traditional and written histories with supernatural legend. The elusive hero John Brown hides out on Chapelhope with his broken band of followers. A convoluted plot revolves around the interpretation of Brown's presence as a supernatural 'brownie', and the persecution of the farmer, Laidlaw, and his family for sheltering Covenanters.

In Hogg's lifetime the period was clearly recalled: leading Covenanters had preached locally, and Ettrick suffered royalist depredation, in the 1640s and during the 'Killing Times'. Hogg's depiction gives vent to emotive folk memories – take, for instance, the initially comic and then harrowing encounter between John Hoy of Mucrah and 'Bloody Clavers'. Clavers refuses to believe Hoy's evidently innocent testimony and issues the order: 'Burn him on the cheek, cut off his ears, and do not part with him till he pay you down a fine of two hundred marks.'⁴⁴

Hogg claims the authority of tradition for his tales, insisting that they were well known in contemporary Ettrick. The 'Brownie' himself takes after his namesake in Scottish tradition: 'a wee bit hurklin crile of an unearthly thing, as shrinkit an' wan as he had been lien seven years i' the grave'.⁴⁵ Although there is a logical explanation – Brown was horribly wounded at Bothwell Bridge – he performs tasks around Chapelhope farm, based on the traditional creature's attributes: harvesting corn overnight, smearing the sheep. The mistress, Maron Laidlaw, is annoyed because she has given the Brownie his 'accustomed wages' yet he has not left the town.

'The Brownie' was first published with two additional Ettrick tales, 'The Wool-gatherer' and 'The Hunt of Eildon', which represent a real and living landscape, integrating people and place. 'The Wool-gatherer', set in the

nineteenth century, draws on ballad and märchen conventions and Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*. 'The Hunt of Eildon', from 'ancient' times, combines supernatural and religious elements from Borders traditions with literary precedents like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and draws a macabre yet comic link between traditional enchantments and modern urban life. The heroine and her lover are transformed into moorfowl on Teviotdale, where they live in harmony, 'till last year, that Wauchope shot the hens'; people in Edinburgh then ate them, giving rise to a proverb: 'When any one is in a querulous or peevish humour, they say, – "He has got a wing of Wauchope's moor-hen."' ⁴⁶ The cock, however, survives, and might be transformed back, to give an account of the last two centuries.

The Brownie of Bodsbeck offers a sequence of tales of transformations, deceptions and revelations of identity, drawing on traditional motifs (brownies, magical shapeshifting, the overcoming of difficulties in love). It is, equally, a series of 'hunts' (for religion, identity, love and sex) through different periods, 'modern' and 'ancient', unified upon a Borders topography and the traditions and experiences of its inhabitants. The whole collection resembles an episodic, traditional oral storytelling session, privileging local and lowly, community and religious interests, and alternating humorous, horrific and morally resonant episodes, in a thematically-linked structure which Hogg would develop further in *The Three Perils of Man* (1822).

Hogg's background in oral tradition, along with his interest in modern life, informs *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824).⁴⁷ Traditional beliefs are pervasive, especially around the demonic figure of Gil-Martin. He is initially thought to be an exotic Eastern prince; people cannot remember his name. Like the devil in traditional culture, he walks with stiff joints; towards the end of the novel he comes to resemble Milton's Satan. Hogg skilfully suggests that, while Gil-Martin might be the devil, he might, equally, be a figment of the characters', the narrators', and even the reader's imagination. Moreover, in his exploration of doubling – the pairing of Wringhim with Gil-Martin; the opposition of characters like the Laird of Dalcastle and Wringhim senior; or the possibility that Wringhim junior is, himself, a divided personality – Hogg recalls the traditional (ballad as well as epic) narrative techniques discussed by Axel Olrik in 'Epic Laws of Folk Narrative'.⁴⁸ Karl Miller's characterisation of *Confessions* as 'a tall tale' draws attention to its roots in oral idiom and local knowledge, as well as its appeal

to an audience adept in these modes of discourse.⁴⁹

Hogg in Ettrick Tradition

The implication of such an audience in his writing may explain the affection with which Hogg is still held in Ettrick. Local historian Thomas Craig-Brown

(19) firmly anchored the poet in his particular landscapes: ‘the mountains and the valleys of the Forest inspired his song, her legends gave form to his poems’; in return this ‘hereditary freeman of the Forest’ left ‘her fi elds greener where he trod, her gloamings lovelier and more glamorous’.⁵⁰ The ‘Blanket Preaching’ of 1935, 150 years after Hogg’s birth, issued a similar encomium; without Hogg, ‘Yarrow would not be the Yarrow we know, nor Ettrick the Ettrick.’⁵¹ First-hand memories persisted. Early examples include an account in the *Border Magazine* of the elderly Mrs Fletcher, who recited Hogg’s poetry and ‘had more than once seen the Ettrick Shepherd on a Fair Day in Selkirk with his collies at his heel, a lass on each arm, and a kindly joke for every one he met’.⁵² Such recollections have lasted in oral circulation to the present.⁵³ To those with closest links to Hogg, like the late Tibbie Shaw, formerly of Tibbie Shiel’s Inn, Hogg was ‘every bit as famous as Burns’ and, like Burns, a man who appreciated drink and women. Shiel’s descendants, the Mitchell family at Henderland, possessed a letter to Shiels in which Hogg claims to have often faced the cutty stool (or stool of repentance, where fornicators had to sit in front of the congre-tation). Hogg as a great lover has proved a persistent image, as can be seen in the (albeit humorous) observation from the late Walter Barrie, who lived in Hogg’s farmhouse at Eldinhope: ‘We get a lot of people claiming to be descendants [. . .] [from] New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the States. Some of them probably *will* be, but no *all* of them can be.’ Hogg is, however, treated with rather more respect than the familiar ‘Rabbie’. He is ‘James Hogg’ or ‘Hogg’ and, while failings are acknowledged, the people of Yarrow and Ettrick know enough about farming to be sympathetic. Although Mrs Shaw noted that: ‘he never made good in farming [. . .] his thoughts were aye on verse and song’, in contrast, Barrie told me: ‘he’d be a good enough practical farmer [. . .] brought up to it [. . .] as a young chap he worked among sheep [. . .] His father was a shepherd, and that counts for a lot [. . .] You pick up a lot from your father.’ The Barries and the Mitchells, having considered Hogg’s *Shepherd’s Guide*, conclude that Hogg’s knowledge of sheep diseases were as effective as his period allowed.

The people of Ettrick are well informed about the work. The late James

Mitchell's grandfather preserved a copy of the 1794 *Scots Magazine*, suggesting that the authorship of 'The Mistakes of a Night' was known locally before it was literary knowledge. Walter Barrie was aware of Hogg's use of Ettrick traditions, from his work with Scott to the novels: 'He embroidered a lot of these stories: used them in his essays and writings, the *Brownie of Bodsbeck* and the Covenanters and [. . .] the *Justified Sinner* [. . .] about the body bein' dug up where three lairds' lands meet by the three cairns'. Barrie was well aware of the literary traditions, agreeing with the verdict (recorded by R. P. Gillies) that while Hogg was plagued with innumerable visitors, he was always a gentleman. However, Barrie added: '*He* says in, one o' his letters that

(20)

when they *drew* the plan [of Eldinhope], they wanted a' the reek to come out o' one lum! So that folk wouldna ken if he was in or not, and they wouldnae come in! [. . .] but he was hospitable, I think.'

A group of anecdotes focuses on Tibbie Shiel's perceptions of Hogg. Tibbie's oft-quoted remark, 'Aye, Hogg was a gey sensible man, for all the nonsense he wrat', is well known in Ettrick, as is a printed anecdote about a severely hung-over Hogg asking Tibbie to 'bring in the loch' for him to drink. Other traditions only survive orally, for instance Mrs Shaw's, about how Tibbie had a specially designed settle/bed: when Hogg was drunk she could open a door at the back of the settle and tip the poet into a box bed behind. Mrs Shaw recalls several unrecorded humorous tales from her grandfather. In one, Hogg went out onto the hills on a particularly foggy day: it was so dense he filled his pipe with fog. Such a tale could be applied to anyone, but it is significant local anecdotes accrue around Hogg. They place him firmly in his Ettrick setting.

Helped by visual icons – the Hogg statue at the head of St Mary's Loch, the Ettrickhall Memorial – Hogg's personality is epitomised in local relics such as the curling stone Tibbie Shaw possessed, or the plaid in Bowhill museum, which stand witness to a working participation in Forest life. Hogg's watch was retained in the Mitchell family, presented to Shiel for the care she gave the poet in his decline, creating a bond between him and her descendants. Manuscripts, including the Crookwelcome Book, the Selkirkshire Agricultural Society books, and the letter to Tibbie Shiel, are treasured heirlooms, testifying to a shared heritage with Hogg. These, backed by oral and

literary traditions, show the very high esteem in which Hogg is held, both as a writer and as a man of Ettrick.

Following the formal dinners in Hogg's honour, in 1832 in London and in 1834 in Peebles, public dinners have been held for Hogg at Yarrow on the centenary of his birth (8 December 1871) and at Tibbie Shiel's, with Mrs Shaw as guest of honour, on the 150th anniversary of his death (1985). The traditional Burns menu was replaced with an Ettrick variation: 'muttons and greens [. . .] and cloutie dumpling', along with celebrations in words and in music. As James Mitchell recalled, 'A said that if anybody ga'ing oot o this establishment *tonight* doesnae see the faires fl oatin round his *pedestal* they hadnae enjoyed themselves! A think quite a few of them saw them!'