

Wild flowers, honeycombs and jewels: metaphors implying audience expectation in early 19th Century Scottish song collections

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In the Preface to his *Scottish Minstrel* song collection (1821-1824), Robert Archibald Smith highlights the inclusion of ‘hitherto unpublished’ songs, and likens folk music to the wild flowers of nature, gathered from ‘the peasantry’, rather than being art-songs.

This is a common metaphor in writings of this period; for example, Sir Walter Scott had earlier alluded to ‘garlands of song’ and ‘wild-flowers’ in his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, but took the imagery several steps further by including the land itself in his metaphor:-

Like the natural free gifts of Flora, these poetical garlands can only be successfully sought for where the land is uncultivated; and civilisation and increase of learning are sure to banish them, as the plough of the agriculturalist bears down the mountain daisy.¹

Allan Cunningham used similar imagery in his *Songs of Scotland* poetry collection. (Indeed, Wiora has remarked upon very similar references on the Continent as well, in connection with his researches into the work of Zuccalmaglio, the contemporary German folk-song collector.)

However, the ‘wild flowers’ were not always as wild as they seemed; indeed Cunningham confessed to some subtle landscape design with regard to his contributions to Cromek’s earlier *Reliques of Nithsdale*.

¹ Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border: consisting of historical and romantic ballads*, 3 vols (Kelso: Printed by J. Ballantyne, for T. Cadell, jun. and W. Davies, 1802), I, 23-24.

I suggest that the imagery used by compilers of Scottish song collections at this time tells us a great deal not only about the compilers' attitudes, but also their audiences' expectations.

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