



The Place of Poetry in Victorian Dundee

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Abstract

This thesis was completed on the AHRC-funded collaborative doctoral studentship, 'Poetry, song and community in the industrial city: Victorian Dundee,' a partnership between the University of Strathclyde and Dundee Central Library. Using the library's extensive archival collections of broadsides, published books, newspapers, and manuscripts, I consider the role poetry and song played in the city's public culture during the nineteenth century.

I argue that poetry and song, forms which nineteenth-century writers and performers did not see a clear distinction between, were an essential part of conversations about life in a rapidly changing city for the citizens of Victorian Dundee. This is evident not only through the content of the poems and songs themselves, but also through the changing context of their print and performance. I also argue that the verse culture of Victorian Dundee has had a lasting effect on both literary and folk-song culture in Scotland.

Certain places within the city became a particular focus for these verse conversations. These tend to be places whose meaning and function were central to Dundee's idea of itself as an industrial city. I have selected five places, or types of places, which were the inspiration for and place of composition for poetry, to discuss in detail. These are the River Tay, the city streets, textile workplaces, parks and green spaces, and central meeting rooms. Examining poems and songs about these places, and their distribution and reception, demonstrates the importance of verse culture as a part of daily life in Victorian Dundee.

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Map of Dundee, 1846



'Plan of the town of Dundee with the improvements now in progress.' (Edinburgh: W. & A. K. Johnston, 1846).

National Library of Scotland, MS.5847 No.80, <https://maps.nls.uk/towns/rec/411>. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland under Creative Commons Licence CC-BY 4.0.

Introduction

Poetry and song were an integral part of public culture in Victorian Dundee. The importance of the city as a centre for the Scottish newspaper press, and the poetry and creative writing which was published by the local newspapers, has been well established. This print culture coexisted with the broadside press, itself inextricably linked to folk performance traditions which adapted creatively to the new context of the industrial city. At the same time, Dundee was home to an early flourishing of literary societies, who used poetry as a means of pursuing education and mutual improvement. Different contexts called for different poetic forms and topics, but, as I will demonstrate, individuals did not restrict themselves to creating or consuming only one type of verse. For many, poetry and song were an essential way of negotiating the challenges of industrial urban life. The diversity of creative activity in nineteenth-century Dundee is reflected through the A.C. Lamb collection, an extensive local history resource held in Dundee Central Library. While the Lamb collection is certainly a well-known source among historians of Dundee, it is relatively unheard of outside of the city, and its potential as a source for the study of nineteenth-century urban Scottish life has been largely untapped. This thesis is the first work which approaches an element of the collection – the poetry and song – as a coherent whole. This approach is necessary when attempting to reach an understanding of how these forms of expression functioned within the lives of the people who composed, performed and heard them.

The collector Alexander Crawford Lamb left remarkably little of his own writings to contextualise his life's work, though he may well have intended to.¹ His death, while away in London in 1897, was sudden, and he left no will stating what he intended for his collections. While many of the antiquarian books were sold at auction, his local collections were bought by Edward Cox, philanthropist and heir to the Cox jute fortune, and donated to Dundee Free Libraries in 1901. By then, Dundee's chief

¹ His collection is peppered with notes in a non-standard shorthand which have thus far evaded translation. These may well reveal more not only about the material but about Lamb himself.

librarian A.H. Millar wrote, it was fashionable to ‘sneer at civic patriotism as mere parochialism,’ an attitude which he claims arose from a fundamental misunderstanding of place and nation. As the Classical bards sang of Sparta and Athens, rather than Greece in general, so modern sense of nation ‘should merely unite and not obliterate the sturdy civic life out of which the larger issues were evolved.’² His point about bards singing a city, rather than a nation, is an interesting context for the poetry represented in the Lamb collection. Lamb’s collection remains in Dundee’s public library, and still forms the largest component of its Local History archives. At the time of donation, the collection numbered 450 boxes, a number since risen to 527, as ephemera relating to Dundee’s cultural life is still added.³ In addition to this, several hundred books and periodicals written in or about Dundee, many rare or unique, were also given to the library. These were added to the existing catalogue and have also been added to through later collection and donations. Recreating the multifaceted historical contexts and cultural references which appear in Victorian working-class poetry poses a considerable challenge. I have attempted to contextualise this material as far as possible, mainly in terms of the lived experience of Victorian Dundee for its authors, through reference to other archival material and published sources which deals with the history – but the poetry is also context for the history.

A.C. Lamb had grown up in the city, familiar with its groups of writers and poets through his father Thomas, who encouraged aspiring (mostly) men of letters to gather in his coffee house. Having followed his father into the hospitality business, Lamb trained as a baker and worked in Edinburgh, Liverpool and Manchester. In 1867, he returned to a Dundee in the throes of physical and intellectual change, to assist Thomas, now in failing health, with the running of Lamb’s Temperance Hotel. By this point, it was one of Dundee’s most popular venues. In 1867, Dundee had established itself as a major industrial city, and many textile manufacturers were turning from flax and cotton to the

² A.H. Millar in Edward Cox, *The Alexander C Lamb Historical Collection*, (Dundee: Dundee Corporation, 1901), p. 16.

³ Items from this collection will be cited throughout with the prefix ‘LC,’ followed by the box and item number. For example, LC125/53 refers to box 125, item 53. Occasional larger items, such as scrapbooks, have been assigned a box number to themselves.

jute for which it became famous. The city was also keen to establish a cultural and intellectual reputation. Lamb's return to Dundee coincided with both the opening of the Albert Institute museum and gallery, and the British Association for the Advancement of Science's meeting and exhibition in Dundee. The two events were not unconnected. An earlier attempt to bring the Association to Dundee, in 1863, had been unsuccessful. In the interim period, the construction of the Albert Institute provided a suitable venue, and demonstrated to the BAAS' committee that Dundee took itself seriously as a place of modern learning.⁴ The Albert Institute, in what became Albert Square (prior to the Institute's construction, The Meadows), was mere steps away from Lamb's Temperance Hotel, and many delegates stayed there.⁵

The event brought the British media's attention to Dundee. While the *Illustrated London News* included a classic view of industrial Dundee from Balgay Hill, it also juxtaposed images of run-down buildings in Fish Street and the Overgate with views of St Andrews' romantic, and uninhabited, ruins.⁶ While this may have been an unflattering choice of illustration for the city, it was not inaccurate – while Dundee was at this point home to the largest textile factories in the world in Baxter's and Cox Brothers' mills, the city was still to incorporate a proper plumbing and sewage system, and many of its buildings were in very poor condition.⁷ More reliant on stereotypes was *Punch*'s satirical report on a scientific investigation of marmalade, including an Orangemen joke and a reference to 'consumption of whiskey [which] exceeded the average.'⁸

These views were somewhat at odds with contemporary views of Dundee from within, but might have stirred concerns that they contained a kernel of truth. Both the BAAS meeting and the construction of the Albert Institute were seen as ushering in a new phase of intellectual development for Dundee. The Reverend George Gilfillan,

⁴ Eddie Small, 'The British Association's 1867 meeting in Dundee viewed through the prism of legacy,' talk given to Abertay Historical Society, 11 October 2017.

⁵ William Norrie, *Dundee Celebrities* (Dundee: William Norrie, 1873), p.348.

⁶ 'The British Association at Dundee,' *Illustrated London News*, 7 September 1867, p. 8-9.

⁷ Charles McKean and Patricia Whatley, with Kenneth Baxter, *Lost Dundee: Dundee's lost architectural heritage*. (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2013) pp. 220-1; p. 230.

⁸ 'Unreported Sitting at Dundee,' *Punch's Almanac for 1867* (London: Punch, 1867), p. 106.

whose work as an author and, probably more importantly, as a patron of many working-class poets made him a central figure in Dundee's literary scene, used his sermon the following week to reflect on the meeting. After covering its scientific themes, Gilfillan reflected further on the BAAS meeting's meaning for the town, referring back to a metaphor of the stars in which constellations cluster in southern skies rather than northern ones. The influx of the great and good of the scientific world highlighted how Dundee was 'really living rather far off from the centre, rather far north, and had contracted some very narrow provincialisms and prejudices of feeling.'⁹ While Gilfillan likely aimed this sentiment at more his fellow religious officials rather than at Dundee's poetic communities, many of whom were directly supported by Gilfillan himself, the idea that Dundee's outlook is inherently parochial is one which followed the city well into the twentieth century, and which still clings to discussions of its cultural heritage. Four years after the Albert Institute marked a new phase of intellectual improvement in Dundee, the 1871 Improvement Act signalled a new phase of development for its built environment. This Act brought many overdue improvements, most notably to the supply of water in the city. The phase of improvement which began in 1871 was the first of several, lasting until the late twentieth century, and arguably beyond, in which planners showed no interest in retaining Dundee's historic landscape. As Charles McKean puts it, '[i]t was of no interest to a community seeking a new identity.'¹⁰ While this was clearly true of those responsible for the Police Commissioners who put forward the Act, there was a demonstrable growing interest in the history of Dundee as a basis on which to build this new identity.¹¹

It was in this context that A.C. Lamb undertook his major collecting work. He continued his father's practice of welcoming groups of writers into his venues, and became an integral part of Dundee's literary scene in his own right, often appearing as a

⁹ 'Sermon on the British Association,' *Dundee Advertiser*, 16 September 1867, p. 4.

¹⁰ Charles McKean, 'Not even the trivial grace of a straight line' – or why Dundee never built a New Town,' in *Victorian Dundee: Image and Realities*, ed. by Louise Miskell, Christopher A. Whatley and Bob Harris (Phantassie: Tuckwell Press, 2000) pp. 15-37 (p. 21).

¹¹ Several works on the history of Dundee and its surrounding area had been published in recent years, including James Myles' *Rambles in Forfarshire* (Dundee: James Myles, 1850) and James Thomson's *The History of Dundee, From its Origin to the Present Time* (Dundee: J Chalmers, 1842).

guest of honour at events. His material support of local poets often took the form of buying multiple copies of broadsides or pamphlets, though on occasion this went further, most famously when he paid for William McGonagall's ticket home from New York. Lamb also took on the role of chronicler of the city's cultural life, both historical and contemporary. Already a collector of rare and antiquarian books, Lamb's collecting mission expanded in the late 1860s to include, as his friend Edward Cox described it, 'old engravings, old books, old pamphlets, old coins, old anything which could possibly throw any light on the past history of his native town.'¹² He also began to collect evidence of the contemporary urban culture in which he lived, a comparatively unusual move for a nineteenth-century antiquarian. Lamb was at once participant in and recorder of the story of Dundee as a historical and cultural entity, and the role of writers and poets was at the foreground of his collecting.

I have chosen to focus on poetry and song which was written for, and appeared in, a public context. The Lamb collection includes many books of devotional or memorial verse written primarily for private or family readings which have not been discussed. For reasons of space I have also excluded religious verse or hymns as a category, though this is also a fascinating strand of Dundee's poetic heritage. It is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a clear line between what is poem and what is song during this period. Many newspaper 'poems' were published with a stated tune, or a chorus, while many broadsides simply provided the words in the assumption readers were capable of determining the tune from the verse forms, or simply assigning their own, when they wanted to sing it. If I use the term 'verse,' it is not a value judgement implying that the material I refer to cannot be granted the status of 'poetry', rather it is to indicate that I may be referring to a poem, a song, or material which shifted between the two states. My study of this material indicates that, while the idea that these were separate categories was certainly present in the nineteenth century, the functions poetry and song served were often similar.¹³ With this in mind, I have incorporated ideas from

¹² Cox, *The Alexander C Lamb Historical Collection*, p. 3.

¹³ The importance of song as an influence in canonical Victorian poetry has been argued for by Elizabeth

both folk song and literary studies in the interpretation of these poems.

This research builds on a significant body of work considering the function of poetry and song in industrial Victorian communities. Martha Vicinus' *The Industrial Muse* was among the first works to bring serious consideration of working-class verse to Victorian studies, and the importance of popular print culture – particularly broadside printing – as well as the politics of language and dialect – are important themes.¹⁴ Brian Maidment's *The Poorhouse Fugitives* was the first anthology of working-class poets in Victorian Britain, in which Dundee is represented through the inclusion of work by William Thom and George Gilfillan.¹⁵ Until very recently, the only Scottish anthology of nineteenth-century working class poetry was Tom Leonard's *Radical Renfrew*, compiled from archives held in Paisley Central Library.¹⁶ Its geographical focus on the west coast left room for similar studies of eastern Scotland, a gap this thesis goes some way towards filling. Both Vicinus and Maidment focus on the importance of poetry as an essentially communal activity, something which can be seen variously in composition, performance and writing. Maidment's idea of the 'bardic community,' first used in the 1985 chapter 'Class and Cultural Production in the Industrial City: Poetry in Victorian Manchester,' is particularly useful here.¹⁷ Romantic ideas of the bard were adopted by industrial Victorian poets, partly because this tradition allowed for a version of poetry in which inspiration and feeling were more important than the access to formal education which these poets were denied.¹⁸ This model also championed verse, in both written and spoken or sung form, as a form of essential social commentary and a way of reinforcing shared values.

This thesis examines the ways in which people in Dundee used poetry as a way

Helsingier in *Poetry and the Thought of Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

¹⁴ Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London: Croom Helm, 1974).

¹⁵ Brian Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1987).

¹⁶ Tom Leonard, *Radical Renfrew: Poetry from the French Revolution to the First World War* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990).

¹⁷ Brian Maidment, 'Class and Cultural Production in the Industrial City: Poetry in Victorian Manchester,' in *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester*, ed by Alan J. Kidd and K. W. Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 148–166.

¹⁸ Maidment, 'Class and Cultural Production,' p. 155.

of interacting with each other and with wider groups. Communities created through shared interests, physical proximity and repeated interactions were central to the composition and circulation of much of the poetry in Victorian Dundee. These could be communities who physically met, in pubs or coffee houses, for the express purpose of composing and reciting poetry, or those who corresponded with one another privately. Poetic communities also extend to the ‘imagined communities’ centred around newspapers, brought together by editors and correspondents’ pages, or around a particular broadside shop.¹⁹ Many authors belonged to more than one of these communities simultaneously. Michael C. Cohen’s recent study, *The Social Lives of Poems in Nineteenth-Century America*, argues that interaction with poems, whether reading, writing, performing, scrapbooking or other, placed people within complex relationship networks. Poems facilitated links between reader and poet, but also links ‘with each other, with the dead, with authors, with the past, and with various forms of imagined community [...]’.²⁰ Cohen’s argument that in order to understand the meaning of poetry to nineteenth-century readers, it is essential to move beyond textual analysis and look at the multiple contexts for their dissemination and role in public culture, is borne out by my findings in the present study.

Studies also highlight essential continuities in the use of poetry between the Romantic period, and indeed earlier, and the industrial nineteenth-century. Victorian working writers were not isolated from the work of previous generations – in Dundee this is most evident in the repeated references to, and reverence for, Robert Burns and Robert Tannahill (the latter particularly important to textile workers), both of whom were known not only as poets but collectors and composers of folk song. The collection

¹⁹ Benedict Anderson, specifically referring to nations, defines ‘imagined communities’ as those in which most of the members are not, and can never be, personally known to one another due to their size, ‘yet in the mind of each [member] lives the image of their communion.’ Anderson notes the combined forces of print technology and capitalism are key enabling factors in the creation of imagined communities. (Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006) (p. 6).)

²⁰ Michael C. Cohen, *The Social Life of Poems in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) p. 7

Class and the Canon, edited by Kirstie Blair and Mina Gorji, highlights that writings by poets of a generation or two ago were often more accessible to working writers than their canonical contemporaries, as their works were available in cheaper editions, and had in several cases entered popular tradition, circulating through performance and broadside printing. Victorian working-class poets were, generally speaking, aware of their place in an ongoing tradition of working (or labouring) class poetry, and their work makes use of a wide range of intertextual relationships.²¹

Studies of Romantic poetic communities thus also provide useful context for the present study, in particular Bridget Keegan's *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730-1837* and John Goodridge's *John Clare and Community*.²² Keegan's demonstration that nature 'is never a socially neutral space, especially for the labouring poor' is essential context for my research and its focus on landscapes of various kinds.²³ While the work of labouring poets was often described using natural terms (often images of soil, or songbirds), their access to nature was restricted in the first instance by demands on their time through work, lack of money for transport and the restrictions of private land ownership. Many nature poems by working-class poets are, when understood in their full context, deeply political. Goodridge's study of the communities with which John Clare interacted is also highly informative, making clear that writers were often part of multiple, overlapping poetic communities. Clare's simultaneous interaction with upper-class London literary circles, other working-class poets and local oral traditions illustrates the multiple influences many poets experienced, at times conflicting and at times complementary. Goodridge's demonstration that oral traditions were influential to the written poetic tradition is important, and particularly so when he observes that this is likely to be the form in which women's creativity influenced Clare's

²¹ Kirstie Blair and Mina Gorji, eds, *Class and the Canon* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). That working-class poets in the Romantic and Victorian periods were well-read, self-aware, and active participants in literary tradition has been made in a number of studies, including notably Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001).

²² Bridget Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730-1837* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); John Goodridge, *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²³ Keegan, p. 2

work. These contexts are equally present in Scottish Romantic poetry. Nigel Leask has demonstrated the extent to which Robert Burns' creation of poetic identity was dependent on identification with locally identified social networks in Ayrshire, both imagined and actual.²⁴ Nineteenth-century poetic communities are also a focus for Mike Sanders' *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History*, which examines the important role poets and poetry played in the Chartist movement. Sanders shows that the presence of verse in popular print media, particularly newspapers, was central to the development of these communities and to Chartism in general.²⁵

I discuss comparatively few named women poets here, though several of the anonymous poems may well be by female poets. Elizabeth Campbell, the Lochee Poetess, has been recently discussed by Florence Boos, so I have not included a detailed study of her here.²⁶ Boos also stresses the links between women's poetry and oral tradition in the nineteenth century in these studies. I do discuss Ellen Johnston, who wrote as the Factory Girl, in the context of workplace poetry, although her life and work has gained a considerable amount of scholarly attention.²⁷ For a town whose outward reputation is associated with working women, it may seem surprising that so few women pursued publication in the same way their male working-class peers did. As I argue in Chapter 3, the working women of Dundee faced extra barriers to publication on top of the ones their male colleagues did, including extra demands on their time outside of work. This does not mean they were not creating poetry or song. There is evidence that

²⁴ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in late eighteenth-century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 84

²⁵ Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁶ For example, in *Memoirs of Working Class Women: The Hard Way Up* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); "'Oor Location": Scotswomen Poets and the Transition from Rural to Urban Culture,' in *Victorian Urban Settings: Essays on the Nineteenth-Century City and its Contexts*, ed. by Debra N. Mancoff and D.J. Trella (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996), 133-156; and "'We Would Know Again the Fields...': The Rural Poetry of Elizabeth Campbell, Jane Stevenson, and Mary Macpherson,' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 17.2 (1998), 325-347.

²⁷ See H. Gustav Klaus, 'New Light on Ellen Johnston,' *Notes and Queries*, 2008, Vol. 55(4), 430-433 and *Factory Girl: Ellen Johnston and Working-Class Poetry in Victorian Scotland* (Mainz: Peter Lang, 1998); Judith Rosen, 'Class and Poetic Communities: The Works of Ellen Johnston,' 'The Factory Girl,' *Victorian Poetry*, 39/2 (2001), 207-227; and Monica Smith Hart, 'The Factory Exile: Ellen Johnston's *Autobiography, Poems and Songs*,' *Victorian Poetry* 53/1 (2015), 77-99.

Dundee's mills were home to a strong tradition of orally composed song, particularly at times of workplace conflict, which was generally performed by women.²⁸

I have mentioned above that newspapers were a key source for poetry in the Victorian period, something that has recently been the focus of critical attention. The importance of the local newspaper to Victorian poetry was felt throughout (at least) the English-speaking world. Andrew Hobbs and Claire Janusewski's 'How Newspapers Came to Dominate Victorian Poetry Publishing' charts the numbers of poems, both original and reprinted, printed in a selection of English local newspapers. Their projected estimate suggests the provincial newspaper press published around five million poems during the Victorian period.²⁹ Poetry was an integral part of the cultural milieu, particularly as a way to comment on local issues or negotiate local identity as part of the wider functions of the local newspaper. Their argument that these poems should be seen as part of a 'print ecology' which also includes magazines and other periodicals, books by a variety of authors, and broadsides and pamphlets has been essential when considering this material. I focus here on newspapers and broadsides as the most common print mediums for verse, but Victorian Dundee's print culture also encompassed popular books, pamphlets and miscellanies, and writers and publishers were often involved in more than one aspect of print culture. Brian Maidment's work also illustrates the range across which this print ecology extended during the first half of the nineteenth century, through examining the various forms and contexts of sale for caricatures and comic print.³⁰

Dundee's print ecology was a particularly strong and wide-ranging one during

²⁸ This tradition in Dundee continued well into the twentieth century, and is best known through the work of Mary Brooksbank.

²⁹ Andrew Hobbs and Claire Januszewski, 'How local newspapers came to dominate Victorian poetry publishing', *Victorian Poetry* 52.1 (2014), pp. 65-87 (p. 7).

³⁰ Brian Maidment, *Comedy, Caricature and the Social Order, 1820-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013). Maidment has also examined the almanac as an important yet overlooked form in the nineteenth century in 'Re-Arranging the Year: the Almanac, the Day Book, and the Year Book as Popular Literary Forms, 1789-1860' (in *Rethinking Victorian Culture*, ed. by Juliet John and Alice Jenkins (Houndsmills: Macmillan Press, 2000), 91-111. Several different Dundonian almanacs were published at various points during the nineteenth century, including one compiled by James Myles.

the nineteenth century, particularly from the early 1860s. William Donaldson's *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland*, which focused on the prose fiction published in popular press, was at its time of publication perhaps the only full-length study of literature in Victorian Scotland. This period was, and to an extent still is, considered within Scottish literary studies to have been a failure. In asserting that '[t]he second half of the nineteenth century is not a period of creative trauma or linguistic decline; it is one of the richest and most vital episodes in the history of Scottish popular literature,' Donaldson countered long-held assumptions from Scottish literary critics. His demonstration that the newspaper press was essential to the literary scene is also key to understanding the context for Victorian poetry in Scotland and further afield. In recent years Kirstie Blair has demonstrated just how prolific, widely read and important the poetry published through Scottish newspapers, particularly the Dundee-based *People's Journal* and *People's Friend* were. Her article 'A Very Poetical Town: Newspaper Poetry and the Working-Class Poet in Victorian Dundee' stresses the importance of the correspondence columns as venues for poetic publication, examining how editors' mediation and poets' challenges to this made the newspaper a space for negotiation of linguistic and cultural standards.³¹ This argument is developed further through the anthology *Poets of the People's Journal* which demonstrates the range and variety, as well as geographical reach, of these newspapers and the poetic communities they fostered.³² Her forthcoming *Working Verse in Victorian Scotland: Poetry, Press and Community* draws together the multiple contexts of poetry's production and reception in a major reassessment of the function of poetry in Victorian Scotland. In addition to newspaper and broadside culture, the production of both local and nationally-focused anthology series such as *Whistle-Binkie* or *Modern Scottish Poets* is revealed as an important step in creating verse culture. Importantly for the present study, the fact that this poetry often reads very differently when considered in the social and political context in which it was originally disseminated is repeatedly demonstrated. Poems which have been characterised as

³¹ Kirstie Blair, 'A Very Poetical Town: Newspaper Poetry and the Working-Class Poet in Victorian Dundee,' *Victorian Poetry*, 52/1 (2014), 89-109.

³² Blair, *Poets of the People's Journal: Newspaper Poetry in Victorian Scotland* (Glasgow: ASLS, 2016).

nostalgic and detached are often in fact comments on political issues coming from a particularly local viewpoint.³³ These studies highlight the need for further interrogation of the high volume of surviving sources from particular places, in the way that this thesis does for Dundonian material.

This print ecology overlapped with a connected ecology of performance, in the widest possible sense, which included not only formal song concerts but informal readings and discussions, impromptu singing sessions, and poetry quoted as part of conversation or speech. Poetry was demonstrably not a solitary activity. A number of recent and current research projects have brought renewed focus to the importance of communities, both print and in-person, to the creation and reception of poetry. The ‘Poetry of the Lancashire Cotton Famine’ research project, led by Simon Rennie, Brian Maidment and Ruth Mather, has recently launched a database of 100 poems written in Lancashire between 1861 and 1865 which deal with the cotton industry and the famine caused by its decline.³⁴ By reading the poems as part of a wider body of work, rather than as individual pieces, the project team identified patterns, such as tropes, characters, phrases and rhythms which appear across multiple poems. This phenomenon is also present in many of the poems I discuss: phrases like McGonagall’s famous ‘silvery Tay’ are in fact repeated across several contemporary poems. Although these could – and have been in the past – be interpreted as signs of a lack of creativity, Rennie concludes they represent the opposite. Poets used these markers to signify they were part of not only a community but a conversation, conducted through newspapers, broadsides and performances. The poems can only be understood as part of their wider whole, because they not only speak individually to the reader but to each other.³⁵ Lauren Weiss’ important work on literary societies in Scotland and the north of England has developed

³³ Blair, *Working Verse in Victorian Scotland: Poetry, Press and Community* (forthcoming). I am grateful to the author for sharing this work with me prior to publication.

³⁴ Simon Rennie, Brian Maidment and Ruth Mather, ‘Poetry of the Lancashire Cotton Famine,’ <<http://cottonfaminepoetry.exeter.ac.uk>> [Accessed 15 September 2018].

³⁵ Simon Rennie, ‘Looking forward to the launch of the first 100,’ *Poetry of the Lancashire Cotton Famine* <<http://cottonfaminepoetry.exeter.ac.uk/2018/05/31/looking-forward-to-the-launch-of-the-first-100/>> [Accessed 15 September 2018.]

our understanding of how literary taste and practice were cultivated as a communal activity.³⁶ This context, and its specific implications for reading Dundonian poetry, are discussed in more depth in Chapter 5.

That oral performance and transmission was an important context for poetry and song in Victorian Dundee is evident from much of the material I consider in the following chapters. It was also rarely separate from the printed contexts discussed above. In recent years, folklorists have moved towards an understanding that separating printed from oral transmission is impossible. Bruno Nettl's 2005 *The Study of Ethnomusicology: 31 Issues and Concepts* warned against a previous tendency to focus on oral transmission to the exclusion of all else when considering folk music.³⁷ More recently, Steve Roud's wide-ranging social history *Folk Song in England* clarified that '[t]here has not been a pure oral tradition for at least 500 years, and most folk songs owe their continued existence to their regular appearance in print.'³⁸ E. J. Cowan and Michael Paterson's *Folk in Print: Scotland's Chapbook Heritage* outlines the development of the chapbook and broadside printing industry in Scotland, and David Atkinson and Steve Roud's recent edited volumes also contain much useful material on the Scottish context.³⁹ The broadside's intrinsic role in the transmission of folk song and ballads is an important focus for my study. In-depth studies have repeatedly demonstrated that, like poems, each song is part of an intricate web of interpersonal and

³⁶ Lauren Weiss, 'The Literary Clubs and Societies of Glasgow during the Long Nineteenth Century: A City's History of Reading through its Communal Reading Practices and Productions,' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Stirling, 2017) and 'The Manuscript Magazines of the Wellpark Free Church Young Men's Literary Society,' in *Media and Print Culture Consumption in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by Paul Rooney and Anna Gasperini (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) pp. 53-73. The website *Literary Bonds* has also made a vast amount of information and context about British literary society magazines available online. (Lauren Weiss, Kirstie Blair, and Michael Sanders, eds., *Literary Bonds* <<http://www.literarybonds.org/>> [Accessed 1 October 2018.]

³⁷ Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one issues and concepts* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005) p. 204-5.

³⁸ Steve Roud, *Folk Song in England* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017), p. 13.

³⁹ E.J. Cowan and Michael Paterson, *Folk in Print: Scotland's Chapbook Heritage* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006); David Atkinson and Steve Roud, eds. *Street Ballads in Nineteenth Century Britain, Ireland and North America: the interface between print and oral tradition* (Washington, VT: Ashgate, 2014); David Atkinson and Steve Roud (eds), *Street Literature of the Long Nineteenth Century: Producers, Sellers, Consumers* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2017).

historical contexts which change meaning depending on the circumstances of each performance or recollection. Gavin Sprott has demonstrated the importance of understanding how material change in people's everyday lives affects the composition and development of folk song in a rural Scottish context, a model which acknowledges change as an integral part of the folk process.⁴⁰

In relation to Dundee, the most notable studies of folk song in context are Edward Miller's 1981 PhD thesis, 'An Ethnography of Singing: The Use and Meaning of Song within a Scottish family,' and Chris Wright's recent chapter 'Forgotten Broadsides and the Song Tradition of the Scots Travellers'.⁴¹ Both reveal the role of the broadside as cultural artefact, a souvenir and marker of song ownership in addition to its role as text and memory aid. They also strongly suggest the Poet's Box shops of Dundee were key to the development of folk song repertoires in twentieth-century Scotland, demonstrating the extent to which broadsides bought at the Poet's Box could travel, either as items or through the song being transmitted through other means. While there is a lack of evidence which can tell us how Victorian Dundee's singers felt about broadsides as part of their repertoires, I argue in my second chapter that the mix of advertising and contextual evidence for the broadsides themselves can illuminate our understanding of traditional song culture in nineteenth-century urban Scotland. The foundations built by the Poet's Box have provided a basis for developing what we consider to be the Dundonian folk repertoire. The importance of broadsides is also clear from Nigel Gatherer's collecting for *Songs and Ballads of Dundee*, in which many singers give the Poet's Box as their original source.⁴² 27 of the 80 songs included were identified as having been learnt from a Poet's Box sheet, and still others appeared in broadside versions not explicitly cited by singers.

⁴⁰ Gavin Sprott, 'Traditional Music: The Material Background', in *The People's Past*, ed. by Edward Cowan (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p.54-64.

⁴¹ Edward Miller, 'An Ethnography of Singing: The use and meaning of song within a Scottish family,' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Texas, 1981); Chris Wright, 'Forgotten Broadsides and the Song Tradition of the Scots Travellers', in Atkinson & Roud, eds. *Street Ballads in Nineteenth Century Britain, Ireland and North America*, 77-103.

⁴² Nigel Gatherer, *Songs and Ballads of Dundee* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986).

The poets and songwriters of nineteenth-century Dundee and their audiences were clearly at home with the use of both Scots and English, and of literary traditions in these languages. The Scots used in publications from this period, particularly in newspaper poetry, does not include much representation of local dialect, though it is noticeably east rather than west coast.⁴³ The Scots language was presented as equally suitable for publication of creative writing as English to the international audience drawn by the *People's Journal*.⁴⁴ The Dundonian dialect of Scots, characterised by flat vowels and fast delivery as well as distinct vocabulary, and now widely used by poets and writers in the city, is notable by its absence.⁴⁵ This is particularly notable given how ready the Dundee press were to embrace local political and place-based detail, and indeed given their readiness to embrace publishing in Scots. The earliest example of published writing in Dundonian Scots I am aware of is David Philips' *Lichty Nichts and other writings in the Dundee Dialect*, first published in 1962.⁴⁶ *Lichty Nichts*, like much of Philips' other work, looks back on Dundee in the 1920s and 1930s, and make it clear the language was well-established at this stage. This implies Dundonian Scots likely has roots in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries at least. Popular tradition in the city has it that the language is itself a Victorian development, with the distinctive vowel sounds influenced by the presence of Irish speakers in Dundee, and that the fast, loud delivery had the advantage of being audible in noisy mill and factory environments. That a specifically Dundonian language was in its infancy during the nineteenth century is one likely reason for the lack of printed Dundonian from this period. Poets also frequently refer to themselves as aspiring to be part of a pan-Scottish tradition of poetry

⁴³ For instance, the frequent use of the diminutive '-ies' in satirical or comic poetry is primarily east coast Scots, now most closely associated with Aberdonian. See for example D. Taylor's poem 'The Tory Lairdies,' discussed on pp. 194-7. ('Meeting on the Green', *People's Journal*, 20th September 1884, p.5.)

⁴⁴ On the use of Scots prose in the *People's Journal*, see Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland*, p.38-47.

⁴⁵ There is still little literature which discusses the history and cultural context of the Dundonian dialect. Mick McLuskey's *Dundonian For Beginners: An Indispensable Guide to Oary Dundonian* (England: Intro2Publishing, 2005) gives an overview of vocabulary and grammar. For twentieth century poetry in Dundonian, see for example Mark Thomson's *Bard fae thi Buildin Site* (Edinburgh: Luath, 2007), Ellie McDonald's *The gangan fuit* (Edinburgh: Chapman, 1991) and Gary Robertson's *Pure Dundee* (Edinburgh: Luath, 2007).

⁴⁶ David Philips, *Lichty Nichts and other writings in the Dundee Dialect* (Arbroath: Herald Press, 1962).

and song whose figureheads include Robert Burns and Robert Tannahill, and the use of a ‘universal’ Scots suits this sense of national tradition. While these Scottish writers are the most frequently cited inspirations, the influence of English-language literary traditions is also evident, largely through references to Shakespeare and contemporary English canonical poets. Writing well in standard English was itself considered an aspirational goal, as the standards literary societies held their contributors to indicate, and it is true that poets responding to ‘serious’ topics often choose English rather than Scots (see, for example, most of the reflections on the Tay Bridge Disaster in Chapter One). However, there was also contemporary cultural exchange between Dundee and regional English traditions, as Chartist periodicals from the north of England were clearly an influence on James Gow, William Thom and others.

The poetic culture of Victorian Dundee itself has been touched on by several researchers, though this is its first full-length exploration. Particularly useful in terms of research into poetic networks is Aileen Black’s *Gilfillan of Dundee, 1813-1878*, whose study of literary patron Reverend George Gilfillan also sheds light on several of the poets he encouraged and funded, and highlights the importance of personal connections.⁴⁷ In light of Black’s comprehensive biography, I have not included as much detail about Gilfillan himself as might otherwise be expected here. The importance of networks of writers to the social and political context in Victorian Dundee was again recognised in *Victorian Dundee: Image and Realities*, part of a series reassessing Dundee’s history. Christopher Whatley’s chapter ‘Altering Images of the Industrial City: The Case of James Myles, the ‘Factory Boy,’ and mid-Victorian Dundee’ uses the text and reception of Myles’ fictional autobiography, intended to encourage young millworkers onto the path of temperance and enlightenment, to explore aspects of Dundee’s civic identity.⁴⁸

Generally speaking, twentieth and twenty-first century discussion of poetry in

⁴⁷ Aileen Black, *Gilfillan of Dundee, 1813-1878* (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2006).

⁴⁸ Christopher A. Whatley, ‘Altering Images of the Industrial City: The Case of James Myles, the ‘Factory Boy,’ and mid-Victorian Dundee’ in *Victorian Dundee: Image and Realities*, ed. by Louise Miskell, Christopher A. Whatley and Bob Harris (Phantassie: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 70-95.

Victorian Dundee has centred around the figure of its most famous practitioner, William McGonagall, and the ongoing question of whether he knew how ‘bad’ his poetry was, alongside various attempts to uncover details of his personal life. As ‘the worst poet in the world,’ McGonagall is regarded with horror by literary critics for a number of reasons: his irregular verse, certainly, but the topics on which he chose to write are also cited as evidence of his badness. They are too local, small-minded, even parochial, possibly the greatest sin in Scottish poetry. And while McGonagall is always the punching bag, one reason he is so despised is that he is thought to be an extreme example of his contemporary poetic culture, but a logical extension of it. Hugh MacDiarmid’s view – that Victorian Dundee was full of poets, but that they were generally more competent, and thus less entertaining, versions of McGonagall – has been an influential one: ‘Dundee was then and has since been the great home and fostering centre of the cheapest popular literature in Scotland, and huge fortunes have been built up there on precisely the chief ingredients of McGonagall’s art—mindlessness, snobbery, and the inverted snobbery of a false cult of proletarian writers.’⁴⁹ The most recent full study of McGonagall’s life, Norman Watson’s *Poet McGonagall* goes further than most in recreating the context among which McGonagall became famous, including an overview of the popular theatre scene in Victorian Dundee, an important overlapping performance context with song and poetry.⁵⁰ I have avoided being drawn into the classic debates about McGonagall, but have attempted to consider his verse and reception as part of wider traditions where appropriate.

A notable early exception to the usual dismissals of nineteenth-century Dundee’s poetic culture came in the 1991 collection of essays and new writing, *Duende: A Dundee Anthology*, an issue of the Dundee periodical *Gairfish*.⁵¹ Mixing contemporary poets and writers’ work with reprints of older poems, including James Young Geddes’ ‘The Glory Has Departed,’ *Duende* considers the existence of a distinctly Dundonian literary

⁴⁹ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Eccentrics* (London: Routledge, 1936), p.64.

⁵⁰ Norman Watson, *Poet McGonagall* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2010).

⁵¹ W.N. Herbert & Richard Price (eds), *Duende: A Dundee Anthology* (Gairfish: Dundee, 1991).

tradition, one characterised by a ‘locally focused Libertarianism’ and surrealism rather than parochialism. Even here, Douglas Dunn’s essay on ‘Dundee Law Considered as Mount Parnassus’ still interprets the later Victorian years as a slippery slope downhill towards McGonagall.⁵² Similarly, Andrew Murray Scott’s *Dundee’s Literary Lives* did valuable work recovering the life stories and details of many of the poets I discuss here, but tends to dismiss non-explicitly political work as ‘the first harvest of the kailyard.’⁵³

Ruth Forbes’ study of the public role of music in Dundee during the latter part of the century provides important context and parallels for the role of poetry in the city.⁵⁴ Forbes identifies a tension between genteel classical concerts which embodied Liberal ideals of a harmonious civic identity on one hand, and the thriving, more rowdy street music culture on the other. John Leng’s continued efforts to create affordable concerts at which working people could experience a higher musical culture, often in the form of ‘polite’ arrangements of Burns or traditional Scottish songs, addressed this to an extent. He was aided by the philanthropy of Lord Kinnaird, which provided a dedicated venue in the Kinnaird Hall. Through channels such as these, music became part of the public language through which Dundee’s civic culture was negotiated. They were, on the whole, successful, and these musical programmes coexisted with street performers or singers, occasionally adapting to suit the tastes of the audiences they sought.⁵⁵ Co-existing ‘respectable’ and popular traditions are just as evident for literature as for music, and in fact overlap considerably, due to the impossibility of drawing a clear line between song and poem as forms in this period.

Dundee, as landscape and community, underpins this thesis as it did Lamb’s collecting. The styles, forms and topics of verse are many, and potentially hard to tie together. The city itself is the most striking common factor. It is an inspiration and a setting for narratives, but also – obviously, but importantly – the place where poets lived, worked and met. Poetry and song were part of what shaped the lived experience of

⁵² Douglas Dunn, ‘Dundee Law Considered as Mount Parnassus’, in *Duende*, 17-42.

⁵³ Andrew Murray Scott, *Dundee’s Literary Lives* (Dundee: Abertay Historical Society, 2003), p. 54.

⁵⁴ Ruth Forbes, ‘A Study in Music, Community and Identity in a late nineteenth-century Scottish town,’ *Journal of Victorian Culture* 11/2 (2006), 256-280.

⁵⁵ Forbes, p.275.

Dundee for many. There has been a tendency in Scottish literary studies, already mentioned, to characterise the poetic culture of Dundee and its hinterland as parochial. This is almost universally deemed a bad thing. Unlike the work of poets in Edinburgh and Glasgow, Dundonian verse speaks not for Scotland, or humanity, but only for itself. WN Herbert and Andy Jackson summarised these ideas:

[Dundee] never commits the folly of imagining, as metropolises often do, that it could stand for the nation, or even be a substitute for it, fronting up for Scotland to the world. Its temptation is rather that of withdrawal, of introversion, picking over local history and minor figures with the meticulousness of the collector.

Nonetheless, it is a city that, every now and then, punches well above its weight in literary terms.⁵⁶

On one level, ‘picking over local history and minor figures’ is exactly what this thesis does, and the figure of the collector certainly looms large. Focusing a study so locally is perhaps a more familiar method in the field of folklore studies than that of Victorian literature. Henry Glassie’s major work *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* approached the culture of a Fermanagh community from the perspective that ‘all history is local history,’ though we have focused on the local history of regional or national elites.⁵⁷ For Glassie, context was key. Narrative forms are an essential context for understanding history as experienced by the people who live/d it, and vice versa.⁵⁸

The value of locally based studies, which recognise that culture is not handed down from capital cities but is built up from people and communities, working in places and influenced by all sorts of unexpected networks and path-crossings, is likewise increasingly recognised in literary criticism. In addition to the locally-focused studies of nineteenth-century poetic communities cited above, Caroline Levine’s ‘From Nation to

⁵⁶ WN Herbert and Andy Jackson, eds. *Whaleback City: The Poetry of Dundee and its Hinterland* (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2016) (n.p.).

⁵⁷ Henry Glassie, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982) p. 655.

⁵⁸ Glassie, p. 450.

Network' questioned the wider tendency within the field to assume Britain and Britishness as defaults for literary inclusion.⁵⁹ She recommends that Victorianists begin to look at literature and place's relationship as one facilitated by overlapping human networks, which are themselves a kind of form, and seek to interrogate how these influence the meaning and reception of texts. Dundee's nineteenth-century networks were wide-reaching. Shipping routes established over the century brought goods and people to and from India, the Arctic and America, among other places.⁶⁰ The local newspapers, particularly the *People's Journal*, circulated globally among Scottish diasporic communities, and frequently featured correspondence and poetic contributions from them. On a personal level, too, the poets represented in this thesis moved into and out of Dundee from as close as Alyth or as far as Toronto, for familiar reasons: work, love, homecoming and escape.

Space and place in the Victorian city have been addressed in various ways in Victorian studies, though to date they have focused overwhelmingly on London.⁶¹ Peter K. Andersson's study of street life aimed to reconstruct the experience of city streets as a space for human interaction beyond a literary or textual level, making use of the theories of Erving Goffman and Lyn H. Lofland, among others.⁶² The 'public-private' spatial divide often referred to in discussions of experiencing the city is usefully modified with the inclusion of what Lofland calls the 'parochial' space category. This is generally a neighbourhood or community division, in which people are known to one another, and often have daily interactions. In this sense, much of the poetry discussed here is parochial, in that it was written with the expectation author and audience shared a set of familiar place-experiences and were part of an ongoing conversation about what these meant. Katrina Navickas' recent *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848*

⁵⁹ Caroline Levine, 'From Nation to Network,' *Victorian Studies* 55/4 (2013), 647-667.

⁶⁰ See Jim Tomlinson's *Dundee and the Empire: Juteopolis 1850-1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), for historical analysis of these networks and the jute trade in particular.

⁶¹ For example, Deborah Epstein Nord's *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995).

⁶² Peter K. Andersson, *Street Life in Late Victorian London: The Constable and the Crowd* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

combines historical and cultural geographical methods to show how these place-experiences, and the strongly local knowledge networks which arose from them, were central to political movements in towns in northern England.⁶³ When discussing the industrial ‘landscape,’ I use the term broadly in the sense which Kenneth Olwig argues for in his influential essay ‘Recovering the Substantive Nature of Landscape’. Although the term is often used to refer specifically to scenery, this obscures relationships between the aesthetic landscape and its functions as a lived, experienced place. Olwig argues that landscape should be considered as ‘a nexus of community, justice, nature and environmental equity.’⁶⁴

The places around which my thesis centres are the places around which poetry centred. They suggested themselves after reading hundreds of poems which often connected to one of these locations, or types of locations. These place-connections also help to reveal the function of the poems and the communities within which they were written. In Chapter One, I discuss poetry about the River Tay which treats the river not as a pastoral space, but as a centre for modernity and technological expansion. My second chapter moves into the city itself, examining the role of the broadside as an urban, public poetic form, and the late-century shift from street sellers to dedicated song shops as the primary mode of encountering them. Chapter Three continues the focus on Dundee’s urban landscape by addressing the workplace-centred poetic communities of the textile industry. The fourth chapter examines further the theme of defending work and leisure time, often mentioned in workplace poetry, with a discussion of the poetry composed about green spaces within the city. Finally, the role of poetry as a practice to the many literary societies and groups who met in mid-century coffee houses and meeting rooms, forming concentrated nuclei for poetic communities, will be discussed in Chapter 5. The main factor these places have in common is that they are all the focus of dispute or debate of some kind. The literary societies’ structured, consciously civilised discussions on the meanings and rules of poetry are one aspect of this. So were the

⁶³ Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

⁶⁴ Kenneth Olwig, ‘Recovering the Substantive Nature of Landscape’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 86/4 (1996), 630-653 (p. 652).

Reform demonstrations on Magdalen Green and the use of pastoral verse to defend traditional land rights, and so were the spontaneous strikes accompanied by the sound of raucous chanting and percussion. The places poetry gathers around are negotiable places, and often those threatened and/or created by the processes of industrialisation.

This is no coincidence. Their authors had little or no influence over the decisions which physically shaped Victorian Dundee: the expansion of mills, construction of bridges, the denial of access to some shared land and the granting of access to more. This does not mean they were entirely powerless to shape their experience of the city. Henri Lefebvre's *The Formation of Space* posits that meaningful space is developed through cycles of human use and interpretation, with the meanings attached to places through popular tradition becoming part of the real experience of inhabiting the space.⁶⁵ These cycles can function as a way to reclaim control. Lefebvre's concept of the people's 'right to the city' was interpreted by David Harvey:

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.⁶⁶

This function may be most obvious in cases of direct poems of protest, perhaps most dramatically in the Right of Way campaign which protected the Law Hill's status as shared green space, discussed in Chapter One. I should re-emphasise that I have focused specifically on poetry with a public function, rather than verse intended for private consumption. These poems are part of an ongoing conversation about how to exist in the changing industrial city. I argue that a re-interpretation of 'parochial' poetic traditions which does not start from the assumption that the local is lesser and inward-looking is an essential step in moving past inherited literary prejudices. No consensus, either stylistic

⁶⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Formation of Space* [trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith] (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

⁶⁶ David Harvey, 'The Right to the City', *New Left Review* 53 (Sept-Oct 2008) p. 23-40 (p.23).

or political, is reached among these poets. Despite this, it is clear that the acts of composing, performing, printing, and reading verse were a powerful part of creating and interpreting a sense of place and community, and that their influence is still felt. In light of how extensive and influential Victorian Dundee's poetic communities can be shown to have been both at the time and since, a detailed study of how poetry and song functioned during this place and time is long overdue.

Note on primary sources

Verse in the Lamb collection is represented in a range of physical forms. There are four boxes whose contents consist entirely of poetry and song material. Commonly, this takes the form of poems cut from newspapers or journals, pasted into scrapbooks or onto a backing for support.⁶⁷ Other frequently occurring forms for this poetry are single sheets or small pamphlets, often announcing they were printed 'for the author.' An index of the poetry in these boxes by title of poem and by first line has been compiled as part of the general Lamb Collection card catalogue, which allows the researcher to search for poems on a particular theme or topic. However, I began my research by going through these boxes item by item, observing common threads as they arose. Where known, the poet's name will also be listed in the catalogue, with reference to their poems and any additional biographical material such as obituary cuttings. There are further examples of poetry, in manuscript or print form, in other sections of the Lamb collection, particularly likely if the verse refers to a specific event. For instance, much of the Tay Whale poetry is located with other news cuttings on the whale. Broadside known to have been printed in a Dundee Poet's Box form the contents of a further Lamb box, with around sixty examples. William Harvey's two-volume scrapbook collection of street literature contains further examples of Dundee broadsides, some labelled as coming from the

⁶⁷ Occasionally the backings used are themselves print ephemera, deemed less interesting in its own right than the poems. There are some instances where the backing material indicates the material was given its backing once the collection was already part of the library's collections. Cuttings are held together in roughly thematic groups in envelopes, with up to ten items in an envelope and an average of twenty envelopes per box (though some boxes contain up to fifty.)

Poet's Box and some from unknown printers.

As well as the newspaper cuttings in Lamb's collection, Dundee Central Library holds hard copies of most Dundee-printed daily newspapers, which have provided not only additional poems but essential social and political context for the material through reading the weeks and months surrounding events such as the opening of Baxter Park, the construction and collapse of the Tay Bridge, elections, and the passing of Reform bills. Local magazines, particularly *The Piper O' Dundee* and *The Wizard of the North*, were also useful in this regard, particularly for poetry satirising local events. There were several attempts to launch new periodicals during the nineteenth century, particularly during the mid-century flourishing of literary societies, and many of these only published for one or two issues. Where these survive, they are normally bound with several other publications of similar size and are listed under their titles in the library catalogue.

Manuscript material from Dundee in this period includes both material intended for later print publication and material intended to be circulated publicly as manuscript, as well as occasional single manuscript poems whose origins are unclear. Collected manuscript versions of poems by Adam Wilson, George Watson and William McGonagall, which all appeared later in print, are represented. There are also several manuscript poems by James Thomson, which may have been circulated in that form or intended for later print appearance. The majority of manuscript material which is known to have been intended for public circulation takes the form of literary society magazines, composed by several authors and re-written in fair copy by one hand. The magazines edited and transcribed by William Gardiner form part of a larger collection of his work, which includes his own poetry collections and botanical writings.

Chapter 1: The Tay Bridge and the Tay Whale

Dundee is situated on the firth of the River Tay. The river as transport and resource was essential to the development of the city, and thus the river has become central to Dundee's sense of itself as represented in poetry and song. In the nineteenth century, the city's harbour and docks, which were relatively quiet at the beginning of the period, grew to become one of Scotland's major trading ports. Dundee's relationship with the river changed dramatically throughout the nineteenth century, as did the geography of the shoreline. Over the century, increasing amounts of land were reclaimed for the purposes of housing, improving dock facilities, and building new railway lines. William Kenefick gives a thorough overview of these developments, noting that even in its mid-century heyday Dundee's harbour was still relatively minor in terms of the number of ships docking, although the value of the trade they brought was disproportionately large.⁶⁸ Ship-building was a significant employer in the town, and the workforce of the textile industries were well aware of how much their livelihood hinged on the ships coming – or not coming – into the harbour with cargoes of jute and whale oil. Dundee's docks in many ways embodied Victorian ideals of industry and colonialism: raw jute from India and whale oil from the Arctic were landed and swiftly transported to the mills and factories which ran on them. The places from which they came were largely abstract to most Dundonians, though they were experienced by people such as ships' crews, soldiers, and merchants. The river also connected Dundee to places where its inhabitants would be more likely to visit: ferries, then later the railway, linked the city to Fife, and further south to political power centres in Edinburgh and London. In many ways, attitudes towards the Tay illustrate Dundee's attitude to the places it interacted with.

The focus of this chapter will be on the differing poetic responses to the first Tay Bridge, and particularly to its fall on the night of December 29th, 1879, which killed 59

⁶⁸ William Kenefick, 'Growth and development of the port of Dundee in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries', in *Image and Realities*, 38-50.

people when a storm destroyed the structure of the bridge and a train fell into the water; and to the incident which took place over New Year 1884, when a humpback whale far out of its natural habitat escaped capture by Dundee's whaling crews for several weeks.⁶⁹ Coincidentally, both of these events took place over Hogmanay and New Year, a time already slightly distinct from normal life, which heightened the sense of drama. The setting of the 'Daft Days,' as the period just before and after New Year was known in Scotland, intensified the feelings of strangeness surrounding both events. These were times in which the Tay, in its capacity as connection to the wider world, both natural and cultural, impacted on Dundee's population, and the perspective in the poetry is from land rather than those who worked on the river. The development of human knowledge, and concurrently its limits, are central in the response to both events. The poetry about both touches on the relationship between a wild, potentially threatening sublime nature and the civilisation of the industrial city. The fall of the Tay Bridge was the ultimate failure of what was seen as a triumph of engineering, and its destruction by a storm provided a metaphor for man versus nature, and fuelled widespread concerns about the safety of railways. The presence of the whale confronted the population of Dundee with a living, unruly, and unavoidable reminder of the origin of the many whale products their industries relied on. Their primary reaction was to laugh at the incongruity of its presence. Later, in the weeks following its dissection, many responses contain an undercurrent of shocked mockery (or mock shock?) towards the concept that, thanks to evolution, people were inextricably linked to this whale.

These incidents make a particularly interesting comparison as they both inspired a significant number of responses across what were probably the two most popular verse forms in nineteenth-century Dundee: newspaper poetry and broadside song. Thus, the poetry about these incidents gives insight into how these two forms fulfilled different emotional and cultural functions to their overlapping audiences, and the different language and literary conventions they made use of in order to do this. There are also

⁶⁹The number of victims in the Tay Bridge Disaster has long been disputed. Original claims were far higher, but even in recent years historians including Charles McKean have argued for a figure closer to seventy. Fifty-nine people, named on the memorial erected in 2013, have been definitively identified as having been lost in the disaster.

notable similarities, most obviously in the choice of subject, but also in metaphor and imagery. The poetry discussed here is just a small part of nineteenth-century poetic engagement with the Tay. A vast wealth of shanties were written and performed on ships sailing out of Dundee, many of which highlight historic connections to Canada, and there was a substantial body of riparian poetry set on the banks of the Tay.⁷⁰ In perhaps one of the most interesting subgenres, the early nineteenth century also saw the beginning of a set of satirical works making detailed reference to the local council politics which formed a complex backdrop to the harbour developments. Throughout the century, almost every proposed harbour development sparked at least one critical verse.⁷¹ Although these subgenres offer fertile ground for further study, poetry about the Tay Bridge and the Tay Whale is particularly revealing as a set of responses to two definable events.

The first Tay Bridge

Railways had been part of Dundee's life for decades before the construction of the Tay Bridge, as work began on the Dundee-Newtyle railway in 1825. Nevertheless, by the 1880s, the railway was still a potent symbol of modernity in the Victorian imagination. That the Tay Bridge was to be the world's longest bridge added a considerable charge to its imagined presence. In contrast to the idea of railways as symbolic of a new, modern age, the language used to refer to the trains themselves frequently crossed over into nature or elemental imagery in both poetry and popular song. JBM's poem, discussed below, describes them as 'snorting,' and 'A New Song on the Opening of the Baxter Park,' discussed in Chapter Four, has the more sinister 'trains like live monsters will come dashing along.'⁷² The broadside 'The Iron Beast' uses this metaphor to comic effect, describing a train from the perspective of a naïve rural character who believes it to be alive:

⁷⁰ Keegan's chapter 'Writing against the Current: Anne Wilson's *Teisa* and Labouring-Class River Poetry' discusses working-class pastoral riparian poetry. (*British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry*, 98-121).

⁷¹ For example, an anonymous handwritten poem, 'Address to the Ruins of the Esplanade Extension,' intersperses metrically standard lines of a praise poem with irregular, lengthy critical digressions, mimicking the unwieldy structure of the esplanade. (LC433/16).

⁷² LC228/26.

An' the chieils wha fed the iron beast
Were as black's a pair o deils, man.
But ne'er a thing they gied the beast,
But fire and coals tae eat, man.
'Twas the queerest brute that e'er I saw,
For it had wheels for feet, man.⁷³

According to Robert Ford, who included this in *Vagabond Songs and Ballads*, this song originated from within the railway community in the late 1840s, and it raises an eyebrow at the widespread tendency of outsiders to describe trains in these animal metaphors.⁷⁴ This tendency is interesting in terms of the later use of imagery pitting humanity against nature (in contrast to human creation as extension of nature), which is prevalent in Tay Bridge Disaster poetry. The change in conceptions of place which railways brought about in the Victorian era has often been remarked upon, although the Tay crossing was already an established journey for many Dundonians, with ferries having run regularly for over a century and several of Dundee's wealthier citizens opting for the commute from Newport.

The design and construction of the Tay Bridge have been covered in a number of popular and academic histories, and do not need to be reiterated here.⁷⁵ During the time of its construction the bridge was heavily anticipated, as a symbol of Dundee's

⁷³ Gatherer, p. 135.

⁷⁴ Gatherer p.149; Robert Ford, *Vagabond Songs and Ballads* (London: Alexander Gardner, 1899), p. 182.

⁷⁵ Peter Marshall's *Railways of Dundee* (Oxford: Oakwood Press, 1996) is the most straightforward history of railway development in the area, while most other accounts are ultimately focused on the disaster. David Swinfen's *The Fall of the Tay Bridge* (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1994) and Peter R. Lewis' *Beautiful Railway Bridge of the Silvery Tay* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004) focus on re-investigating evidence to draw new conclusions about the physical causes of the fall. Several more works focus on the human side of the disaster, the most recent being Robin Lumley's *Tay Bridge Disaster: The People's Story* (Stroud: The History Press, 2013). John Prebble's creative history, *The High Girders* (London: Penguin, 1956), remains popular, and Charles McKean's *Battle for the North: The Tay and Forth Bridges and the 19th-Century Railway Wars* (London: Granta, 2006) places the disaster in the wider context of Scottish railways. The latter two works are the only two to reference contemporary poetry in their assessment of the aftermath, and are therefore the most relevant to my focus here.

expansion and place as a modern industrial city. JBM in the *People's Journal* wrote about the coming bridge in 1870 as a symbol of 'the restless spirit of the age.'⁷⁶ McKean notes the importance of the bridge in the British popular imagination – 'the longest railway bridge in the world had become symbolic of man's ingenuity and technical progress.'⁷⁷ The process of building was visible to Dundee citizens, and was followed with interest, even if its finer details remained mysterious to most of the population. Perhaps because of this, the main imagery used to describe the building of the bridge is very much human, a narrative of the triumph of intellect. The anonymous 'The Bridge O'er the Tay: An Industrial Chant' emphasises the role of thought in creating the physical bridge:

Work, work, work,
Hath built a strong bridge o'er the Tay;
Work, work, work,
Unceasing by night and by day,
Yet slow, slow, slow.
For seven long years and more
'Twas eagerly watched by the people around
Stretching from shore to shore.

Thought, thought, thought,
Designed the strong bridge o'er the Tay;
Thought, thought, thought,
Which worketh by night and by day.
And hard, hard, hard,
Worked the brains of the men in charge,
Designing, confining, resisting, and twisting
Away on their lonely barge.

⁷⁶ *Poets of the People's Journal*, p.88.

⁷⁷ McKean, *Battle for the North*, p.167

Firm, firm, firm,
The bridge o'er the Tay now stands;
Firm, firm, firm,
With its caissons stuck deep in the sands.
And fast, fast, fast,
O'er its whole length, two miles and more,
The trains fly along, while their thundering song
Re-echoes from shore to shore.⁷⁸

The hard mental work of designing the bridge is the basis for the physical work of building it, and thus the underlying driver for progress, the fruition of which is only possible by the two combining. The poem references Thomas Hood's 1843 'The Song of the Shirt,' whose refrain 'Work! Work! Work!' invokes the painful and never-ending drudgery of manual work (specifically, of sewing, which is interesting given Dundee's status as a textile town at this time.) This is very different to the meaningful, productive vision of labour in the above poem, and the comparison may well have been created on purpose. How much the author knew about the conditions labourers constructing the bridge worked in is not clear, but conditions were dangerous, with accidents including explosions, crushing by machinery and being blown into the river.⁷⁹ If the poem was intended to honour these workers, they seem rather overshadowed in its text by the focus on the engineers, so the function of using Hood's poem as a model is unclear. Thomas Hood, and this poem, were well known at the time. As he had visited Dundee in his youth and written about Stobswell Fair, writers from the city seem particularly fond of referencing him. One of the poems below, about the Tay whale, also mentions Hood. The slowness of the building process is compared with the current speed of the trains. While they are 'flying' and 'thundering,' wild nature words, the idea of the trains' song is more purposeful, rhythmic, structured, as is the song/chant the author has described

⁷⁸ 'The Bridge O'er the Tay', *Courier*, 10 August 1878, p.6.

⁷⁹ *Railways of Dundee*, p. 69.

them in.

The previous year, the *Courier* had published two sonnets by ‘Y’ of Broughty Ferry (17 October 1877). The first concludes, similarly to the ‘Industrial Chant,’ with a celebration of the designers’ intellect pitted against the unfamiliar, uncontrollable water:

O, wondrous archway! Deep the thought and skill
That planned thee, brave the hearts that dared the floods,
Foundations laying in strange solitudes!
Now, rest ye pillars strong, each wish fulfil –
Upbear the marvellous highway; let it be
Its builders’ fame, the glory of Dundee!

Y’s second sonnet references the Bible verse Daniel 12:4, in which Daniel is told by an angel ‘shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.’ It is the second part of this verse which is relevant for the poet.

See how the pen inspired portrays the fruit
To issue from invention’s spreading root;
Lo! now the angel’s words have come to pass –
The vision pictured in the Prophet’s glass,
Foreshowing ‘many to and fro shall run.
And knowledge be increased on earth,’ ‘tis done.
Now Man and Thought may compass sea and sand,
Swift as the light reach every distant strand.
O may this work achieved make dim eyes see
Th’assured truth of ancient prophecy!
And seal on wisdom’s words, divine and true,
Indelibly on every heart anew,
That firmer each may tread love’s pathway given

To bridge the gulf that severs earth from heaven.

The poem places intellectual progress into the context of an ordered Christian universe in which God has our best interests at heart – balancing potential anxiety about the dangers of overstepping the boundaries of humanity’s place in the world through exploration and experimentation. Portraying the completion of the bridge as the fulfilment of a prophecy may also have been intended as a rebuke to Patrick Matthew, the ‘Seer of Gourdiehill,’ who claimed to have seen visions of disaster during the bridge’s construction. Y suggests Matthew, whose visions came from a Highland second sight tradition, was merely superstitious, whereas the poet was speaking from a place of Christian rationality.⁸⁰

The Tay Bridge Disaster

Despite these celebrations of the engineering achievement, the Tay Bridge was always a potential source of concern. Although railways were a well-established form of transport by the 1870s, there was still a widespread fear of and fascination with railway accidents. Ralph Harrington, writing on public attitudes to railway accidents in England, observes that this fear was fuelled by, and in turn reinforced, a general public mistrust of both railway companies and the government.⁸¹ Although comparatively rare, when accidents occurred, they were widely reported in newspapers across the country, which confirmed public suspicions. Concerns about the Tay Bridge were probably heightened as it crossed a stretch of water of a size that no other contemporary bridge in Britain did, combining old fears about sea crossings with new ones about railway accidents. These fears were confirmed for Dundee and the rest of the country a little over a year after the bridge’s opening, when the bridge collapsed in high winds, sending a northbound train into the river and leaving no survivors. The event quickly became known as the ‘Tay Bridge Disaster,’ and was deeply traumatic for Dundee. The majority of those killed

⁸⁰ For a full exploration of second sight in Victorian Scotland, see Elsa Richardson’s *Second Sight in the Nineteenth Century: Prophecy, Imagination and Nationhood* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

⁸¹ Ralph Harrington, ‘Railway Safety and Railway Slaughter: Railway Accidents, Public and Government in Victorian Britain’, *Journal of Victorian Culture* 8/2 (2003), 107-127.

were resident there, and the city in general had taken pride in the bridge and was shocked by the dramatic way in which it had failed. Several claimed to have witnessed moments when the girders fell, and the train entered the water, knowing there were passengers on board. But the symbolic value of the bridge as a triumph of modern railway engineering was shared beyond Dundee, and the geographical range of the poetic responses is testament to this. The Tay Bridge Disaster was international news, by no means a purely local concern.

Within Dundee, the poetic response to the disaster was immediate, and published both through newspapers and broadsides. The following day's *Dundee Advertiser* noted that they had rejected two poems, which, though they liked the sentiment, lacked 'felicity of expression.'⁸² This is not surprising, considering they must have been composed extremely quickly in order to meet the next morning's deadline, probably in a state of high emotion which left little energy for revision. In the following days, a succession of poems commemorating the event were published in the Dundee press, both by local poets and others. Far more poems were written on it than were ever printed. Both the *People's Journal* and the *Dundee Advertiser* remarked throughout January 1880 that they continued to receive a high volume of Tay Bridge poetry. For example, on the 8th January the *People's Journal* noted 'We continue to receive shoals of verses on the Tay Bridge catastrophe. We could not make use of the tenth part of it, even if it were first class; but truth constrains us to say that most of it is sheer rubbish.'⁸³

A set of images and themes that are used to describe the event soon became established. The conditions of the night itself (although stormy, there was also bright moonlight) are emphasised in many poems. The destruction of the bridge is set up as a battle between humanity and vengeful nature frequently personified as the Storm Fiend, or Spirit of the Storm. That this characterisation and the 'Storm-fiend' phrase is today associated with William McGonagall in particular rather than poetry about the disaster in general only illustrates how divorced from their context McGonagall's poems have become. The January issue of *The Wizard of the North* features a dramatic sketch of

⁸² 'Correspondence', *Dundee Advertiser*, 29 December 1879, p.3.

⁸³ 'To Correspondents', *People's Journal* 8 January 1880, p.3.

‘The Spirit of the Storm’ as a bearded man tearing apart the bridge, perhaps inspired by the several poems using the image which had already been published in the *People’s Journal* and the *Dundee Advertiser*.⁸⁴

The aftermath of the Tay Bridge Disaster was far from the first time such imagery had been used as a characterisation of sublime or violent nature. English poet Thomas Noel’s 1841 ‘The Storm Fiends’ featured similar malevolent sea-spirits in a shipwreck narrative, and the personification of storms as destructive spirits is even more widespread.⁸⁵ The timing, it being the last Sabbath of the year, also became significant in responses. Arbroath poet G.W. Donald’s ‘Lines inspired by the melancholy wreck of the Tay Bridge’ set the scene for many of the poems to come, opening with the lines:

‘Twas Sabbath e’en, the pale moonlight
Was streaming from on high,
Save where the clouds like sheeted ghosts,
Were drifting ‘cross the sky.
The storm fiend, in his wildest mood,
Impell’d the scowling blast;
And trees and towers were scatter’d wide,
By every gust that past.⁸⁶

The clouds’ ghostly appearance foreshadows the death which every reader of a Tay Bridge Disaster poem knew was imminent. Donald also introduces some of the characters killed in the accident – in a fairly generic way, as not much information about passengers could have been available when the poem was written. While the human stories and their closeness to the Dundee community were one of the main factors in journalistic coverage, most newspaper poems focus on the event itself, writing from outside the train carriages on the scene of the storm and the bridge. Newspaper poets

⁸⁴ Figure 1, Appendix.

⁸⁵ Thomas Noel, *Rhymes and Roundelays* (London: William Smith, 1841), pp. 1-22.

⁸⁶ ‘Lines inspired by the melancholy wreck of the Tay Bridge’, *People’s Journal*, 3 January 1879, p.3.

frequently despair and pray for the souls in general, but the cataloguing of individuals lost is more often seen in broadsides, so Donald's poem is atypical in this respect. In the same newspaper, 'T.I.T.'s 'The Spirit of the Tay Bridge' sets up a conversation between what actually appears to be the nature spirit of the Tay (rather than of the bridge itself as the title implies) and the spirit of the storm in a conversation between co-operative and malevolent images of nature:

But yesterday I stood upon the shore
Of Forfar, when the ghostly gap was seen
In what was erst so beautiful a work
Of man's device, but now the solemn hills
Seemed mocking in their pride the ruin there,
And dire destruction of our dearest hopes;
When suddenly I hear a sweet voice rise
Amid the howling of the hideous blast,
And then its mellowed accents seemed to mourn
'Triumph of engineering skill, it said,
My Bridge would brave the elemental war
For ever, or at least until the world,
Had burnt its candle to the socket down.
Alas! vain fools! and vain fool I to think
That aught so frail and fair could last so long.'
No, potent spirit of the storm, thou said'st:
'What ha! is this, that dares my course deny?
What structure reared in pride my might to stay?
Down it shall go! and do these mortals think
To roll their trains of living freight across,
When I, even I, am thundering on the flank?
I'll push them off, and thrust their bridge down, too,
Into the boiling cauldron of the deep.

Ha! ha! these shrieks of mortal agony!
What is't to me that men should suffer pain?
I reckon not – nay, I wish – that more
Or all mine enemies who built this bridge
That made my voice scream out in Babel sounds,
As, sweeping past, I met resistance there,
Had perished and had suffered as these have
I hate those braggart men, I hate them all;
My free course stayed with their accursed works,
And my rejoining strength eked out in shreds.'
'Oh, spirit of the storm, forbear, forbear!
Am I not, too, of nature like to thine?
A spirit. Dost thou no pity feel for me,
Torn, riven, perhaps for aye – and those my friends,
Those mortals who had reared my bridge in pride?
What harm have they done to thee? Was it much
The puny let thou foundest in thy way?
They set their hearts upon it; merchandise
From all the ends of earth was to roll o'er
A new departure of the nation's trade,
My sister Bridge of Forth assisting them,
Bringing fresh gladness to a myriad homes,
And bidding North and South join hands and kiss;
And now 'tis ended. Shame upon thee! Shame!
At least thou needest not have wrecked the lives.
Would not a train of merchandise have served
Thy cruel wrath to sate? But know, cruel fiend,
Those men that thou despisest are not beat!
They'll rear my Bridge again in such estate
That not thy rage, nor yet thy greater rage,

Shall shake or overwhelm it in the floods below.
Thou know'st not men as I do; I'll be healed,
And then thy baffled spite in vain thou'll show,
'T'were better now thou took'st a better thought.'
The sweet voice ceased – and I was left alone –
Along with the wild waves and mocking lulls.

This contrast between different natural forces places the Tay on the side of humanity, as a familiar place with which the people of Dundee had been interacting for centuries, with the storm as an invading unknown. The depiction of the bridge as 'frail and fair' is at odds with the descriptions of it before the disaster, and it was certainly not designed with those characteristics in mind. The poet, assigning to the bridge the fragile nature of the lives that were lost with it, wrestles with the futility of human endeavour, though is ultimately hopeful for a future where the bridge will be rebuilt, better. The sense that the landscape around the Tay has been irrevocably changed is far more present in disaster poetry than in poems about the bridge's construction. The bridge had been an improvement on, almost an extension of, nature. After the disaster, the gap between the two remaining sections was a permanent reminder of loss, made 'ghostly' by the awareness of what it used to contain.

'D.M.'s poem 'The Bridge of Tay' returns to the popular 'iron horse' metaphor for trains, and compares the train itself to a demon:

See the iron horse on its iron path
Guided along by each friendly light,
Dashing away through the wind and the rain,
Like some terrible demon of night.
Shrieking and screaming and dashing away,
Bravely bound for the Bridge of Tay.

Its final verses intensify the horror imagery:

The storm-fiend leaped with a terrible glee
As he danced in his maniac joy,
And tossed the bridge with its burden of souls,
Just as a child might do with a toy.
The moon saw the deed from her silvery way,
High o'er the broken Bridge of Tay.

No human ear caught the wail of despair,
No human voice the story will tell,
Of the gutt'ral shriek or the death-filled sigh,
The muttered prayer and the brief farewell.
Retire, fair moon, send us the child of day,
To light the broken Bridge of Tay.

All is silent now – the river rolls on
Over the dead with its ancient song,
And telling no tale of the shortened way
From the world of right to the world of wrong.
'Tis a solemn sight in the light of day,
The wrecked – the broken – Bridge of Tay.⁸⁷

This poem's focus on the lack of surviving human witnesses, and of any meaningful link to the experience, places the disaster at a remove, outside of the Dundee inhabited in everyday daylight, reinforcing the fear of a lack of control over the world echoed in many of these poems. M.E. Hattersley of Lincolnshire's 'Lines on the Tay Bridge Calamity' sets an oblivious nature composed of seabirds, fish, and even the moon against the mourning which is human alone:

⁸⁷ LC125/53.

Oh, caverns of the deep
And stormy sea! did ye not howl and weep
When echo told the tale of woe and death?

Oh, wild birds of the watery main! Your breath
Gave ye not forth in lamentations dire
When through the darkness flashed the fated fire?

Oh, finny tenants of the sad sea-wave!
Gathered ye not, ere morn, in vast conclave
To seek the purport of those ocean spoils
The night had brought?

Ah, no! 'tis man that toils,
And man, alas! must mourn, and seek, and weep
For loved ones lost, and scanty comfort reap
Their graves beside; yet sorrow cannot give
The loved ones back again, and they who live
And mourn their loss, must due submission crave
To God's own will.⁸⁸

This picture of silence, of lack of response, comes in direct contrast to the wild, active descriptions of the wind and sea earlier in the poem. This is a nature entirely removed from humanity, unlike the shared feeling imagined by the author of 'The Spirit of the Tay.' 'The Doomed Train' by 'M.T.W.' opens with images of moonlight and 'the chill and the tempest,' demonstrating another view of nature's role in the disaster:

⁸⁸ 'Lines on the Tay Bridge Calamity', *People's Journal*, 17 January 1880, p. 3.

For 'neath that fierce tempest tremendous,
That Bridge which for ages might stood,
A wreck and a ruin stupendous,
Sinks down with that train in the flood.

Oh, pray for the fond hearts bereaved,
Oh, mourn for the loved ones gone down,
Where no human power could have saved them,
Within sight of the fair-lighted town.

For 'midst crash of that beast of the creature,
Swept down by the elements' strife
The poor martyrs to Science and Nature,
Pass swiftly from death into life.⁸⁹

The deaths of the passengers here are portrayed almost as a necessary part of the journey of progress. 'Martyrs' die for a purpose, and 'no human power' could have saved them. The lines between technology and nature are blurred through the phrase 'beast of the creature,' which may refer to the storm or the train, or somehow both. The shift in language used to describe the building of the bridge and to describe its fall is most dramatically different in the fact that almost every disaster poem includes some form of personification or animation of at least one part of the scene. Most commonly this is the storm, but can also be the river or the train, though it is rarely the bridge itself. This imagery, which places humanity as one of many consciousnesses in an animate universe, contrasts strongly with the poetry which emphasised the intellectual success of the bridge's creation as humanity forging ahead in an oblivious natural universe. Although none of the Tay Bridge Disaster poets ultimately seem to have lost faith in human progress, Dundee's sense of itself was deeply shaken, and writers turned to older

⁸⁹ 'The Doomed Train', *People's Journal*, 17th January 1880, p.4.

metaphors and images, often from a tradition of shipwreck poetry, to express this.

Other poems, such as 'The Lost Train,' focus on the railway workers as the centre of their narratives.

'That's a terrible storm blowing over the Tay –

A terrible storm to-night!

Do you think we will manage to cross the bridge?

Ah! The signal is shining 'All right!'

[...]

Their eyes are fast fixed on the northern shore,

To the bright flashing lights of Dundee;

For somewhere among them they know there is home

And there they their loved ones will see.

[...]

A hundred bright lives in a few moments quenched –

The nation sunk again in gloom –

A thousand bright homes filled with mourning and woe –

Our bright river now a dark tomb.

Oh! What were the thoughts and the fears flitting there

And what the despair and dismay;

The mind stands aghast at the wild havoc wrought

At our doors in our well-beloved Tay.

All praise to the men who the signal obeyed,

When it flashed its 'All right' down the line;

And wherever they lie, let their epitaph be –

'They were heroes, and up to their time.'⁹⁰

⁹⁰ 'The Lost Train', *Wizard of the North*, January 1880, p.3.

The change in the public's view of the river is also made clear in this poem. Like in 'T.I.T.'s 'The Spirit of the Tay,' the beloved river has been irrevocably damaged. The train staff, obeying the signal in the face of danger, are portrayed as brave and heroic, almost like soldiers in war poetry, who died doing their duty. A darker vision focused on a surviving railway worker is the focus of 'The Signalman's Dream,' which the author, a former resident of Dundee, prefaces with a statement that they have adapted this poem to fit the occasion from an earlier work inspired by a dream.⁹¹ In this verse, the signalman narrator is a liminal, haunted figure, familiar to many readers through Charles Dickens' 1866 story, in which the titular Signalman is visited by a ghost prior to deaths occurring on the railway. Throughout the poem the signalman, returning to work after the accident, is haunted by memories of the disaster, which come accompanied by the refrain:

Ho, clitter, clatter, click, clack,
Here comes the fatal train.

The rhythm and sound of the verse mimic the movement of the train, bringing scene forward in time and place as the train moves through actual space. The final verse imagines the visions of death which follow the signalman:

I see each blood-stained human shred –
The crushed, the slain – these I behold.
They follow me living. When I am dead
I dread the meeting beyond the mould.
Oh, eyes made dim with all these tears,
Canst thou discern no dim retreat
Where I could hide these fatal fears
Which Memory cannot defeat?

⁹¹ 'The Signalman's Dream', *People's Journal*, 10 January 1880, p.5.

Nay, nay, I'm ever on the rack,
For ever sounds the strain -
'Ho, clitter, clatter, click, clack,
There goes the fatal train.'

The horror of disfigurement of bodies of railway accidents occurs in other creative depictions of railway accidents, and is also present in news reporting of them.⁹² Railway workers themselves contributed to such poetic traditions. William Aitken, a Glasgow station inspector, published *Lays of the Line* in 1883, a collection in which many poems chronicle horrific imagined disasters. 'Widow Morgan' uses the image of 'a hundred helpless victims, maimed and bruised, and bleeding there' to emphasise the danger of allowing railway staff to become overworked.⁹³ Kirstie Blair has argued that in Aitken's poetry, and that of Alexander Anderson, the use of mechanical rhythms interrupted by more 'fragile' human ones varyingly celebrates and counters the dominance of industrial force.⁹⁴

In fact, 'A Signalman's Dream' is more focused on railway sounds and scenes than many of the imagined views of the Tay Bridge victims. The mutilation described was not a notable feature of the accident, as the train itself was relatively unharmed. What killed people was the shock of hitting the water or being drowned in the carriages. The links between this disaster and shipwrecks are evident in the imagery elsewhere, particularly in the broadside song discussed below. This poem indicates the extent to which railway disasters lurked in the public's imagination across Britain. There was a set of railway sounds and images of death which were instantly brought to mind at the news of one, and existing poems based on potential disaster could be adapted to specific circumstances.

The shared sense of railway trauma across Britain and the wider western world is

⁹² Harrington, p.192-3.

⁹³ William Aitken, *Lays of the Line* (Edinburgh & Glasgow: John Menzies & Co., 1883), p. 11.

⁹⁴ Kirstie Blair, 'Inhuman Rhythms: Working-Class Railway Poets and the Measure of Industry', *Victorian Review* 40/1 (2014), 35-39 (p.36).

evident elsewhere in the responses. The *People's Journal* published a list of other recent notable railway disasters in their January 3rd issue, including incidents in France, the United States, Canada and England. A number of poems written elsewhere were published in Dundee, some re-printed from other periodicals and some presumably sent to the Dundee newspapers in sympathy. There were also responses from over the Atlantic: among these, Perthshire-born Mrs M.S. Livermore wrote to the *People's Journal* from Kansas. Railways are connections between places, and the fear of disaster, and the mourning when it happened, were now shared too. The fame of the bridge when it was built also contributed to this. Poetry from outside of Scotland tends to place it as a Christmas disaster, rather than, as most of the Dundee verse does, placing it at New Year or not mentioning the season at all. 'The Ballad of the Bridge,' first published in the *Whitehall Gazette* on January 1st, was reprinted by the *People's Journal*:

'Noel! Noel! Noel!' How the carol rang!
'Noel! Noel! Noel!' How the children sang!
All the world was happy – all the land was gay!
Sudden – like the lightning – came the news from Tay!

Joyous was the laughter, jocund was the song;
'Wassail! wassail! wassail! wassail!' chaunted loud and long.
The mummers ceas'd their mumming – the singers ceased their lay
When they heard the ghastly tidings of the waters of the Tay.

Sped the fateful tidings (ill news flies apace!);
Strong men sobb'd like children – women hid their face.
The nation sobb'd in anguish – wept as well it may
For those who sleep beneath the tide, the cruel tide of Tay.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ 'The Ballad of the Bridge', *People's Journal*, 3rd January 1880, p. 3.

Several of the works by local authors reference the approaching New Year, but their biggest temporal focus is on the Sabbath.⁹⁶ This is at odds with most of the newspaper's poetry, and suggests that, despite its popularity in a literary sense, Christmas was not yet meaningful enough in Scotland to have much effect on people's emotional response to events. The idea that the disaster was a punishment for running trains on a Sunday was expressed by some Sabbatarians, though it was certainly not a popular view with any of Dundee's newspapers, prompting comments like: 'there has been a 'precious' deal too much charitable nonsense written and spoken about the fall of the Tay Bridge and the 'breaking' of the fourth commandment.'⁹⁷

The 'To Correspondents' column reveals that not only was the *People's Journal* not prepared to sacrifice its usual high standards at this emotional time, they also expected accurate depictions of events. 'Parnassa' had a poem rejected as they 'seemed to think the wind was blowing up the Tay when the bridge fell [...] [b]ut the fact is, the wind was blowing down the river when the catastrophe occurred.'⁹⁸ The editors were still prepared to print any particularly awful submissions in order to amuse readers, as they did with the following:

'Our poetical friends will surely admit that in the following verses on the Tay Bridge the ne plus ultra has been reached. They should at once hang up their harps, and own with as much grace as they can muster up for the occasion that nothing more can be said on the subject: -

'Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.

A solemn warning,

⁹⁶ In Scotland, Christmas would not be officially recognised as a holiday until the mid-twentieth century, and while its celebration was not as actively repressed as it had been in previous centuries, the Church of Scotland certainly did not encourage it. The idea of Christmas was gaining popularity in nineteenth century Scotland, reflected in Dundee in the *People's Journal* Christmas writing competitions. Tara Moore has observed a tendency for entrants in the *People's Journal* competition who did use a Christmas theme – many did not – to use London settings and language, rather than Scottish ones. (Tara Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 37)

⁹⁷ 'To Correspondents', *People's Journal*, 12th January 1880, p.3.

⁹⁸ 'To Correspondents', *People's Journal*, 3rd January 1880, p.3.

Great brig, Tay Brig, dangerous Brig,
Fearful Brig, black Brig, dead Brig,
Lying low;
Airy Brig, teary Brig, weary Brig,
In the deep;
Windy Brig, dreadful Brig, weeping Brig,
Out of might;
People's Brig, sleeping Brig, rotting Brig,
Made many mourn;
Trying Brig, tremendous Brig, warning Brig,
To the nations;
Tay Brig, train Brig, fearful Brig,
The Sabbath Breaker;
Disobedient Brig on the last Sabbath '79, Brig,
To your maker.
What will you say, Brig, at the last day, Brig,
At the judgement,
A robbing Brig, a murdering Brig,
To the Great Creator?
Did you pray, Brig, when you was made, Brig,
For a blessing?
Stand as you are, Brig, for a warning, Brig,
To keep the Sabbath.'⁹⁹

The Sabbatarian attitude, as much as the verse, is what is being mocked here. In the views of the *People's Journal*, this was an old-fashioned attitude which did not fit with the ethos of a modern city at the forefront of industry and engineering, though it must have held enough traction among Dundee's population that they felt the need to

⁹⁹ 'To Correspondents', *People's Journal*, 8th January 1880, p.3.

counter it. As with many of the bad poems in which readers of the *Journal* took delight, it is hard to determine the ultimate seriousness of the author: elements such as the heavy pun of ‘Sabbath breaker,’ as it literally broke on the Sabbath, and the bridge ‘disobeying its maker’ like Sabbatarians accused humans of disobeying theirs, suggest the author may have been making fun of the idea. The bridge in this poem is imbued with so much spirit that it is expected to pray on its own behalf, which is a fairly extreme leap: perhaps the poet intended to satirise the many personifications of the storm and other elements of the disaster which had already appeared. Whether written genuinely or not, it is part of the significant tradition of ambiguous ‘bad poetry’ whose main home was the correspondence columns of Scottish newspapers identified by Kirstie Blair.¹⁰⁰ The strength of this genre is evident in how soon after the disaster the editors were prepared to find humour in verse about it.

The broadside publishers and performers of Dundee also responded to the Tay Bridge Disaster. While the number of surviving broadsides is far less than that of the newspaper poems, the songs have proved enduring in their influence. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it was common for a shipwreck or other disaster to be announced, in verse or prose, in broadside form. Although by the 1880s broadsides were no longer the primary source of news for the working-class, responses to such events were still popular, and their authors demonstrate different techniques and focus to the newspaper poets. The eighteen-verse broadside ‘In Memory of the Tay Bridge Disaster’ was written by C. R. Horne, some of whose other works are listed on the sheet. These notably include ‘The Aberdeen Ferry Boat Calamity’ and ‘The Fishing Boats’ Disaster.’ Being a good commemorator of disasters was evidently still a valuable skill in the broadside printing world.

The version shown on *The Word on the Street* is a particularly well-made broadside, illustrated by an ornate border and an engraving of the Tay Bridge, an unusual feature when the common practice was to reuse tangentially related (or

¹⁰⁰ Kirstie Blair, ‘Let the Nightingales Alone: Correspondence Columns, the Scottish Press, and the Making of the Working-Class Poet’, *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47/2 (2014), 188-207 (pp. 199-202).

completely unrelated) images.¹⁰¹ The severity of the topic clearly called for an extra degree of care in the design. A preface to the song briefly explains the event, and how many bodies had been recovered by the time of printing in May 1880. The song may well have been written earlier, and been reprinted when further news came to light. There are two addresses in Aberdeen listed where it can be bought, at Craigie Street and Gallowgate. According to property valuation rolls, Horne was the proprietor of these shops as well as the songwriter. Charles Horne, originally from Forres, is listed as a ‘newsagent’ for the Craigie Street address in 1885, while his entry for the Gallowgate shop lists him as ‘master bookseller’ in 1876. The Gallowgate premises cost him ten pounds and one shilling yearly in rent. Given that some of his neighbouring shopkeepers were paying one or two pounds, his printing of broadsides was clearly one facet of a large and profitable business, and may explain his ability to produce such high-quality illustrations at short notice. Although there is no Dundee address listed, broadsides travelled fast, and little heed was paid to original authorship. Many singers of this song give a Dundee Poet’s Box broadside as their source, indicating these shops continued to sell a version of this into the twentieth century.

Horne’s verse, with its reliance on repetition and an obvious yet not always consistent rhyme scheme, would not have impressed the editors of the *People’s Journal* or the *Dundee Advertiser*. Audiences would interact with a broadside in an entirely different way from that in which they would a newspaper poem, and Horne’s verse is perfectly designed for its purpose. Broadsides were not only to be read silently, but to be read aloud, memorized, sung and performed. They also contain a stand-alone narrative in a way that newspaper poetry about current events does not have to, as by definition a newspaper poem will be read alongside reports of the news. The newspaper poems discussed above were encountered by readers intermingled with reports on the latest theories about the bridge’s collapse and the recovery of bodies, whereas a broadside has to introduce the topic in the assumption the listener may not have any prior knowledge. I

¹⁰¹ ‘In Memory of The Tay Bridge Disaster’, National Library of Scotland, *The Word on the Street*, <<https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/view/?id=16622>> [Accessed 18 September 2018.] See Figure 2, Appendix.

will expand on broadsides and their importance in analysing both written and performance traditions further in the following chapter, but the ‘Tay Bridge Disaster’ is a particularly illuminating example of the tenacity of a good broadside song.¹⁰² Several versions have been collected by folklorists in the twentieth century, almost all of whom cite a Poet’s Box song sheet as their ultimate source. Most of these are far shorter than the printed version, at either three or nine verses, such as Willie Mathieson’s version, recorded in 1952.¹⁰³ The longer song did not disappear, as Peter Shephard recorded an almost word-for-word version of this song from Mrs Balfour of Lindores, Fife, circa 1986.¹⁰⁴ While there do not seem to be any surviving nineteenth-century accounts of how a singer would learn a broadside of this length, Angus farmworker Eck Forbes recalled learning this song from a Poet’s Box sheet around 1930, when the disaster was still in living memory: ‘So, ye got this bloody ‘Tay Brig Disaster,’ an’ I thoct, ‘that’s ower buggering lang’ ... Christ, I read it an’ read it... It took a long time tae learn it... there wis times when ye’d think ye werenae makin’ muckle o’t, an’ ye’d ca awa at yer work an’ it’d come intae yer heid an’ ye wid start awa intae it.’¹⁰⁵

The changes between Horne’s original lyrics and Mrs Balfour’s version are minimal, but potentially illuminating. ‘Ancient Holyrood’ in verse 6 becomes ‘holy Holyrood,’ introducing a repetition of sound probably for aesthetic reasons and as a memory aid, though it also reinforces the overall appeal to religion in the song. Similarly, in verse seven, the final word ‘town’ is changed to ‘vale,’ creating an internal rhyme in ‘hill and dale and country vale,’ and adding to the assonance of the verse overall (with ‘way’ and ‘Tay’.) The opposite has occurred in verse 13, where the tempest ‘loud and shrill’ becomes the ‘tempest’s loudest blast,’ thus removing one of the verses’ rhymes. In verse fifteen, the living freight in Horne’s version have become

¹⁰² While Horne’s version has a longer title, later versions are either referred to as simply ‘The Tay Bridge Disaster’, or as ‘The Fall of the Tay Bridge’, though they are evidently the same song. This flexibility of titles is common in oral song traditions. There were at least two other broadsides using the title ‘The Tay Bridge Disaster’.

¹⁰³ Interview with Willie Mathieson (School of Scottish Studies Archives, University of Edinburgh (SA1952.02)).

¹⁰⁴ Gatherer, p.29-30.

¹⁰⁵ Eck Forbes, quoted in Miller, ‘An Ethnography of Singing’, p.54.

‘numbered with the dead,’ but in the sung version they are ‘mingled with the dead’ – an image which, in the immediacy of performance, brings the listener back into the moment of the disaster, imagining the moment of the crash and train sinking into the water, with some still dying and others dead. There are other slight changes in the wording of Balfour’s version compared to Horne’s, but overall the continuity between the two is striking. The most successful broadside writers created phrases and images which demonstrate an understanding of how memory and performance work in oral transmission as well as written.

Other broadsides inspired by the Tay Bridge disaster are similar in focus and narrative, but do not seem to have gained the same longevity as Horne’s song. ‘Tay Bridge’, similarly to some of the newspaper poems discussed above, makes specific reference to the disaster taking place ‘at Christmas time when mirth abounded,’ and refers back to this throughout. This suggests this song may also have originated outside of Scotland, though there is no mention of printer or vendor’s details to confirm this.¹⁰⁶ Another song using the title ‘The Tay Bridge Disaster,’ throughout emphasises the physical loss of not only lives but bodies:

Men and women, and dear children,
Lay in the river’s icy bed.
We all must say may God be with them,
And bless the poor ill-fated dead.
They did not dream that death was near them,
But that, alas, we never know,
The gates of death were beneath them,
In the water ninty [sic] feet below.

The station was besieged by thousands,
Waiting there with bated breath,

¹⁰⁶ ‘Tay Bridge’, *The Word on the Street*, National Library of Scotland, <<https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/view/?id=15025>> [Accessed 18 September 2018].

The disaster all their fears arousing,
For their dear friends lying cold in death,
There's young and old among the missing,
And a sailor just returned from sea.
By this calamity so distressing,
Hurried into eternity.

May heaven bless our fellow creatures,
Lying in the river Tay,
With bruised and distorted features,
Now their lifeless bodies lay,
Their holiday that day was over,
Their friends and homes they'll see no more,
Husband and wife, and maid and lover,
Lost their lives on that dark shore.¹⁰⁷

As discussed above in relation to newspaper poetry, terror of mutilation of bodies in railway accidents was widespread. The Tay Bridge Disaster was not only a railway accident, but a maritime one, with one crucial difference from most shipwrecks: it happened in full view of the city, rather than in far-flung, unknown waters. The fear of not recovering bodies in order to lay them to rest (newspapers updated readers every day on how many had been found, and the waiting room at Dundee station became a morgue in which bodies waited for their families' identification) was accompanied by a parallel fear of what their injuries may reveal once recovered. The non-recovery of bodies lost at sea was traditionally dealt with through sets of customs, stories and beliefs, many of which were still practised in fishing communities in the nineteenth century; but to people in a Victorian city which thought of itself as thoroughly modern and free of superstition,

¹⁰⁷ 'The Tay Bridge Disaster', *The Word on the Street* <<https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/view/?id=15027>> [Accessed 18 September 2018]. This is the broadside which John Prebble quotes extracts from throughout the final chapters of *The High Girders*, where he uses street singers as a Greek chorus to the official enquiry.

yet who still relied on a mourning process centred around the corpse, this would have posed an extra emotional challenge. The idea that a sailor returning home after facing danger on the sea had then been drowned in a train accident stood out as a particularly cruel fate. The imagery of coldness, darkness and obscurity is shared with depictions of death in shipwreck songs, which were certainly present in Dundee's popular culture at the time of the Tay Bridge disaster, though one of the most popular was the story of Grace Darling, for its uplifting rescue and because of the local connection with the ship *Forfarshire*, which was bound for Dundee when it was wrecked. A Dundee broadside describes the wreck:

To pieces she went while the crew fell a weeping,
And some to the bottom with death went so cold,
While the shrieks and the cries met the ears of that female,
Grace Horsly Darling that female so bold.¹⁰⁸

Darling's story was also serialised in the *People's Journal* in the year following the Tay Bridge Disaster. While newspaper poets tried to find meaning in death by focusing on the bridge and what it symbolised for Dundee and the world, the broadside writers began the process of commemorating the dead using traditional verse models that had been used for many disasters before, and which they knew would be cemented through repetition by many singers. The broadsides' lists of the lost, even without their names, began to create the human link with the disaster that newspaper poets lamented the lack of. The act of singing or reciting aloud, as people undoubtedly did with these broadsides, was perhaps as important as the words themselves: the shared experience of performances likely functioned as part of the healing process for communities affected by the disaster.

The Tay Whale

¹⁰⁸ LC421/11.

Almost three years after the Tay Bridge Disaster, in November 1883, an unfortunate humpback whale was sighted in the Tay estuary, perhaps drawn so far south by unusually high herring numbers. The first sightings of the whale were from Broughty Ferry, where, a contemporary eyewitness reported, the schoolchildren were ‘much grateful to his whaleship’ for drawing their teachers out of the classroom to catch a sighting, resulting in an impromptu winter holiday and a general atmosphere of high excitement.¹⁰⁹ This set the tone for subsequent interactions with the Tay Whale, which became an almost carnivalesque popular spectacle, and the focus of many satirical poems, songs and newspaper reports. Dundee in 1883 was still the centre of an important whaling industry that was intertwined with that of textiles. In addition to the myriad other uses for whale derivatives in the nineteenth century, Dundee made use of a great deal of whale oil as a softener for raw jute. Whales were a part of everyday life to many of Dundee’s population, but as a source of products, not as an animal. Only whalers would have seen an entire, living whale before, and this unexpected re-presentation of a familiar concept appears to have simultaneously fascinated and alienated Dundee’s writing communities.

This was not the only time a stray whale had appeared in Scottish waters. The closest geographically and temporally was the Longniddry whale in 1869, which also became first a tourist attraction, and later an anatomical lesson.¹¹⁰ In the case of the Tay whale, Dundee’s whaling ship crews swiftly organised crews and sent boats out into the river to harpoon the creature, but remained unsuccessful after many voyages. The irony of a whale swimming into a harbour famous for its whaling ships, and eluding capture for weeks on end, was not lost on Dundee’s press. Both whalers and whale became the targets for mockery, and comic anecdotes sprung up about the situation. One such story had a boatful of sailors, excited to have caught the whale unaware as it dozed, realising

¹⁰⁹ LC143/3.

¹¹⁰ A poem on this whale, ‘A Tale of a Whale’ by ‘Harpoon’, was published in the *People’s Journal* in November 1869 and foreshadows the tone for Tay Whale poetry with its obvious rhymes (all sixty-two lines rhyme with ‘whale’) and puns on tale and tail. (*Poets of the People’s Journal*, p.81-2.)

they were in fact aiming their harpoons at the hills of the Cows of Gowrie.¹¹¹ The responses in both prose and verse treated the events as a farce, but also took on a distinct tone of resentment towards the whale for remaining alive. An 1884 pamphlet on ‘The History of the Whale’ accuses it of ‘not behaving with the calm dignity which ought to distinguish an animal weighing twenty-six tons.’¹¹² Most of Dundee’s newspapers seem to have almost completely abandoned the idea of reporting the whale story in a factual manner in favour of puns and satire. The *Dundee Advertiser* reported on the whale’s surprise at having escaped thus far: ‘I’ll be blowed, the whale is said to have remarked, as he took a header into the depths of the river.’¹¹³ The furore continued over the New Year; in late December, thinking the creature had escaped, *The Courier* published ‘The Whale Interviewed by his Mother on his Exploits in the River Tay.’

Oh! where have you been, my son, my son?
We have not met since the morn was young.
‘I left the North, good mother, to see
The whaling fleet in bonnie Dundee.’

Oh! why went you there, my son, my son,
Within the range of their banging gun?
‘Fear not, mother, ‘twas only a lark,
I reckoned they would shoot wide of the mark.’

Ah! Finny, my boy, is it not vile,
They do so thirst for our precious ile?
‘Yes, mother, for our good blubber they pine,
But I took care they didn’t get mine.’

¹¹¹ George M. Martin, *Dundee Worthies: Reminiscences, Games, Amusements* (Dundee: David Winter & Son, 1934) p. 169.

¹¹² ‘The History of the Whale, giving graphic accounts of its pursuit, escape, recovery and subsequent adventures’, p.4 (LC143/4).

¹¹³ *Dundee Advertiser* cutting, 12 December 1883 (LC143/3).

Pray, tell me, did they not chase you, dear,
With harpoons, lances, and such like gear?
'What if they followed me, don't despond,
Chasing's not catching, mother fond.

They follow'd me up, they follow'd me down,
In view of gaping folk of the town;
But I, when they thought to take sure aim,
Skedaddled, and sent them swearin' hame.''

Go never again, my son, my son,
Rest content with the laurels you've won;
'Trust me, mother, they may know about bales —
I'm blowed if they know as much about whales.

A party was sent the other day
To do for ma slick in Gowrie's Bay;
My eye! they peppered it hot on poor me,
Then found it was only a rock. He! he!' ¹¹⁴

Putting mockery of the whalers into the mouth of the whale simultaneously assigned motive to the animal and exempted the poet from accusations of being disparaging towards the sailors. This poem – unlike others from Dundee – does raise the question of whether the whaling industry was cruel, but does not pursue this line, and in general there was scant sympathy for the creature from within Dundee itself. The growing awareness of animal rights in the later nineteenth century is expressed by correspondents

¹¹⁴ 'The Whale Interviewed by his Mother on his Exploits in the River Tay', *Courier*, 27 December 1883, p.3.

like A. Stephenson, looking on from Edinburgh, who despaired of the futility of the whale's journey 'from the frigid zone to be gashed and gored with lances for the Philistines of Dundee!'¹¹⁵ To add to the indignity for Dundee's whalers, the eventual capture of the whale – which by this point was weak and injured - only occurred after it escaped from the Tay and made for the north. It was harpooned and dragged into Stonehaven Harbour late on 9th January 1884, after which its body was brought back to Dundee in preparation for dissection and embalming. By this point, the Tay Whale's fame had been cemented in the local area and further afield. Special trains were laid on from Arbroath, Forfar, Kirriemuir and Perth so people could see the spectacle before its skeleton was taken on a tour of Britain. Upon its return to Dundee, the skeleton was returned to the Albert Institute, where it still resides. A.C. Lamb showed a particular interest in the affairs of the Tay Whale, and he made a point of collecting many of the newspaper poems, articles, booklets and ephemera generated at the time. One of the poems in his collection, 'The Tale of the Whale,' signed only as 'A.', (originally published in the *People's Journal*), was dedicated to the poet Thomas Hood.

The Tale of the Whale

After Tom Hood.

I fain would blubber for the whale
That at us lately tossed his tail
 In recognition sportive;
And harp awhile on the harpoon
Whose cruel buffets rendered soon
 His strongest blows abortive.

The poem's appeal hinged on its puns, perfectly pitched to elicit groans of recognition: the whale was finally 'brought in chains before the 'Law'' to be 'embalmed like him of

¹¹⁵ Letter to the *Scotsman*, January 1884 (LC143/3).

Waterloo/ A very bony party.’ One verse refers to theories of evolution and natural selection:

Tis told that he was once a bear
Four legged and covered all with hair
With teeth in great perfection;
But where that hyperborean still
Whose brewings churn out whales at will
By natural selection?¹¹⁶

The question of evolution became a thread running through much of the comic newspaper poetry about the whale after the display of its body, which was received simultaneously as grotesque spectacle and as scientific education. The dissection by Aberdeen’s Professor Struthers and his accompanying lecture generated a great deal of discussion about the concept of evolution as a process and by extension the connections of humanity and animal life. Concluding an article on the whale’s anatomy which touched on how its muscles suggested a four-limbed ancestor, the *People’s Journal* reported:

[...][T]he good folks of Dundee have at present an opportunity not merely of seeing a whale which is a somewhat rare one on our coasts, but of seeing a creature which is at all times, and of whatever variety, well worth contemplating as full of instruction. The day is not long past when rudimentary structures such as those which have been above alluded to were regarded unintelligently as mere curiosities or freaks of nature. But since the late Mr Darwin put forward his hypothesis, such structures have been looked on as having received their explanation and as furnishing strong evidence in support of the views of that illustrious observer and thinker.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ *People’s Journal* cutting, 12 February 1884 (LC143/3).

¹¹⁷ ‘The Whale’, *People’s Journal*, 19th January 1884, p. 3.

The theory of evolution is frequently touched on in the poetry, but generally in surreal or ridiculing terms which suggest a discomfort with the idea, either in general or of being specifically related to this whale. In the *Wizard of the North* Bob Johnston (a fictional character created for the purposes of the magazine, in the same vein as and probably inspired by the success of the *People's Journal's* hugely popular tailor character Tammas Bodkin) gave a 'scientific' lecture on the whale, and the magazine mocked Struthers' discussion of whales' quadruped origins. The whale, in popular imagination, was considered very much a fish. Songs describe 'fishing for the whale,' and hunting for the 'whale fish'. Although Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection* had been published decades previously, Callum Brown suggests evolutionary theory did not significantly begin to affect popular opinion in Scotland until almost the end of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁸ Thus, this may have been one of the first times in which the people of Dundee were confronted with these theories up close, and the physical evidence of the whale's sparse hair and skeletal structure linking it to quadrupeds may have forced people to engage more deeply and critically with the actual meanings of theories of evolution. The default response for many, at least among the poets, seems to have been to laugh their way out of any doubt. Tammas Bodkin wrote a long 'fragmentary poem' on the Tay Whale which was set entirely in the realm of fantasy – the first fragment, published on February 2nd 1884, sets up the narrative of a committee of sea creatures, real and mythical, setting out to get revenge on whalers:

In the calm afterglow of an Arctic day
The whales held a council in Disco Bay,
A scheme to devise whereby to withstand
All hostile raids into Blubberland;
For they had been hunted for many years
By roving flotillas of Buccaneers,

¹¹⁸ Callum Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730* (London: Methuen & Co., 1987), p. 173.

Who every summertide sallied forth
Into the depths of the Frozen North,
To murder and pillage – a ruthless band –
In the icy empire of Blubberland;
And many a huge Cetacean they
Did in their wanton cruelty slay.¹¹⁹

His second fragment, published on February 9th, incorporates satirical visions of evolution into the narrative, introducing a theory of people abandoning the land and evolving into whales in the sea, evolving blowholes and flippers.

Our Dunderheads too, and our Dorsal Humps
May be simply accretions evolved from the Mumps.
So the scientists say; but we venture to mention
That such statements are pure idiotic invention;
For whales we were made by the Mighty Adapter,
And whales we'll remain to the end of the chapter.¹²⁰

Verse was not a regular feature of the Tammias Bodkin columns, written by the *People's Journal* editor W. D. Latto, which held a comic mirror up to Dundee's current events through the eponymous tailor character and his wife Tibbie. This poem was very much in keeping with the general tone of whale verse, as well as with the usual tone of the columns, though he usually wrote in Scots: the high poetic English used is part of the humour, and is mixed with terms which show that familiarity with, and often accompanying mistrust of, scientific language could be expected from readers. Unlike most of the poems published about the whale, this is being written from an already fictionalised version of Dundee, which allows for an extra level of irreverent surrealism on top of that which was already attached to the topic. Bodkin, a very popular character

¹¹⁹ 'The Whale: A Fragmentary Poem by Tammias Bodkin', *People's Journal*, 2 February 1884, p. 4.

¹²⁰ 'The Whale: A Fragmentary Poem by Tammias Bodkin', *People's Journal*, 9 February 1884, p. 4.

with readers of the *People's Journal*, inspired two poems in response to his verse on the whale. Emily Sutherland of Crieff was full of praise:

But sin ye are married, ask Tib to excuse
My bauldness in statin' sae freely my views.
Just tell her 'tis a' through pure admiration
O the great muckle whale an' yer splendid narration.¹²¹

Another response, by 'a Highland bard,' offered an alternative story:

Nae whale, O Bodkin, ere did dive
In maritime dominion,
But well deserved to love an' thrive,
Wha set thy lyre a-singin';
To thee I'll dedicate my mind,
Although our views are no entwined,
For faith! it's my opinion,
That whale had left the frozen north
To thunder forth oor naval worth.

He bade the winter realm adieu,
Where biting breezes blaw;
He left behind the Arctic crew,
And dived into the thaw.
A jolly sailor o' the main
Was guiding on wi' spur an' rein.
Like John o' Arnha',
Until upo' the Greenlan' shore,

¹²¹ 'To Tammas Bodkin', *People's Journal*, 16 February 1884, p.5.

The pilot swore he'd steer no more.

Then southward thro' the Boreal sea
 He plew'd the waves o' green,
Wi John o' Groat's upo' the lee,
 An' roon' by Aberdeen,
An gained the teeming firth o' Tay
In time to haud his Hogmanay,
 Wi' spear an' hunter keen.
But oh, alas! I needna tell
What more befell the kingly whale.¹²²

The reference to John o' Arnha is typical for nineteenth-century Dundee poetry and broadsides. John was the hero of a popular comic poem by George Beattie based on a real Montrose man, John Finlay, who told extraordinary tales. 'John o' Arnha' was first published in the *Montrose Review* in 1815, and subsequently in many other formats, while the name John o' Arnha became a shorthand for one who claims to have done impossible things. One section of the poem, the one referenced here, tells of John joining a whaling voyage on a whim, harnessing a whale and riding it back to Peterhead. Poems dedicated to Tammas Bodkin were very popular within the *People's Journal* poetry community, so these responses are not atypical. It is indicative of the popularity of Bodkin, and the *Journal* in general, that a sub-thread of poetry responding to him developed alongside the many other whale poems being written.

The *Dundee Advertiser* reported at the time that "Have you seen the whale?" was a question on everyone's lips, and to answer 'no' was to "put oneself in the position of a person justly entitled to universal and unbounded pity."¹²³ *The Wizard of the North* mocked the constant conversational focus:

¹²² 'To Correspondents', *People's Journal*, 24 February 1884, p. 5.

¹²³ *Dundee Advertiser* cutting (LC143/3).

Have you seen the whale?
Before that all-engrossing theme
All other topics seem to fail ;
Each mother's son doth kindly scream –
 'Say, prithe, have you seen the whale?'

Why, as you trot along the street
 The trite remark your ears assail;
The query comes from those you meet –
 'Ho, chappie, have you seen the whale?'

The poem gives a humorous overview of different social groups in Dundee, all of whom have become swept up in 'whale fever' –

The whale had heard of M—phy's luck,
 Like him, he drank no grog or ale (?);
Yet, unlike Pat, the brute got stuck –
 Good Templars! 'Have you seen the whale?'

The monster came in quest of knowledge
 To raise him in the social scale;
He's in Professor Wood's oil college –
 Professors! 'Have you seen the whale?'

[...]

His friends may now sing a Te deum
 For soon the subject will be stale;
His frame will hang in the museum,

Stop asking ‘have you seen the whale?’¹²⁴

The magazine combined its social satire – a main selling point for the *Wizard* – with the popular whale puns which were clearly still attracting readers, thus simultaneously indulging in and positioning itself above the public fervour. The invitation to view the whale is also taken as the base point for humour in the only surviving broadside about the incident, ‘Come and see the Whale,’ alternately titled ‘The Dundee Whale.’ Although the broadside is not dated, it makes mention that ‘a whale was caught the other day’, and due to the specific setting of the action, it is likely it was circulated and performed during the period when the dead whale was available for view in Dundee. The crowds gathering in the city would have provided a substantial ready-made audience for the broadside singer and seller, and made for an excellent opportunity for them to play up to excited crowds and sell their latest work as a souvenir of the Famous Tay Whale. The song is credited to Tom Glen of Dundee, some of whose other works will be discussed in the following chapter. Several other broadsides were published under this name, and it is made clear from the context that he was also a performer.

I just arrived in town last night,
And being a stranger here;
That people should get onto me
I thought was something queer.
For while walking down the street to-day,
With fright I turned pale;
When I heard some little boys shout out
Come on and see the whale.

Spoken – Yes, they were standing staring at me and shouting out at the top of their voices.

¹²⁴ ‘Have You Seen The Whale?’, *Wizard of the North* (February 1884), p.9.

Chorus.

Come and see the whale, boys,
Come and see the whale;
He measures more than forty feet
From the head down to the tail;
And he is one of the queerest fish,
That ever you did see;
The more they shouted out the whale,
The more I thought 'twas me.

I turned and ran, the boys ran too,
But I never stopped to see,
In what direction they had run,
For I thought 'twas after me.
Til I rushed into a bobby's arms
And to him I told my tale;
How all the little boys in turn
Had took me for a whale.

Spoken – Took you for a whale says he, yes says I, for as I was coming down the street just now they gathered round me and commenced shouting.

The bobby he began to laugh
And rub his hands with glee;
Then said you've made a mistake my friend,
The joke now can't you see;
A whale was caught the other day,
And is now down there on view.
The boys were speaking of the fish,

They weren't meaning you.

Spoken – There I was instead of the boys taking me for a whale I'd been making a cod of myself; just then a cabby shouted out, going down to see the whale sir, take you down for a tanner, dont mind if I do says I, so down I goes to see the cause of all my misery. And a whapper he was too, no wonder the boys were shouting.

Though the song hinges on the trope of a stranger arriving in a city, Glen has not used it as an opportunity to mock any particular place or group of people, which is often the case in such songs. This is particularly true of those which feature a Gaelic speaker coming into a Scottish city, such as 'Cumarachandhu' where the humour centres on the perceived strangeness of the language.¹²⁵ Because the whale was news not only in Dundee but in the adjacent towns and countryside, strangers were arriving in town on special trains arranged for the event, and may well have had this song performed to them. In any case, the character's place of origin is not important to the narrative, and their confusion echoes the general response of Dundee towards the whale. There are no accounts of Glen's performance, but given the music hall style, it is possible he made a joke of his own large size. Taken in the context of the evolutionary debates happening in other responses to events, there is another layer of humour in a man being mistaken for a whale, alongside the obvious slapstick.

The spoken interjections between verses are reminiscent both of the traditional ballad sellers' patter, often more important than the sheet itself in selling copies, and the pun-laden music hall interludes which developed from this school of performance.¹²⁶ A skilled street singer could have adapted their act depending on the daily developments of the story they reference, the interests of their audience, and any new jokes which

¹²⁵ Cumarachandhu (LC421/41) probably originates with the Poet's Box in Glasgow, as although there were Gaelic speaking communities from Highland Scotland in Dundee, the Irish community was larger and more of a focus for mockery and scapegoating. Fife is a common source of 'country bumpkin' characters in Dundee broadsides.

¹²⁶ For example, see J.S. Bratton, *The Popular Victorian Ballad* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 134-5.

occurred to them at the time. This sort of ad-libbing could potentially keep an audience returning to see them time and time again. While Glen's broadside tells a self-contained story, its humour is mainly contextual, and the broadside, with its switch between spoken and sung parts, is clearly a representation of performance. Like the Tay Bridge broadsides, it was written in response to a situation which demanded attention, but unlike them, it seems unlikely that Glen would have intended this to stay in currency once the furore surrounding the whale had died down.

William McGonagall was, by this time, a well-known figure at any Dundee event. He is noted as having made good use of the situation to sell copies of his poem 'The Famous Tay Whale' in broadside form to the crowds at its dissection.¹²⁷

'Twas in the month of December, and in the year 1883,
That a monster whale came to Dundee,
Resolved for a few days to sport and play,
And devour the small fishes in the silvery Tay.

So the monster whale did sport and play
Among the innocent little fishes in the beautiful Tay,
Until he was seen by some men one day,
And they resolved to catch him without delay.

When it came to be known a whale was seen in the Tay,
Some men began to talk and to say,
We must try and catch this monster of a whale,
So come on, brave boys, and never say fail.

Then the people together in crowds did run,
Resolved to capture the whale and to have some fun!

¹²⁷ *Dundee Advertiser* cutting (LC143/3).

So small boats were launched on the silvery Tay,
While the monster of the deep did sport and play.

Oh! it was a most fearful and beautiful sight,
To see it lashing the water with its tail all its might,
And making the water ascend like a shower of hail,
With one lash of its ugly and mighty tail.

Then the water did descend on the men in the boats,
Which wet their trousers and also their coats;
But it only made them the more determined to catch the whale,
But the whale shook at them his tail.

Then the whale began to puff and to blow,
While the men and the boats after him did go,
Armed well with harpoons for the fray,
Which they fired at him without dismay.

And they laughed and grinned just like wild baboons,
While they fired at him their sharp harpoons:
But when struck with the harpoons he dived below,
Which filled his pursuers' hearts with woe.

Because they guessed they had lost a prize,
Which caused the tears to well up in their eyes;
And in that their anticipations were only right,
Because he sped on to Stonehaven with all his might.

And was first seen by the crew of a Gourdon fishing boat
Which they thought was a big coble upturned afloat;

But when they drew near they saw it was a whale,
So they resolved to tow it ashore without fail.

So they got a rope from each boat tied round his tail,
And landed their burden at Stonehaven without fail;
And when the people saw it their voices they did raise,
Declaring that the brave fishermen deserved great praise.

And my opinion is that God sent the whale in time of need,
No matter what other people may think or what is their creed;
I know fishermen in general are often very poor,
And God in His goodness sent it to drive poverty from their door.

So Mr John Wood has bought it for two hundred and twenty-six pound,
And has brought it to Dundee all safe and all sound;
Which measures 40 feet in length from the snout to the tail,
So I advise the people far and near to see it without fail.

Then hurrah! for the mighty monster whale,
Which has got 17 feet 4 inches from tip to tip of a tail!
Which can be seen for a sixpence or a shilling,
That is to say, if the people all are willing.¹²⁸

Like most broadside verse, McGonagall's work does not assume his potential audience to have any prior knowledge of events and covers all the key facts of the story, including details like dates and the size of the whale. He also undoubtedly wrote with performance in mind. McGonagall occupies an ambiguous place in terms of where he fits on the folk song-poetry scale, as his work frequently uses elements from both ends of this spectrum.

¹²⁸ William McGonagall, *Collected Poems* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), pp. 44-6.

Whether or not he wrote intentionally as a comic poet is a moot point, but contemporary audiences definitely received his work as such – unsurprisingly, given the other bad poets they enjoyed in the newspaper columns. The humour is not in the words themselves, as this may be the only thing written about the Tay Whale not to contain a single pun, but in the style and the way they fit together. McGonagall combines the storytelling of the broadside with the language of the newspaper poet, and fails at both: potentially to amuse an audience which he knew was highly familiar with both. In the context of this particular poem, he would certainly have been aware that this was an event people were already laughing about when he went to perform it.

It is important to remember these responses do not tell us the full range of public opinion: anyone inspired to write a heartfelt poem on behalf of either the whale or Darwin's theories would likely have thought better of sending it into a Dundee newspaper. They do illustrate the ways in which nineteenth-century Dundee found things funny. The situational humour of a whale out of its normal habitat escaping capture in a major whaling port is built upon through a series of puns, fantastical elaborations, and slapstick scenes. Unlike the poetry responding to the Tay Bridge, the major difference between broadside and newspaper verse here is in style, rather than purpose. The newspaper poets use subtler puns (sometimes), and mark their well-read status with nods to more famous writers, but both sets of verse are equally dependent on their context for the main thrust of their humour.

Conclusion

There were overlaps between the people who read and wrote newspaper poetry and those who wrote, bought and sang broadsides: they were not two separate worlds. Broadside sellers advertised in newspapers. It is very hard to ascertain whether there was much overlap between authors as so many works, particularly broadsides, are anonymous. It is, though, reasonable to assume a degree of overlap in audiences, who had different expectations from each, and would have known what they wanted from a particular work. The skills required of a good broadside writer or performer were very

different to those required of a successful newspaper poet: newspaper poets had to demonstrate a high level of familiarity not only with the events they wrote of, but with poetical forms and the literary scene, in order to meet the editors' standards. Broadside writers did not have the same restrictions, but this does not make them less of an art to compose. Writing for memorisation and performance has its own challenges. The two forms fulfilled very different needs for their audiences in the aftermath of the Tay Bridge Disaster: broadsides told the story, and provided an opportunity for people to vocalise their feelings through song. The newspaper poetry responding to the bridge is somewhat confused in its imagery, actively working through shock, and tends towards imbuing things like storms, trains and rivers with intention and personality in a way which jars with the progressive scientific language surrounding its construction. Later poems dealing with the bridge, such as George Colburn's 1891 'The Tay Bridge', use these themes in a more ordered way, and, having had time to consider the context of events, can purposefully contrast them with the ideals towards which the bridge was built. Colburn places the Tay Bridge as one phase in Dundee's wider history:

I stood upon the Scottish 'Bridge of Sighs' –
That wondrous product of a great man's dream;
I saw its piers and stately girders rise
In airy grandeur from the mighty stream
That pour its dark and murky waves between
Banks famous in the warlike days of yore,
Where now the towers of trade and learning gleam;
And o'er the broad expanse this bridge did soar,
Like some gigantic chain, linking shore to shore.¹²⁹

Broadside poets, on the other hand, are still writing from a world where these things can and do happen – in the window of the Poet's Box broadside shops, local

¹²⁹ Herbert & Jackson, p. 14. Colburn, a grocer by trade, originally published this poem in his 1891 collection *Poems on Mankind and Nature*.

humour mingled with shipwrecks and ancient battles. Thus, the whys and hows of the disaster are not a question they need to address, the important thing is to acknowledge that it happened, and tell the story. Through repetition, the people who were lost will be remembered, this disaster will be honoured in being sung about. The Tay Whale poetry also reflects a disruption of Dundee's relationship with the natural world, though in a different way. While responses were light hearted, and there was a great deal of fascination among the general public, there is definitely an undercurrent of resentment towards this one's refusal to conform to the contemporary idea of whale as prey animal. Later, at the public dissection of the creature, Struthers reminded people of evolutionary theories which displaced humanity from the centre of an ordered creation, and people responded again by mocking the ideas. These two major events affecting Dundee's poetry in the 1880s demonstrate the different, yet overlapping ways in which writing communities worked towards reconciling their experiences with a wider worldview which itself was in flux due to technological advancement and scientific discovery. The Tay was the scene of two of the events which most epitomised the struggle of contemporary communities to place themselves in the world. Its already liminal status as constantly-changing tidal river, and as a main boundary between Dundee and the rest of the world, provided a fertile setting for the poetry through which the people of the city worked through the problems these events provided.

Chapter 2: Street Song and the Poet's Box

The broadside street song tradition, a way of distributing songs which was at one point popular across much of Europe, traditionally relied on individual street sellers. Ballad sellers would buy song sheets from printers and sell them, using 'patter' and performance to interact with and entice their audience. There was little restriction as to what could be printed on a song sheet, and traditional ballads, verse or prose on current events, particularly crime, political statements, and satire were all popular topics in Britain and Ireland. The nature of song sheets and their means of distribution meant that songs moved easily between places, following people as they moved for work or other reasons, and it was common for songs to be adapted to incorporate local details to reflect the world of the people who sang them. The later nineteenth century saw a change in the ways in which people encountered broadside songs, both in terms of purchase and performance. Generally speaking, Britain's songsheet trade began to decline, particularly in the wake of the proliferation of affordable newspapers and magazines.¹ Despite this overall pattern, the cultural importance of broadsides and song sheets in Scotland in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth is evident from the continued performance of many such songs.²

In this chapter, my focus turns from the Tay, ever-present but experienced mainly as a concept, to the public spaces within the city in which poetry and song were performed as part of an oral tradition. Over the century, this culture tends to move indoors, with street performances replaced by the shop and the music hall. In Dundee, song sellers on the street were largely replaced by small shops which used the name 'Poet's Box' and both printed and sold songsheets from the premises. This roughly coincided with the beginnings of a shift in performance context, from singing on the

¹ *Street Literature of the Long Nineteenth Century*, p. 27-8.

² Isobel Corfe's chapter 'Sensation and Song: Street Ballad Consumption in Nineteenth-Century England' (*Media and Print Culture Consumption in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 131-145) makes a parallel argument for the continued function of broadsides as songs rather than texts in late nineteenth-century England.

street itself to performances in venues such as music halls. The particular mix of surviving broadsides from Victorian Dundee illustrate the diversity of cultural influences active in the city, while the overlap in material shared between Dundee, Glasgow and Aberdeenshire also strengthens the picture of verse and song as a highly mobile form. A more detailed look at the links between broadside songs and music hall entertainment also highlights a symbiotic relationship between the two, rather than a straightforward progression from one to the other, and sheds light on the origins of aspects of Scottish popular culture which are still influential today. Continuing the theme raised in the previous chapter that the broadside form was particularly linked to the folk tradition in social function as well as content, I argue here that the development of the Poet's Box shops in Dundee represents a significant adaptation of traditional song culture in response to new social contexts and print technologies. I also suggest that later nineteenth-century broadside and performance culture has had significant influence on contemporary Scottish folk repertoires.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, most people in Scotland who bought broadsides would have done so from itinerant street vendors. In *Hawkie: Autobiography of a Gangrel*, the eponymous Glasgow ballad seller, whose real name was William Cameron, describes the process of getting books from printers and 'crying' them.³ Generally, he would approach the printers and ask for material, but as his reputation grew, sometimes a printer would seek him out and ask him to sell their latest work. Hawkie also wrote several of his own pieces. The patter used to hook in the public and intrigue them was more important to the success of a street seller than the quality or content of a broadside, and often the two were not particularly linked. Hawkie recalled 'I had known Wattie and Meg all my life since infancy, but had no idea how to patter it.' One of the tricks Hawkie employed was 'straw selling,' where he would announce 'I daurna' either name the book, nor sell the book, but I will sell ony o' ye a *straw*, an' gie

³ John Strathesk, ed. *Hawkie: The Autobiography of a Gangrel* (Glasgow, David Robertson & Co, 1888) <https://www.gla.ac.uk/0t4/~dumfries/files/layer2/glasgow_broadside_ballads/hawkie.htm> [Accessed 13 April 2018].

ye the book into the bargain.⁴ This would indeed be a loophole for selling anything of questionable decency, but also potentially an excellent way to get rid of old news without giving anyone the time to examine it too closely. The importance of patter alongside a song, in the form of asides to the audience, or a spoken meta-narrative to the sung one, would later become an integral part of the success of many music hall acts, and was very likely influenced by the older techniques of street sellers. Several broadsides, such as ‘Come and See the Whale,’ also included printed patter as part of songs.

The shift from street sellers to dedicated song shops, which appears to have been a phenomenon peculiar to industrial Scottish and Irish cities, is a particular focus for this chapter. A song shop trading under the name ‘Poet’s Box’ appeared at Castle Court, Belfast, in the mid-1840s, as evidenced by the name appearing on broadsides held in the Bodleian Library collection.⁵ Other shops by this name later became popular in Glasgow and Dundee. Singers and hawkers were certainly still present on the streets in the later decades of the nineteenth century, but the volume and variety of song sheets available in these shops was greater than what could be carried by any individual, and they seem to have drawn customers accordingly, stressing choice, variety and novelty, and possibly contributing to a growing conception of musical taste as an individual, personal trait as each customer was encouraged to curate their own repertoire. This was not a completely new factor in repertoire construction. Individual influence and creativity have been often overlooked in accounts of folk song transmission in a historic context, in favour of an image of passive reception of tradition. This is generally a classed assumption, in which ‘the folk’ operate almost as an amorphous mass, while ‘high art’ is created by named, and upper class, individuals. Personal choice in song learning has always been a factor in people’s repertoires. Bruno Nettl stresses the role of individual taste and circumstances working in conjunction with collective and cultural ones in forming

⁴ Strathesk, Chapter XII <

https://www.gla.ac.uk/0t4/~dumfries/files/layer2/glasgow_broadside_ballads/chapter_13.htm> (n.p.)

⁵ E.g. ‘‘Skin the Goat’s’ Letter’, c.1846-1852 (Harding B 26(606), Bodleian Libraries: *Broadside Ballads Online*, <<http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/edition/4012>> [Accessed 13 April 2018]).

repertoires, and his warning against over-privileging oral transmission when considering the learning of folk song is also relevant to the present discussion.⁶

The Poet's Box shops, as will be shown below, were not affiliated with one another. While they shared many characteristics, and had no qualms about selling each other's broadsides, they were run independently according to the judgement of the owner, reacting to the place and community in which they existed. Their collections, of course, showed influences from elsewhere: music hall songs from popular London performers were sold as broadsides, as were plenty of American songs. The development of a distinctively urban Scots song culture in which contemporary working lives, recreation and urban landscapes are represented, often with humour, is also in evidence. Prior to the arrival of music halls proper in Dundee, theatrical entertainments of varying type and quality were provided by travelling performers at seasonal fairs, and in the 'penny gaffs' which were popular in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷ The development of Poet's Box broadside shops came at around the same time as the development of the music halls and their particularly audience-inclusive performance style, and there is evidence of a symbiotic relationship between broadside and music hall, with broadsides promoting songs and performers and music hall acts inspiring customers to buy their own versions of songs from the shops. Broadside versions of music hall songs were also sold without their writers' or performers' permission.

A specifically Scottish music hall tradition has been identified by historians of the theatre, through works such as Alasdair Cameron and Adrienne Scullion's 1996 *Scottish Popular Theatre and Entertainment*, and Paul Maloney's 2003 *Scotland and the music hall, 1850-1914*.⁸ These studies do not explicitly address the function of broadsides in relation to performance. Maloney does note that the Saltmarket in

⁶ Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one issues and concepts* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005), p. 292-3.

⁷ These traditions are described in more detail by Martin Horan, *The King's, Gods, and Commoners: A History of Dundee's Theatre* (Dundee: Walton Servies, 2001), and Ian McCraw, *The Fairs of Dundee* (Dundee: Abertay Historical Society, 1994).

⁸ Alasdair Cameron and Adrienne Scullion, eds, *Scottish Popular Theatre and Entertainment* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Library, 1996); Paul Maloney, *Scotland and the music hall, 1850-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003)

Glasgow, where music halls were first established, was traditionally an entertainment quarter, though crucially this entertainment often took the form of broadsides and Poet's Box shops.⁹ Their observations are useful when considering the Poet's Box phenomenon, and are reinforced by the additional evidence which song sheets and advertising provide. Cameron and Scullion's observations about music hall culture as a way of negotiating new urban life patterns and social dynamics, as well as their highlighting of Irish influence not only on the songs themselves but on performance and transmission style, are particularly interesting when considered alongside the Poet's Box material and its social and historical context.¹⁰ Dundee, like Glasgow, was home to a large number of Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century, and a very considerable influence from Irish culture is evident in Dundee's song history. While there were certainly conflicts between Protestant and Catholic Irish immigrants into Dundee, some of which are discussed below, they did not reach the intensity of those in the south-west of Scotland, perhaps because the political impact of the Orange movement in Dundee was negligible.¹¹

Scholarship on Scottish music hall has primarily focused on Glasgow.¹² While there are many similarities in form and repertoire between Glasgow and Dundee's music halls, and the two cities clearly benefited from an ongoing exchange of songs between their Poet's Box shops, Dundee was also influenced by a distinct music hall tradition stemming from Aberdeen and the north-east. Aberdeenshire was home to a set of songwriters and performers whose material developed from the bothy songs sung by farm workers. These were songs in Scots about the realities of farm life, often with jocular references to certain farms or farmers which would only be known to the

⁹ Maloney, p. 27.

¹⁰ Alasdair Cameron and Adrienne Scullion, 'W.F. Frame and the Scottish Popular Theatre Tradition,' in *Scottish Popular Theatre and Entertainment*, ed. by Cameron and Scullion, p. 39-62.

¹¹ Richard B. McCready, 'St Patrick's Day in Dundee c.1850-1900: A Contested Irish Institution in a Scottish Context', in *Ireland and Scotland in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Frank Ferguson and James McConnell (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009) p.134-146 (p.144)

¹² While Maloney outlines the development of music halls as venues in Aberdeen, his analysis of performance communities and material is Glasgow-focused.

community in which the song was composed.¹³ While Glasgow music hall looked to Highland culture such as kilts and tartan for its Scottish imagery, Aberdeen performers often wore versions of the traditional farm worker's outfit, perhaps most distinctively the nicky tams (ties below the knee, said to be to stop mice running up trouser legs when working in barns). The development of these music hall connections did not stop less formal domestic performances, and songs from these performers made their way into the popular repertoire. This aspect of song culture was also influential in Dundee. Bothies were, if anything, more common as a living situation for farm workers in Angus than in Aberdeenshire. The bothy song tradition was definitely active in Dundee, where these workers came to celebrate at fair days between feeing terms. The influence of bothy songs in the Dundee Poet's Box is documented in the early twentieth century, by which point the music hall 'cornkister' style was well established, though several older songs of farm life also appeared in broadside form. Music hall, like other popular verse forms from this period, has often been misunderstood or dismissed, and understanding local resonances is an important step towards reconstructing the meaning of this genre.

Street singing in Dundee

For many, street singing as a way of making a living appears to have been a last resort, often combined with hawking various cheap goods, begging, or theft. In *Vagabond Ballads*, Ford recalls a 'decrepit old man' who wandered the Perth Road in the 1860s or 70s, singing 'The Bonny Hoose O Airlie,' the only song he seemed to know.¹⁴ William Mullen, a 'middle aged' hawker, street singer and beggar, was convicted of stealing a jacket while drunk in 1893.¹⁵ In 1896, pedlar George Lloyd, his wife, and his daughter Jane were arrested and charged with singing for alms on a Sunday afternoon, after a police constable heard them and followed them into a pend. This was 'almost the first'

¹³ For example, songs like *The Barnyards of Delgaty*, generally taken now to be about a mean farmer with poor horses, was a joke based on the farm's reputation for having particularly good horses in the late nineteenth century. (Ian Olson, 'Bothy Ballads and Song', in John Beech, Owen Hand, Mark Mulhern and Jeremy Weston (eds), *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology* Vol. X, (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), 322-359 (p. 340.))

¹⁴ Ford, *Vagabond Ballads*, p.298-9.

¹⁵ 'Singer, Beggar and Thief', *Evening Telegraph*, 27 January 1893, p.2.

case of arrest for Sunday singing in Dundee for several years, according to the *Dundee Telegraph*. George's defence was that his former job as a coal miner had left him nearly blind, and this was his only means of supporting the family. The majority of the money in their possession was in coppers. George held a pedlar's certificate, but this was removed from him in punishment for his crime, and – although the couple were said to be kind to their children - young Jane was detained and sent to Dundee Industrial School until the age of sixteen.¹⁶ Desperate people continued to turn to street singing into the early twentieth century. In 1909 the *Courier* reported on the drowning of John Lonie in Cupar, a street singer and pedlar who had been refused an old age pension and chose death over the poorhouse.¹⁷ Later that year, 'broken-hearted' Ann Stewart or Cackron from Montrose was arrested for stealing from a tinsmith's shop in the Hawkhill. Since her husband left her, she had supported herself singing and selling laces. The judge told her she would be more comfortable in jail.¹⁸ There were doubtless many such low-status street singers who did not come to the attention of the courts, and are thus lost to the historical record.

Others, such as Hugh Lennox, better known as Blind Hughie, made a living by street singing. By developing a repertoire and performance style which resonated with their audience, singers could gain a good deal of respect.¹⁹ The role of musician or singer was, in practical terms, one of few available to blind people, and the blind street performer was a familiar figure in nineteenth-century cities. They were not always treated with the respect afforded Hughie. In London, Henry Mayhew defined two categories of street singers, 'the skilful and the blind,' and the lack of sympathy given to George Lloyd above is telling.²⁰ Hughie performed on busy street corners, particularly Reform Street, and travelled beyond Dundee to perform in Angus towns including

¹⁶ 'Sunday Street Singing in Dundee', *Evening Telegraph*, 10 February 1896, p.2.

¹⁷ 'Rather go to grave than poorhouse', *Dundee Courier*, 7 January 1909, p.5.

¹⁸ 'Broken hearted Montrose woman steals tinware in Dundee', *Evening Telegraph*, 6 October 1909, p.2.

¹⁹ Nigel Gatherer also reports his name as possibly being Hugh M Gowans, though does not give a source for this. (Gatherer, p. 113).

²⁰ Henry Mayhew, 'Labour and the Poor,' letter LV to the *Morning Chronicle*, 6 June 1850 (<<http://www.victorianlondon.org/mayhew/mayhew55.htm>> [Accessed 17 April 2018]).

Arbroath and Montrose. Prior to his wife's death, he lived with her in Kirriemuir, but subsequently took residence in one of the 'common lodging houses' in Dundee.²¹ His performances were often comic, and in Scots. His voice is described alternately as 'husky, rough, and cracked' and 'clear and strong.'²² The varying commemorations of him perhaps depend on the reasons for invoking his memory, or perhaps simply reflecting changes with age and a long lifetime of singing. An illustration by 'JFP' shows him neatly dressed, cane hanging in the crook of his arm as he sings, although his hat in this picture is not the Kilmarnock bonnet he is often described as wearing.

George Martin's 1934 description of Hughie in *Dundee Worthies* casts him in the role of 'poor but honest' respectability, illustrating this with an incident where he recognised by the feel of the coin that a woman had given him two shillings instead of a penny, and called her back to return it. Although she did not have a penny, the watching crowd were so touched by the singer's honesty that he received 'a liberal shower of coppers.'²³ His work as a street singer, according to Martin, is acceptable because he is sober, honest and tidy, and his poverty is presented as being through no fault of his own. This was not always the case, as some of the news reports quoted above show. Hughie was genuinely popular with Dundee audiences. After his death in 1889, a broadside with no assigned tune was sold in the Poet's Box, celebrating his life and repertoire:

Wha hasna heard tell o Blind Hughie the singer?
The last wandering minstrel o Scottish sang-lore;
I'm sure in some mem'ries his ootlines still linger,
For worthy was Hughie o' fouk to adore.
His lang, strappin' figure was crooned wi' a bannet,
A real Kilmarnock o' weatherproof blue,
That, like a corona encircling a planet,
Hung wi' its red toorie ahint to the view.

²¹ Martin, *Worthies*, p. 6.

²² Gatherer p.113; Martin, p. 6.

²³ Martin, p.6.

His bonnie broo bare to the sun and the weather,
Surmounted in beauty his life-darkened een;
His coothie-like face, wi the hue o' hairst heather,
Made ilka observer o' Hughie a freen.
His broon vocal thrapple was void o' a' happin,
His strippet sark collar hung doon in twa peaks;
His short furzy coat was the warmest o' wrappin,
Weel buttoned ower waistcoat and corduroy breeks.

His shoon, wi their soles tacket-studded and clampit,
Defied ilka leather-made fashion or mode;
But Hughie ne'er heeded sae lang as he trampit
Dry shod ower the miles o' ilk rough Scottish road.
A staff he aye carried, wi its handle-en' crookit,
To be his sole guide; hech! 'twas nae use ava;
For somehoo or ither his feelin' aye lookit,
An' guardit him weel frae a gutter or wa'.

The crook o' his staff ower his wrist-bane aye hingin,
His thoughtfu'-like face lookin doon tae the grun,
Wi mou a wee thrawn-ways Hugh startit his singin,
An' peered fu' appealingly up to the sun.
He'd sing o' the Stuarts, an' hielan devotion,
He'd sing o' the tartan, the mountains and heath,
He felt what he sang, sae, owercome wi emotion,
His hearers wad sab wi a faltering breath.

Ilk market an' fair tint the haif o' its pleasure
Gin Hughie was no in the thick o' the thrang,

Delighting the lassies wi some hinny measure,
Or firin the chiels wi a heart-grippin' sang.
The hame-ower, pathetic, their joys was be calming
Love ditties, lane courtin's, wad kittle ilk heart.
But wi 'Cam ye by Athol' he'd droon Robbie Salmon,
The eloquent gingerbread man, an' his cart.

Puir Robbie wad start a long-windit oration
(An' better than he we'll nae mair see at fairs),
Yet a' heard the finish o' Hugh's emanations,
Ere ever they'd gang tae buy gingerbread wares.
Nae mair we'll hear Hughie, wi voice ringin' cheerie,
Nae mair will he warble the soul-rousin' strain;
He sees an' sings in the hame for the weary,
An' Scotland will greet for her true-hearted wean.²⁴

Here Hughie is given the role of the last in a line of wandering minstrels, and the descriptions stress his outdoor life – alluding to a more rural setting than the streets of Dundee with references to 'hairst heather' and the 'rough Scottish road.' This is not necessarily inaccurate, as he did spend a considerable amount of time in Angus towns and countryside. The song links this itinerant lifestyle to Romantic ideas of Jacobitism by putting considerable emphasis on how the Highland landscapes, tartan, and the Stuarts are represented in his repertoire. 'Cam Ye By Athol,' the only one of Hughie's songs mentioned by name here, was written by James Hogg and is sung to a tune written for it by Neil Gow, and describes the gathering of men preparing to fight for Prince Charlie in the Rebellion of 1745. The song was popular in the 1840s, and Queen Victoria requested that popular singer John Wilson perform it for her at her visit to Taymouth Castle in 1842, demonstrating the extent to which Jacobite imagery had been

²⁴ LC421/25. At the time of Hughie's death in 1889, there were two Poet's Box shops active in Dundee.

rehabilitated into polite society as another symbol of Highland-themed romanticism.²⁵ The emphasis on these connections in the song associates Hughie with the Highlands and thus with the idea of a Scottish tradition which is dying in the wake of industrial modernity.

The broadside's image of Hughie bringing his audience to tears with the emotion in his singing contrasts with Martin's portrayal of him as a mainly comic artist. As *Dundee Worthies* was written to entertain, it is not surprising Martin stresses the amusing aspects of his memories, and Hughie more than likely knew when the audience would respond well to either comic or emotional songs. His humorous repertoire included a song 'Good News,' which was also printed in broadside form and is included in William Harvey's collection. This song is set in a fictional shop, poking fun both at advertising verse and at the role of the shopkeeper in contemporary society. The verses mainly list outlandish and ridiculous goods for sale – 'razor straps and curling stanes, Epsom Salts and wheelbarrows, wine grapes and potato graips, Mason's mells and gum flowers' – and the chorus proclaims:

There is selling, buying, cheating shops each other beating,
There is quackery completed, in the most of their views,
Among customers and jokers, teetotallers and brokers,
From gingerbread nuts to pokers, I read good news.²⁶

In comparison to the image of Hughie as a representative of the old Scottish ways portrayed in his commemorative broadside, his performance of this song indicates that he was also keeping abreast of popular song culture and including items in his repertoire which people could identify with in terms of their immediate daily lives. This style of humorous take on everyday Scottish life also formed a key part of many popular music hall acts.

²⁵ Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, *Memorial of the Royal Progress in Scotland* (Edinburgh: A&C Black, 1843), p. 325-6.

²⁶ William Harvey Collection, Dundee Central Library Sp.Coll., B303.

Hughie's life and legacy has parallels with the later street singer and accordionist Martha Wallace (1875 or 6 - 1962), known as Blind Mattie, whose career as a street singer ran from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Mattie became extremely well known and liked by Dundonians - she was, in her later life, invited to perform at the Caird Hall, and a public subscription was raised to buy her a new accordion when her existing one was damaged in an accident. Mattie lived with Maggie Nicol, a friend or partner, for most of their lives, eventually retiring to a care home together when Maggie also became blind. After her death, Stewart Brown of the Dundee band Lowland Folk composed a song which, like the broadside about Hughie, celebrates the street singer as hardy in the face of a hostile outdoor landscape – though Mattie's is urban, an old Dundee of 'markets and fairs, and roond the back stairs' which was then being reshaped through the construction of high rise flats and new housing developments:

Squeeze the old box an' rattle the can
Never mindin' the wind or the rain
Though the nights are drawin' in
An' the blood's gettin' thin
It's time to be singin' again.²⁷

Mattie's repertoire included 'Dark Lochnagar,' (an example of poetry, in this case by Byron, being adopted into a folksong repertoire), 'The Old Rustic Bridge by the Mill,' 'Count Your Blessings,' and 'Hame o' Mine.' Her signature song was 'My Ain Folk,' a sentimental song on the theme of immigration and exile, which was also circulated in Dundee in broadside versions during the nineteenth century.

The image of the street singer as a transient figure, almost of another time, is

²⁷ Gatherer p.109. Mattie also appears in Michael Marra's 'The Lonesome Death of Francis Clarke,' a late twentieth-century take on exile and emigration to and from Dundee based on Marra's family history: 'We'll summon up the drums of the Blackness foundry/ Blind Mattie, the Mackay twins too/ We'll sing it up from the Overgate to Anchorage/ And place a precious coal upon the fire for you.' (Michael Marra, *Posted Sober* (Inner City Records, 2002.))

shared by the commemorations of Hughie and Mattie. The success of ‘My Ain Folk’ above the rest of Mattie’s repertoire perhaps suggests that people saw her as an exile, not in place but in time, in the same way Hughie is portrayed in the broadside about him. The street singer, to their audience, is always on a journey because the audience encounters them as they themselves pass through the streets, so an association of unsettlement around them and their songs is perhaps inevitable. A general nostalgia also began to surround the idea of the street singer as they became a less familiar presence in cities.²⁸ As well as being a direct way of making a living for some, song and verse were also heard on the street as an advertising technique: street cries from vendors of milk, shellfish and other goods were generally focused on the products themselves, but not exclusively. One vendor on the High Street, known as Match-Paper Willie, used a fragment of unrelated song to gain attention:

Ye lassies far and near,
Come listen to my sang;
Ye’ll maybe think it’s queer,
 But I’ll no detain ye lang.
Wi ye’re bonnets braid p’lice and plaid,
An’ curls hangin’ pretty
 Yer flooers neatly laid,
Oh, I canna say but weel they set ye.
 Whack rowdy, Row-dow, fal de ral, de ray.²⁹

The ‘come-all-ye’ opening and ‘whack fal de ral’ refrain show the influence of Irish street ballads, whose influence on Dundee street songs I discuss further below.

The Poet’s Box shops

²⁸ *Street Literature of the Long Nineteenth Century*, p. 28.

²⁹ Martin p. 15-6.

The late nineteenth century saw a decline in the number of street singers, and the parallel development of new ways of accessing new songs. As I note above, the earliest use of the name ‘Poet’s Box’ on a broadside, from the evidence currently available, occurs in Belfast c.1846, printed at 1 Castle Court by James Moore.³⁰ These sheets often signpost their exclusivity through the tagline ‘this song is only available from the Poet’s Box shop and printing office,’ a tactic later shared by Poet’s Boxes in Glasgow and Dundee. The shop also uses the broadsides to advertise their services printing raffle tickets, again something Scottish shops would offer. The name Poet’s Box is first seen in Scotland as a shop selling broadsides and other cheap publications in Glasgow’s Saltmarket, already a focal point for street literature, in 1849, under the proprietor Matthew Leitch.³¹ The shop built up custom locally, and throughout central Scotland through the operation of a postal service. Over the following decades, Poet’s Box shops were set up, generally with success, in Paisley, Edinburgh, and Dundee.

There seems to have been a shared understanding of the meaning of the name Poet’s Box, yet no explicit discussion of what this was survives. The Glasgow-based Lansdowne YMCA’s magazine at one point attempted to incorporate a ‘Poet’s Box’ section.³² Although it did not meet with great success, the aim was that the section would be a mix of popular works from well-known poets, contributions from readers, and poetry trivia. The ‘box’ as a magazine section would necessarily be metaphorical, but in the case of the shops, it could have referred either to the shop space itself, which was generally small and basic, or the boxes in which broadsides were often stored on the shop’s counters. Based on what we know of how Poet’s Boxes operated, it is likely the name carried connotations of variety, a wide pool of collaborators, and – crucially – verse and song as performance material rather than private reading material.

There is no evidence that the various Poet’s Boxes were a coherent chain of

³⁰ The Harding Collection, at the Bodleian Library, contains thirty-four broadsides stating they were printed at the Poet’s Box, with a further one in the Firth collection. Moore also printed broadsides at several other locations, using only his own name as a brand. (Bodleian Libraries: *Broadside Ballads Online*, <<http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/printers/Moore%2C%20J>> [Accessed 17 April 2018]).

³¹ Adam McNaughton, ‘A Century of Saltmarket Literature, 1790-1890’ in *Six Centuries of the Book Trade in Britain*, ed. by Peter Isaac (Winchester: St Paul’s Bibliographies, 1990), 165-180 (p. 173.)

³² I am grateful to Lauren Weiss for bringing this to my attention.

shops: in fact, it appears that the name was borrowed and used for a variety of publications and business models, often directly competing for customers. What the vendors using this name in Scotland in the later decades of the nineteenth century shared was a new approach to popular culture, which emphasised the variety and number of songs or speeches available and the potential to collect song sheets. The Boxes combined the idea of a song shop – which could stock a far bigger and more varied collection of broadsides than a hawker could carry – with a small in-house printing press, which allowed them to deal directly with songwriters and respond quickly to local tastes and events. There is, unfortunately, little or no evidence relating to how a songwriter or poet would be paid for work sold through these shops.³³ Here, residents and visitors to a city pooled their respective repertoires, and people could seek out particular songs to learn which suited their taste and interests, without having to make personal contact with someone who already knew the song, or relying on an individual ballad seller to have it. In some ways, this model transferred power over song selection into the hands of the proprietor, as we can definitely see the influence of shop owners' creativity and taste in some of the items on sale.

The Saltmarket Poet's Box advertised its services, not only in Glasgow newspapers but in other Scottish publications, offering a mail order service: 'Songs sent to any part of the world'. John Morris' overview of the Scottish chapbook and broadside trade identifies the Poet's Box name as having been specifically a catalogue-based postal business.³⁴ Another Glasgow printer who used this name, Barr's Poet's Box, also focused particularly on postal sales, offering eight 'numbers' comprising several of their best and most popular songs, which are frequently advertised in the *Dundee Courier*. They did, though, also have a small shop window filled with 'scrofulous ballads' in Glasgow, described in a *Herald* news article about a local newspaper conflict in which

³³ Atkinson and Roud cite an anonymous reporter in the *Typographic Advertiser* in 1863 who stated that 'twopence per line is the usual pay by [...] Seven Dials publishers for original songs,' but I have been unable to find a similar reference for Scottish shops. (*Street Literature of the Long Nineteenth Century*, p. 23.)

³⁴ John Morris, 'Chapbooks and Broadside', in *A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology* Vol. X, 360-378 (p.371).

the proprietor was involved.³⁵ One of Barr's collections, entitled 'Song of Songs,' survives in William Harvey's broadside collection.³⁶ It offers twenty-one songs in necessarily small typeface over a four-page booklet – very good value considering its price at one penny, the same paid for one or two songs on most broadsides. Most of the songs are comic, and show crossover with music hall style: the Dooley Fitba Club, where 'patter' interludes form a key part of the narrative, is typical of these. One of the more sentimental songs, 'Fair Fa' The Gloamin'', is credited to a Dundee publisher, Simpson & Co. Many of the songs, in common broadside fashion, name existing popular tunes. The comic courting song, 'The Twa Sisters', uses the tune 'Castles in the Air', at that time probably best known as the tune to the popular sentimental song 'The Drunkard's Raggit Wean'.

No shop bearing the name 'Poet's Box' appears in Dundee until 1873. Its appearance was probably inspired by the popularity of the Glasgow shops and their frequent advertisements in Dundonian newspapers. The earliest notice of the Dundee shop calls for people to submit 'almost any song' to 82 Scouringburn, indicating that a Poet's Box needed a community of songwriters in order to source enough material, and that the shop did not have one ready-made when it opened.³⁷ Like the Saltmarket Poet's Box, they offered a postal service, and would send send songs to any part of Britain. The Scouringburn was a densely populated and heavily industrialised area, formed as the city expanded in the 1830s and 40s and named for a stream which powered many of Dundee's earlier mills. The street, no longer in existence, roughly corresponds with today's Brook Street, and the Scouringburn itself can still be seen running below the floor of the Verdant Works museum.³⁸ In 1850, James Myles had categorised the Irish

³⁵ 'A Glasgow Newspaper Conspiracy,' *Glasgow Herald*, Tuesday 29 October 1878, p. 4.

³⁶ William Harvey Collection, Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll., B304. The name 'Song of Songs' more frequently appears on broadsides as a comic work made up of well-known song titles and lines (see below) and its use here may be a reference to this.

³⁷ 'Advertisements,' *Dundee Courier*, Saturday 8 February 1873, p. 1. A previous advert, placed in the same newspaper on the 4th of February, describes the Scouringburn Poet's Box as 'from Edinburgh,' suggesting that an enterprising printer may have tried their business there first, then moved further up the east coast. Compared to Dundee and Glasgow, Edinburgh Poet's Box broadsides do not seem to have survived in any great number.

³⁸ McKean & Whatley, *Lost Dundee*, p. 111-2.

immigrants who made up much of the street's population as 'impenetrable lumps of humanity,' whose 'vile slang and immoral habits have seriously injured the general character of the poor population of Dundee.'³⁹ Although this is a good two decades prior to the Poet's Box opening, a potential link between Irish communities and Poet's Box shops is suggested not only by the Belfast connection outlined above, but some of the themes seen in broadsides and advertising discussed below. The Scouringburn Poet's Box's neighbouring shops were licensed grocers, confectioners and stationers.⁴⁰

There is no evidence for the fate of this shop, but the lack of regular advertisements over the next few years suggests a shaky start for the idea of the Poet's Box in Dundee. The opposite, that the shop was successful enough by word of mouth that they did not need to advertise, may be true, but this is unlikely given that other successful Dundee and Glasgow shops have left a strong advertising record. In 1879, George Morris, a bookseller on the High Street, advertised a Poet's Box under the address of his main business, which seems to have been a smaller section of the shop dedicated to procuring songs and recitations.⁴¹ This too swiftly disappears from the records.

In the following decade, the idea of Poet's Box shops fully took off in Dundee. In 1882, J.G. (James George) Scott opened a shop at 172 Overgate, announcing its arrival with the promise of 'recitations new out!'⁴² There would be a Poet's Box shop at some location in the Overgate, though addresses frequently changed, almost continuously until 1949. This street was itself the setting for several of the more popular Dundee broadsides sold through the shop, and had been a key Dundee thoroughfare since the town's earliest days. In the nineteenth century, it was architecturally characterised by a mixture of four and five-storey buildings dating from various points over the preceding four centuries. Formerly a desirable location, by the 1880s many of the old tenements were in a state of disrepair. The area had become known for its pubs,

³⁹ James Myles, *Rambles in Forfarshire* (Dundee: James Myles, 1850), p. 25.

⁴⁰ *Dundee Post Office Directory 1874-5* (Dundee: James P. Morris & Co, 1874), p.362-4.

⁴¹ 'Business Intimations', *Dundee Courier*, 23 July 1879, p. 1.

⁴² 'Business Intimations', *Dundee Courier* 30 September 1882, p. 1.

licensed grocers, pawn shops and brothels, the first three of which are confirmed by the *Dundee Yearbooks*, the fourth referenced in the musical tradition of Dundee. As early as 1864, millwright John Sturrock wrote in his diary that he avoided the street on account of its reputation and ‘stench of tobacco and alcohol.’⁴³ Tradition also emphasises this aspect of the street, with the enduring popularity of the eponymous song in which the protagonist is robbed by a prostitute. In reality, the Overgate was at the centre of Dundee and was also home to a number of respectable businesses such as ironmongers and tailors, which must have brought in a range of customers. Alexander Wilson’s extensive collection of late nineteenth-century photographs of Dundee contains many images of such businesses at the east end of the Overgate.⁴⁴ This was the opposite end from where the Poet’s Box shops were located, for despite the frequent changes of address, the shop never moved more than a few doors at a time. Therefore, it is possible that the west end of the street was where the less respectable businesses congregated.

Before long, Scott’s business had become successful enough to attract a rival, Sinclair’s East End Poet’s Box, which existed at two different Blackscroft addresses over the 1880s. Blackscroft, similarly to the Scouringburn, was industrialised comparatively early due to the availability of power from Dens Burn.⁴⁵ Being a short distance from the docks, the area saw many unemployed men seeking casual labouring work, as well as visitors and new arrivals from ships, and there were a number of ‘singing pubs’ in the area.⁴⁶ Scott’s and Sinclair’s Poet’s Boxes frequently placed rival adverts on the front page of the *Courier*, escalating claims over the variety and novelty of their stock. Often, the alphabetical listing meant they appeared right next to one another, although they sometimes lead with ‘Visit...’ or ‘Songs...’, presumably to avoid this. Their stock of songs was regularly updated. Sinclair promised ‘new songs every

⁴³ Christopher A. Whatley (ed.), *The Diary of John Sturrock, Millwright, Dundee 1864-5* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1996), p. 53.

⁴⁴ Wilson Photographic Collection, Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll.

⁴⁵ *Lost Dundee*, p.129.

⁴⁶ Anthony Cooke, *A History of Drinking: The Scottish Pub since 1700* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p.141-2. The name Blackscroft came in with the industrialisation process in the nineteenth century, with the area previously being known as The Croft.

week,’ while Scott boasted ‘all the newest and most popular songs.’ The standard price was one penny for a two-song broadside, though it was also possible to buy a single song for a halfpenny.⁴⁷ This was an affordable luxury on most labourers’ wages, and the weekly new releases seem calculated to coincide with weekly paydays. By 1888, Sinclair’s advertisement reads simply, though enthusiastically, ‘Songs! Songs!! Songs!!!’ while Scott’s Overgate shop trades on its status as ‘the oldest Poet’s Box in Dundee.’⁴⁸ There is little attempt in the advertisements to differentiate between the genres, types or titles of songs offered. The emphasis is on volume and variety, with popularity as an indication of, or substitute for, quality. The songsheets themselves were certainly curated to appeal to the wide range of political, religious and cultural groups in Dundee, and, for example, temperance verse and celebrations of drunken escapades shared shelf space in the shops. That there was enough custom to support one, and occasionally two, dedicated broadside vendors suggests these shops were, for a few decades in the later nineteenth century, very popular with people looking for affordable, accessible song culture. But what exactly did people find in a Poet’s Box?

The shops definitely printed broadsides on the premises. Several newspaper adverts explicitly state this, and some broadsides advertise not only that they are available but were ‘printed at the Poet’s Box by William Shepherd.’ While descriptions of the earlier shops are few, the frequency with which the Overgate shop changed addresses in the 1880s and 1890s indicate that the printing equipment held on site must have been comparatively portable. The catalogue released in 1885 was not printed in the shop, but rather by WP Saunders in New Inn entry, implying that on-site printing was only set up for small runs of single-sheet publications. Another Overgate premises was acquired in the late 1880s, after which Shepherd starts advertising his ability to print other things such as business cards. The reason for these frequent moves is unclear, but a contributing factor may be that by the late nineteenth century, many buildings in the

⁴⁷ Poet’s Box catalogue (LC421/49). No prices for Sinclair’s broadsides have survived, but their close competition suggests they operated at similar prices.

⁴⁸ ‘Business Intimations’, *Dundee Courier*, 24 April 1888, p.1. The Poet’s Box at 182 Overgate also used ‘Songs! Songs!! Songs!!!’ as a tagline on broadsides. For an example of these adverts, see Figure 3, Appendix.

Overgate were in very poor condition.

Newspaper reports of a fire which took place in the Overgate shop in 1892 describe the interior of the shop in more detail than any other contemporary source. The wooden rack which divided the back ‘printing office’ from the front shop was set alight by a cinder from the fire in the back: the rack, being full of ‘novels, song-books &c’, was soon aflame and the damage spread throughout the shop.⁴⁹ The *Courier* also made reference to a canvas screen which divided the two areas catching fire.⁵⁰ The fire was extinguished with pails of water, being under control by the time the fire brigade arrived, and no one was injured. The damage, which was covered by Shepherd’s insurance, came to a cost of £30. This incident did not precipitate a change of venue, so the structural damage must have been minimal. This image of a small shop crowded with songs and books is echoed in George B. Lowe’s recollections of visiting the shop in the early years of the twentieth century: ‘It wasn’t a big shop. I remember how the bell tinkled when you opened the door. Inside, the counter was buried in boxes of songs at a penny each, and there were some second-hand books on the shelves as well as in the window.’⁵¹

Recollections of early-twentieth century visits to the Overgate Poet’s Box show that many people did not just buy their songs and leave. It was a place where people also sang, performed recitations, and listened. This seemed to be particularly popular with the farm labourers from Angus who also contributed their own songs, bothy ballads often referring to the specifics of their working lives. Lowe recalled: ‘There would probably be a crowd of ploughmen bawling out a bothy ballad chorus, like the Muckin’ o Geordie’s Byre.’⁵² While such memories of the shop in the nineteenth century have not survived in written form, there are indications that the conflation of shop and performance space did not only take place in the twentieth century. When the Poet’s Box moved briefly out of the Overgate in 1896, to premises at the nearby 10 Hunter Street, the then proprietor, J.M. Oates, placed an advertisement in the *Courier* asking for

⁴⁹ ‘The Dundee ‘Poet’s Box’ on Fire’, *Telegraph* 24 February 1892, p.2.

⁵⁰ ‘Fires in Dundee in 1892’, *Dundee Courier*, 28 December 1892, p.3.

⁵¹ Colin Gibson, ‘The Poets’ Box’, *The Scots Magazine*, 106/6 (March 1977), 601-608 (p. 606).

⁵² Gibson, ‘The Poets’ Box’, p. 606.

singers and reciters (specifically these, not customers or song writers) to come to the new address. Performers who usually frequented the shop may not have picked up on the change of street, and their absence was felt.⁵³ Earlier that decade, Shepherd's Poet's Box also had a lively social life, enough so that it could get out of control. A police court report describes how the policeman was punched by a customer, labourer Henry Burke, when they attempted to break up a 'mob' gathering in the shop. Burke's wife, Margaret Cates, then attacked the officer arresting him.⁵⁴ Glasgow broadside shops definitely mixed their trade with that of the nearby pubs, with singers taking their new songs down the Saltmarket in search of money.⁵⁵ Given the similarities in business models, it is entirely possible this also happened in Dundee.

The specific context of nineteenth-century urban Scotland in which the Poet's Box emerged was far from the first time traditional culture had interacted with capitalism and consumerism, but a number of factors make these shops an interesting new phenomenon. Without the availability of printing technology and shop space, a strong local songwriting and performance tradition, and widespread working-class literacy combined with a constantly developing oral tradition, these shops could not have existed. One intriguing notice added to a mid-1880s railway disaster broadside suggests the Poet's Box proprietor may have been willing to act as transcriber for those without developed writing skills, stating that 'those without manuscript will receive assistance with their order for printing.'⁵⁶ While it is tempting to suggest the greatly increased choice of songs to learn provided by Poet's Boxes might have led to a growing conception of repertoire as a reflection of personal taste, it is very hard to assess this given the lack of biographical material about their customers. Also, the high number of songs printed without tunes indicate that the social aspect of song sharing was still very much a part of the process. Without a tune either printed or named, the only way you could sing a song is if you had already heard it, and the shops certainly functioned as a

⁵³ 'Miscellaneous Wants', *Advertiser*, 28 November 1896, p. 1.

⁵⁴ 'Dundee Police Court', *Courier*, Tuesday 19th December 1893, p. 7.

⁵⁵ McNaughton, p.174.

⁵⁶ 'The Danger Signal', William Harvey collection, Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll., B303.

way for people to get the lyrics of songs they had encountered and wished to learn themselves. In the words of one twentieth-century Dundee Poet's Box customer, 'I'll gie ye the words, but ye can ging outside for the air.'⁵⁷ The shops supplemented the oral tradition, rather than supplanting it, just as their hawker predecessors had. The extent to which broadside culture was part of the folk tradition is also demonstrated by their attitude to accusations of copyright infringement. Harry Linn, a music hall performer whose songs were frequently published by Poet's Boxes in both Dundee and Glasgow, sued J. Sanderson, an Edinburgh stationer, in 1888, for reproducing songs without his permission. The *Dundee Telegraph* reported on the case: 'In defence, it was stated that the defender had sold the songs for years, and had not been interfered with till now.'⁵⁸ Copyright was a wider contemporary issue which had been under debate since the eighteenth century, with concern building as printing capacity increased and the link between selling printed works and potential profit grew stronger. Regulations established in 1842 guaranteed control of material either for the life of the author plus seven years, or for forty-two years since publication.⁵⁹ Broadside shops often responded to these anxieties with mockery. The Dundee Poet's Box printed purposefully misspelt copyright claims on some broadsides, such as 'Wretten composed and sung by comedian and vocalist Wilford Taylor with emmense success, [Strictly Copyright,].'⁶⁰ They also printed 'Fareweel tae Blairgowrie', a version of the traditional song better known as 'Mormond Braes', claiming it to be 'strictly copyright', with no accompanying author credit.⁶¹ This joke makes a mockery of the idea of copyright itself. Once a song exists, the broadsides remind us, nothing can stop people learning it, sharing it or changing the details to suit their own life or landscape better.

⁵⁷ Miller, p.52. Also see School of Scottish Studies Archives SA1986.172, in which Peter Shephard, interviewed by Stephanie Smith Perrin, describes singers using Poet's Box broadsides in this way in Fife in the 1920s-40s. (*Tobar an Dualchas*, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/84117/17> [Accessed 5 October 2018]).

⁵⁸ 'Action as to the Copyright of Songs', *Telegraph*, 25 October 1888, p.2.

⁵⁹ James Raven, 'The Promotion and Constraints of Knowledge: The Changing Structure of Publishing in Victorian Britain' in *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain*, ed by Martin Daunt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 263-286 (p. 270).

⁶⁰ 'My Friend Bill', *The Word on the Street*, <https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/view/?id=15047> [Accessed 17 October 2018.]

⁶¹ William Harvey Collection, Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll., B303.

The broadsides: themes and performance

The stock of the Dundee Poet's Boxes featured many songs either composed about the city or adapted to the locality, in addition to the many from elsewhere. Towards the end of its lifetime, the Overgate shop's primary focus seems to have been songs with a Dundee or Angus focus, but its earlier years also included as many of these as possible. These songs are diverse in their form, endurance and topic, encompassing comic songs, responses to current events, romantic and dramatic ballads. The success of the shop at the time, and the extent to which many of the songs which passed through it have remained in both sung and printed circulation until the present day, suggests that the Poet's Box became an important source for representing the city to itself in popular culture. At the time the Poet's Box was established, Dundee was a key centre for the Scottish press and was well served by daily newspapers, so seeing familiar place names in print was not unusual. The songs, as songs tend to do, would probably have continued to be sung, written and move between places even without printed versions. But an accessible print representation of a place as experienced and imagined by those who live there is an important basis for confidence in a culture whose taste-makers value the printed word above the oral.

Many of the Dundee songs printed by the Poet's Box tell stories which can be found across the world – the drama of love, sex and their consequences provide endless inspiration – and several are easily identified as variants of songs which exist in other forms elsewhere. This does not necessarily make them any less 'Dundee songs.' Contrary to the attitude of many earlier song collectors, what is important is the meaning and function they had for the people singing and hearing them, rather than the earliest traceable origin of the lyrics. Dundee is one point within a wider network of places covered by the broadsides. The primary interaction, in terms of both performed songs and physical exchange of broadsides, is with Glasgow, though lyrics also show interaction with other places, both urban and rural.

Time as well as place is evoked in these songs. Seasonal settings are traditionally

important in folk song, where spring and summer often mean love and autumn and winter tend to be when supernatural or tragic action takes place. Many broadsides also refer to specific historical events or legends. The more everyday and contemporary relevance of the calendar is in evidence too, with songs celebrating New Year and other occasions. The songs I have selected for discussion here are those that illustrate something about social life in nineteenth-century Dundee through either their lyrics or the history of their composition, and which therefore demonstrate the Poet's Box shops' links to Dundee's various social networks.

Fair days were important as a performance opportunity, as demonstrated above by Blind Hughie, and for selling broadsides to the temporarily increased population. 'The Back O Reres Hill' is set during what was Dundee's biggest fair:

Last year at Lady Mary's Fair when I wis in Dundee
I fell in wi an auld sweetheart, he bein on the spree
His company I did accept, and with him I did go
All to my sad misfortune, for it proved my overthrow.

We wandered East, we wandered West, we wandered roon the Law
He said he'd see me hame that nicht, but hame I never saw
He kept beside me a' the time resolved to have his will,
An' by and by we lost our way by the back o' Reres Hill

So when we got to Reres Hill, the laddie said to me,
'We can't go home tonight ma dear, it's far ower late ye see,
But the nicht is warm and in my pooch, I have another gill,
So let us lay doon here content at the back o' Reres Hill.

So syne we had a nip apiece to quieten oor alarm
When we awoke in the morning we were locked in each other's arms
He handed me the bottle, another glass to fill

And I drank his health and store o' wealth at the back o' Reres Hill.

It's syne the laddie says tae me, dear lassie dinna mourn,
For while I draw the breath o' life frae you I'll never turn,
And if ye come tae yonder toon my wedded wife to be,
We'll be the happiest couple yet was ever in Dundee.

It's may I never prosper, may I never thrive
In anything I tak in hand as lang as I'm alive
If e'er I say I rue the day ma laddie had his will
Success tae Lady Mary's Fair and the back o' Reres Hill.⁶²

Lady Mary's Fair was an August occasion, to celebrate the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, patron saint of Dundee. This took place for about a week, in the Greenmarket in central Dundee. Reres Hill is just outside of the city, in Broughty Ferry. The fair is shown as an opportunity to break free from the working routine, and as a time when normal behavioural standards are suspended. The female narrator of this song seems ambivalent towards her experience: depending on interpretation and, crucially, the nuance put into a performance, this is either a story of rape retrospectively justified by marriage, or of a happy match made when the woman (temporarily) disregards social expectations. This potential to create different emotional impacts through different performances of the same words, depending on the experience of singer and listeners and how these coincide with or differ from one another, is one of the places in which the power of traditional song is strongest. This is one of a number of fair songs sold in the Dundee Poet's Box, including 'Forfar Fair,' and the Glasgow-set song 'The Hail Week O the Fair' which describes the comic drunken adventures of a far less happy couple.

As Chris Wright demonstrates in his chapter 'Forgotten Broadside and the Song Tradition of Scots Travellers,' the proprietor JG Scott was also adapting songs to his

⁶² LC421/1.

audience's taste, often claiming them as his own in the process.⁶³ 'The Bonny Broughty Ferry Fisher Lass,' about a small fishing town outside Dundee, is very similar in words, and uses the same tune, to 'Shannon Side,' an Irish song which was at that time 'very well known' throughout Angus and Aberdeenshire, according to song collector John Ord. Scott's version opens:

It was in the month of August, one morning by the sea,
When violets and cowslips they so delighted me,
I met a pretty damsel, for an empress she might pass,
And my heart was captivated by that bonny Broughty Ferry fisher lass.

Compare this with the opening verse given by Ord in *Bothy Songs and Ballads*:

It was in the month of August
 One morning by the dawn,
When violets and cowslips
 Were strewn upon the lawn,
When flowers, like a mantle
 Bedecked the fields with pride
I met a comely damsel
 Upon the Shannon side.⁶⁴

This, and most other versions collected from singers, scan better than Scott's Broughty Ferry version. This suggests his motive in adapting the song to the place may be to encourage people to buy it, when the original could quite likely be 'got' easily and cost-free by listening to singers in pubs or theatres. The function of the song sheet was more than merely words and tune to be learned: they could be a souvenir or memento, a gift, or an affordable way of decorating sparse living quarters. Scott also used published art-

⁶³ Wright, 'Forgotten Broadsides', p. 97.

⁶⁴ John Ord, *Bothy Songs and Ballads* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990 [1930]), p.200-203.

song and poetry collections as raw material, most successfully when he adapted Charles Grey of Anstruther's poem 'Grim Winter', first published in 1811, to a more singable, Scots format and published it as 'The Road and The Miles To Dundee.'⁶⁵ To this day, Scott's broadside version or something very similar is performed as a quintessential Dundee song, even featuring in the Verdant Works museum's introductory video to Dundee's history.

The city of Dundee was, as mentioned above, a frequent destination for travelling agricultural workers, many of whom brought songs into the Poet's Box as well as 'getting' them there. 'Carse of Polmaise,' unusually a bothy song localised to a Stirlingshire farm, appears to have found its way into the world through Dundee popular print. Its lyrics are very similar to the Aberdeenshire song 'Arlin's Fine Braes', to the extent that Tobar an Dualchas lists them as variants of the same song. The place name is 'Polmaise' in Shepherd's Poet's Box catalogue, and this is the accurate place name, but it has become 'Pommaize' on the Glasgow Poet's Box edition of the sheet. A handwritten, undated letter by John Liddell, now of New Zealand, in Harvey's broadside collection, suggests to the editor of the *People's Journal* that they may wish to print this song, which Liddell attributes to a ploughman named Knox whom he used to work with, and claims to have written the song down in 1851. His lyrics are:

I have travelled this country both early and late
And among the Carse Lasses I've taen many a seat
Coming home in the morning when I should have taen my ease
Frae roving all night through the Carse of Polmaise.

The first thing I did when I entered the town
Was to gie my horse corn and syne rub them weel down
But my master came on me ere I shifted my claes
he says Jack you've been roving through the Carse of Polmaise

⁶⁵ Wright, 'Forgotten Broadside', p.99.

It's often at mealtime my mistress [?jokes] me
she says such a rover she never did see
but she says I would mind it when I com to old age
how I ran wi the lasses in the Carse of Polmaise.

It's all the whole day when I'm at my work
my mind is contriving mischievous plots
Such as coupling folks straw stooks I ne'er could tak ease
when rinnin wae the lasses in carse of Polmaise

As soon as I losed my horse frae the pleugh
I gaed them their supper the truth to tell you
but I ne'er looked more on them til the sun shone the braes
then I sought my way home through the Carse of Polmaise

Its mony a lassie she lies down and sighs
O, where is my laddie he never comes nigh
weel awa tae our beds and take our night's ease
Since the rover is awa frae the carse o Polmaise

Then to my love's windae I gently did reel
As soon as she heard me she sprang to her heel
And it's out from the Blankets its she quickly rose
Saying here comes the Rover back to Polmaise

Its mony I time I have sat by the fire
Sometimes in the barn sometimes in the byre
But I never thought on parting till the sun shone the braes
Then I sought my way hom through the carse of Polmaise

Its mony I time I've been chased frae the toun
And mony I time I've sat watching the louns
Sitting darning their stockings and mending their claes
In the wee farm houses in the carse of Polmaise

Come all you young ploughmen I pray do not run
And neer go a courting a courting by moon
For the girls they will entise you when they get on braw claes
In the wee farm houses in the carse of Polmaise.

The version published by the Glasgow Poet's Box in 1877 is essentially the same, though slightly shorter and tidier. No Dundee broadside version of this seems to have survived. The presence of the written version, and accompanying letter to the *People's Journal*, in Harvey's collection of broadside material, raises the possibility that there was even crossover between material submitted for publication in newspapers and in broadside form. Perhaps broadside publishers were actively looking for verse rejected by newspapers, which might be more successful in their hands. The possibility that the letter is more recent than the broadside is very real. Liddell refers to the song's popularity 'fifty years ago,' which, if this was the same time as he wrote it down, puts the letter around 1900. In this instance, the mystery is how the letter got from the *People's Journal* offices into Harvey's collection, as to the best of my knowledge he never sought out newspaper verse, only broadsides and chapbooks.

For most Scottish cities in the nineteenth century, the largest group of incomers were not from overseas but from the surrounding countryside. Several Poet's Box songs celebrate, or lament the leaving of, Angus towns such as Arbroath or Montrose. The lyrics often imply the author has departed overseas, usually to America, but the people who wrote and bought these broadsides were centred around Dundee. The broadside 'Toon of Arbroath' was printed by the Poet's Box in the 1890s:

Although far frae home and the blooming heather

Thousands of miles across the deep sea
At night, when I'm weary, my mind loves to wander
To the scenes of my boyhood, so dear unto me.

CHORUS – Then here's to the sons of the dear old St Thomas
The lassies are bonnie so blythe and so free;
The auld Abbey ruins, the Cliffs, and the Commons,
The toon o Arbroath will be dear unto me.

The toon of Arbroath is my home and my birthplace
It was there when at school with the rest of the boys
When lessons were over we played till the gloamin',
It was there that I tasted my life's sweetest joys.

It was there that my father and mother both taught me
To deal honest and fair, to be kindly and free.
And never to forget there's One Eye above us,
That watches our actions where'er we may be.

It was there where I courted my ain bonny Mary,
Her cheeks like the new rose, her skin like the snow;
I proposed, she consented, we kissed and concealed it,
Down by the Sealon Den where the burnie doth flow.

I've lived as an exile since I left old St. Thomas,
And toiled day and night on a far distant shore;
But like a true Scotchman my work it ne'er failed me,
So now I can boast I've got health and galore.

But the first ship that sails I'll go back to old Scotland,

To the dear old home that I left long ago.
And when life's journey's over I will die then contented,
And my last sleep shall be beneath the Abbey ruin O.⁶⁶

Exile, particularly from a rural or semi-rural place, is a popular recurring theme in broadside ballads, generally printed and circulated in an urban context, in Scotland and further afield. Phil Eva has discussed this in relation to Manchester broadsides, a generally good comparison to Dundee because of the shared high levels of Irish immigration and industrial factory employment.⁶⁷ While the Irish person in Britain may have been the most iconic figure of exile in song, these songs clearly resonated beyond the boundaries of Irish communities. A shared sense of displacement among industrial city dwellers, even those who had not moved far to be there, may have fuelled this identification with the rootless, exiled protagonist in these songs. These locally focused emigration songs also inspired parodies by songwriters unimpressed with the distance involved, including the broadside 'Fareweel tae bonny Scotland, for I'm awa tae Fife.'⁶⁸

Immigration from Ireland did have a lasting influence on song culture in the city. There is an indication that the two Poet's Box shops which existed simultaneously in Dundee may have been cultural and religious rivals as well as financial ones. In December 1882, JG Scott advertised the availability of 'Orange songs' in his Poet's Box.⁶⁹ The majority of Dundee's Irish immigrants were Roman Catholic, but by no means all. Richard B. McCready's research on Irish immigration suggests that historic support for Orangeism in Dundee has been underestimated, with Orange Order marches taking place as early as 1845.⁷⁰ Catholic-Protestant conflict among Irish immigrants and their communities centred, to an extent, around St Patrick's Day, with both groups

⁶⁶ LC421/60.

⁶⁷ Phil Eva, 'Home Sweet Home? The Culture of Exile in Victorian Popular Song', *Popular Music* 16/2 (1997), 131-151.

⁶⁸ William Harvey Collection, Dundee Central Library Sp.Coll., B303.

⁶⁹ 'Business Intimations', *Courier*, 19 December 1882, p.1.

⁷⁰ Richard B. McCready, 'St Patrick's Day in Dundee c.1850-1900: A Contested Irish Institution in a Scottish Context', in *Ireland and Scotland in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Frank Ferguson and James McConnell (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 134-146.

wanting to claim ownership of the holiday. Discussions took place in newspapers on questions like ‘St Patrick’s Day – only for Catholics?’, and debating to what extent churches should be involved in the celebration, if at all. The following refrain was heard in the streets around St Patrick’s Day in the mid to late nineteenth century, with the colours reversed depending on which group had started singing:

The Green, the Green, the dirty, dirty Green,
The Green, the Green that shall be torn;
The Blue, the Blue, the bonny, bonny, Blue,
The Blue that shall be worn.⁷¹

Of the Dundee newspapers, the *Courier* was the more sympathetic to the Orange Order, and its influence, according to McCready, may have kept the Dundee Order’s political associations more moderate than in many other cities.⁷² An *Evening Telegraph* article reminiscing about pubs in Blackscroft in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries recalls the area’s ‘singing pubs,’ where sentimental songs like Nellie Dean were popular, but so were Irish Catholic sectarian songs.⁷³ The author recalls a frequently chanted verse, which often led to fights among the pubs’ clientele:

Ha! Ha! The bhoys, don’t youse hear the noise
The days of the Paddies bees coming
They’re coming up in lots
And they’ll kill youse dirty Scots
And you’ll know what it is to be a Fenian.

Whether this aspect of musical culture was reflected in the broadsides sold in Sinclair’s Poet’s Box may be impossible to establish – as far as I know there are no surviving

⁷¹ *Dundee Worthies*, p. 51.

⁷² McCready, p. 146.

⁷³ ‘When the Lang Stairs led to a teeming warren’, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 21 October 1960. (Dundee Central Library Special Articles Vol. IV, p.83).

broadside which can be proved to come from Sinclair's shop. However, as Sinclair's Poet's Box was in one of Dundee's strongest Irish Roman Catholic areas, and the rival Poet's Box made a point of catering to the Orange Order, it is likely this dynamic existed. That Poet's Boxes appeared first in Belfast, then Scotland, demonstrates a Northern Irish connection in their origin. The Poet's Box proprietors were not the only ones to exploit the musical culture of sectarianism: a blind fiddler, remembered only as 'Jimmy,' would stand outside Micky Coyle's pub in the Hawkhill at closing time and play 'St Patrick's Day' or similar, until a Protestant would request 'Boyne Water' or another tune, at which point he would switch, and continue to do so as long as he kept receiving money, until fights broke out, resulting in 'sore heads at home and in Bell Street [police station] the next morning.'⁷⁴ The influence of Irish culture on poetry in Dundee is particularly evident in textile workers' poetry, and I will highlight some instances of this in the following chapter.

The Temperance movement had influence across many areas of cultural life in nineteenth-century Scotland, and several broadsides in keeping with the mores of the temperance movement were printed. One of the most enduringly popular was the Temperance song *The Drunkard's Raggit Wean*.⁷⁵ The success of this song inspired a number of responses, giving the child a happy future. There were many songs on a similar theme, such as 'My Father's Old Coat,' in which the young newspaper-seller and his mother are neglected by the drunken father. In true self-reliant style, she manages to make her son a jacket from the rags of the father's old coat.⁷⁶ Such appeals to emotion through the depiction of innocent childhood were frequently employed in temperance broadsides, as they were in novels and visual art dedicated to recruiting people to sobriety. 'The Drunkard's Wife's Lament' makes use of a dramatic turnaround in fortune in the final verse, to inspire others to follow suit. The chorus and final verses are:

⁷⁴ *Dundee Worthies*, p.51.

⁷⁵ Kirstie Blair, 'The Drunkard's Raggit Wean': Broadside Culture and the Politics of Temperance Verse', *Cahiers Victoriens and Edouardiens*, 84/3 (2016) <<https://journals.openedition.org/cve/2918>> [Accessed 15 September 2018]. (Online edition does not use continuous pagination.)

⁷⁶ 'My Father's Old Coat', *The Word on the Street*, <<https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/view/?id=14942>> [Accessed 18 September 2018].

Oh ladies, all beware, never wed a drunkenman,
For my husband to all other men's a warning
O, wretched is the life of a poor drunkard's wife
I wish he'd turn a Good Templar in the morning.

Last night he said to me that his folly he had seen.
A public house he never more would enter,
When no money he had got they'd not trust a single pot,
He's signed the pledge and now we'll be contented,
To work he has now gone, and he is an altered man,
And he finds that Good Templarism is the wisest plan.
Now he reads his books at home, and the tavern does not seek,
And we all do live so happy with his thirty bob a-week.

So tipplers all I pray take a drunken fool's advice,
And by my reformed husband take a warning
Both health and wealth you'll find, and contentment in your mind,
If you'll only join the Good Templars in the morning.⁷⁷

The business of drink and refraining from it is also treated with humour in many cases. 'Come Down and Open the Door, Love,' a broadside clearly adapted from a stage performance, invites the audience to laugh at the oblivious drunken husband, and the text is split fairly equally between verse and spoken 'patter' along the following lines:

'Not a bit of use, I can't get in. I've been stuck out here
In the snow, and the hail, and the sleet, and the rain (hic) for about
two hours, more or less, whilst upstairs there's my daer, precious,
darling, loving, tender harted, fat-headed wife. (hic) She's got her

⁷⁷ William Harvey Collection, Dundee Central Library Sp.Coll., B303.

head on the pillow, and she dosen't care whether mine is under a cart
wheel, or where it is (hic) and I've been bowling out at the top of my
voice – ⁷⁸

The misspelt words here may be intentional, to recreate the slurred speech of a drunk, but spelling is never particularly consistent in broadside printing. The title is printed as 'Come Down and Open the Door,' showing either dedication to this characterisation or, perhaps more likely, a rush to get it printed and on sale after it featured in a successful night at the music hall.

The writer Tom Glen of Dundee often had his home city proudly included on the Poet's Box sheets next to his name. His output includes 'Come and See the Whale', 'The Dundee ABC', 'If I Only Knew Her Name', and 'Don't Sit Down and Grumble,' and many of them stress that he performed as well as wrote these mainly comic songs. Glen's 'Dundee A.B.C.' was published between 1882 and 1885.

Noo if ye pay attention, I'll no detain ye lang;
But dae my best to please ye, wi a new and local sang,
Altho' the title may seem strange, wi me you will agree;
That there are stranger titles noo a days, than the Dundee,
A.B.C.

CHORUS

Then sing, lads, sing, and let us be jolly
Don't sit down an' fret an' frown such nonsense is a folly;
We've a' met here to enjoy oorsell's, so let us happy be,
And join me and all in the chorus o' the Dundee A.B.C.

A stands for Albert Institute wi' its monuments so grand

⁷⁸ William Harvey Collection, Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll., B303.

B. stands for the Baxters Park it's the finest in the land;
C. stands for the Cowgate the famous auld East Port,
Whaur Wishart often stood and preached in spite of Pope or Court.

D. stands for Dock street, wi its stately Sailors Home,
E. stands for Esplanade to beat it there is none;
F. stands for Fish Street tho' in ruins it soon will be
It was the resort o' Kings an' Queens in the guid auld days gone by.

G. stands for Green Market the spot for merchants o' a' kind.
H. stands for High Street, the toon house there you'll find;
I. stands for Infirmary, a noble institute,
J. stands for staple trade of course you ken that's Jute.

K. stands for King Street to find it none can fale
L. stands for Lindsay Street that leads straight to the jail.
M. stands for masher, likewise for Murrygate
N. stands for Nethergate whaur the Mashers congregate.

O. stands for Overgate whaur brokers shops abound,
P. stands for Peace an' Plenty may it in every home be found.
Q. stands for Queen Street a street of great renown,
R. stands for Reform Street, the fashionablest in town.

S. stands for Ships an' Sailors who look sae neat an trig,
T. stands for Tay an' its world-famed Bonnie Brig.
U. stands for Union the factory workers freen',
V. stands for our Volintees they're the bravest ever seen.

W. stands for Women God bless them all say I,

X. is a nondescript of English language shy;
Z. is Zinith myself & I hope I've pleased you all.⁷⁹

The idea was either stolen from or stolen by the Glasgow Poet's Box, for they also published a 'Glasgow A.B.C.' in a very similar format.⁸⁰ The broadside, like Shepherd's reworking of traditional song, is evidently aimed at an audience who knows Dundee and wants to celebrate it. Many of the streets are only described in the briefest detail, which might be meaningless to an audience who was not familiar with these places. The references to Mashers and celebration of the jute trade, and indeed factory workers' unions, may well represent the audience Glen and J.G. Scott, the Poet's Box proprietor at the time, intended to sell this song to. Shared awareness of the town's history is suggested through the reference to Wishart, the pre-Reformation Protestant preacher who was executed in St Andrews. The archway at which he was supposed to have preached, formerly part of the medieval city walls, had been restored in 1877 so was presumably an ongoing point of interest. Choosing the Protestant preacher, 'in spite of Pope or court,' as a historic figure certainly does nothing to dispel the picture of religious tension in Dundee's popular culture, and JG Scott was the same proprietor who advertised his stock of Orange songs. Fish Street, then quite notorious for its brothels and run-down sailors' boarding houses, is presented as almost already a thing of the past. Compared with such modern features as Baxter Park and the Tay Bridge, both well-known far beyond Dundee's boundaries, the song portrays the city as a modern, exciting place to live. The 'Glasgow ABC', which does not give a named author, features a similar catalogue of landmarks, and the same minimal, though positive, performative framework.

Most of Glen's songs feature explicit mentions of the audience to which they are being sung, and his broadsides often have the tagline 'written and sung with great success'. The place where 'we've a met to enjoy ourselves' is most likely one of Dundee's music halls. The celebration of the place in which the audience lives is a

⁷⁹ William Harvey Collection, Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll., B303.

⁸⁰ William Harvey Collection, Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll., B303.

contrast to the many exile songs, which on one level refer to the audience's family members and friends who did live abroad, but on another also spoke to a sense of displacement among the large numbers of people who had moved to the cities in search of work. The broadside shop and music hall, as well as being places to escape the struggles of everyday life, were also places where a sense of community and place could be found through the shared experience of a song, and Glen's works seem to be written with this aim in mind. His 'Don't Sit Down and Grumble' is fairly self-explanatory in its message, and 'Come and See the Whale' assumes its audience is tuned into Dundee news and gossip in order to be in on the joke. This important aspect of music hall, frequently overlooked by critics who focus only on the exaggerated imagery, was identified by Cameron and Scullion: '[i]t is in a context of familiarity and ironic reflection upon a common experience that the Scotch comics are to be placed and celebrated.'⁸¹ Broadside, too, contributed to this sense of community, with Poet's Box shops as a focal point for the community of singers and listeners.

Another music hall performer particularly associated with Dundee was P.P. Bell, whose success peaked in the 1890s. Short verses from his performance made their way into the sung tradition of the city, and are currently in the repertoire of Dundee singer Alex Clarke, who learned them from his grandmother:

In the shade o the lamp on oor stair,
Ye're share tae find my sister there,
Wi a lad caad Mackay, he's only one eye,
On the tap o his head there's nae hair;
In the shade o that bonnie wee licht,
They're share tae be there every nicht,
For like twa little dears, they've been stannin for years,
In the shade o the lamp on oor stairs.

⁸¹ Cameron and Scullion, p.53.

Mary ma Scottish fairy, won't ye come awa wi me?
Won't ye leave yer hills and dales,
Yer bonnie bloomin heather and yer Scotch bluebells?
Come awa wi me tae Bonnie Dundee famed for jam and marmalade,
An ye'll see a lot o funny sights ye've never seen before,
On the esplanade.

Sandy MacGregor, the kilt it surely suits yer figure,
When ye're walkin its wavin in the breeze,
And when you go strollin by, You can hear the lassies cry,
He must be awfie cauld aboot the
Hooch aye, Johnny Walker, Johnny Walker, hooch aye.
Wi yer sporran and Glengarry, och ye fairly tickled Mary,
But there's one thing makes me sigh,
Oh it's nae yer knees sae bare, nor yer saucy underwear,
That captivates ma fancy when ye're nigh;
It's yer cute little cannie little white-wash brush,
When ye waggle it aboot man it maks me blush,
Johnny Walker, hooch aye.⁸²

These are likely shortened verses, the highlights of Bell's full act, and have almost certainly altered a little from their original form, but the humour and imagery is unmistakably music hall, and suggest that the image of a Scotsman in full Highland dress was just as popular on the Dundee music hall stage as it was in Glasgow. 'In the shade of the lamp' is a parody of the sentimental love song 'In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree,' popularised in 1905 by artists including the Haydn Quartet.⁸³ The references to tenement courting would have been funny for their familiarity. The

⁸² Alex Clarke, on *Old Songs and Bothy Ballads – Grand to be a Working Man* (Balmalcolm: Springthyme Records, 2009).

⁸³ I am grateful to Ann Auchterlonie of Lifelong Learning Dundee for pointing out this connection.

reference to Dundee particularly demonstrates the way music hall artists created their material based on the life experience of the communities who came to see them (communities the performers generally also lived in themselves.) The Esplanade would have been where many of the audience went walking with, or to meet, partners, to which ‘funny sights’ is a knowing reference. This verse also sends up sentimental songs about leaving a rural home for the unknown city.

The availability of broadsides would also have helped spread the fame of music hall performers, as well as individual songs, and it seems likely writers like Tom Glen were happy to have their work sold in this format. As certain songs became more popular, they were often re-worked as parody or pastiche versions of the original, perhaps working in references to local and recent events. The ballad ‘The Bonnie Hoose O Airlie’ was a particularly popular choice to base new, and humorous songs on. This is most likely due to the fact the place, as well as the tune and format, were well known to Dundee, and the amount of rhymes available for ‘Airlie.’ The ‘song of songs’ was also a popular way to reference all the hits of the day. These were new songs created from titles and famous lines of existing popular works. Shepherd’s 1885 catalogue devotes a whole page to advertising his stock of them, and one of Sinclair’s newspaper adverts claims ‘Still they come! Songs of songs!’⁸⁴ A song of songs entitled ‘Cheer Boys Cheer Medley,’ printed at 182 Overgate, gives an impression of the amount of songs people had to choose from:

Cheer, Boys Cheer: Tam Glen, and Maggy Lauder,
Bessie Bell, and Mary Cray, and Jean o’ Sauchielt,
Met Auld Robin Gray, on the Banks O’ Allan Water,
And danced the Reel o’ Boggie there wi’ Jockie far awa
When Auld John Paul cam’ up wi’ Bess the Gawkie,
Heather Jock, and Donald Blair, and Bonnie Bessie Lee,
Auld Bonnie Johnnie Lowrie too, alang wi’ Sleepin’ Maggie,

⁸⁴ ‘Publications’, *Telegraph*, 11th April 1893, p.1.

And they sang Nix My Dolly, by the Bonnie Rowan Tree.

Cheer, Boys Cheer! the Ducks dang o'er my Daddie,
Jockie's made a Waddin o't, wi' Bonnie Jeanie Gray,
An' Willie Wastle says yon shouldn't Buy Tripe on Friday,
But Ca' the Ewes to the Knowes, on Birks o' Invermay.
The Lassies a' Laugh, when Rantin' Roarin' Robin,
The Auld Wife Ayont the Fire, wi' Jessie o' Dunblane,
They Met, Twas in a Crowd, and they were A' Nid Noddin',
For Willie Brew'd a Peck o' Maut, to Charlie o'er the Main.

Cheer, Boys, Cheer! for Jenny Dang the weaver,
Within a Mile o' Edinboro' Toun, on Clean Pease Strae,
And, On, he was a Bonnie Lad, He was a Gay Deciever,
He's Dead! He's Dead! in the Cauld House o Clay.
Up an' War them a', My lady's Gown has Gairs on't
A Lassie leeves Ayont the Burn, along the Banks o' Clyde,
Gae Doun the Burn Davie Lad, and you'll see Kitty Darlin',
For Ye cow a', quo she, and This is no my Plaid.

Cheer, Boys, Cheer! and Whistle o'er the Lave o't,
Nannie wilt thou gang wi' me, My Bark is on the Sea,
Haud awa' Bide awa' frae me, Danty Davie,
It's bye wi' ye a' noo, and Ye never Daut on me
I'm afloat, I'm afloat, and A Man's a Man for a that,
Steer me Back to Erin's Isles, O! Happy Happy Land,
O'er the Hills and far awa, We'll hae a wee Drap mair o't,
Then, Hip, Hip, Hurrah! and Noo what will you stand.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ 'Song of Songs,' *The Word on the Street*, <<https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/view/?id=14990>> [Accessed 5 October 2018].

This assortment of characters and titles from popular songs gives an idea of the abundance of cultural references the Poet's Box customers must have been aware of if they were to spot the jokes and cameos. The poets Burns, Tannahill, and Charles Mackay (the original author of *Cheer, Boys, Cheer*) are all represented, and a multitude of traditional songs are also there. The nonsensical humour of the song once put together would also be a major part of the appeal.

Songs which were very well known – sometimes, clearly, too well known for some listeners' taste – also inspired answer songs which ridiculed the values or message of the original. A broadside which was sold in Dundee, 'Marry an Aberdonian,' extolled the virtues of women from the north-east, at the expense of other regions:

Now I've been looking up and down
For months, I 'm sure, about this toun,
A thrifty wife my joys to croon
But I'll no say I 'll take ony ane.
O' a' the places I ha'e seen
In different places I ha'e been,
Nae damsel pleases my twa een
Like a strapping Aberdonian.

Chorus:

For there's naething in this world that pleases me,
Like a bonny young lass and a gude cup o' tea,
And my mither aye says, 'Be advised by me,
And marry an Aberdonian.'

Now to speak o' mysel', it's my belief,
I 've gotten a' my wisdom teeth,
For I wouldna tak' mustard without beef,

I 'm no sic a senseless loonie ; and
For age, I 'm just about my prime,
Hale, hearty, stout, and up to time,
I 'm sure I'll please the lassie fine
When I get my Aberdonian.

Now there 's lots o' chaps, as sure's I'm here,
Wha think o' naething but drinking beer,
Their heads aye muddled, they ne'er see clear
Tae dee good tae themselves or ony ane.
Lat ithers plague me wi' their chaff,
I'll no put up wi' sic riff-raff,
But I 'll stay at hame wi' my better half
Aye, and I 'll nurse my Aberdonian.

Now I will need to be gaun awa'
For fear ye may think I 'm gaun tae blaw,
Some ither night I 'll gi'e ye a ca'
Say the morn's night, or ony ane ;
And gin ye meet me in the street
Along wi' some lassies dressed up so neat,
I hope you'll no be so indiscreet
As cry 'How 's your Aberdonian?'⁸⁶

The Scots used here seems more Aberdonian than Dundonian, particularly the use of 'loonie' for young man or lad; while 'loon' is used in Angus the -ie diminutive ending suggests Doric, as does 'dee' instead of 'dae.' This suggests the song was written by

⁸⁶ 'Marry an Aberdonian', *The Word on the Street*, <<https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/view/?id=15038>> [Accessed 18 September 2018]. The broadside in the N.L.S. does not state which Poet's Box this was sold at, but it is listed in Shepherd's 1885 Dundee catalogue.

someone from the north-east, and may have been received elsewhere as sanctimonious and boastful, or simply as an opportunity to engage in inter-city rivalry. Its message of sensible living and female propriety inspired an answer song whose popularity has outlasted the original. 'Beware o an Aberdonian' uses the same verse pattern, and while no tune is listed for 'Marry an Aberdonian' the two songs could certainly be sung to the same one. The similarity in sound of 'mairry a' and 'beware o' is also more notable in Scots than English. The later song reworks the classic story of an innocent young man on the spree being taken advantage of by an unscrupulous woman, who is of course in this case an Aberdonian. Nigel Gatherer recorded the version quoted here from the singer Eck Harley.

I've had misfortunes ane or twa
They're scarcely worth tae mention
But I'll tell ye ane that bangs them a'
Gin ye gie me attention.

Ae nicht I left hame in Lochee
Wi twa or three lads to hae a spree.
We wandered doon intae Dundee,
Where I met an Aberdonian.

Chorus:
It's oh young men where e'er ye be,
If ever ye gang on a spree
I hope ye'll aye be advised by me
Tae beware o an Aberdonian.

The song follows the standard pattern of such works: he spends ten shillings buying her food and drink, but she drugs and robs him:

For when I wakened up again
I'd lost my purse and my watch and chain
I'm sure I'll nae see them again
Far less my Aberdonian.

The hapless protagonist concludes, in a mirror of the original broadside:

If ever I think to chance my life
And tak untae masel a wife
I'd rather fa upon a knife
Than marry an Aberdonian.

There's nothing in this world that pleases me
Like a gey braw lass and a guid cup o tea
But ma mither aye said be advised by me
And beware o an Aberdonian.⁸⁷

Harley gives his original source as being a broadside printed in Edinburgh by C. Sanderson, an interesting origin given that this song is explicitly set in Dundee, and seems particularly local given the recognition of Dundee and Lochee as separate entities is generally not encountered outside of the city. This again shows an urban Scottish broadside culture where songs move easily between cities. The original context of this song would have been as an adaptation of a familiar story as a mocking riposte to a well-known song. But the original meaning of answer songs can be lost or change as the reply becomes better known than the original.

Despite the 'millions' of songs claimed by the Poet's Box owners, it is important to remember that, even if it were possible to recover all of them, they would not represent the whole of nineteenth-century Dundee's popular song tradition. There were

⁸⁷ Gatherer, p. 66.

certainly many songs which were not considered fit for general printing. One which may well have been current in the nineteenth century was 'The Dundee Weaver':

Oh, I'm a Dundee weaver and I come fae bonnie Dundee
I met a Glesca feller and he cam coortin me
He took me oot a-walking doon by the Kelvin Ha'
And there the dirty wee rascal stole my thingummyjig awa'
And there the dirty wee rascal stole my thingummyjig awa'.

He took me oot a picnic doon by the Rookin Glen
He showed tae me a bonnie wee bird an' he showed me a bonnie wee hen;
He showed tae me a bonnie wee bird fae a linnet tae a crow,
He showed tae me the bird that stole my thingummyjig awa;
He showed tae me the bird that stole my thingummyjig awa.

Now I'll gang bak tae Dundee lookin' bonnie, young and fair,
And I'll pit on my bucklin' shoes an' tie up my bonnie broon hair;
And I'll pit on my corsets tight tae mak my body look sma,
An' wha will ken wi' ma rosy cheeks ma thingummyjig's awa?
An' wha will ken wi' ma rosy cheeks ma thingummyjig's awa?

Come a' ye Dundee weavers, tak this advice fae me,
Never let a fellae an inch above yer knee;
Oh never stand at the back o' the close or up against the wa',
For if ye do ye can safely say yer thingummyjig's awa,
For if ye do ye can safely say yer thingummyjig's awa.⁸⁸

This version was collected in the 1970s by Nigel Gatherer, who remarks that collectors

⁸⁸ Gatherer, p. 60.

usually only get to hear this sort of song ‘after the tape recorders have been switched off,’ though he had heard it sung several times by men and women singers in Dundee.⁸⁹ The way in which most of the action is located not just in Glasgow but in specific places within Glasgow suggests it may even have been composed there as a comment on the reputation of the women of Dundee’s factories, and made its way to Dundee from there. Songs like this, even if not this specific composition, would certainly have been sung without ever being committed to print for one reason or another.

Conclusion

It is evident from contemporary song culture in the Dundee area that the Poet’s Box and the songs it circulated have had a lasting effect, and many are still sung and recorded. In this regard, despite their frequent characterisation as fleeting, broadsides are perhaps the least ephemeral form of verse included in this thesis. In order to understand the role of broadsides in verse and song culture, they must be considered as part of a wider cultural milieu including both semi/professional and amateur performances in street and domestic contexts, and the development of the music hall style of performance from a synthesis of traditional theatre and contemporary song culture. These songs illustrate an urban street-based singing tradition adapting to industrial life.

In particular, the Poet’s Box broadside shops in Dundee and Glasgow were clearly a new way of forming poetic communities in the industrial city, creating a new place in which songwriters and performers were explicitly invited to congregate. These shops were as much part of a popular culture which reflected the experience and interests of working-class urban audiences as the more widely analysed music hall performances, though even these have been far from fully explored in a Scottish context. Drawing conclusions about past performance culture from such limited evidence is impossible to do with much certainty, but the comparatively large number of surviving broadside sheets is one of the most fruitful resources for ascertaining what people were writing, singing and listening to for entertainment. Dundee was one hub of creativity

⁸⁹ Gatherer, p 67.

among many in nineteenth-century Scotland, alongside other urban centres in Glasgow (which, at least in terms of number of songs printed, was Scotland's broadside capital) and Aberdeen, as well as incorporating aspects of rural song culture. Songs were shared and adapted between these places – as songs and stories have always been, whether carried by print, performance or both.

Chapter 3: Poetry of the Workplace

This chapter will focus on the role of work, the workplace and working identity in verse, and the part poetry and song played in shaping and reflecting ideas about work and workers. My focus is Dundee's textile industry because of its importance not only economically, but culturally, although looms and mills were far from being the only workplaces to inspire poetry in Dundee. For example, the textile industry was intertwined with the whaling industry which also inspired many songs, and the maidservant's strike in 1872 triggered a poetic discussion in the press.¹ The verse I deal with here is about, rather than part of, work, and does not cover the separate work category of 'work song' which is performed as part of the task at hand in the way that, for example, sea shanties and milking songs are. This chapter expands further on the ways in which poetry was part of social life in Victorian Dundee, and builds on discussions of newspaper and broadside poetry in the previous two chapters by considering the implications of publication for working-class poets.

The industrial workplace was central to poets not only as inspiration, but as a place in which communities were formed and reputations cemented. On many occasions it also provided opportunities for performance. The first section of this chapter will demonstrate how central the textile industry became to perceptions of Dundee through a brief study of industrial cityscapes in poetry by both textile workers and outside observers of the workplace. The following sections will look at the use of poetry and poetic personas by textile workers over the century. The shift from handloom weaving to factory-based production is mirrored in changes in the language and poetic devices employed by working poets, and the images of community they create with them. Despite this, I argue there is significant continuity throughout the century in the ongoing use of poetry to reinforce a sense of shared identity among textile workers, and evidence

¹ See Gatherer, p. 52-3; and Norman Watson's *The Dundee Whalers, 1750-1914* (East Linton, Tuckwell Press, 2003) for discussion of the importance of song on board whaling ships; and for discussion of the maidservants' strike and its poetic response see Blair, *Poets of the People's Journal*, p. 105-6 and Jan Merchant's 'An Insurrection of Maids: Domestic servants and the agitation of 1872', in *Image and Realities*, 104-121.

that the work of earlier weaver poets continued to be influential in the factory era. I will also examine the poetic treatment of Dundee's considerable female workforce, and suggest reasons why they, for the most part, did not engage with poetic tradition in the same way their male colleagues did.

The production of textiles was the city's primary industry throughout the nineteenth century, with the flax and cotton of the early century being replaced by jute around the 1870s. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, weaving was done by hand, either at home or in loom 'shops' or 'sheds', where the weaver would still own their own loom, but material was obtained from a manufacturer who would pay when the weaving had been completed to their satisfaction.² In Dundee, the material would likely be coarse linen, for example for sail cloths, or possibly cotton.³ Although the weaving trade had been prosperous in the late eighteenth century, by 1830 it was in decline. Hours were nominally self-directed, but it was often necessary for weavers to work extremely long hours to make a living. George Ure remembered that, c.1830, Dundee handloom weavers would work between twelve to fifteen hours a day, for a wage of twelve to fifteen shillings a week; and at times this could go up to seventeen hours a day.⁴ Even in relatively prosperous phases for the trade, weaving was associated with health problems, probably due to the tendency for weaving sheds to be poorly lit and badly ventilated, leaving the air filled with fibre particles. Combined with already poor sanitation and housing conditions in Dundee, this could be deadly.⁵

Industrial growth in Dundee from the 1820s saw the introduction of steam-loom factories, which soon became the primary textile workplace. Instead of working alone, or with a small group in a weaving shed, a spinner or weaver might be one of hundreds

² Norman Murray, *The Scottish Handloom Weavers: A Social History 1790 – 1850* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1978).

³ Sir John Sinclair, *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, Dundee, Forfar, Vol. 8 (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1793), p. 216. (University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow 1999, The Statistical Accounts of Scotland online service: <<http://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/link/osa-vol8-p192-parish-forfar-dundee>> [Accessed 13 April 2018]).

⁴ George Ure, *Dundee and Dundonians Seventy Years Ago: Personal reminiscences of an old Dundonian* (Dundee: James P Mathew, 1892) p. 53. The first *Statistical Account* lists wages for professions such as labourers and maidservants, but not for weavers – suggesting perhaps that wages often fluctuated to such an extent it was hard to give an average.

⁵ Sinclair, *Statistical Account*, p. 238.

employed in a large factory. David Blyth's 'My Native Town: Dundee Described,' portrays Dundee's industrialisation as a healing process on a broken town. His narrative suggests Dundee had been almost desolate since Monk's sacking of the town in 1651 until the steam loom renewed its fortunes, although presumably this is for dramatic effect rather than a historical argument. Blyth gives one of remarkably few Dundonian poetic descriptions of the actual engine at work:

The furnace roars, the studded cauldron boils;
With scorching breath the horrid python toils,
Deep through its entrails pours the imprisoned steam,
Leaps the strong piston, and vibrates the beam;
Th' alternate crank, the equalising fly,
On rolling axles still unwearied ply.
From shaft to shaft, from wheel to wheel transferred,
The vital impulse travels unimpaired.
More widely ramified – remotely felt –
Locks the toothed pinion, and revolves the belt.
The dizzy spindles wheel on pliant bands,
And lo! the attenuated thread expands.
From the broad roof-tree to the seated base
Power urges Power, one entangled maze!⁶

Blyth was a seaman, not a textile worker, though his family were linen and thread merchants with a vested interest in the success of the industry. The workers are briefly mentioned, as a mass, but the focus of Blyth's industrial landscape is undoubtedly the machine. Although this is ostensibly a modern and forward-looking poem, there are connotations of witchcraft in the imagery of cauldrons and pythons with scorching breath. This echoes the descriptions of trains in terms of living, often monstrous, beings,

⁶ David Blyth, *The Pirate Ship* (Dundee: Edmiston and Company, 1879), p. 97.

and in fact he does describe a train as a ‘panting monster’ in the following verse.

Industrialisation changed the experience of the city not just for textile workers, but for the population as a whole. The prospect of work, and the increasing difficulty of working on a loom in a rural setting, led more people into Dundee, and the population doubled to 63,000 between 1821 and 1841, continuing to grow throughout the century.⁷ Dundee itself expanded beyond the medieval walls which had more or less contained it since their creation, incorporating nearby villages and rural land for the creation of larger mills and factories. The success of these factories did not translate into high wages for workers. Enid Gauldie’s research demonstrates that for the second half of the nineteenth century in particular, Dundee textile workers’ wages were continuously low, with only a few small increases during prosperous times. While the city’s physical expansion created large new industrial areas, the amount of domestic housing built was not even close to sufficient for the rise in population, and living in cramped conditions was the reality for all but a few factory workers.⁸

The textile industry affected the lived reality of everyone in the city, regardless of their occupation. As well as the profound changes to the visual landscape, and the increasingly busy streets, factory chimneys filled the city space with smoke. But Dundee’s reputation as an industrial city of Empire was also growing. The success of the textile industry came to rely almost entirely on the import of cheap jute fibre from India, and many Dundonians went to reap the benefits of colonialism. The sense of pride in industrial Dundee and its successes which developed was tied up with Britishness. An image of Dundee from the Law, chosen to represent the town in an 1892 encyclopaedia of World Cities, shows rows of factory chimneys contributing to a thick mix of clouds and smoke, the industrial buildings indistinguishable from the domestic, but they were the factors that had elevated Dundee onto the world stage.

The textile factory came to define the city both to residents and visitors, and so the poetic response to Dundee as an industrial city comes not only from the workers.

⁷ Whatley, *Diary of John Sturrock*, p. 2.

⁸ Bruce Lenman, Charlotte Lythe and Enid Gauldie, *Dundee and its Textile Industry* (Dundee: Abertay Historical Society, 1969), p.18, 65, and 106-8.

The general attitude to Dundee's industrial growth is positive: many poems celebrate the city's progress, modernity and engineering skills, echoing the responses to the building of the first Tay Bridge. In 1881, 'W.A.' visiting from Sunderland saw 'Bonnie Dundee' as:

Jute! Jute! Jute! steamers and docks and bales,
 Streets of stores and labour's roars,
Men and brutes and trucks and rails,
 For Jute!

Jute! Jute! Jute! merchants and clerks and cash,
 Sell and buy and markets spy,
Push and rush and love the fash,
 Of Jute!

Jute! Jute! Jute! forests of chimneys shoot,
 Mills and wheels and pirns and reels,
Dust and din and smoke and soot,
 For Jute!

Jute! Jute! Jute! engines and looms and frames,
 Brain and skill and hand and will,
Bolts and nuts and fires and flames,
 For Jute!

Jute! Jute! Jute! lasses and lads must live,
 Tirl and dirl and birl and whirl,
Spin and weave and homage give,
 To Jute!

Jute! Jute! Jute! forever bring Dundee,
Wealth and fame shall deck her name,
Greater shall her future be,
For Jute!⁹

As this poem describes, the influence of the industry extended into the wider city in several ways. This poem appears to be an outsider's idea of factory life, giving a detached perspective composed of multiple industrial images. The mechanical rhythm of factory machinery is extended to incorporate the life of the whole town. This poetic device would have connected to many people's experience, as the sounds of factory life did become entwined with the life of Dundee itself. Most factories signalled the beginning, end, and breaks of the working day by sounding steam powered 'bummers', loud penetrating blasts often using different pitches or rhythms to distinguish factories from one another. The number of people employed in each factory meant that streets would become extremely busy around six a.m. and six p.m., a phenomenon reflected on in Grace Appleton's poem 'Mill Bells,' published in the *Evening Telegraph* in 1880.

Hear the mill-bells ringing – ringing!
In their belfries swaying – swinging!
Hurrying – scurrying – outward flinging
On the air their clamorous call!

Far and near their summons sending,
Deafest ear, slow step, befriending,
And, with human voices blending,
Echoing clear from roof and wall!

Tho' the idling world is sleeping,

⁹ 'Bonny Dundee', *Wizard of The North*, 29 January 1881, p. 3.

Lo! The busy current keeping
Rhythmic measure, onward sweeping
Tuneful tramp and soft footfall!

Answering back the bells' outleaping
In their final, lingering sweeping,
And their dying cadence creeping,
Humming, 'Coming, one and all.'¹⁰

This poem is particularly set in the industrial street, rather than the factory itself. The poet does not seem to be part of the crowd going to the mills, rather, she is an observer of this mass movement. The experience is all aural, as if she is hearing the activity, possibly from indoors, instead of watching it. The people observed are a part of the industrial city itself: their voices blend with the bells, and their footsteps chime with their rhythm. They are part of the symbolic machinery of industry, or perhaps another raw material to be fed into it. There is an unusually tuneful element to the soundscape here, at odds with the evidence relating to the mills' use of bammers. The description of 'lingering cadences', and the rhythm of the poem itself, seem more appropriate to a village church scene than an industrial city. The reference to the sound reaching even those of 'deafest ear' is almost ironic, considering the hearing damage loud machinery inflicted on so many workers. The metaphor of factory as church is sometimes used by modern poets reflecting on industrial pasts, and there might be a deliberate allusion to this here. There is also a possibility that the emphasis on tunefulness and pleasant sounds was a subtle response to ongoing criticism of the female workforce for being too loud while entering and leaving the workplace.

There was also competition between factory owners to dominate the industrial landscape by demonstrating they were more enterprising, more forward-thinking, and more productive than their competitors. Emma Wainwright has demonstrated how this

¹⁰ 'Mill Bells', *People's Journal*, 22 March 1884, p.5.

often manifested itself in trying to build bigger, and higher, particularly in the case of the height of chimney stacks.¹¹ Cox's Stack in Lochee, built 1865-6, was ultimately the most successful. Camperdown Works, owned by the Cox brothers, was at that time the largest jute mill in the world, and for a few years, the Italianate-style Cox's Stack was the highest chimney in Europe. Recent housing developments within view of the stack have mimicked its brickwork designs, continuing the Cox brothers' influence on Dundee's landscape. In the early 1890s, John Cairnie of 48 North Street composed a broadside, 'Walker's New Stack,' celebrating the recent addition to Walker's Mill, which was located just off Dens Road in the Hilltown area, a traditional handloom weaving area formerly known as Bonnethill. Cairnie's address, further up the Hilltown, was around fifteen minutes' walk from the mill, and he was likely an employee. Given his gender and desire to promote the mill, he was possibly a foreman or office worker, or perhaps had ambitions to be one.

I would crave your kind attention friends,
I mean both one and all,
Don't be too rude should I intrude,
Or to lift me e're I fall.
Tho' some may try to criticise,
That's not the case with me;
Yet I would speak of Walker's Stack
As the foremost in Dundee.

It's a noble piece of workmanship,
Believe me what I state,
For it coves the camel drover
That's on top of yonder gate.
Just merely take a bird's eye view,

¹¹ Emma Wainwright, 'Manufacturing Space: Gendered Cityscapes and Industrial Images in Dundee', *Environment and Planning A*, 41/2 (2009), 336-352.

It's all that you require,
Then you'll say without exception
It stands foremost in the shire.

In the year of eighteen ninety,
On the seventh of April,
The found being laid, the circle made,
For that majestic pile,
When those wise and cunning workmen,
They commenced with rule and square,
And in three months to their credit
It was towering up in the air.

Like an eagle soaring sky-wards,
There each workman took his flight;
Where two hundred feet and twenty-five,
To-day it stands in height.
Now its famed besides unrivalled,
Not in Forfarshire alone,
But for eighty miles and further
It stands second unto none.

For in Lochee there is Cox's stalk,
Nigh to the Law Hill side,
Then there's Tenant's stalk of Glasgow,
It stands famous near the Clyde.
Should you come to Brothers Walker,
You can see there at a glance,
It outshines the Eiffel Tower,
That's erected now in France.

Then all honour to these workmen,
Who with trowel, brick and lime,
Raised aloft this proud memorial
In that short space of time.
There it stands like ancient Babel,
Towering like some gaint oak;
You should see to-day how beautiful
It carries off the smoke.

Then success to Brothers Walker,
Master William and Master John,
I'd fain mention here another,
But alas, now he is gone,
Though he's from our midst departed,
He shall live within the core,
Til we meet in yon bright mansion,
When this pilgrimage is o'er.¹²

The broadside itself is quite plain: there is a border, but no illustrations, and the lack of a printer's address or advertisements for other products suggest it may have been produced by the mill itself as publicity for their new venture. Not only is Walker's stack compared favourably to other industrial landmarks, it is described as outshining a monument built solely as art, the Eiffel Tower. Performative framing is common with broadsides, and the call to attention brings to mind music hall traditions where exaggeration and wild comparisons are to be expected. While this is likely a tongue in cheek description, the broadside celebrates an aesthetic of industry which promotes the big, the bold, and the functional. The comparison to an oak tree highlights how much

¹²LC125/9.

taller this is than any tree, suggesting it is even an improvement on natural beauty. This is a confident voicing of Dundee's importance in not only a local but a European context.

This chapter will now examine further representations of the textile industry in song and verse composed by workers, and the ways in which these workers used their jobs and workplaces to create poetic identity. Work is almost always represented in contrast with the potential of its absence, whether this appears as the fear of no pay or the joy of a day off. It is important to remember that work was not the whole extent of a worker's life, nor even necessarily its defining factor, even when it took up most of their waking hours. The poets represented here appear in other chapters too. As well as textile workers, they were walkers, political activists, followers of the news and members of societies. Their representations of working life interact with, and are informed by, these other identities. The first section focuses on the poetry of William Thom and James Gow, whose poetry representing their identity as weavers in the last years of the handloom industry is strongly informed by Chartist principles and poetic traditions. Then Dundee's move to a mainly female workforce, and the way poetry was used in the ensuing debate about women's role in society, will be discussed. Finally, poets from the 1860s onwards, whose poetic personas were often tied to their factory work, will be investigated. This group includes David Tasker, Adam Wilson, Ellen Johnston and George Watson, whose poetry demonstrates the complexity of workers' relationships to their workplaces in later nineteenth-century Dundee.

Handloom Weavers

Handloom weavers were already closely associated with poetry in Scotland by the beginning of the nineteenth century through the work of groups like the 'Paisley Poets,' and Robert Tannahill (1774-1810), referred to as 'The Weaver Poet,' in particular. The poetic topics prevalent in weaving communities changed according to the economic situation. As it became harder to make a decent living as a handloom weaver, more poetry was devoted to poverty and inequality, and criticism of the authorities who

allowed them to continue.¹³ In the 1830s and 1840s, handloom weavers found themselves increasingly struggling as their skilled trade faced stark competition from factories. Weavers formed an important part of the Chartist movement in Scotland, and poetry dealing with the struggles of weaving life was often related to a wider working-class fight for representation.¹⁴ In Dundee, a group of Chartists and handloom weavers met regularly to discuss poetry and politics, either in the Wheatsheaf Inn or in the weaving sheds where their members worked. This group would later be referred to as the ‘Republic of Letters,’ and they connected to the wider British Chartist community through reading and publishing poetry in newspapers such as the *Northern Star*. Many of the group were directly involved in local political action. The Chartist movement was a serious concern for Dundee’s establishment: in 1842, five hundred special constables were engaged to protect specifically mills from the threat of Chartist attack.¹⁵ These weavers included William Thom and James Gow, both of whom made explicit use of their weaving experience in their poetry and in their poetic identities. The other members of the group included David Gardiner, author of the 1853 book *Love and Liberty*, John Mitchell, who led the Chartist March on Forfar, and Alexander Wilson, who was known as the ‘Mountain Muse’ and published his *Collected Poems* in 1843. His son Adam, born in 1850, became one of Dundee’s later nineteenth-century Factory Poets and will be discussed below. My focus here is on Thom and Gow as weaver poets, though the wider collective will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

The most famous of these poets during their own lifetime was William Thom, who moved between Dundee and Aberdeenshire throughout his life. Thom is was referred to as ‘The Bard of Inverurie’ after his birthplace, and most of his work is set in this area, but his links to Dundee make his work worth considering here. He was an active member of the Dundee poetry scene when resident in the city, at a formative time for his poetic development, and he continued to correspond with poets in the city when resident elsewhere. Thom had returned to Dundee and was resident there at the time of

¹³ Murray, p.170-1.

¹⁴ See *Radical Renfrew* for political poems written by weavers in the west of Scotland during this time period.

¹⁵ *Diary of John Sturrock*, p. 2.

his death, with George Gilfillan taking up the cause of supporting his common-law widow and children. Dundonian contemporaries and those later in the century saw him as a Dundee poet as well as an Aberdeenshire one. For instance, he is given a lengthy biography in *Dundee Celebrities*, and familiar references to Thom's life and work can be seen throughout the century. Thom's life story is often presented as that of the classic self-taught and self-ruined poet who could not handle the pressures of being part of the literary establishment, though various other tensions are apparent. As a child, Thom was run over by a carriage owned by the Earl of Errol, and his mother refused on principle to accept the token compensation offered. The injury, and perhaps the symbolism of it, remained with him through his life. William Thom's *Rhymes and Recollections of a Hand-Loom Weaver* combines a substantial autobiography with a collection of poems. His life story and status formed an important part of his poetic persona and, as is typical of working-class poet's autobiography during this period, crafts aspects of his life into a narrative championing self-education and moral living.

The *Recollections* deal in more detail with the weaver's life than the *Rhymes*, and Thom opens with a despondent picture of the moral and physical degradation once rife in the 'dead monster' of School Hill factory in Aberdeen. He contrasts the life of the generation before him, who worked four-day weeks on a wage of forty shillings, with his own experience of starting in 1814 on six shillings a week. It was common for fines to be made for lateness, often as much as the whole days' wages, meaning that workers, especially young girls, frequently found themselves working for days with no pay to make up their debt. His descriptions of meeting in the Gordon Street hospital garden to read on summer's days combine nature and literature as escape from dreary work: Scott, Byron and Moore were all popular, as was Hogg; but by far the highest praise is reserved for Tannahill, 'our ill-fated fellow craftsman.'¹⁶ Thom characterises Tannahill's work specifically, but also verse more generally, as 'Song Spirits' which 'walked in melody from loom to loom, ministering to the low-hearted.'¹⁷ The importance of song

¹⁶ William Thom, *Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1844), p. 14.

¹⁷ Thom, p.14.

culture to raise the weavers' spirits was particularly vital as, in their impoverished state, they had no clothes suitable to wear to church and thus could not attend sermons. Thom writes of the weavers' own compositions with the characteristic modesty expected of working-class writers in this period, quoting one he remembers from the weaving shops not 'for any merit of its own,' but for evidence of how they could, for a brief time, find escape in a more morally sound hobby than the drinking weavers often turned to. Thom's own life is testament that poetry was by no means antithetical to drinking, and he himself was later cited as a cautionary tale, but his own enjoyment of alcohol is not alluded to in his autobiography. He also eschews making direct reference to his political activity, but an awareness of injustice certainly appears throughout. Little mention is made of political activism in his autobiography either, though his letters seem to suggest this was a concern throughout his life, and William Buchanan's book *Glimpses of Olden Days in Aberdeen* gives the story that Thom actually began writing while imprisoned for his part in a meal mob.¹⁸

Thom's first publication in the Aberdeen Herald, a lightly comic take on love and society in Aberdeenshire entitled 'The Blind Boy's Pranks', was submitted under the pseudonym 'A Serf,' and he made a point of declaring with his submission that as a weaver he had to work '*fourteen hours out of the four-and-twenty*. [Aberdeen Herald's emphasis]'. The editor expressed hope that his toil may soon be abridged, so that he may have 'more leisure to devote to an art in which he shows so much natural genius and cultivated taste.'¹⁹ By the time this poem was published, Thom and his family had already suffered extreme poverty and sorrow during periods of unemployment: his daughter Jeanie died from exposure in 1837 when the family was forced to walk from Dundee to Aberdeen looking for work. Following the publication of 'The Blind Boy's Pranks', Laird J.A. Gordon of Knockespoek wrote via the editor of the Journal, offering £5 in return for the pleasure he gained from the poetry, and aiming to establish an ongoing relationship with the poet:

¹⁸ William Buchanan quoted in Robert Bruce, *William Thom, the Inverurie Poet – A New Look* (Aberdeen: Alex P. Reid & Co, 1970), p. 22.

¹⁹ 'The Blind Boy's Pranks', *Aberdeen Herald*, 2nd January 1841, p.3.

‘I trust that you will allow me to know your address, that I may wait on you in passing through Inverurie, hoping that should you pass by my house you will not spend all your time in admiring the OUT-side of it.

I am, Serf, your Serf,

J.A. Gordon (Knockespock).²⁰

Impressions thus far suggest Thom was not the sort of man in the habit of standing and admiring country houses, but the prospect of an income to supplement the little the failing handloom industry by then offered, coupled with literary recognition, could not have gone amiss. He later accepted a further £20 and an invitation to visit the Laird’s home in London, where he was introduced to various literary figures as an example of the archetypal peasant poet. His autobiography suggests mixed feelings on the experience: ‘I have listened to the eloquence and heard the nonsense of those who give laws to the people. I saw Majesty and Misery, and many of the paths between.’²¹ Their relationship became uneasy not long after this visit, possibly for both personal and political reasons. Thom had children with two women during his life, Jean Whitecross and, following Whitecross’ death in 1840, with Jean Stephen. He remained legally married to a woman he never mentions by name, who had left him in Dundee to return to her native Aberdeen when their relationship presumably broke down around 1831, by which time they had been married three years. According to Thom’s biographer Robert Bruce, Gordon disapproved of these domestic arrangements. Thom also continued to be politically vocal, editing, along with William Bruce, a short-lived literary and political periodical entitled *Gossamer* which experienced both financial difficulty and controversy over its views.²² Gordon still encouraged Thom’s move to London in 1844, in order to produce an extended second edition of his *Rhymes and Recollections*. While there, Thom was celebrated as a prime example of the natural, self-taught poet in literary

²⁰ Bruce, p. 58.

²¹ Thom, p.52.

²² This William Bruce, who Thom also lodged with for a time, was the grandfather of Robert Bruce, whose 1970 biography of Thom draws largely on personal correspondence left in the care of his family.

circles, but quickly became involved in Chartist societies as well. His correspondence displays a growing resentment of Gordon's influence, which he felt had 'bought' the laird too high a degree of creative control over his work. In letters to his friend and fellow poet David Vedder, he commends Vedder for not having given into the temptations of patronage. Vedder, an Orcadian tide surveyor resident in Dundee, likely had more stable employment than the weavers, so was less likely to feel he had to accept patronage as a matter of sheer survival.

The second edition of *Rhymes and Recollections of a Hand-Loom Weaver* is coloured by the troubled relationship between Thom and his patron. Gordon had requested Thom assign him the copyright, allowing him to insert long antiquarian notes into the poems, which frequently take up the majority of any given page with details of historical Aberdeenshire. These notes muddy the narrative sense and meaning of the poems, and mark the entire work as antiquarian, part of the 'local colour' and history of rural Aberdeenshire, rather than the contemporary words of a living poet who was actively involved in cultural and political movements. This may have been on some level an effort on Gordon's part to steer Thom back into the role of rural curiosity which he had in mind when inviting him to London. Thom does not seem to have made a point of stressing his political affiliations when meeting with literary crowds: someone who encountered him as a speaker at a dinner in Aberdeen came away with the impression that 'beyond a kind of Chartism by mere position, he cared [not] an atom about politics.'²³

The only poem in *Rhymes and Recollections* to address the weavers' experience directly is 'Whisperings for the Unwashed'. Set in 'A Town in the North,' it uses the rhythm of the town drummer, who wakened the citizens at five or six a.m., rather than that of the loom itself. The second verse describes the unfortunate fate of the weavers:

Rubadub, rubadub, row-dow-dow!

Hark, how he waukens the Weavers now!

²³ From *Macmillan's Magazine*, February 1864, quoted in William Norrie (ed), *Dundee Celebrities of the nineteenth century* (Dundee: W. Norrie, 1873), p. 108.

Wha lie belair'd in a dreamy steep -
A mental swither 'tween death an' sleep -
Wi' hungry wame and hopeless breast,
Their food no feeding, their sleep no rest.
Arouse ye, ye sunken, unravel your rags,
No coin in your coffers, no meal in your bags;
Yet cart, barge, and waggon, with load after load,
Creak mockfully, passing your breadless abode.
The stately stalk of Ceres bears,
But not for you, the bursting ears;
In vain to you the lark's lov'd note,
For you no summer breezes float,
Grim winter through your hovel pours -
Dull, din, and healthless vapour yours.
The nobler Spider* weaves alone,
And feels the little web his *own*,
His hame, his fortress, foul or fair,
Nor factory whipper swaggers there.
Should ruffian wasp, or flaunting fly
Touch his lov'd lair, 'T IS TOUCH AND DIE!
Supreme in rags, ye weave, in tears,
The shining robe your murderer wears;
Till worn, at last, to very '*waste*,'
A hole to die in, at the best;
And, dead, the session saints begrudge ye
The twa-three deals in death to lodge ye;
They grudge the grave wherein to drap ye,
An' grudge the very *muck* to hap ye.

Thom's rhyming couplets and insistent rhythm create a building sense of urgency,

reaching its peak in the image of the triumphant spider, which is then sharply contrasted with the decline of the human weavers, driven to inevitable and undignified death. English translations of Scots words are provided throughout the book – both Thom and Gordon were anticipating English readers – but ‘waste’ is also given a translation from ‘weaver’s language,’ meaning ‘broken threads.’ The destructive process of weaving life breaks its people down as if they too are material being processed. Thom’s description of rag-clad weavers making ‘the shining web your murderer wears’ is similar to the imagery of Ernest Jones’ ‘The Song of the Low,’ popular at Chartist gatherings, which included the lines:

We’re not too low the cloth to weave -
But too low the cloth to wear.²⁴

The theft of the fruits of labour from the human weavers is contrasted with the spider as ‘nature’s weaver,’ part of a world evoked by the agricultural imagery of corn, larks and summer breezes in the preceding lines. In the second edition of the book, the mention of the spider is accompanied by one of Gordon’s footnotes, giving an account of the Robert the Bruce story, which has links to Inverurie, and Dumourier’s invasion of Holland, which was informed by the habits of spiders in different weathers. The relevance of this last piece of historical information is tenuous at best – either a result of Gordon getting carried away as an amateur antiquarian, or a deliberate distraction from Thom’s message in the poem itself, where the spider is more important as a utopian rather than as a historical symbol, setting the freedom of the natural world in contrast to the enclosed, captive existence of the weaver. Nature’s law dictates that they, too, should have the freedom to defend, and thus reap the benefits of, their own webs and work, but they are prevented from doing so by the oppressive economic system.

Throughout the poem the image of weavers being awakened by the repeated ‘Rubadub, rubadub, row-dow-dow!’ of the drum becomes a representation of political

²⁴ Ernest Jones, quoted in Florence Boos, ‘Working-class Poetry’, in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry* (Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman & Antony H. Harrison (eds) (Oxford: Blackwell 2007), p. 215.

and intellectual awakening. As well as awakening, the town drummer carried connotations of punishment and social segregation for Thom. Historically, the Inverurie drummer was also responsible for drumming beggars out of town. This custom ceased during the nineteenth century, but Thom had witnessed it in his lifetime, and referred to it in another poem.

Saw ye Selbie coming, quo she,
Saw ye Selbie coming,
A beggar wife on ulca arm
And the drummer drummer drumming, quo she,
And the drummer drummer drumming.²⁵

The weavers are, in their poverty, almost as low as the beggars being excluded from the town, a microcosm of society itself, and are at risk of this final expulsion themselves. The final verse, the only one not to begin with that recurring line, makes the awakening metaphor explicit:

Arouse ye, but neither with bludgeon nor blow,
Let mind be your armour, darkness your foe;
'T is not in the ramping of demagogue rage,
Nor yet in the mountebank patriot's page,
In sounding palaver, nor pageant, I ween,
In blasting of trumpet, nor vile tambourine;
For these are but mockful and treacherous things -
The thorns that 'crackle' to sharpen their stings.
When fair Science gleams over city and plain,
When Truth walks abroad all unfetter'd again,
When the breast glows to Love and the brow beams in Light -

²⁵ Bruce, p. 126-7.

Oh! hasten it Heaven! MAN LONGS FOR HIS RIGHT.

Thom urges his fellow workers to enlighten themselves, rejecting physical resistance in the process, in the faith that a collective educated working-class will be impossible to ignore and deny. The idea that justice will ultimately be achieved through non-violent means, such as the spread of knowledge, education and religion, is characteristic of the Scottish Chartist movement in the 1840s.²⁶ The urge for workers to ‘win’ or earn rights through education and moral strength is a theme returned to by poetry composed throughout the century.

James Gow (1814-1872) was often referred to as ‘the weaver poet,’ and in periodicals he published as ‘Jas Gow, Weaver.’²⁷ Most of his published writing was done earlier in his life, and *Lays of the Loom*, his only collection, was published at the age of thirty-one. Shortly after, illness prevented both work and poetry, leaving him mostly dependent on charity. Gow did not cease writing altogether in later life, but appears to have had a troubled relationship with it, on top of more general unhappiness.²⁸ He continued to weave for a living, though also struggled with this due to his ongoing ill health. Like Thom, he appears to have had an uneasy relationship with his patron Lord Kinnaird, and perhaps felt caught between his beliefs, artistic integrity and need to support himself. Gow’s weaving shed, and the loom itself, were central to his poetic identity. It was ‘possibly the most dark and gloomy in Dundee,’ but his loom was covered in sheets of poetry, and the walls too were adorned with cuttings from the *Chartist Circular*, the *Northern Star*, and the local papers.²⁹ As well as the ubiquitous presence of a love of Burns, he is remembered as having a particular liking for the

²⁶ T.C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People, 1830-1950* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1986) p. 235.

²⁷ LC216/58.

²⁸ One poem, ‘Despondency’, which appeared in the *People’s Journal* in 1867, laments his current ‘weary’ state, and looks forward to the potential release of death, a theme recurring from his earlier poems. This was met with an encouraging response by W. R. Mainds the following week. (*Poets of the People’s Journal*, p.68-70).

²⁹ Norval [Scrymgeour,] ‘History of James Gow the Weaver Poet’, *People’s Journal*, 10 February 1872, p. 2. The newspaper also printed a poem in Gow’s memory by James Cargill Guthrie, Dundee Free Library’s first Chief Librarian.

poetry of Jessie Morton, a contemporary of Gow's based in Dalkeith and later Fife who published widely in newspapers, frequently in Scots, with social comment and gentle satire among her recurring themes. His two favourite poems of Morton's, 'The Herd Lassie' and 'The Wee Spunk Laddie', were given the most prominent positions in his work space, one on the loom itself and one on the wall behind where he sat.³⁰ This local tradition influenced Gow alongside wider traditions of Chartist poetry. 'The Wee Spunk Laddie' is the story of a poor boy who makes a good life thanks to, and through his own, human kindness. Gow's neighbours in this shed were influential on his development. When he began working there, the shed shared premises with a 'beggar's gellie', a shelter for itinerants, many of whom were musicians. They would frequently enter through the weaving shed, and play instruments and sing.³¹ He made time to listen to their life stories, and the figure of the mistreated beggar which recurs in his poems may be inspired by these conversations. The beggar appears as an innocent victim of corrupt society, but also free in ways that workers are not. After the gellie's closure, the premises were taken over by James Low, a Chartist and Temperance reformer who introduced him to political networks in Dundee.

Lays of the Loom was published in 1845, after encouragement by and likely donations from his social circle. Unlike most of the poets discussed in this chapter, Gow did not include a substantial autobiography in the volume, though in a brief Preface he stresses his lack of formal education and exposure to literature.³² Accounts of his life indicate that he was familiar with the work of several historical and contemporary writers from an early age, though he uses this platform to emphasise his role as outsider to the literary establishment. Gow describes his book as a rare opportunity for one of his class and social status to speak to those beyond his own circles. It is likely that the book would indeed have brought his work to a different audience from those who read his work in newspapers like the *Northern Star*. Many of his poems are addressed explicitly to fellow workers, leaving hypothetical upper and middle class readers as silent

³⁰ Norval, *People's Journal*, 10 February 1872, p. 2.

³¹ Norval, *People's Journal*, 10 February 1872, p. 2.

³² James Gow, *Lays of the Loom* (Dundee: J. & J. Taylor, 1845) p. iiv.

witnesses to a conversation. Publication for Gow was not to be an erasure of his weaving life and its difficulties, but an opportunity to awaken awareness, sympathy, and support for them.

The poems in *Lays of the Loom* are predominantly focused on the experiences of poverty, of both the working and the unemployed. These are placed in an egalitarian Christian theology, with frequent references to the redistribution of wealth and status which will occur after death. This is an allusion to a better life to come in heaven, but his imagery is very focused on earth, the grave and the dead body. Gow was raised in a devoutly religious household, though his mother and father belonged to different sects and attended different churches. His mother's love of reciting religious poetry was likely an early influence. A review of *Lays of the Loom* in the *Northern Star* praises his writing's accordance with nature as well as its politics.³³ It also advises Gow not to expect poetry to become a remunerative career and to continue his weaving work, which was certainly realistic advice to a poet in Gow's situation.

'The Lay of the Weaver' expands on the themes suggested by the book's title and the author's identification as a weaver-poet:

ALAS! must I rise again, the clock has just struck four,
Yet fainly would I slumber on, I'm wearied still and sore;
But my swan-necked wallet, that weary is and light,
Bids me to think sincerely upon to-morrow night: -
For, though it is but Friday morn all over Christendom,
With it 'tis fully Saturday, which wraps my soul in gloom,
And makes me wearily to rise, and go quick, quick,
And cause my crazy loom to cry – Chick! Chick!! Chick!!!

The morning's wet and chilly, and the clothing that I wear
Upbraids me when I touch it – its weight it scarce can bear;

³³ 'Reviews', *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser*, 21 February 1846, p. 28.

And when my ghastly limbs are clad in such a motley suit,
They say I'm like a pelican that's sickly in the mou't;
But my mou'ting time, alas! than his is more severe,
For I am a non-descript that mou'teth all the year;
But I must go away again – quick, quick, quick,
Or my web to-morrow night must stick, stick, stick.

And if it stick, what shall I do? though fain I hope 'twill not,
I may decamp and stick me up beside old Madam Lot,
Else my heartless landlady from home will turn me out,
Perchance to roam a vagabond till death gives me the route;
To quit the loom entirely, and thoughts of earthly things,
And join the land where beggar's dust unites with clay of kings,
Who made in life the lowly rise – and toil quick, quick,
And think on many Saturdays they'd stick, stick, stick.

But I'll away and work and sing, and learn to be content,
For well I know that every woe for good to me is sent,
And that instead of eating husks, I merit not the smell!
Starve, but conserve; says easy paunch; don't murmur, don't rebel.
The parsons say I'm blessed well off, and I must them believe,
For worthy characters like them could ne'er us poor deceive,
Who for our sins should a' be driven from earth, quick, quick,
But if they were, the *rich, I fear, would stick, stick, stick.*³⁴

Both book and poem make use of the double-meaning of lay as the name of a part of the loom, but also as a type of narrative verse, traditionally intended for performance with

³⁴ Gow, p. 21.

musical accompaniment.³⁵ The music which accompanies this lay is that of the loom itself, explicitly voiced in the final ‘Chick! Chick!! Chick!!!’ of the first verse, but ever-present both in the echoing of this rhyme at the end of every verse and in the urgent rhythm of the couplets throughout each verse, recalling the back and forth of the shuttle. Biblical imagery recurs throughout the poem. The weaver is likened to a sickly pelican, symbolic of sacrifice (as the pelican was thought to pierce its own breast to feed its children on its own blood), and thus also associated with Christ’s sacrifice for humanity. The weavers are pelicans, Christ-like figures who sacrifice their lives and wellbeing. Their sacrifice is not only for the necessity of feeding themselves and their families with metaphorical blood, but also to keep their superiors in a class-based society, present here as the landlady and the parsons, afloat. The shabby, moulting imagery is ironic in that these producers of cloth are so poorly clad, as in Thom’s poem above. The potential for existence as a wandering non-weaver, raised and discounted in the second verse, suggests that being free from the restrictions on time, movement and thought which working life entails may be preferable, even it means poverty. This may be a nod to the tradition of the lay as a form performed by wandering minstrels in medieval Europe, contrasting the weaver-poet’s restricted life with theirs. Gow presents death as the only inevitable bringer of equality. Kings may cause the lowly to rise as in waking, but the allusions to Christ earlier hint that in death it will be the workers who rise to heaven or resurrection. Singing as an act is portrayed, on the surface, not as a rebellion but as a comfort and distraction: ‘I’ll away and work and sing/ and learn to be content.’ This verse is a sarcastic account of the view that says workers should accept hardships quietly, and Gow’s ‘singing’ of it subverts this. The narrator may be a symbolic representation of all weavers rather than Gow himself. This poem was, though, identified as one of his more autobiographical.³⁶ Themes of the weaver poet speaking to his fellow workers in Biblical terms are repeated throughout Gow’s poems, most notably

³⁵ The phrase ‘Lays of the Loom’ was used again in the early twentieth century by Joseph Lee, best known for his poems describing the First World War. Lee’s use was one Gow would probably have approved of, a heading for poems describing the misery of poverty for female jute workers published in socialist periodical *Tocsin*, though whether its use was an explicit homage to Gow is unclear. (*Tocsin* no.1 (1909), p.8).

³⁶ Norval, *People’s Journal*, 10 February 1872, p. 2.

humanity. Poverty and starvation are recognised as political ills, not an unavoidable part of the human experience.

One of his most popular poems with Dundonian audiences was 'The Dying Address of Will Hara's Horse,' in which the well-known Dundee character Will Hara, notorious for mistreating his horses, stands in for all bosses and the cruelty of industrial capitalism.

O Will, O Will, I greatly fear.
For thee or thine I'll toil nae mair;
My bleeding back forbids to bear
 Your ne'er greased cart:
Ilk joint o' me is e'en richt sair;
And sick's my heart.

Just as the clock struck twal yestreen,
I swarfed outright, through fever keen,
Which made my twa time-blinded een
 Stan' in my head;
And think ere now I wad hae been
 Baith stiff and dead.

Ye needna' stan', and fidge, and claw,
And crack your whip, and me misca;
'Tis just as true 's ye gie me straw
 Instead o bran,
That my auld stumps forbid to chaw –
 I'll die ere lang.

Or, when I couldna eat the trash
Ye coft, when ye were scarce o' cash,

Wi' hazel rung ye did me thrash
On head and hip;
But sune I'll save ye a' that fash, -
Lay up your whip!

Gae, tell gleyed Pete, your wisest brither,
That Death on me has tied his tether;
And syne come quickly, baith thegither,
My corpse to manage,
And tak me where they took my mither, -
Straucht tae the tannage.

But, guidsake! tell na brither Tam,
That shapeless semblance o' a man –
Wha's liker some ourang-outang
Than human being:
Nor ane o' your horse-murdering gang –
Your auld mare's deein'.

Mak' haste now, Will, and gang awa,
For Pate and his auld naig, to draw
My pithless banes to Death's chill ha' –
A dreary scene!
For ere you're back I'll lifeless fa' –
Amen, Amen!³⁹

This monologue from the perspective of a dying horse is a moral comment on the treatment of workers by employers, and perhaps a specific reference to the cruelty of the

³⁹ Gow p.41-3.

growing factory system in which the boss-worker relationship is more immediate than it was for handloom weavers. Using an animal to stand for the workers not only represents the lack of respect shown to them as human beings, but highlights their voicelessness, suggesting that even were workers' thoughts to be vocalised, no-one would hear or understand. The use of the Habbie stanza after Burns is often satirical, and here forms a dark satire on local inequality and the mistreatment of workers which those unaffected by it refuse to see. The horse's body, standing in for the workers', has been steadily broken down and abused, signalling that the poor are treated as disposable, like working animals. Local tradition has it that this is based on a real incident, with Will Hara being notorious for the poor treatment of his horses, and it seems likely that the continued popularity of this poem throughout the nineteenth century was less because of what it says about injustice, and more down to its connection to local worthies.

Women in the workplace

The vocal and visible presence of the female workforce of nineteenth-century industrial Dundee is frequently described as one of its defining characteristics. The general move from handloom weaving to large-scale factory production of textiles coincided, in Dundee, with a shift towards employing more women in the industry. Women (and children) had always worked in the textile industry in various roles. Work in bleachfields was often done by women, and the role of the 'pirm wife' who assisted in the weaving process was so associated with women that it is very rare to see references to men in this role. This was by no means exclusive to Dundee, as women worked in textile factories across Britain. What was distinctive was that the more prestigious roles of spinner and weaver, traditionally male and considered skilled work, became in Dundee primarily women's roles. Spinning had in fact been done by women in the flax industry in the Dundee area from the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ The

⁴⁰ 'The Flax Industry in Dundee', Lamb collection 196/3; J. Gordon, ed. *The New Statistical Account of Scotland by the ministers of the respective parishes, under the superintendence of a committee of the Society for the Benefit of the Sons and Daughters of the Clergy*. Dundee, Forfar, Vol. 11, Edinburgh: Blackwoods and Sons, 1845, p. 17 (University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow, 1999: The

proportion of women employed in the city also increased over the nineteenth century, though Christopher Whatley points out that the point at which Dundee became a ‘women’s town,’ in which more women than men were employed, did not occur until after 1871, later than is often suggested.⁴¹ This shift was largely due to employers’ decisions, the key factor being that a workforce which consisted mostly of women and young people could be paid considerably less than one of adult men. Over a similar time period, Dundee manufacturers moved towards producing jute products – a rough, and comparatively cheap, fibre which was used to make sacking, rope, and carpets. William Walker argues that it was this change in method and material which created a form of work different enough from linen weaving that male weavers had no traditional hold over it, and the factory owners took this opportunity to employ cheaper labour.⁴² Whatley’s counter argument notes that jute did not come to dominate the Dundee market entirely until later in the century, by which time the factories were already predominantly staffed by women.

In the later decades of the nineteenth century, gender began to dominate discussions of Dundee’s workforce in the press, as the reality of city life increasingly clashed with the idea of the woman as representative of the home. The image of the Dundee man as a ‘kettle biler’ who looked after the house while the women worked has been enduring, but is partly fantasy. While male unemployment was comparatively high, evidence indicates the majority of household work and child-rearing was left with the women.⁴³ Working women in Dundee were the subject of much scrutiny, often focused on their appearance and clothing, and the ways in which they spoke and behaved in public. These accounts did not always go unchallenged by the women themselves – ‘factory girls’ were often active participants in these newspaper letter exchanges. Two opposing stereotypical images developed, of the unruly, morally corrupt and dirty

Statistical Accounts of Scotland online service: <<http://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/link/nsa-vol11-p1-parish-forfar-dundee>> [Accessed 13 April 2018].

⁴¹ Whatley ‘Altering Images,’ p. 94.

⁴² William M. Walker, *Juteopolis: Dundee and its textile workers, 1885-1923* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979), p.36.

⁴³ Eleanor Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland, 1850-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) p.164-5.

spinner, and the hard-working, clean and well-presented weaver. Weaving was certainly still the higher wage and status job, and still carried respect as it demanded a period of training in order to reach the required level of skill. Spinners were more likely to come from poorer families, who were unable to wait for the training period to pass before receiving a wage, and (largely due to this factor) were more likely to come from Irish immigrant families. Thus, the development of these stereotypes drew on existing prejudice about class, poverty and race already in play in Dundee, as well as ideas about how women as a group ought to behave. In general, hard-working factory girls who retained a sense of domesticity, were celebrated in poem and song by male poets, while the loud spinners were accused of singing their own, corrupting, songs in their workplaces and on the streets. These dynamics are, of course, an oversimplification of the reality. Many families contained both spinners and weavers, and the difference in social experience of the two was not vast.⁴⁴

The 'Factory Girl' as a character in nineteenth-century popular culture is not restricted to Dundee. In folk song, she is incorporated into existing narratives as well as being the subject of new songs. The song 'Bonny Blue Handkerchief' sets the broken token story, in which a disguised man tests his female partner's loyalty, then reveals his identity by producing his half of a token, in an industrial textile setting:

Where so fast? said I, and got her round the waist;
I'm going to my work, all in a great haste,
I work in yon factory, where cotton they spin,
With my bonny blue handkerchief tied under my chin.⁴⁵

The lyrics do not specifically tie the action to any particular city, and it is not clear where it originates from, but the song was carried in the Dundee Poet's Box during the 1880s. The factory girl replaces the more standard rural poor heroine in these songs. Another song, usually called 'The Factory Girl,' explores the idea of cross-class

⁴⁴ Gordon, p. 154-160.

⁴⁵ LC421/53.

romance in the industrial city:

The sun had just risen on a fine summers morning,
And the birds from the bushes so sweetly did sing,
And the lads and the lasses so merrily moving,
Unto these large buildings where labour begin,
I spied a fair damsel far brighter than Venus,
With cheeks like the roses, none could her excel;
And skin like the lilies that grow in the garden,
Had this lovely goddess, the Factory Girl.

I stepped up to her, this beautiful creature,
She cast upon me a proud look of disdain,
Stand back sir, she said, and do not insult me,
Tho' poor and in poverty that is no sin.
Said I, my sweet damsel no harm is attempted,
Grant me one favour – pray where do you dwell?
At home sir, she answered, and was going to leave me,
I am only a hard working Factory Girl.

I stood all amazed, and on her I gazed,
Such modesty and prudence I never did see;
Said I, my sweet charmer, my soul's sweet alarmer,
If you will prove constant a lady you'll be.
But she said, sir temptations are used in all nations –
Go, marry a lady and you will do well.
So let me alone sir, the bell is a-ringing,
I am only a poor working Factory Girl.

I stood in a flutter, I knew not the matter,

Like Cupid the whole of my heart had trapan'd.
Lovely girl, I replied, if you'll not become my bride,
My life I will waste in some foreign land.
For what pleasure's in treasure if love is awaiting,
Your beauty upon me it has cast a spell,
I'll marry you speedily, I'll make you a lady,
If you will become my dear Factory Girl.

She gave her consent, when her license was purchased,
The bells they did merrily echo and ring;
To the church then they went, and as they returned,
The bridesmaids and men did so merrily sing.
Now this loving young couple live happy together,
She blesses the day that she met with her swain,
This Factory Girl she is made a great lady,
She is married to a squire of honour and fame.⁴⁶

There are many versions of this song from Ireland, Scotland and England. In this version, the couple do get married, but in many she rejects him, assuming that no one of his status would court her seriously and telling him to find someone from his own background. One of the tunes most frequently used in Scottish versions is the 'Road and the Miles to Dundee,' though this does not necessarily indicate it stems from a Dundee tradition. The response in these versions is perhaps more realistic, a warning that if you are a factory worker and a rich man is coming on to you, he is unlikely to be serious about the relationship. Usually, though, he is the narrator of the song and presented as genuinely in love, sometimes saying he will die for her sake. Common to all versions is

⁴⁶LC421/13. An almost identical version of the song was printed in a parodic article in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* Vol. 22, under the name 'George Gilfillagain.' Titled 'A Glance at the Minstrelsy of the Middlesex Border', it mocks Gilfillan's interest in local poetry as well as the lyrics of traditional song itself (or at least the ones which do not meet the historic and literary standards of Walter Scott's collection.) It is tempting to think that a Dundee broadside seller saw the article because of its Gilfillan connection and then printed the songs anyway.

the discussion before the proposal is accepted or rejected. One of the reasons often given by the factory girl for her rejection is ‘my friends and relations would all frown upon it,’ in which she is not remaining loyal to an existing suitor but to her own community. This could be read as a reflection of the growing economic independence of women and the increasing freedom to reject marriage, or even as a reflection of growing awareness of class solidarity in the industrial city, although the parallel popularity of versions in which they do happily marry makes it impossible to attach a single meaning to the song.

James Easson, a house painter whose verse was popular in the *People's Journal*, also wrote a poem entitled ‘The Factory Girl’, inspired by his observations in Dundee:

In a thrifty dress of an homely guise
 All iron'd, smooth, and clean,
The factory girl, at the brief meal hour,
 Is always to be seen.
And there is ever on her face,
 That look which seems to say,
‘Industry is the noblest plan,
 By which to live you may.’

Both snow and sleet her ceaseless feet
 Can brave without regret;
More sweet thinks she it thus should be,
 Than sleep and wake in debt.
And she lightly warbles while she works,
 The moments to beguile,
As quick they fly, like the rapid wheel
 That merrily whirls the while.

Around and round the mighty arm
 Of the engine sweeps its track;

But every turn still serves to bring
 The hour of respite back.
When the mighty bell on the lofty roof,
 Calls out with clamorous din,
'To your homes now go all ye below,
 Who closely weave and spin.'

Then home she goes to that much lov'd hearth,
 And there sinks down to rest;
When a well won meal rewards her toil,
 Of all rewards the best.
Then when the happy board is swept,
 Some reading forth she'll bring;
Or haply with her brothers young,
 She tunes her voice to sing.

Year after year this is the mode,
 In which she spends her days;
An endless scene of activeness,
 Her hist'ry's page displays,
And though her lot may be obscure,
 The less of care has she;
So may her happiness increase,
 And toils unnotic'd be.⁴⁷

This celebration of both domestic and industrial productivity, undertaken willingly and cheerfully, perhaps epitomises the idealised factory girl image in Victorian Dundee. The factory bell, again, is present as a constant feature of timekeeping. The mechanical

⁴⁷ James Easson, *Select Miscellany of Poetical Pieces* (Printed for the author: Dundee, 1856), p.36.

movement extends beyond the machines on which she works to encompass sweeping, circular days contained recurring patterns, her life contained in the patterns set out by the poem's neat lines and rhythm. This image contrasts dramatically with the self-described painful toil of handloom weaving described by Thom and Gow. The workplace had certainly changed since their days, though it had not necessarily improved. The mid-century factories were loud, crowded and dangerous workplaces, while the average working day was still around twelve hours in length.⁴⁸ The woman's intellectual and social life outside of work is here portrayed as entirely in the home – her happy singing with younger siblings is an approved use of the female voice, in contrast to the other types of singing attributed to working women which will be discussed below. Easson revisited this poem seven years after its first publication, using it to conclude a flaneur-style sketch, 'Six O' Clock in the Scouringburn,' which observed the crowds at factory closing time.⁴⁹ Easson's portrayal drew clear lines between the steam-loom girls (weavers) and mill girls (spinners), contrasting a 'smart and tidy steam-loom lassie' with two mill girls 'ranting might and main' while 'thick covered with mill stoor.'⁵⁰ When talking of factory girls as a group, he proclaims 'They do not *all* deserve the sneer we mention, [Easson's emphasis]' indicating he believes many do. These distinctions drew some criticism from readers, including 'A Mill Girl' from Arbroath, who insisted that, outside of the workplace, the difference between steam-loom and mill girls was imperceptible, and defended the use of their voices: 'He terms us the 'Loud mouthed mill lassies.' What does he mean? Does he know that in a factory we can scarcely speak loud enough to be heard? [...] It has become so great a crime now-a-days to be a mill girl that some of them deny that they are so, but I will never do such a thing.'⁵¹ Easson's fairly defensive reply puts the criticisms down to misunderstanding and wilful offense,

⁴⁸ Gordon, p. 146.

⁴⁹ 'Six O'Clock in the Scouringburn', *People's Journal*, 12th December 1863, p.2. He made some minimal changes to the poem: in the fourth verse, 'much-lov'd' and 'well-won' were hyphenated. The only word to change was in the first line of the final verse, which had been changed to include the internal rhyme: 'Year after year this is the sphere.'

⁵⁰ *People's Journal*, 12th December 1863, p.2.

⁵¹ 'Correspondence', *People's Journal*, 26 December 1863, p.3.

saying his comments were made in ‘purely humorous’ spirit, and that the author of the letter, being one who ‘glories in [her] work, and honest way of life,’ was among the type he praised in his original piece.⁵²

Two decades later, George Watson, ‘The Roper Bard,’ whose wider body of work is discussed below, wrote ‘The Blithe Mill Lasses’, a song celebrating Dundee mill girls in general, and his wife in particular:

O’ a the towns in Scotland wide
For spinnin’ mills Dundee surpasses;
May health and safety there abide,
An’ work abundant for the masses.
I’ll sing a sang while in my glee
In honour o’ the working-classes,
And aye the burden o’t shall be,
The Dundee bonnie, blithe mill lasses.

Hey! The bonnie, blithe mill lasses,
The honest, toilin’, blithe mill lasses;
May blessin’s fa’ on ane an’ a’,
The Dundee bonnie, blithe mill lasses.

For helpmates they to us were gi’en;
Oh, what were life on earth without them?
When claes come frae the bleaching green
There’s aye a caller smell about them.
A clean coat an’ a white short goon
Oor lasses wear while in their passes,
But see them wi’ us doon the toon,

⁵² ‘Mill Girls v. Factory Girls’, *People’s Journal*, 2nd January 1864, p.3.

Ye wadna tak' them for mill lasses.

There lives a lass in yonder ha',
The mither o' my bonnie bairns,
An' sample o' oor lasses a',
Wha spin an' reel oor far famed yairns.
In sixty-six I took her frae
The mill, an' though she whiles was saucy,
Wi' a' my soul I bless the day
I wooed an' won the blithe mill lassie.

Dear Burns sang the lasses' praise,
'Twas his delight to digniffee them;
'Mang them he spent his happiest days,
An' mony a mile he gaed to see them.
I ne'er may sing as Burns sang,
Nor climb sae high the steep Parnassus;
But, be my days here short or lang,
I'll aye respect the blithe mill lasses.

Hey! The bonnie, blithe mill lasses,
The queenly, cleanly, blithe mill lasses;
May blessin's fa' on ane an' a',
The Dundee bonnie, blithe mill lasses.⁵³

The tune assigned to this song, 'Beauty winna pay the rent', sets the tone of the poem. This appears to have been a song circulated among Dundee's Irish community, whose original lyrics also focused on work. I have been unable to locate a full text for this song,

⁵³ 'The Blithe Mill Lasses', *People's Journal*, 3 August 1881, p.3.

but an *Evening Telegraph* article from 1962 recalled the chorus (in cod-Irish accent) as:

When Oi've money Oi'm content,
Paverty aye keep me toilin' nya;
Beauty winna pey the rint,
No, nor keep the kettle bilin' nya.⁵⁴

In Watson's poem, areas highlighted for criticism, such as their clothes, voice and attitude, are celebrated. The women are incorporated as part of the working-classes, and the reader is invited to take pride in them as part of the full package of Dundee's industrial success. Even so, they are still conceptualised primarily in terms of their relation to men – 'for helpmates they to us were gien.' The assumption here is that women will leave work on marriage, which was less true in Dundee than has been demonstrated in comparable towns such as Paisley, due to Dundee employers' reluctance to hire men.⁵⁵ All these depictions of factory girls leave the women constantly on duty. Even when their work has finished they are still seen as working types and are representatives of their wider working community. The continuing expectation for women to do the majority of domestic work suggests that, for several generations of women, leisure time must have been extremely rare. This combination of demands on their time may partially explain why there are so few examples of Dundee women writing about their experience of textile work in the nineteenth century, though there are certainly women poets from other occupations and backgrounds. It is also possible that women poets employed in factories used pseudonyms and/or anonymity to allow them to write without the additional judgement associated not only with their gender but specifically with their profession. Florence Boos has observed that we may have lost the

⁵⁴ 'They Sang Strange Songs in 'Beef-Can Closie', *Evening Telegraph*, 10 August 1962 (LC378). The reference to 'kettle bilin' here is also worth noting, as this was the popular name given to unemployed men supported by their wives' wages.

⁵⁵ Graham Smith, 'Protest is better for infants: Motherhood, Health and Welfare in a women's town, c.1911-1931', *Oral History* 23/1 (1995), 63-70.

work of possibly ‘thousands’ of working-class Scottish women poets due to the lack of interest from publishers and peers at the time, with their work less likely to be taken as serious poetry.⁵⁶

Unsuitable songs and their performance are frequently cited as a sign of moral degradation in women, and, unfortunately, the actual songs they sang were usually considered unfit to print. The *Courier* in 1862 opined that factory working women were unsuitable as wives in the colonies, as what was needed there were home-makers: ‘The true factory people may be almost said to be homeless. They have places to eat and drink and sleep in, but of *homes*, in the true sense of the word, there are but few among them. [...] Her evening lounge has been not by the domestic hearth, but in the streets or the cheap singing saloon.’⁵⁷ The dangers of corruption to women in factories was not a new concern in the mid-century. As early as the 1810s, William Thom referred to the dangers of mixed-gender workforces: ‘Man became less manly. Woman unlovely and rude.’⁵⁸ As factories grew larger, the author of the *Second Statistical Account* for Dundee remarked that while the city’s wealth was increasing, the morality of the workforce was not.⁵⁹ The concern about the power of women to corrupt specifically through song was illustrated in *Chapters in the Life of a Dundee Factory Boy*, which was anonymously serialised in the *Northern Warder* in 1850. Later, James Myles openly claimed authorship and published it in book form. Myles intended it at the time to be taken as a piece of fiction whose moral was to encourage temperance and respectable behaviour, and his audience readily received it as such, but in the twentieth century it has been mistaken for a genuine autobiography, as in David Philips’ 1982 edition. The young narrator, shortly after being forced into mill work after his father’s downfall through drink, finds himself in the company of unsupervised mill girls: ‘[I] heard, for the first time, a vile production called ‘Sally Kelly,’ sung with much enthusiasm and glee. This

⁵⁶ Boos, ‘Cauld Engle-Cheek’, p. 53.

⁵⁷ ‘The Cotton Famine’, *Dundee Courier*, 22 April 1862, p.2. The *Courier*, then the more conservative Dundee paper, was less likely to have been read by the factory girls themselves than its competitors the *Advertiser* and the *People’s Journal*.

⁵⁸ Thom, p. 12

⁵⁹ *Second Statistical Account*, p. 18

horrible compound of doggerel and obscenity is still popular among mill boys and girls [...]’ Shortly after, he overhears ‘one of the oldest women in the flat teaching a little girl a song, so disgusting in its character and even name, that it cannot be mentioned.’⁶⁰

Dundee mill girls undoubtedly had their own verse culture, which seems to have been primarily youthful, oral and performative, and mostly separate from the newspaper and broadside verse communities in which the other works discussed here were published. The main social space for women employed in mills seems to have been the streets in industrial areas. Despite the concerns, most were not spending their free time in disreputable taverns, instead walking up and down certain thoroughfares and talking. The use of the street as a social and performance space was common, but large numbers of young, unaccompanied women taking control of public space raised concerns. Walker reports that there was less interest in the mainstream culture of respectability and self-improvement among mill girls.⁶¹ This may also partially explain their lack of engagement in popular poetry culture, which was very focused towards these ideas.

The performance of song, and particularly of street games and rhymes, was an essential part of the workplace experience for Dundee’s women, as well as a key tool for effective workplace protest. As with the ‘vile’ rude songs above, newspapers were reluctant to report the actual words of strike songs, but there are frequent references to their performance, particularly from the later decades of the nineteenth century. In 1892 the Royal Visit to Dundee was disturbed by ‘a body of young girls on strike from a neighbouring mill,’ who marched between the High Street and the Tay Bridge Station singing a strike song with what the *Dundee Advertiser* described as ‘the dreary and most unmusical refrain of ‘Ay, oh, we’ll have a heicht o’ wages, oh!’⁶² They showed no sign of being intimidated by the police, and appropriated the music of the piper and marching band sent to welcome the royal party by marching in front of them. In 1899, the *Dundee*

⁶⁰ David Philips (ed.) *Chapters in the Life of a Dundee Factory Boy* (Dundee: David Winter, 1981), p. 15. ‘Sally Kelly’ may well have been a real song causing moral outrage at the time, but I have failed to find any lyrics to it.

⁶¹ Walker, *Juteopolis*, p.12-15.

⁶² ‘The Royal Visit to Dundee’, *Advertiser*, 22nd October 1892, p. 5.

Telegraph noted the singing of ‘the strike song,’ described as a ‘local Carmagnole,’ as an omen of approaching trouble.⁶³ This song is mentioned as if familiar to readers, but, perhaps because of its familiarity, it is not quoted. The choice of comparison says something about its performance. The French revolutionary song La Carmagnole was based on a dance, and dancing remained part of its revolutionary meaning.

The idea that strikes were performative, and even celebratory, is hinted at further by the *Telegraph*’s earlier warning that the ‘singing strikes oftenest lead to mournful days,’ despite youngsters’ light attitudes and ‘rousing lilts.’⁶⁴ These strikes were also generally organised by word of mouth among factory workers, something that male would-be trade union leaders often despaired of, and made several attempts to impose order on, with limited success.⁶⁵ This form of strike seems to have been just as effective as the more official trade union-organised ones in achieving its goal. The combination of domestic and economic demands on women’s time has often been overlooked in accounts of their workplace resistance, and it was certainly overlooked by trade unions at the time. Siobhan Tolland’s research into the strikes of 1909-12, just a few years after the above newspaper reports, shows strikes as almost carnivalesque, with women wearing masks, singing music hall songs, and performing children’s games in the street.⁶⁶ Her description of strikers forcing policemen to join in with those games also brings to mind the tradition of forcing opponents of the French Revolution to dance the Carmagnole, a tactic seen much earlier in Dundee when, ahead of the first Reform Bill, protestors forced the unpopular Provost Riddoch to dance around a Tree of Liberty they had stolen from a garden on the Perth Road.⁶⁷ One of the most popular activities in the 1912 strikes was ‘Three Times Goes Round the Gallant Ship,’ a children’s game song with actions, which was certainly current in the nineteenth century as it is the subject of

⁶³ ‘Here and There’, *Telegraph*, 5th September 1899, p.2.

⁶⁴ ‘Here and There’, *Telegraph*, 21st August 1895, p.2.

⁶⁵ Walker, *Juteopolis*, p. 148-198 describes Reverend Henry Williamson’s efforts to organise female textile workers through the Dundee and District Mill and Factory Operatives’ Union, efforts which were supported by John Leng.

⁶⁶ Siobhan Tolland, ‘Just Ae Wee Woman: Dundee, the Communist Party and the feminisation of socialism in the life and works of Mary Brooksbank’, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Aberdeen (2006), p.28.

⁶⁷ James Myles describes these events in *Rambles in Forfarshire*, p. 63-66.

reminiscence in *Dundee Worthies*:

‘They formed a ring by clasping the hand of a player on each side of them and careering round to the following verses:

‘Three times round goes our gallant gallant ship
And three times round goes she;
Three times around goes our gallant ship
Until it sinks to the bottom of the sea.’

All sit down on their heels - ‘Hunkerties’ - they then sang the following:

‘Pull her up, pull her up,
Cried the brave sailor boy;
Pull her up, pull her up, cried he (All rise).
Pull her up, pull her up,
Cried the brave brave sailor boy,
Until he sank to the bottom of the sea (All down).’⁶⁸

The cultural elements represented in Dundee jute strikes during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were, as Tolland points out, representative not only of the young and female nature of the workforce, but of the tensions resulting from the lack of leisure time given to Dundee women over the preceding half a century or so. The playfulness of the strikes was a way of reversing existing power relations of both class and gender, creating a space outside of everyday life where normal rules did not apply, and thus put the women in charge with the ability to pose a genuine threat to policemen and jute owners.

Historically, women have often been portrayed as bearers of an oral tradition which is rooted in domesticity. This characterisation overlooks the role of an oral

⁶⁸Martin, p. 188.

tradition, in which women fully participated, which dealt with matters of work and politics. Referring to a west coast weaving poetic tradition, Chris Whatley has observed social and political tensions present in the material collected from Agnes Lyle by William Motherwell and suggested this is part of a wider tradition of women transmitting political song and poetry by mouth.⁶⁹ While the impromptu and chaotic nature of these strikes resisted writing and publication, it was also what made them effective. Women striking in Dundee were resisting not only low pay and poor work conditions, but also the expectation that their small amounts of leisure time should be spent quietly and productively – an expectation that had been made explicit from the time they entered the workforce. Given women workers' right to representation was generally excluded from movements to extend the franchise, they had less to gain by conforming to the respectable values which male working-class writers often used to prove they 'deserved' the vote.⁷⁰ In any case, the poetry on the pages of books and newspapers clearly co-existed with a range of spontaneous, oral and rebellious verse, primarily composed and performed by women. Despite the lack of evidence for its content today, contemporary newspaper reports demonstrate their performances at strikes had a direct and immediate effect on the perception of the industrial landscape, and at least temporarily challenged power relations along gender and class lines.

Factory Poets

As the factory became the dominant symbol of work and production in Dundee, it is not surprising that a number of poets used their roles as factory workers as an integral part of their poetic identity, something seen from 1860 onwards. The possibility for introducing poetry to the workplace changed. Unlike in loom shops, there was no opportunity for displaying printed verse or hosting meetings of poets and musicians outside of work hours. Nevertheless, poetry was still an important factor in forming

⁶⁹ Christopher A. Whatley, 'Sound and Song in the Ritual of Popular Protest: Continuity and the Glasgow 'Nob Songs' of 1825', in *The Ballad in Scottish History* ed. by Edward Cowan (East Linton: Tuckwell Press: 2000), 142-160 (p.144).

⁷⁰ T.C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People*, (p. 247) and W.W. Knox, *People and Society in Scotland* (p. 158) discuss the role of respectability culture in working-class movements further.

workplace communities and in communicating the perspectives of workers to a wider audience. Neither was performance completely absent from these new workplaces, as William McGonagall's creative career is said to have begun with his recitals of Shakespeare speeches to his workmates in Seafield Works.⁷¹ There is, though, a growth in poets who identify with a wider community of factory workers, and poems which comment on the factory itself as a workplace, rather than displaying a specific identification with the job of weaving. The more popular 'Factory Poets' in Victorian Dundee included David Tasker, Ellen Johnston, Adam Wilson and George Watson. I argue here that these poets used their identity as 'factory poets' to comment on social issues affecting themselves and their colleagues, and many of their poems are part of ongoing conversations about the right way to address problems of industrial life.

David Tasker dedicated his 1865 book *Musings in Leisure Hours* to 'the working-classes of Dundee,' signing himself 'their fellow labourer.' This collection was reprinted several times, including a 'cheap edition' in 1879 by James P. Mathew & Co., indicating demand for the works in an affordable format. His Preface stresses not only his disadvantages through lack of education, but also through having grown up an orphan. A more detailed account of his life story is given in a much later work, *Readings, Recitations and Sketches* (1907). Tasker was born in Dundee c.1839. His father was a weaver by trade, but had recently left armed service. From the age of around eleven, following his mother's death, Tasker took over her role as 'pirm wife'. At the age of 16, his father's death led him to take up weaving and other work on behalf of himself and his siblings. Tasker's 1907 autobiography recalls seasonal work at the potato lifting and work in various factories at the hackle machines, as well as work as a hand-loom weaver.⁷² After the publication of his first book, he spent some time at paper mills on Tyneside before returning to Dundee to work at Upper Dens Works.

Tasker began composing his own poems and songs at a young age. He sent his first serious composition, inspired by the death of a neighbour's child, to the *People's Journal*, who published it. Before Tasker became successful as a poet, he was known as

⁷¹ Norman Watson, *Poet McGonagall* (Edinburgh: Birlinn 2010), p. 43.

⁷² David Tasker, *Readings, Recitations and Sketches* (Dundee: John Pellow, 1907) p. 19-22.

a performer: in his youth he took part in song concerts in venues such as the Thistle Hall, and was one of a group who organised a benefit concert for a former fellow employee who needed financial help during his time working at Baxter Brothers' Mill. He also recalled attempting, along with another singer, a concert at the Thistle Hall to make money for themselves, at which the proceeds were stolen by the deceitful doorman. The Thistle Hall, on Union Street in the town centre, was a popular venue for local poets and musicians to perform, and also for specifically workplace-focused gatherings. Tasker's first collection of poems did not contain, he wrote, 'grand ideas or subtle originalities.' They were written 'to clothe in simple language the simple thoughts that have been struggling for utterance within his mind, trusting that they might find an echo in the hearts of his fellow workmen.'⁷³ Gilfillan's introduction reflects this, praising their '*sweet sincerity*', like 'the artless note of a bird ... [who] sings so well because she cannot help it!' This imagery is typical of the idea of the working-class poet as self-taught, and thus natural. Gilfillan also places Tasker as representative of his class, if more articulate than most: he sings in 'the name and stead of a very large class of his fellow-workmen.' The majority of works are either nature poems or sentimental tales of family life and death. The troubles of the workplace are depicted in 'Wee Richie, The Mill Laddie':

The snaw-flakes frae the wintry cluds
Fa' heavily and chill,
As puir wee Richie, scant o' duds,
Gangs trudgin' fae the mill;
The saut tears doon his cheeks, sae cauld,
Are tricklin' fast, like rain -
For some sma' faut, the loon's been tauld
To nae gang back again.

⁷³ Tasker, *Musings in Leisure Hours* (Dundee: James P. Mathew & Co., 1865), p. vi.

He's fearin' hame to gang; but, ah!
Nae hame, nor freens, has he -
His mither sleeps beneath the snaw,
His father in the sea -
He lives 'mang stranger folks, wha ken
Nae love nor charity.

Oh! Wearily amang th' sleet
He wanders up an' doon -
His hackit feet, sae cauld an' weet -
Wae's me! th' orphan loon,
Withoot a hame, withoot a freen,
In a' the big mill toon!⁷⁴

The lone child facing the cruelties of the industrial world alone resonated with Victorian audiences, as the success of Myles' *Chapters in the Life of a Dundee Factory Boy* shows. The child here is an innocent victim of the dehumanising effects of city life, which makes his neighbours 'strangers,' and his powerlessness to defend himself should spur adult readers to consider their own acts of love and charity. Depictions of children damaged or corrupted by mill life must have been common in poetry, as five years before the publication of Tasker's book, a former mill girl claimed that the employment of children was in fact 'not so shocking as some fine poetry would have us believe.'⁷⁵ The description of 'hackit feet,' a cracked, cut condition resulting from going barefoot in the winter, is also used to describe the condition of the unfortunate hero of the hugely popular broadside 'The Drunkard's Raggit Wean.' The poem goes on to describe how the child spends the following three days looking for work in various mills and sleeping rough. On the night of the third day:

⁷⁴ David Tasker, *Musings*, p.97-100.

⁷⁵ 'Letters', *People's Journal*, 24 March 1860, p.3.

The factory toon is husht ance mair
In slumbers still and deep;
Again upon a cauld, damp stair,
He's shiv'rin' gane tae sleep:
In dreams his sainted mither's voice
Fa's sweetly on his ear;
It tells him o' calm heavenly joys,
An' whispers they are near.

His weary soul rejoices;
In a low and dreary hum
He hears th' far-off voices
O' angels white that come.
The midnight lift is riven:
Doon an air o' gowden licht,
Frae the glitt'rin' shores o' heaven,
Come the angels, fair and bricht.

They bear the laddie hame, to dwell
Whaur tears th' een ne'er dim; -
Th' jowin' o' th' lood mill-bell
Nae mair will wauken him!⁷⁶

The Christian moral framework remains an important component of poems addressing the injustices of the workplace, along with a continuing focus on morality guaranteeing reward in the next world, though it does not in life. The angels stand in for the child's deceased mother as a benevolent guardian, and allow the reunion of the family unit in heaven as this is how society functions best. Industrial capitalism is still shown as

⁷⁶ Tasker, *Musings*, p. 97-100.

fundamentally at odds with the Christian way of life, though the focus is on how it diminishes individuals' capability for love, rather than how the industrial system itself may be un-Christian.

The difference between Tasker's depictions of his own life and writings in his 1865 'Preface' and his 1907 'Biographical Introductions' is striking, and suggests he felt pressure to conform to certain tastes in order to begin his career. By the time of writing the later book, he is in a more secure position, and as a known writer he is not dependant on the approval of a respected figure in order to publish or sell. Robert Ford, in the *Poets' Album* of 1902, recalls him having been as ready to perform humorous recitations as sentimental ones in his teens.⁷⁷ His account of his life presents a far more lively and humorous tone than the apologetic language of *Musings in Leisure Hours*, and the verses selected are balanced between humorous and sentimental. For instance, 'Lucy Lee: A Legend of the Tay' parodies emotional ballads of lovers separated by shipwreck, using comically forced rhyme and incongruous specificity reminiscent of the best-worst broadsides.

By far the best illustration of the conflict Tasker felt between his own creativity and the expectations of his patron is his later admission of having been the author behind the 'Moses Dalite' poems.⁷⁸ These appeared in the *People's Journal* in the mid-1860s, the same period during which his first book appeared. Dalite was an admirer and imitator of Poute, the pseudonym under which Alexander Burgess published his comically 'bad' verse in phoenetic Scots, and corresponded with him in verse. Poute was the originator of a small yet significant poetic movement in the Dundee press which took themes encouraged for the working-class poet, such as flowers or a rainbow, and presented them in a way which broke every writing convention through lengthy lines, forced rhymes and frequent digressions. Kirstie Blair, in identifying this poetic trend, has argued that Poute's writings were funny because they were 'deliberate and self-conscious satires on the kind of poetry that an uneducated Scottish poet might be

⁷⁷ Robert Ford, quoted in *Readings and Recitations*, p. iv.

⁷⁸ This is sometimes spelt as 'Daylite,' especially in later sources, though earlier publications use 'Dalite,' possibly a play on both 'daylight' and 'delight.'

expected to produce.’ The joke was not on the poets themselves, but on the editors, who were often unable to determine these from ‘actual’ bad poetry.⁷⁹ As the best-known patron of working-class poets in Dundee, Reverend Gilfillan is the target of several asides. Poute deliberated about dedicating his collection to Gilfillan, but chose not to as ‘he michtna tak the thing weel oot.’⁸⁰

Moses Dalite’s poem ‘Ode to the Old Steeple’ was prefaced by a lengthy note to the editor, also purposefully misspelt. Here, Dalite also references the importance of newspaper editors in forming poetic reputations, gratefully exclaiming ‘Haddint it nut bean for yew i wood have bean, as Shapeskear sase, a flour born to blush unsean.’⁸¹ The language of natural talent, applied liberally to Tasker himself in the introduction to his first collection, is presented in a form which completely negates its own standards. Gilfillan, the author of that introduction, is also referenced in the final verse of the poem:

Twood be moar sad if a strong east wind was blawin
Sum stormy Sabeth day, and yew was fawin.
They wood here the thundrin crash near broty ferry -
Yude kaws a wundirfil sensaishon verie
Amongst the sitisens of this grate naishan
But speshily in the numeris kongirigashun
That okkypies the skool wind kirk clos buy,
Whair grate filgillan lifts his voyse on high.
But i do hop that time is far away
And that i wont be in the kirk on that disastris day.⁸²

As Blair has stated, these mock-admiring poems are, at their core, a ‘critique of middle-

⁷⁹ Kirstie Blair, ‘McGonagall, ‘Poute,’ and the Bad Poets of Victorian Dundee’, *The Bottle Imp* (No. 14, November 2013) <<https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2013/11/mcgonagall-poute-and-the-bad-poets-of-victorian-dundee/> (n.p.)> [Accessed 23 September 2018].

⁸⁰ Poute, quoted in Blair, ‘Bad Poets of Victorian Dundee.’

⁸¹ Tasker, *Readings and Recitations*, p.103.

⁸² Tasker, *Readings and Recitations*, p.107.

class patronage and a determination to do without it.⁸³ Dalite's poem, in light of the knowledge that its author had, that same year, published a book of verse to warm praise from the 'grate filgillan,' makes this meaning clear. Tasker was highly aware of the standards to which he was held as a working-class poet, and was more than capable of writing to them to pursue his poetic ambitions. Equally, he was conscious of the ironies and hypocrisies which adhering to these standards entailed, and Poute's lead provided him with another voice in which to express these. Tasker's early success as a 'good' working-class poet meant that publication of a second book under his own direction was possible.

Of the factory poets active in Dundee from 1860 onwards, the best known today is Ellen Johnston, who also worked in factories in Glasgow and Belfast throughout her life. Her poetry and autobiography were published by subscription in 1867, featuring a foreword by George Gilfillan. Johnston often creates a poetic image of the workplace, whether through depictions of everyday events, as in 'Nellie's Lament for the Pirnhouse Cat,' or the more dramatic series of poems written following her dismissal from Verdant Works. Johnston used the name 'Factory Girl' for her writing, playing with its associated stereotypes by refusing to be fulfilled either the expectations of the well-behaved domesticated factory girl, or the raucous shawl-clad mill girl. Johnston appears to have been keen to make the most of her poetic ability to further her position within the workplace, and often composed verse in praise of factories where she was employed. The Thistle Hall was also the venue for a gathering of power loom weavers of Chapelshade Factory, on 7 August 1866, during which their foreman James Dorward was 'presented with a handsome sofa, as a token of gratitude and respect, from the workers under his charge.'⁸⁴ She composed the following 'Lines Most Respectfully Dedicated to Mr James Dorward' for that occasion:

Dear Chapelshade Factory! once more I hail thee,

⁸³ Blair, 'Bad Poets of Victorian Dundee'.

⁸⁴ Ellen Johnston, *Autobiography, Poems and Songs of Ellen Johnston* (Glasgow: William Love, 1867), p. 101.

For one of thy brave sons doth claim honour's lays;
Whate'er be the fate that in future assail me,
This night I will sing thee a song in his praise.

For worthy is he of our hearts' deep devotion,
And worthy is he of our souls' grateful love;
The kindness he has shown us with heartfelt emotion,
Cold death from our bosoms can only remove.

Believe us, James Dorward, we ne'er can forget thee –
Thy kindness to us in the dear Chapelshade;
And here in the Thistle Hall this night we've met thee,
Now in our hearts' grateful thanks before thee we spread.

Thy skill as a foreman hast gained admiration,
Thou hast aimed at our welfare in each daily plan;
O long may you fill that same situation,
We never would wish for a better foreman.⁸⁵

Johnston often voiced either extreme joy or sorrow in her poetry, so the high-register, heroic language here is not unusual for one of her celebratory poems. This does not seem to have been in thanks for any one particular incident, rather Dorward's ongoing interest in the workers' 'welfare.' Chapelshade was also the first place Johnston worked after her dismissal from Verdant Works, during which time she called herself the 'Factory Exile', and she may also have hoped her positive portrayal of her new workplace community would make it back to her former one. These social events certainly helped to cement an emotional bond with the workplace, not only between workers but across the class and power spectrum. Works' outings, summer trips to

⁸⁵ Johnston, p. 101.

nearby towns or beauty spots, were often put on by employers, as were dances or concerts at New Year. Fostering a sense of local community based around individual factories helped to lessen the possibility of wider class-based action across the city, and many mill owners were aware that a happy workforce was a more productive one. This secured them workplace loyalty but also, to an extent, was a means of social control which extended workplace culture and discipline outside of the factory building, continuing the gradual conflation of ‘workplace’ with the idea of Dundee as a whole. Many events, like the one Johnston describes, seem to have been organised by workers in favour of their employers, indicating that the benefits of paternalism were widely appreciated. Poetry and song were often used at such gatherings. In February 1865, millwright John Sturrock, one of a relatively small group of artisan men employed in Dundee’s jute industry, attended a soiree in the same venue, intended to thank his employers the Pearce Brothers of Lilybank Foundry for changing the payment of wages to weekly instead of fortnightly. This consisted of speeches and ‘several songs sung [...] on the whole the evening was spent in the most agreeable and harmonious manner imaginable and broke up, after enjoying an hour and a half’s dancing, at twelve o’clock.’⁸⁶ These reports contribute to a picture of a harmonious mid-Victorian work culture, with relatively little conflict outside of personal or inter-factory grievances, a world away from the earlier Chartist discontent. W.W. Knox observes in his overview of nineteenth-century Scottish workplace culture that, rather than stopping and starting at various points in the century, working-class political tradition underwent ‘a continuous process of renegotiation and redefinition.’⁸⁷ Poetry written by Dundee workers reflects this alongside its awareness of the traditions of previous generations.

Adam Wilson, probably inspired by his father’s ‘Mountain Muse’ persona, used the name ‘The Factory Muse’ when publishing poetry, and addressing a muse is a frequent poetic device for him. Wilson is clear that, as a poet, he speaks to his fellow

⁸⁶ *Diary of John Sturrock*, p.102.

⁸⁷ W. W. Knox. ‘The Political and Workplace Culture in Scotland, 1832-1914’, in *People and Society in Scotland Volume 2, 1830-1914* ed. by W. Hamish Fraser and R.J. Morris (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), p.152.

workers. His 1906 book *Flowers of Fancy* is dedicated ‘to the mill and factory operatives of Dundee’ from ‘their sincere friend and fellow worker.’⁸⁸ That he felt part of a network of similar factory poets is suggested by his writing of a poem dedicated to Tasker, ‘To D. Tasker (Author of ‘Leisure Hour Musings’)’. The poem’s final stanza speaks of Tasker’s audience, himself included, as workers:

With other bards thy name may live,
Because thy works are good I own,
And all that fame to thee can give,
May give to thee ere thou art gone.
Now since thy name in print is known,
As flow'rs cull'd from beauty's bow'rs,
Long may they to the world be shown,
To cheer the toilers’ ‘Leisure Hours.’⁸⁹

Wilson began publishing poems in newspapers in the 1870s, while in his twenties. He sent work to the Glasgow-based *Penny Post* and *Amateur and Singer’s Journal* as well as the Dundee newspapers, but it seems to have been in the *People’s Journal* that he found his most receptive audience. By 1888, he was well known enough that the *People’s Journal* referenced his work in a report on the Dundee holiday-time in July: ‘As the factory muse might put it, the whirr of the machinery will be substituted for the brawling of the stream, and the pure air of the mountain for the dusty atmosphere of the mill and factory.’⁹⁰ As this reference suggests, Wilson’s poetry is often concerned with urban working-class experience of, and time spent in, nature. His songs addressed to ‘ye workers a’, wha toil and spin’ extoll the benefit of natural landscapes, particularly their healing powers as an antidote to the ills caused by factory work, and he is a constant defender of workers’ right to time off. Wilson was evidently aware of, and

⁸⁸ Adam Wilson, *Flowers of Fancy* (Dundee: Paul & Mathew, 1906), n.p.

⁸⁹ Wilson, *Flowers of Fancy*, p.63-4.

⁹⁰ ‘Local Notes’, *People’s Journal*, 28 July 1888, p.4.

influenced by, the poetry of the handloom weavers discussed above. His poem ‘At the Grave of James Gow, Author of Lays of the Loom’ expresses his appreciation of the earlier poet. To Wilson, Gow was not only a notable local poet, but a friend and potential link to his father. Alexander Wilson died the same year his son was born, while Gow lived until 1872. While there is no evidence of correspondence between the two, it is possible Gow became a poetic mentor or father figure to his friend’s son. Wilson addresses him as ‘Jamie my freen,’ describing him as a star ‘in the gloom o life’s nicht.’⁹¹

When Adam Wilson does address the factory workplace experience directly in his poetry, he is also firmly on the side of striking workers. In ‘The Mill and Factory Strike (1875)’ he expresses solidarity with striking women as part of a mixed-gender workforce:

Miss Muse, ye needna at me speir
What ‘tis that’s causin’ a’ the steer
Amang the factory workers here.

You’d like to ken?

Aweel it’s just the wages, dear,
Reduced again.

Some merchant princes o’ oor toon
Are tryin’ aince mair tae screw us doon,
A’ thro’ a’e’ avaricious loon

Wha ga’e the hint.

We’ll pay them back wi’ int’rest soon
For what we’ve tint.

The man wha speaks o’ women’s fare,

⁹¹ Wilson, p.39-40.

'Bout what they eat and what they wear,
I say is nae man, and declare
 'Twad be nae sin
To strip his big fat hurdies bare
 And warm his skin.

Nae doot the trade's a little dull,
And markets may be stock'd and full,
But lowerin' wages never will
 Reduce the stock.
They needna try wi' words to gull
 Poor workin' folk.

We're a' quite willin' to submit
To work short time a while, but yet
When trade revives we'll hae to get
 The ten per cent.
We lost before, or de'il a bit
 Will we relent.

Such gross injustice ne'er shall be,
A little while, and that you'll see,
If you're determined so are we
 To fight and win,
The factory workers o' Dundee
 Shall ne'er 'cave in.'⁹²

The poem was originally published in the *People's Journal* during the time of strike, and

⁹² Wilson, p. 49-50.

is also included in his later collection. The first verse has the poet distanced from the action, explaining the situation to his muse. The conversational setting is at first a light-hearted framing of a serious topic, but in later verses the poet's voice is fully linked with the strikers', speaking in terms of 'we' rather than 'they'. The reference to 'merchant princes' seems to have originated with the description of Baxter in these terms on donating the park, but soon became a by-word for wealthy factory owners, as 'jute barons' did in the twentieth century. Using this term here highlights the gap between Baxter's charitable 'princely' behaviour and the actions of the bosses at fault here. Wilson also counters the perennial criticism of women workers' public decorum in the third verse, suggesting public humiliation as fitting punishment for the bosses. The *People's Journal* meant a wide audience, making this a very direct and public statement of support for the strike. The poem itself becomes negotiation, speaking with his fellow workers to say they are prepared to work short time, but will continue to fight to regain the wages that have been cut. Working short time was a fairer alternative to mills shutting down some machines, as this meant available resources were spread among all workers

His song 'The Brotherhood of Man,' set to the tune 'The Wearing of the Green,' is, in form and content, closer to James Gow's verse than to many of his contemporaries':

Arise, ye sons of labour, artisans of every grade,
Be up and lay aside your instruments of trade,
While 'unity is strength' our right will be to guard the van,
For the universal fellowship and brotherhood of man.
For the brotherhood of man, man's humanity to man,
For the universal fellowship and brotherhood of man.

With meagre wage and hours too long, we'll strive now to curtail
The working day, and have our pay set to some equal scale.
For labour's share in capital's our principle and plan

For the universal fellowship and brotherhood of man.

For the brotherhood of man, etc.

Why should a few have all the wealth, and teeming millions be

The slaves of those in whose employ they toil for petty fee?

Let master unto servant act the Christian, if he can,

For the universal fellowship and brotherhood of man.

For the brotherhood of man, etc.

Our path through life is rough and hard, but we will clear away

What e'er impedes our progress as we plod on day by day,

For a vast co-operation in the future dim I scan,

Bringing universal fellowship and brotherhood of man.

For the brotherhood of man, etc.

We do not wish to take away from what already is your own,

But let some law of equity to nations all be known.

Let one be to the other just, as when the world began,

In universal fellowship and brotherhood of man.

For the brotherhood of man, etc.

Now if this world was made for man to share in what it yields,

Then, why like beasts of burden, or, like cattle in the fields,

Must we suffer and be driven by vile mammon and his clan?

Oh, for universal fellowship and brotherhood of man!

For the brotherhood of man, etc.

'The world is ill divided' – we have often heard it said –

Where luxury reclines at ease, the poor cry out for bread.

Tho' the land belongs the people toiling, weary, weak, and wan,

There's no universal fellowship or brotherhood of man,
For the brotherhood of man, etc.

By birth and blood we are the same, though some distinguish'd are,
What better is the royal brow beneath its crown and star?
All are a part of those who breathed at first creation's dawn,
In universal fellowship and brotherhood of man.
For the brotherhood of man, etc.⁹³

Much of the language here, including calls to arise, references to slavery, and the promise of a utopian future, echoes Chartist poetic tradition. The brotherhood of man is originally a Biblical phrase, and in the context of Scottish song communities would have brought to mind Burns' declaration that men will 'brithers be for a' that.' The poetic traditions used do not allow for linguistic solidarity with the female workforce here. As a song with a chorus, the form is also specifically communal.

The phrase 'This world is ill divided' is quoted as though it is frequently cited in workplace talk about pay and workplace conditions and will be familiar to the reader or listener. The phrase has been associated in wider culture with Dundee's jute industry since the 1930s, when Mary Brooksbank's song 'Oh dear me' became popular in folk song circles, including the lines:

Oh dear me, the world's ill divided,
Them that work the hardest are aye wi least provided.

This song, like much of Brooksbank's work, was quickly taken up into oral circulation because it drew on traditional songs and rhymes already present in Dundee mill culture. The chorus, which begins 'Oh dear me, the mill's gaen fest,' was based on a girls' street rhyme. It seems that 'the world's ill divided' was another such popular phrase already

⁹³ Wilson, p.159-60.

well known in the mills, and it is referred to in a similar context by George Watson below. This could possibly be a reference to one of the elusive slogans used in nineteenth-century strikes, which continued in circulation into the twentieth century. Wilson's chosen tune, 'The Wearing of the Green,' is significant. An Irish rebel song is an immediate political statement about power and self-determination, and demonstrates the cultural influence of the Irish workers in Dundee. There were several versions of the song circulating in the nineteenth century. The version adapted by Dion Boucicault for his play *Arragh na Pogue* in 1864, which subsequently became very popular, references a mythical land of liberty across the sea (America, though not named as such) where equality is a universal right.⁹⁴ It may be this connection which inspired Wilson to select it for his song, but it also indicates a solidarity with Dundee's Irish workforce often lacking in mainstream discussions at this time.

George Watson, 'The Roper Bard,' was another popular newspaper poet whose writing career spanned similar decades to Wilson's, starting and finishing slightly later. He was born in 1846, and seems to have published most frequently in the period between 1880 and 1905. Watson's poetry was frequently featured in both the *People's Journal* and the *Evening Telegraph*, and he adopted the name 'Roper Bard,' after his work in the rope factories in the Perth Road area of Dundee, when he was already being published fairly regularly. Watson continued to occasionally publish under his own name, and sometimes as 'Nostaw,' his surname reversed. There is no obvious pattern which suggests what influenced his decision about which name to put to a poem. He uses 'The Roper Bard' as well as his own name in the publication of his second book *Love's Task*, in which the introduction stresses, as well as his humble occupation, the fact he is still employed as a rope spinner at the age of sixty.⁹⁵ Watson's poetic themes are varied, but are frequently addresses, love lyrics and moral narratives set in the familiar context working-class Scottish life. He often wrote verse encouraging readers of the *People's Journal* to vote for the Liberal candidate at election time, and was a

⁹⁴ Deirdre McFeely, *Dion Boucicault: Irish Identity on Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) pp. 40-42

⁹⁵ 'D.D.', 'Preface', in George Watson, *Love's Task* (Dundee: 1899) p. 5. His first book, entitled *Love's Last*, was published in 1885.

supporter of the campaign for the eight-hour working day. As a worker poet, Watson frequently expresses sympathy and concern for the unemployed, whether as part of a wider observation as in 'The King of the Law,' discussed in the following chapter, or as the focus for a whole poem as in his 1887 'An Appeal on Behalf of the Unemployed':

'He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord.'

Hoo lang, dull trade, hoo lang will ye harass us?

Cauld winter's here, wi' its chill frost an' snaw;

We've far ower mony idle lads an' lasses;

This state o' trade'll never dae ava.

Alas! There's muckle need o' some improvement –

Nae views o' wark, says ilka ane we meet.

Revive, sweet hope! Oh, for the eight-'oor movement,

To tak' each willin' worker aff the street.

Methinks I hear sad-hearted mithers sighin'!

Whaur there's nae fire nor licht it's cauld an' dark.

It's sair to hear the bairns for 'pieces' cryin';

There's little bread when faither's oot o' wark.

God brack hard fortune, there are scenes heart-rendin'

In mony a hame on this the New Year's Day;

Ye thochtless spendthrifts half o' that yer spendin'

Wad help a brither up life's weary brae.

Fu' weel ye ken need mak's life's brae the steeper,

Could we for aince no want the social gless?

Remember, lads, we are oor brither's keeper,

An' only stewards o' a' we here possess.

And who art thou, I hear the wealthy saying,
That bids us to the poor and needy give?
A humble bard upon his auld harp playing,
Wha lives and likes tae see his brithers live.

E'en though my income be but unco sma', frien's,
A selfish heart I scornfully abhor;
T'wad grieve my heart fu' sair to send awa', frien's,
A needy brother hungry frae my door.

Oor actions a' are weighed by the All-Seein' –
He kens what we are able to afford,
An' kindly says, when to the poor we're giein',
We're lending to a faithfu' lovin' Lord.⁹⁶

There is a strong focus on the importance of personal charity as solutions to poverty. The focus is on what people should do as individuals to relieve the suffering of their neighbours, creating a better society through a series of good deeds. This is a plea to bring back the sense of community Tasker mourned the loss of in 'The Wee Mill Laddie'. He is also clear on the necessity of structural reform alongside these individual actions, as this is not his only poem to reference the necessity of the eight hour bill. Watson's 1885 poem, 'A Jute Prince's Boast,' seems to have been written in response to a particular speech or incident:

It's foolish to be grumblin'
Though scanty be oor lot;

⁹⁶Watson, *Love's Last*, p. 104.

Let's labour on an' do oor best
To mak' a better o't.
Ye who but worship self an' ease -
Here humbly let me say -
I wadna gie my poverty
For a' the wealth ye hae.

I've laboured noo these thirty years,
An' I am willin' still
To labour on for thirty mair,
Gin it's the Master's will.
The necessaries here o' life
May whiles be hard to get,
But wha is he wha says he'll mak'
Us 'eat oor jackets yet?'

'This world is ill divided,'
I've heard poor Pat declare,
'Sure every mother's son of us
Should have an equal share.
We've nothing in the Bank at all,
And nothing in our kit;
I'd ait the man who said he'd make
Us ait our jackets yet.'

Suppose we were a' rich alike,
An didna need to toil,
Hoo wad we get the coal that mak's
Oor pots an' kettles boil?
An' mony a thousan' usefu' things

That I maun here omit.
 We canna a' be masters, but
 We may be weel aff yet.

 Misca na ye the warld, Pat.
 Mind what ye are aboot.
 There's mony a costly luxury
 Some folk could do without.
 We'll a' be on ae fittin', Pat,
 When this braw earth we quit.
 Forget the cuif wha said he'd mak'
 Ye eat yer jacket yet.⁹⁷

The 'jute prince' label is again used here, though its target is less evident than in Wilson's strike poem. The poem may be responding to a boast by a particular jute prince, or implying that all workers have the potential to be princes in spiritual, if not physical, wealth. At the time of the poem's publication, the textile trades in Dundee were experiencing a slump. The same newspaper in which 'A Jute Prince's Boast' was published carried a report on a meeting in Lamb's Temperance Hotel to discuss the possibility of mills running on short time for a few months, with some in the city having already shut down some machines until further notice.⁹⁸ Here, Christian morality is again used to highlight the difference between the righteous poor and the sinful rich, who 'but worship self and ease.' In contrast to the Chartists' visions, the workers themselves are where they are because of God's plan, not in aberration of it: he is happy to 'labour on [...] Gin it's the Master's will,' equating the wishes of his heavenly and earthly masters. Pat, who he addresses here, stands for the discontent worker. Given the name and social context and the speech mannerisms given to him, particularly 'sure' and 'ait', we can assume Pat represents the Irish workforce. Irish workers were certainly

⁹⁷ 'A Jute Prince's Boast', *People's Journal*, 14 March 1885, p.4.

⁹⁸ 'Current Topics', *People's Journal*, 14 March 1885, p.4.

considered a disruptive influence in society, whether or not they were more likely to be involved in protests than Scottish workers. Adam Wilson's use of the tune 'The Wearing of the Green' reinforces the Irish connection, though in a way which places workplace disruption in a positive light. While Watson's poem is in many ways a defence of the status quo and discourages readers from voicing discontent, his opposition of direct action suggests its effectiveness was by no means a consensus among workers. George Watson's work, taken as a whole, also suggests he was more critical of the status quo and more supportive of Irish workers than this poem taken alone. For instance, 'Hoo Lang,' published in *Love's Task*, berates the British government:

Hoo lang maun puir auld Ireland suffer
Laws sae unjust and cruel?
'John Bull,' ye are a heartless buffer,
An' weel dae ye deserve a cuffer,
Richt whaur ye put yer gruel.

Ye waste the nation's time at leisure -
Far better, empty boards;
Ye bungled Gladstone's Hame Rule measure -
Is Ireland ever tae have pleasure,
Ye selfish Peers and Lords?

That ye hae nearly run yer tether,
Is easy to be seen,
The whips are ordered, mind the leather
Was tanned in Scotland, Ireland's brither.
Noo this is what we mean:

Ye dinna care a snuff about us,
Ower weel we ken it's true,

Sae mark us, sirs, an' dinna doot us,
As yer vain service disna suit us,
We mean to pairt wi' you.⁹⁹

Unlike many of the other poems Watson included in this collection, 'Hoo Lang' carries no original publication date, indicating it did not appear in a newspaper prior to publication there. This is comparatively unusual for the prolific Watson, and suggests the poem was withheld due to his awareness that it would not go down well with editors or patrons, saving it for inclusion in a book published when he had already secured his reputation as a poet.

Conclusion

Over the nineteenth century, Dundee became a city whose identity as an industrial textile producer was inextricably linked to its sense of itself and its place in the world. The workplace and its power divisions thus became central to discussions about politics, family life and social interaction. Many of the images presented in contemporary accounts of Dundee's industrial past stem from the idea of the city as a place of dualities, such as working women and unemployed men, or snuffy spinners and neat weavers. These oppositions are often based on quantifiable truths, but the ways in which they were experienced, negotiated and challenged by the people who experienced them are many. Poetry was important to workers, not always as a way of directly addressing issues. Often, it was a highly necessary escape. The ways in which people encounter these poems and songs change over the century. As the workplace itself becomes in many ways more distant from the processes of composing, hearing, or reading, poems are more likely to be performed at social gatherings in public halls, albeit gatherings that were still very much part of workplace culture. The growing importance of the newspaper as a basis for poetic communities is also very much in evidence. While in the 1830s and 1840s, newspapers linked Dundee poets to Chartist communities in the north

⁹⁹ Watson, *Love's Task*, p.96.

of England and to poets writing elsewhere in Scotland, the foundation of the *People's Journal* in 1858 led to the newspaper as a source of much more local connections for poets writing in the 1860s. Poetry could be an extension of, or a response to, the discussions about conditions, pay, and workers' behaviour which took place in the letters pages. The increasing importance of newspapers as the place of first publication for later generations of Victorian Dundee's poets placed editors in a position of some authority over what working-class poets chose to express in print. It is clear that poets like David Tasker were well aware of the power dynamics in which they operated, and were capable of both challenging and embracing standards according to their needs.

The language and poetic devices used to talk about work also change between the handloom weaving generations and the factory working ones. Generally speaking, direct appeals to fellow workers to rise up – intellectually or otherwise – and the language of right and justice which characterised the handloom weavers' poems fall out of popular use with the decline of the Chartist movement which it was part of. Instead, poets tend to use a narrative or account of personal feeling to make their points, with the poet's voice becoming the observer of a scene. This might at first suggest a weakening of the sense of community, or a prioritisation of individual feeling over collective action, but upon further examination there is continuity. A sense of Christian morality is still the most powerful appeal against injustice for factory poets, as it was for handloom weavers. Communities are still present, though often presented in terms of individuals helping one another, such as in Watson's aid to the unemployed, or Johnston's benevolent foreman, rather than in terms of a large group acting as one body.

The idea of what a working-class poet could, and should, be is a wider issue which affects more than just the poetry that is directly about the workplace. It is a thread throughout all sections of this thesis. The cultural politics of self-education and productive leisure which are central to this debate are also relevant to how working poets speak about or on behalf of their fellow workers more generally. As the women's strikes discussed above demonstrate, the right to leisure time, and public places in which to spend it, were essential concerns for industrial workers. In the following chapter, I will demonstrate how poetry about parks and green spaces by working poets illustrates

changing attitudes to both leisure and poetry over the nineteenth century.

Chapter 4: Parks and Green Spaces

This chapter examines four open, recreational green places within Dundee, and how their role within the imaginative landscape of the city was defined and contested through poetry and song over the course of the nineteenth century. The places discussed here are the Magdalen Green, the Law, Balgay Hill and Baxter Park, chosen largely because the shift in their use and description over the time period in question is illuminating. The Magdalen Green is the most central of these green spaces, and was traditionally a multi-use space for leisure, work, and political gatherings. At the beginning of the period in question, the Green was beside the river, though reclaiming land for the railway in mid-century changed this. Both the Law and Balgay Hills were landmarks located outside of the city itself at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and both were enveloped in Dundee's expanding boundaries. This precipitated debate about the traditional use of both hills as recreational spaces, and campaigns for both to be officially purchased on behalf of the people of Dundee. Baxter Park was an entirely new green space created in the early 1860s, funded by the wealthy mill-owning Baxter family as part of the growing public parks movement.

Following the previous chapter's focus on work, this chapter makes a parallel study of poetry of, and as, leisure in the industrial city. The nineteenth century saw the growth of a wider culture which encouraged working people to see leisure time as an opportunity for moral and intellectual self-improvement. Spending time in ordered nature, in landscapes specifically designed for leisure, was one way to do this. Another was to write verse inspired by this nature within a set of recognised poetic conventions. The places themselves, and the poetry written about them, became viewed and experienced as 'productive leisure,' to be engaged with for the inherent benefits of the experience, rather than as a setting for narrative action or to communicate specific memories and emotion relating to past events. Despite this, political questions relating to these spaces' ownership and access are never far away. A significant side effect of the rapid industrialisation of the nineteenth century was that both the amount of accessible

green space and the free time people had in which to access it both reduced considerably for urban workers. The Magdalen Green, the Law and Balgay Hill were all places to which access was, until various points in the nineteenth century, unquestioned and unmediated for all inhabitants of Dundee. Attempts to restrict access, particularly in the case of the Law, were met with both poetic and physical resistance. Towns in the north of England, as Katrina Navickas has demonstrated, often saw their traditionally public wild spaces transformed into or replaced by designed parks, which became ‘a source of contention over the right to protest (and what ‘public’ meant).’¹ In Dundee, popular opinion demanded a plurality of green spaces. As we shall see, the existence of Baxter Park was used by the people as an argument for continued access to places like the Law and Balgay Hill, rather than by civic leaders as a replacement for them. These campaigns, similarly to those discussed by Navickas, defend traditional walking routes as central to the experience of place itself.

The way in which people wrote of these spaces is important. In the eighteenth century, the genre of loco-descriptive poetry was frequently used as a way of legitimising privileged forms of taste and aesthetics. Tim Fulford has shown that the genre of prospect poetry, in which a particular landscape is described from a distant vantage point, is inherently a leisure activity. The ability to describe a landscape from afar was typically a luxury restricted to those with the time to view it, and the connections to gain access to places regarded as being worth writing about. This privileged position was presented as one of detached perspective and used to back up the connection between ownership of land and political legitimacy.² Bridget Keegan has further demonstrated that the form of prospect poetry, when employed by working-class writers, becomes a site to confront not only political questions of landscape but of poetry itself, and the role and rights of the working-class poet.³ Thus, even in the seemingly straightforward poetic descriptions of landscapes discussed here, questions of who has the right to view and comment on the landscape are present. In the changing social

¹ Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place*, p. 227.

² Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry and Criticism from Thompson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³ Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry*, p. 65-8.

context of the industrial city, anxieties about the effect that city life had on people were ever-present, and the working class in particular were seen to be at risk of alienation and de-personalisation. Often, rural landscapes were used in painting and literature as embodiments of the changes their creators felt were needed in the urban landscape, and came to represent the ideal nation even as the majority of its population became city-dwellers.⁴ In this chapter, I argue that the role of green landscapes in Victorian Dundee's poetry and song moves over the century from being primarily a setting for stories, either political or personal, to be a setting for descriptive reflection upon nature. This ties in with a wider cultural narrative which prioritises self-improvement and self-reliance, but does not negate the role of the places in question as important to collective political and social movements.

'Dundee's Bannockburn': Political Memory and Public Protest on the Magdalen Green

The Magdalen Green was, until the nineteenth century, more frequently referred to as the Magdalen Yard. It was traditionally a public meeting space, and historically where the town's leaders would convene when threatened with invasion or civil unrest.⁵ During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this was the standard venue for protests and radical meetings, as well as other mass gatherings including prayer meetings. Its physical landscape and location lend themselves to such use: close to the city centre, it was also close to the harbour and later the train station. Its topography also creates something of a natural auditorium, as a speaker could position themselves at the top of the slope to boost visibility. These factors secured the Magdalen Green a role as a place of performance and public speech – political, religious and artistic – both in actual use and in its depiction in writing. The Magdalen Green's role as political symbol during the nineteenth-century Reform campaigns was reinforced by a speech given by the 'Radical

⁴ See John Morrison, *Painting Labour in Scotland and Europe, 1850-1900* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014) and Elizabeth K. Helsinger, *Rural Scenes and National Representation 1815-1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) for full discussion of the political meaning of landscape painting in nineteenth-century Britain.

⁵ Donald Dorward, *Dundee: Names, Places and People* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1988), p.96-7.

Laird,' George Kinloch, in November 1819. The speech, in which Kinloch called for an extension of the franchise and accused Lord Sidmouth of 'treason against the people' for his part in Peterloo, resulted in the laird being sentenced to deportation to Australia. He avoided this fate by escaping to France until the political landscape changed, and became Dundee's first MP after the passing of the 1832 Reform Act.⁶ Although Kinloch's speech was popular at the time, the subsequent events made it a cornerstone of Dundee's nineteenth-century political folklore. The Magdalen Green itself was so associated with this history that it became a powerful symbol of Dundee's radicalism within the Victorian pro-Reform press. Later Reform demonstrations on the Magdalen Green were often accompanied by newspaper references to Kinloch. As we shall see, this identification sometimes clashed, yet more often quietly co-existed, with attempts to re-make the Green into a socially acceptable park space through a regeneration project in the 1840s.

The Magdalen Green remained a key space for political activity throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in the demonstrations leading up to the Reform Acts in 1867 and 1885, and Dundee's newspapers often formed a textual forum for reaffirming its historical associations in order to legitimise and support current political struggles. The series of reform meetings and demonstrations which took place over 1866-7 seem to have been a source of dispute among both reformers and commentators. Newspaper coverage, rather than rallying behind a shared history, presents a fragmented picture of campaigners at odds with one another. In January 1866, the *Advertiser* sought to counter Dundee's political reputation with a tamer image, claiming the recent 'sensible' conduct at a demonstration on the Magdalen Green meant 'neither Disraeli, Horsman or Lowe can say Dundee is a radical town in which the People cannot be satisfied.'⁷ A July demonstration in the same space drew contradictory reports: 'A Working Man' was proud not only of the conduct but of the cross-class support shown by Carnegie and Baxter. In contrast, 'Scrutator' saw the event as 'pandering to a vulgar and illiterate

⁶ For more on George Kinloch, see Charles Tennant's biography *The Radical Laird* (Kineton: Roundwood Press, 1970).

⁷ 'Great Reform Demonstration on the Magdalen Green', *Dundee Advertiser*, 16 January 1866, p. 4-5.

display of sentiment,’ and was particularly unimpressed by calls to ‘Kick out Lord Derby!’ and the references to Bruce and Bannockburn in the speeches.⁸ By October of that year, the *Courier*’s letter page was home to frustrated missives about ‘monomaniacs’ among the local reform organisers and the movement’s failure to co-ordinate speeches and events.⁹

Kinloch and the events of 1819-32 play a far bigger symbolic role in the coverage of an 1884 reform demonstration, which took a route around central Dundee culminating in a rally and speeches on the Magdalen Green: memories of the events themselves had faded, allowing them to be ascribed a more mythical function. The *Dundee Advertiser*’s coverage alluded to national history when they described the Green as having been ‘hitherto the Bannockburn of Dundee,’ the site of the most notable conflicts between people and government over the last century.¹⁰ The *Courier*, counting between sixteen and twenty thousand protestors, noted the importance of the space itself to the possibility of protest, as well as the number of people resident in the ‘great town.’¹¹ The surviving veteran Reformers who had taken part in the 1830s protests were given a key symbolic role, taking the route in special carriages.

The *People’s Journal* published a recap of Kinloch’s speech on the same spot to go out on the day of the protest, as well as histories of the Reform Demonstrations in 1831-2. Next to these historical accounts, a prominent map of the Magdalen Green and surrounding area showed locations of muster points for various trade groups around the city, and the location of speakers’ platforms on the Green itself. Alongside this map, a poem by D. Taylor, ‘The Tory Lairdies,’ stirs up feeling for the coming demonstration:

Wha the diel hae we to fecht wi noo
But a when wee Tory lairdies,
Wha sit up in their braw, big chairs

⁸ ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Dundee Courier*, 30 July 1866, p. 2.

⁹ ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Dundee Courier*, 19 October 1866, p. 2.

¹⁰ ‘The Magdalen Green’, *Dundee Advertiser*, 23rd September 1884, p. 12.

¹¹ ‘The Dundee Demonstration’, *Dundee Courier*, 22 September 1884 p. 2.

An' strake at their lang beardies
Wi haughty pride they look a'roond
An' seem to think they're safe an' soond
But sune they'll get an ugly woond
Thae pridefu' Tory lairdies.

Thae stupid lairdies nae doot think,
Because they hae big yairdies,
That men o sense they can hoodwink
Wi big lees an' lang beardies;
But tae their grief we'll let them see
That we wi' them nae mair can 'gree
An' that 'the leek' they'll hae tae pree,
The blawin', thrawin' lairdies.

Auld Willie, wi' his axe in hand
Plays havoc 'mang thae lairdies;
A blow from him they canna stand,
It mak's them riv their beardies.
At sicht o them they a' look blue,
An' noo they try his axe tae pu':
But that's a trick they'll sairly rue,
Thae sneakin' Tory lairdies.

They hae been in their place ower lang,
Thae haughty Tory lairdies;
They aye hae tried tae dae us wrang,
An' keep us fae oor yairdies;
But noo we'll let them ken the oor
Has come tae end their graspin' poo'r

We'll mak them flee afore's like stoor!
Thae feckless Tory Lairdies.¹²

This verse would have been recognisable to most readers as being based upon 'The Wee Wee German Lairdie,' a comic song published in Hogg's *Jacobite Relics*, as well as elsewhere. The original song diminishes the Hanoverian royal family as German lairdies, impoverished and taken up with lowly, dirty work in the 'kail-yairdie,' and suggests they will be no match for Scotland's rugged landscape.¹³ Taylor's verse uses the same diminutive language to take down his aristocratic subjects. The 'yairdies' in this poem represent land belonging to the Scottish people, and perhaps specifically evoke the historical name Magdalen Yard itself. Land ownership was key to the political debate at this time, as owning property was still required as a condition for voting, and Taylor claims both land and representation as rightfully belonging to working people. The fond familiarity with which 'Willie' Gladstone is referred to is shared among many Reform poems from this period, as is the image of him holding an axe to fell political opponents.

Most of the organisations and workplaces represented in this demonstration bore banners with rhyming slogans and short verses which referred both to their occupation and political intentions. Protesters also used tools and work-related objects to demonstrate their intentions: jute workers' breakers to break the Lords, dampers to dampen their plans: the identities presented here are created through trade and workplace status, as well as place. In addition to Dundee guilds and factories, groups came from smaller Angus and Fife towns. Auchterhouse's ploughmen declared:

We bore, we blast, we plough, we till
And we will hae the Franchise Bill.¹⁴

¹² 'Meeting on the Green', *People's Journal*, 20th September 1884, p.5.

¹³ For example, see Alexander Whitelaw, *The Book of Scottish Song* (Glasgow: Blackie & Co., 1843), p.520.

¹⁴ 'Reform Demonstration in Dundee', *Dundee Courier*, 23rd September 1884, p.3.

Banner verse was an important part of Scottish Victorian franchise demonstrations. Restricted by obvious limits on space, poems were rarely more than four lines long, but they make their point through imaginative use of local imagery and humour, as well as strong political sentiment. A collective of Lochee workers at the same demonstration held a banner declaring:

We've licht eneuch, I'se guarantee,
Tae lat the auld man see
To thrash the Lords, an' pass oor Bill
An' set the puir man free.¹⁵

Again, the 'auld man' Gladstone appears as a familiar figure. The reference to light alludes to Lochee's lack of street lighting, an idea based in historical fact which became a local stereotype. Mark Nixon has recently argued for the further consideration of banner poetry as a distinct tradition to the political poetry which appeared in newspapers and periodicals, being both different in form and, crucially, free from editorial mediation. As well as supporting the official aims of Reform demonstrations in extending working men's franchise rights, Nixon writes, banner and placard poetry 'called for the end of hereditary powers of legislation, a cause far more radical than the Liberal Party and its leader – the apparent hero of the processionists – could countenance.'¹⁶

These frequent references back to memories of protests and speeches led to wider ideas of the Magdalen Green as a political stage in the imaginative landscape of Dundee. The poem 'A Legend of Dundee' sets the Provost of Dundee against an unnamed challenger on the Green:

¹⁵ 'Reform Demonstration in Dundee', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 22 September 1884, p.4. Lochee, which became home to many Irish immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century, retained an independent sense of place distinct from Dundee, and to an extent continues to do so today.

¹⁶ Mark Nixon, 'Banner and Placard Poetry', *The People's Voice - Scottish political poetry, song, and the franchise, 1832-1918*. < <https://thepeoplesvoice.glasgow.ac.uk/essays/> > [accessed 1 September 2018].

A bouncin' loon came tae oor toon
Some guid when years gaen past
And challenged a', baith great an' sma'
Tae fecht him tae the last

The appointed day, as poets say
Came forth wi glorious sheen
And found the twain, intent on slayin'
Upon the Magd'len Green.¹⁷

This epic battle turns out to be more of a comedy drama, as the Provost banishes his opponent with snuff as a weapon:

'You silly blade', the Provost said,
'I think you've laughed enough'.
Then in his face, wi broad grimace,
Dashed his hand fu' o snuff.

And then he said, 'My friend, your head
Frae you I tak' would fain;
But say to me you'll leave Dundee
In mercy I'll refrain.'

The local pronunciation of 'Madlen' is not only implied by scansion but made implicitly clear in the spelling here. This poem almost certainly refers to a particular 'bouncing loon' and a specific political issue, and what seems now to be a vague narrative highlights the importance of social, political and even printed context in reconstructing the meanings of these works. The fact that it is there, as opposed to another public space

¹⁷ LC125/1.

with political associations such as the City Square, which is the poet's go-to setting for the drama, makes clear that the Magdalen Green was a space of words and action for Dundee. The Magdalen Green, like most of the spaces discussed in this chapter, was a disputed landscape in terms of ownership, use and potential profits. An 1839 court case between the Magistrates of Dundee and the Laird of Blackness debated whether his historical rights over the area were restricted to grazing, or whether he had the right to quarry in the area, as he wished to. Documents from the 1600s were interpreted as having safeguarded the Green as a recreational space for citizens, and the quarry did not go ahead.¹⁸ Following this, the Green was 'laid out' in a style more reminiscent of a designed public park, with paths shaping walkers' experience of the space. As the protest from the 1880s discussed above shows, this did not strip the Magdalen Green of its political function.

The landscape of the Green also changed significantly with the coming of the Dundee-Perth railway. A painting by George M. McGillivray, among the last images of the area to be created before the railway, shows the Green, then edged by sea, occupied by a circle of boys in matching outfits playing cricket.¹⁹ Early photographs of the Tay Bridge show beaches stopping abruptly at the railway.²⁰ The Magdalen Green certainly functioned as a recreational and social space as well as a political one, though not always in such a genteel fashion as McGillivray's painting suggests. A traditional song, usually known simply as 'The Magdalen Green,' now one of the best-known Dundee songs in folksong circles, has the Green as the setting for a courting story. Hamish Henderson gives the song's origins as being from around 1820 in Dundee in his introduction to Jimmy MacBeath's performance at the People's Festival Ceilidh 1951.²¹ While the search for the temporal origin of traditional songs is often a fruitless one, it

¹⁸ Contemporary news accounts, LC312/20-27.

¹⁹ Figure 4, Appendix.

²⁰ Charles McKean and Patricia Whatley with Kenneth Baxter, *Lost Dundee: Dundee's lost architectural heritage* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2013) p. 213-4.

²¹ See Tobar an Dualchas: <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/2766/1> Henderson probably refers to the earliest written version of the song he was aware of, though I have yet to ascertain which this might be.

makes sense that the song would have been composed before the railway and promenade developments separated the Magdalen Green from the activity surrounding boats coming into the city. McGillivray's painting shows ships berthed within sight of the Green. The Dundee Poet's Box broadside gives the lyrics as:

Here am I a stranger, just newly come from sea
And my ship it lies anchored in the harbour o Dundee;
Your face it is the fairest that ever I did see;
O would ye take a walk with me
All along by the Magdalen Green.

With a smile upon her face she answered me and said,
Oh, yes, kind sir, I would go with you, but you know I am afraid.
The roads they are so slippery, and the night so cold and keen;
It would not be a pleasant walk
All along by the Magdalen Green.

With kind words and promises, along with me she went,
Two or three happy hours along with her I spent,
Until a strange thought came in my mind,
That I would run to sea, and I left that maid
Lamenting on the banks o sweet Dundee.

As I lay on my bed last night, I dreamt an awful dream,
I dreamt I was the father of a dear, beloved son,
And I saw its poor mother all alone in my dream
And she was weeping bitterly
All along by the Magdalen Green.

Come all ye joyful sailor lads, a warning take by me,
And never slight a fair maid for all her poverty;
If you do not like that fair maid, shun her company.
And never do as I have done, down by the Magdalen Green;
If e'er I should return again, it's her I will see, and make it up again on the
Magdalen Green.²²

This version is notably different to many more recently recorded ones, though the text of a broadside cannot be assumed to be the only, or even the primary, performed version of a song even at the time of its publication. The broadside is a snapshot in the life of the song, as is any individual performance or recording, but it may also have been used more as a performance guide or reminder rather than being thought of as a definitive version. Many versions make the sexual nature of the walk more obvious, through the woman protesting 'it wouldna do for me to fall, doon by the Magdalen Green', followed by the narrator's 'I fear that maid had many's a fall.'²³ In distinct contrast to many traditional songs in which a pregnant woman is abandoned, the regret and moral imperative for others to 'take a warning' by them is aimed at the men listening. The remembered landscape of the Magdalen Green becomes an anchor for the emotional consequences of their tryst, following the sailor after his departure within the lyrics, and, through the song itself, carrying meaning throughout and beyond Dundee.

The tune given for the Poet's Box broadside is 'Down by the Old Mill Stream.' As there is no exact date for the broadside it is hard to tell, but it may refer to Tell Taylor's 1908 song by that name, thus dating this broadside to 1910 or later after it became a widespread hit.²⁴ Jimmy MacBeath (b.1894) uses the same tune for his version

²² LC421/1.

²³ For example, Eck Harley's version, recorded c.1980 (Gatherer p. 72).

²⁴ If it does refer to this song, there is an interesting contrast between the unproblematic narrative of love at first sight described in its lyrics and the story it is re-used for. The main impetus for re-using the tune may well be the similar cadence and scansion between the two titles (bearing in mind the Dundee pronunciation of Madgalen.)

as is used for ‘Come Aa Ye Tramps and Hawkers,’ and this or a variant on this tune is used by some other singers.²⁵ Nigel Gatherer’s song collecting found ‘almost a different tune for each singer,’ but little variation in the words, an indication that the main source for this song among Dundee singers was indeed a Poet’s Box broadside.²⁶ The Magdalen Green is also the scene of seduction in a Dundee version of ‘The Shearin’s No For You,’ another song in which the female character is abandoned by the man who got her pregnant. The lyrics Dundee singer Sheena Wellington learnt from her family include the lines ‘Dae ye mind the Madlin Green, bonnie lassie o/ Dae ye mind the Madlin Green, where I played on your machine.’²⁷ Other versions of this song have used the locations Glasgow Green or the banks of Ayr.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the space was once and for all secured for the use of Dundee’s population, as the Council purchased it from the Laird of Blackness in 1874. Following this, there was a movement to further legitimise the space as a park landscape, with the introduction of new rules about which sports and activities could take place at certain times, and a bandstand added in 1890 provided a formal performance space for people to listen to professional musicians.²⁸ This shift in use of the space echoes a wider movement within Britain which saw protest and political discussion relocated from parks and streets into indoor space.

A poem by George Watson, the Roper Bard, printed in the *Evening Telegraph* for the occasion of May Day, 1900, reflects this shift in the conception of the Green from political stage to recreational landscape.

The sights I see an’ soon’s I hear
Ayont the Green aside the Tay,

²⁵ For example, Donald MacMartin’s, recorded in 1963 (*Tobar an Dualchas*, <<http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/28055/6>> [Accessed 7 October 2018.]) Donald was born in Perthshire in 1903 and heard this song from fellow farm workers there.

²⁶ Gatherer, p.78.

²⁷ Sheena Wellington, *Strong Women Rule Us By Their Tears* (Edinburgh: Greentrax Recordings, 1995).

²⁸ LC374/44.

Fa' saftly on my listening ear
On this the happy first o' May.

I hear the blackbird 'mang the trees
Fu' blithely chant his mornin' lay
An' there is balm upon the breeze
On this the happy first o' May.

There's music in the engine's din,
Swift-rattlin ower the metal way,
As backward doon the shed I spin,
On this the happy first o' May.

Young lads an' lasses nae a few
Upon the grass I see an' hear
They weet their faces wi the dew
To mak' them bonny a' the year.

The gardens here look really grand
Bedeck't wi floweries fresh an' gay,
An' here I trace the Master's hand
On this the happy first o' May.

O charmin', sweet, delightful May,
Ye ken a secret dear to me
Ye maunna tell til gloamin' gray,
Then love will grant ye liberty.²⁹

²⁹ 'The First O' May', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 1st May 1900, p. 3.

While, as we will see, there are numerous descriptive landscape poems about other Dundee green spaces, it is unusual to come across one about the Magdalen Green. Here the gardens are gardens, to be enjoyed for their landscapes, rather than a venue or stage for a narrative. ‘Spring poems’ describing the beauties of the season became a familiar trope for nineteenth-century newspaper poets. The green is far from a depopulated landscape here. Instead, it is a place for community interaction, part of the life of the industrial city, not separate from the sounds and rhythms of factory production. The reference to liberty in the final line is on first reading entirely emotional, not political. Readers would be aware, though, that there had been at least one May Day demonstration on the Green to demand an eight-hour work day in a previous year.³⁰ As discussed in the previous chapter, Watson himself had written other poetry explicitly in favour of the eight-hour bill. While the Magdalen Green in this poem is fully a *green* in form and function, a place for relaxation rather than agitation, it is not divorced from the life of the city and the workers who make use of it.

The Law and Balgay Hill

The Law, an extinct volcanic peak which dominates the view of Dundee from the Tay, is a point of symbolic as well as visual focus for the city, and seems to have been used as a recreational space for Dundonians for a considerable amount of time. Over the course of the nineteenth century, expansion saw the Law transformed from a hill on the outskirts of Dundee, forming a natural boundary, to being incorporated into the town itself, its slopes becoming a disruption of the built-up industrial landscape. In 1860, the Law became the centre of a land rights dispute, as the Laird of Dudhope, whose estates it was on, shut off roads leading to the Law with the intention of quarrying in the hill. A Right-of-Way Association was created to advocate for access. The Association’s first meeting took place in October 1860, at Lamb’s Temperance Hotel in Reform Street. John Leng, proprietor of the *Dundee Advertiser* and *People’s Journal*, was active in the campaign and published several poems in support of its aims. This was paralleled across Scotland,

³⁰ ‘Work and Wages’, *Dundee Advertiser*, 19 May 1893, p. 7.

with other activist groups using poetry as a way to defend access to established footpaths when this was threatened by landowners. Leng was not the only sympathetic newspaper editor to publish right-of-way poetry, with Charles Mackay of the *Glasgow Argus* (who published his own poetry on this theme) and James Adam of the *Aberdeen Herald* among others identified by Kirstie Blair.³¹

The following year, Dudhope began to erect a wall around the hill. This, it was claimed, was to prevent accidents around the quarry. This raised suspicion and resistance, and thus the events referred to as the ‘Siege of the Law’ began, as Right-of-Way activists demolished Dudhope’s wall under cover of darkness. The *Dundee Advertiser*, reporting on this ‘Upheaval of Nature,’ faux-innocently wondered if this area was prone to earthquakes due to its volcanic origins.³² The *People’s Journal* reprinted the piece later that week, next to a poem by ‘R.C., Dundee’ titled ‘Oh! Dudhope, dinna dyke the Law!’

‘No road this way!’ – the landlords say,
When dusty sons o’ toil
Wad breathe, alang th’banks o’Tay
The freshness o th’ soil –
They fence our fathers’ paths awa,
An’ Dudhope means to dyke th’ Law.

By rood an’ ell, frae mason’s mell,
Stane wa’s around her creep,
Closed up to please a Laird himsel’;
Just think o’ that an’ weep.
Oh! Dudhope, gar thae men withdraw;
Ye dinna mean to dyke th’ Law.

³¹ Blair, *Working Verse in Victorian Scotland*, p.184.

³² ‘Another Upheaving of Nature’, *Dundee Advertiser*, 21 September 1861, p.2.

Ere pedigree o' he or she
 Made feudal law ensnare
That native bulwark ower Dundee,
 By Nature's law was there,
For generations ane an' a'.
So, Dudhope, dinna dyke th'Law.

Frae hill an' glen, our countrymen,
 Ejected, disappear;
That's no th' way for Lairds to ken
 O' 'Rifle Volunteers.'
We may require a fort or twa:
Ha! Dudhope needna dyke th'Law.

Though landlords trace but plebeian race,
 By forest, field, or trench;
I tell ye, landlords, to your face,
 Far better these than French.
Estrange nae Scotland's heart awa' –
Hark, Dudhope, dinna dyke th'Law.

Since my delight wi' paper kite
 Was ower that Law to flee
It's forty years o' day an' night –
 'Oh! Woodman, spare the tree' –
Nor fence, nor stile we ever saw.
Whence Dudhope's right to dyke th'Law?

Town Council, here your duty's clear,
 Now dinna hand an' draw;

Ye maun, as guardians, interfere:
Ye're nae unfond o' Law.
Ram's horns we're all prepared to blow,
And blast their walls to Jericho;
An', Dundee, lowse a tiger's jaw,
If ever Dudhope dyke th'Law.³³

This poem appeals to a sense of communal ownership through historical use of landscape, a pedigree reaching far further back than any aristocratic title. The equivocation of people and nation with rural or semi-rural landscape discussed by Helsinger is taken control of by the Right-of-Way movement and used as evidence for their claims. This assertion was important legally as well as emotionally, as proof of continued use was often an important element in the success of disputes such as this one.³⁴ The particular need for access in the modern industrial city, to allow the 'dusty sons of toil' to breathe, is highlighted here too. Dundee as a city is seen within the context of Scotland in general, through the solidarity with rural 'fellow countrymen' forcibly evicted from their hills and glens: their right to work in this landscape a parallel struggle to the Dundonians' right to recreation in theirs. This landscape is associated with the 'country' in general which the returning soldier, here a Rifle Volunteer, has fought to protect. The appeal to the Council to intervene makes use of the irresistible 'Law' pun, a common trope in Dundonian poetry. The penultimate verse refers to the popular American song 'Woodman, spare that Tree,' composed in 1837 by George Pope Morris and sometimes hailed today as 'the first environmental protest song.'³⁵ Like the Law poem, it defends the landscape through the feelings and memories attached to it by its human narrator, not through inherent qualities of the tree, or concern about the effects of pollution on a wider ecosystem.

It is again the human history of the landscape which is most evident in later

³³ 'Oh! Dudhope, Dinna Dyke the Law!', *People's Journal*, 21 September 1861, p. 3.

³⁴ Andy Wightman, *The Poor Had No Lawyers* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2010), p.200.

³⁵ Edmund Clarence Steadman, *An American Anthology 1700-1900* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900) <<http://www.bartleby.com/248/131.html>> [Accessed 13 April 2018].

debates on the ownership of the Law. ‘Historicus’, writing in the *Courier* in December 1875, cited the *First Statistical Account*’s description of fortifications and signal fires on the hill to demonstrate its centuries-old status as land used for the good of Dundee’s people.³⁶ The following year, the *Telegraph* published a poem, ‘The Strength of Tay’ by Colin MacPherson, which the author preceded with a paragraph asserting that the name of the city itself is derived from the ancient settlements on the Law, ‘Dun-Dei.’³⁷ The poem references a semi-mythic history of Celtic warriors, which blurs into legend and poetic pseudo-historical tradition with references to Ossian. The author’s name is potentially a pseudonym referencing James MacPherson:

Brave warriors moulder ‘neath thy sod
Who held thy rocky ramparts long.
When Celtic chiefs in armour trod
Within Dun-Die’s bold bulwarks strong.

Oft have the dauntless mountaineers
From off thy heights repelled the foe,
And with their arrows, swords and spears
Have laid their fierce assailants low.

And long ere Ossian tuned his lays
And told of Fingal’s mighty men
Druidic bards upon thy braes
Had mused and sung in lofty strain.³⁸

³⁶ ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Dundee Courier*, 28 December 1875, p. 4.

³⁷ MacPherson translates the city’s name as, ‘Godly strength of Tay,’ rather than the frequently repeated folk etymology Dei Donum, ‘Gift of God.’ While the ‘godly’ aspect of his translation is spurious, and the sense of Dun-Die is likely the more prosaic ‘fortification on the Tay’, this is a fairly reasonable explanation for the city’s name.

³⁸ Catherine Cairnie (ed.) *Tay Pearls: Original poetry by the people of Dundee 1879-1905* (Arbroath: Urban Press 1993) pp.25-6 (originally published in *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 25 August 1886).

Here, the Law's importance is legitimised not only through its historical significance as a centre of Dundee life but through the sense that people have been creating poetry and song – both about and, crucially, *on* the Law for centuries and continue to do so. The hill becomes symbolic not only of the past generations but of the continuing creative force of the people of Dundee. Later in the poem, Macpherson urges his contemporaries to draw on the strength of their ancestors and protect the Law:

And shall we see thee injured now,
 Thy famous battlement of old,
And rocks torn from thy hoary brow
 To glut a grovelling greed for gold?

No! ne'er let future history tell
 That we thy lofty cone have seen
Defaced and scattered o'er the vale
 Since loved for aye thy heights have been.

Then, like our sires, let us unite
 Thy ancient form and fame to save;
Let love and unity and right
 Still shield the relics of the brave.

Descriptive poetry about the Law uses the hill as a viewpoint from which to describe, in keeping with the eighteenth-century tradition of prospect poetry. In contrast to this tradition, it is the urban landscape which is being examined, where the dramatic features are man-made mills, ships, and even Baxter Park itself. The hills are used as a spatial and temporal point of remove from the poet's life. Ideas of history and the passing of time are, similarly to the right-of-way poetry above, strongly associated with the landscape of the Law in more descriptive poetry. The visual perspective on the changing city from the top of the Law is frequently used as a device to gain perspective on

emotional changes in the life of the poet. Descriptions of the changing city itself are important here too, though. Using a mode of composition associated with surveying one's own domain implies the poets are making a claim of ownership towards the city they live and work in.

One of George Watson's earlier poems, published before he developed his 'Roper Bard' persona, addresses a childhood playmate who has emigrated to Canada and recalls the days they played together on the Law. This is a trope he returns to multiple times over his poetic career. 'The King of the Law,' written in 1883, refers to draigen flying competitions 'when I was a loonie lang syne at the mill.'³⁹

Oh, bonnie Law Hill! Oh, bonnie Law hill!

E'en noo from thy tap I can see the auld mill

Whaurin I wrocht weel till I entered my teens

Among my workmates at the hackle machines.

It's thirty lang years sin oor draigens we flew –

Hoo short the time seems when the past we review –

They surely a' canna be dead an awa

Wha played there an ca'd me the King o the Law.

Oh, bonnie Law Hill! Oh, bonnie Law Hill!

Time soon will the prophet's three sayin's fulfil;

Auld Thammas, the Rhymer, declared ye wad be,

Some time in the future the heart o Dundee.

³⁹Draigen, Scots 'kite.' This description echoes 'R.C.'s reference to childhood kite flying in 'Oh! Dudhope, dinna dyke the Law!', and William Kidd's *Kidd's Guidebook to Dundee* (Edinburgh & Glasgow: John Menzies, n.d.) refers to the Law as a particular favourite place for children to play, indicating the memories in Law poems are likely to be based in real experience as well as poetic convention.

Ships sail on the sea noo without the wind's force,
An' cars on the street noo are drawn without horse;
I winner if ony when I'm tane awa'
Will ever remember the King o' the Law.⁴⁰

Watson presents himself as an exile in time, if not in place, and uses the perceived timelessness of the undeveloped landscape to reconnect with his idyllic ideas of childhood. 'Perceived' timelessness, for, as the Right-of-Way group would attest, the landscape of the Law has indeed been changed significantly through human activity within living memory. The Law, now safe, can move from being a threatened symbol of the people's right to land and back towards being a symbol of permanence. A later poem by Watson on similar topic, 'An Autumn Reverie on the Law Hill,' begins with the poet observing modern Dundee with pride, but verges into more critical territory:

As I heretofore hae said,
Grand improvements hae been made –
There's oor bonnie Esplanade an' Baxter Park;
Yet there's lots o vacant land
That just needs the workman's hand –
It's a cheerless hame when father's oot o' wark.

Ye're a city noo, dear toon,
Yet I whiles am forced to froon
When I see at yer street corners, lanes, an' pen's
Groups o' idle men an' women
While the toon wi wealth is teemin' –
There's a lot o misspent siller, guidness kens.⁴¹

⁴⁰ 'The King of the Law', *People's Journal*, 13 October 1883, p.3.

⁴¹ This poem, from September 1901, was probably published in the *Dundee Evening Telegraph*. The cutting is included in Watson's personal scrapbook (LC394).

Rather than calling to address this imbalance by criticising the town's elite in particular, or advocating an uprising from the unemployed, Watson's call to action in the final verse is conciliatory and collectivist: 'Let us do the best we can/ For oor toon an' fellow men.' He also appeals to God's rewards which await, in a similar vein to some of his poems of work discussed in the previous chapter. Samuel Skene's poem 'Balgay Hill and the Old Steeple,' while ostensibly focusing on the landscape of Balgay, again uses the Law as a place to gain perspective on the passing of time.

From the Law-hill I looked on the scenes of my childhood,
I thought on the pleasures of youth's happy day:
Pondering deep as I dwelt on their memories,
And accepted, with feeling, the wreck of decay.

Balgay stood forth as the eye viewed its beauties,
And I traced out the scene which my footsteps had led
To seek out the wild fruit with my schoolmates around me,
Then bask in the sun on its green mossy bed.

As well as emphasising the importance of the Law as a vantage point for Dundee, this poem highlights a connection in view and imaginative role between the Law and Balgay Hill. Skene moves on to observe the Old Steeple, viewing it as a time marker, one whose bells symbolise time as it changes:

I pondered in thought of the old church beside it
And memory recalled its once better day,
When its beams were much stronger and its seats less foot-worn
And other parts weakly – so nearing decay!

All are happy to know that this shall be changed

To something more modern, more pleasant to see:
May an organ send forth its volume and sweetness,
The ear both to charm, and the voices make free.⁴²

The changes brought by modernity are by no means all for the worse, or something feared by these poets. The use of these spaces is part of an ongoing tradition of Dundee people, and their right to use them must be protected, but the changes of industrial society are to be embraced for the material benefits they bring.

Balgay Hill occupies a roughly analogous place to the Law within the poetry of Dundee. Over the nineteenth century the hill of Balgay went from being a wooded spot just outside of Dundee to another urban green space, as expansion brought the small, yet already industrial, settlement of Lochee within Dundee itself. Balgay Hill was celebrated in poetry in the early decades of the 1800s, but was closed to public access by the landowner in 1849. People still felt connected to the place, and continued to visit, though surreptitiously. Right-of-way action seems to have been firmly concentrated on the Law, perhaps because of its geographical and ideological centrality within Dundee. Nevertheless, public opinion strongly favoured the Council purchasing the hill on behalf of the city, which they eventually did in 1871. It may have been an attempt to reclaim some standing in the public eye after the trouble surrounding the Law, and in the wake of Baxter's popularity. If this was the case, they were not entirely successful. The negotiation process had again been fraught, and the Council's price-conscious attitude was unlikely to match Baxter's 'princely' gift in the population's estimation.

Balgay Hill's official opening as a public park incorporated some of the same ceremony which had been seen eight years previously at the Baxter Park opening, including a trades procession. The *Dundee Advertiser* lauded Balgay's opening with a long description of 'A working man's view of the Park,' praising the fine art of landscape gardening and quoting Wordsworth's 'Come into the light of things/ Let nature be your teacher.'⁴³ The *People's Journal*, while it was certainly supportive of the

⁴² LC125/163.

⁴³ 'The Balgay Park', *Dundee Advertiser*, 21 September 1879, p.2.

purchase of Balgay, was critical of the council's motivations and the celebration they encouraged. Balgay Hill, unlike Baxter Park, was not a gift to Dundee. It was theirs by right, and the Councillors' elaborate acquisition of the land was, at best, a necessary step towards righting the mistakes of 'our selfish and besotted forefathers.' At worst, it was a cynical move with upcoming elections in mind.⁴⁴ Alongside this opinion piece, the Journal included a long satire on the topic in mock-Biblical verses, 'The Book of the Chronicles of Balgay': 'O Balgay, Balgay, thou hast been redeemed out of the hands of the great, and thou art exalted even as Baxter, that goodly field, given unto us in former days, a glory among the people and a wonder to the eyes of the nations round about.'⁴⁵ Within the satire are two songs, put in the mouths of the Councillors, one describing their feasting and their disregard for the actual working people of Dundee in this matter:

To Balgay! To Balgay! Weavers, keep to your looms,
Ye blacksmiths and bakers, your 'toilette' and 'thooms'
Are tarnished with rust, soot and dough sirs; so pray,
Defile not our garments at Bonnie Balgay!⁴⁶

Descriptive poetry about Balgay Hill echoes many of the themes of the Law poetry, and the line of view from one to the other is frequently mentioned by poets including Watson, McGonagall, and Samuel Skene. The two hills come to form points within the emotional landscape of the city which refer back to one another. The landscape of Balgay is intensely 'memorialised' in a personal context. Watson also wrote in praise of Balgay using similar, though more sentimental, themes to his Law poems: 'Bonnie Balgay' moves from happy childhood and courting memories to a reflection on friends now dead:

Oh, bonnie Balgay, dear, bonnie Balgay,

⁴⁴'The Book of the Chronicles of Balgay', *People's Journal*, September 23, 1871, p.2.

⁴⁵'Chronicles of Balgay', *People's Journal*, 23 September 1871, p.2.

⁴⁶'Chronicles of Balgay', *People's Journal*, 23 September 1871, p. 2.

They're noo sleepin soond in thy cauld breast o' clay;
We'll never mair see til they come in His name
To meet us an' greet us an' welcome us hame –
Loved, bonnie Balgay.⁴⁷

The landscape as 'memory palace' is here anchored and intensified by the hill itself, in its role as graveyard, being their physical resting place. Whether or not this situation was truth or poetic convention for Watson himself, the idea would have struck an emotional chord with readers. In 1878, Balgay Cemetery became the resting place of the Reverend George Gilfillan, further confirming it as a place of memory and mourning for many of Dundee's aspiring poets.

George Maxwell's 'Prospect from Balgay' also uses the themes of reflection on childhood and a changing city from a high point outside of normal life which we have seen in the Law poems discussed above:

Oh! Beauteous are thy sylvan slopes – Balgay;
For fifty years they have familiar been;
Yet, at this hour I love the peaceful scene
E'en more than ever in youth's primal day;
How placid lies the bosom of the Tay,
Reflecting azure skies and hills of green,
While spanning gulf which yawns the shire between
Is bridge gigantic, bearing iron way,
O'er which sweep trains, which potent steam obey,
In constant traffic to and from Dundee;
My native town; which from Law's base we see
Extending Eastward as far as eye can trace,
Its denizens full trebled, in the space

⁴⁷ 'Bonnie Balgay', *Evening Telegraph*, 14 September 1897, p.3.

Of time embraced within my memory.⁴⁸

These poems take the (semi-)pastoral green space as a viewpoint from which to observe the urban development of the city, reflecting on it and their experiences within it. This echoes cultural depictions of the rural as past, while the city is contemporary. The experiences of Dundee they describe are often community-based: it is ‘oor’ city and ‘all are happy’ to hear of the changes, and early memories of the Law feature workmates or school friends. They are still unmistakably personal histories rather than the wider human histories of place or nation alluded to in the Right-of-Way poems. In this the poems differ from traditional prospect poetry. While the setting of the poem is detached from city life, the poets’ concerns are not observing the city dwellers below with detached interest. Here, they are closer to John Clare’s nature poetry dealing with the rearrangement of the parish in which he lived, written during and shortly after the process of parliamentary enclosure in the 1820s. John Barrell writes that, for Clare, this remaking of the landscape was a destruction of the familiar, but also a remaking of his local knowledge and identity.⁴⁹ In many ways, the urban landscape rather than the pastoral is at the centre of the Dundee ‘prospect poems,’ which come not from a sense of ownership of the landscape discussed, but of lived experience of working in it. The Law and Balgay Hill, now that they have been secured for the use of Dundee’s population, are primarily used as places of quiet reflection, and it is the ‘natural’ landscape which enables these poetic reflections.

‘The Ideal Philanthropic’: Baxter and the People’s Park

In contrast to the long and contested history of the places discussed above, Baxter Park was designed and created specifically for use as a public recreational space, and the

⁴⁸ Cairnie p. 5-6. This poem has also recently been anthologised in WN Herbert & Andy Jackson (eds) *Whaleback City: The Poetry of Dundee and Its Hinterland* (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2013).

⁴⁹ John Barrell, *Poetry, Language and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.118-123.

underlying ideology of its creation focused on bringing the citizens of Dundee together, physically, politically, and culturally, across class boundaries. The Baxter Park was ‘not a place to make a rich man feel poor, but to make a poor man feel rich.’⁵⁰ The official opening was in September 1863, but the grounds seem to have been open for public use some months before this, as the first newspaper reports of activity there begin to appear in the summer of that year. The Baxter family, successful mill owners, donated £50,000 to pay for the land and its landscaping, and also created a fund to employ gardeners for its upkeep. This came at a time when public parks were being recognised across Britain as a necessary antidote to urban expansion and rapidly increasing population density. The desire of the elite to provide accessible green space to the working-class was not a selfless one: protests and riots had left them genuinely in fear of a revolutionary uprising. The 1840 Select Committee on the Health of the Towns reported that parks were needed not just for the well-being of the poor, but to protect ‘the safety of property and the security of the rich.’⁵¹ These parks were envisioned by elites as places for the poor to exercise, thus giving them a non-revolutionary way to use their energies, and keeping them fit for work, and to engage with the civilised version of nature which formed the mid-Victorian ideal. Birkenhead Park, one of the first in Britain designed with this mindset, became known as the ‘People’s Park,’ and the American landscape gardener Olmstead wrote, incredulously, that ‘the baker of Birkenhead has the pride of an OWNER in it.’⁵²

Sir Joseph Paxton, the designer of Birkenhead, was sought out by Baxter as a fitting individual to design his gift to Dundee. This would not be Baxter’s only foray into philanthropy, but it was by far the most successful.⁵³ His name became engrained in

⁵⁰ ‘The Baxter Park’, *People’s Journal*, 12 September 1863, p.2.

⁵¹ Quoted in Hilary A. Taylor, ‘Urban Public Parks, 1840-1900: Design and Meaning’, *Garden History* 23/2 (1995), 201-221 (p.202).

⁵² Brent Elliott, *Victorian Gardens* (London: BT Batsford, 1986), p. 53.

⁵³ In 1866 the firm attempted to provide better housing for their workers by building an experimental five tenement stairs containing a total of 103 two- and three- room flats. Their housing project ceased here, as they could not cover building costs at a rate their employees could afford to pay, and some tenants failed to treat the property with the respect the firm expected from them (in contrast to the reverence apparently given to Baxter Park by the public.) (*Lost Dundee*, p. 115-6).

Dundee's popular consciousness as a byword for charity and benevolence, and George Gilfillan's description of 'plain Davie Baxter [...] a man of the people in origin and feeling' clearly struck a chord with the public of Dundee.⁵⁴ Following the gifting of the park, over 16,000 people donated to a campaign to fund a statue to Baxter in his park. While the name David Baxter is the one primarily associated with the gift, his sisters Eleanor and Mary were joint benefactors. The statue subscription committee originally proposed all three to be represented, but the two women asked not to be depicted, presumably acting in keeping with contemporary ideas of modest female behaviour. The fact that the land of Baxter Park had been guaranteed permanently to Dundee significantly contributed to the celebrations, especially given the context of the ongoing disputes around other green spaces at that time. Baxter's remarkable generosity was noted outside of Dundee, too: papers including the *Illustrated London News* covered the events at the opening. The Manchester Anti-Corn Law League organiser and free trade enthusiast Richard Cobden was invited to the opening, which he declined, but an enthusiastic letter from him was printed in the *People's Journal*, where he wrote 'It is a Cockney saying that money will secure for Londoners the best of all the productions of the country, except only country air. Your Park will, therefore, preserve for you what even money will not purchase for a crowded city.'⁵⁵

The opening celebrations on 9th September 1863 were grand, and, in keeping with the 'People's Park' ethos, aimed to represent a version of Dundee society where the classes co-existed in harmony. 'A New Song on the Opening of the Baxter Park in Dundee' was printed for distribution prior to the event, combining anticipation and grateful chorus with warnings against potential bad behaviour.

Chorus:

Then long live Sir David, and happy may he be;

He's a friend of the people, all plainly may see

⁵⁴ Aileen Black, *Gilfillan Of Dundee, 1813-1878* (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2006) p. 173.

⁵⁵ 'The Baxter Park', *People's Journal*, 12 September 1863, p.4.

The gift he has given a blessing will be
To the working-classes of Bonnie Dundee.

Final verse:

Now, I hope you will all take warning advice
And keep yourself sober, and steady, and nice
And ne'er let it be said that with debauchery
You opened the Park of Bonnie Dundee
In the fine summer nights, when you stop frae your wark
With your wives and your families you can walk in the Park
To future generations it a blessing will be,
The gift of Sir David to Bonnie Dundee.⁵⁶

Dundee here is a progressive and celebratory landscape, with decorated streets and ringing bells, in which Jock and Jenny, everyman and everywoman, can enjoy a break from their difficult, but productive, work. Part of the ceremony featured a Trades Procession, and the song lists the historical nine trades of Dundee. Established artisans with guild representation are present, but so are the less skilled workers, including mill girls and hecklers, happy to take their place in the hierarchy. With their banners and song, the material experience of this parade is strikingly similar to the Radical demonstrations on the Magdalen Green, but the emotional resonance is very different. This procession seeks to build a civic, city-centric identity rather than one based primarily on class or political allegiance. The family group is the primary unit of interaction with society and place here, a way of living presented as ideal for all classes. While Sir David is the only one named here, Baxter was known as a family name and company, an ideal of familial cohesion as well as of self-made success.

'Rouse, Brothers, Rouse' was written specifically for performance at the opening ceremony, where it was performed by a glee club. The lyrics, by a Mr D.S. Robertson,

⁵⁶LC228/26. The songsheet gives no author or tune, but this seems to be another song based on 'Bonnie Dundee.'

were printed in the *People's Journal* prior to the event, presumably so people could join in chorus on the day. The song, described as 'a new version,' bears resemblance to two Charles Mackay songs, beginning with the same line as his 'The Pioneers' and following a similar structure to 'Cheer, Boys, Cheer.' Both of these songs are associated with America, and specifically the idea of new land and new opportunities.

Chorus:

Rouse, brothers, rouse, the day beams brightly o'er us,
Free and unfettered here we may roam;
Swell the glad tidings over the meadows;
Carry the tidings to every home.

Still must we toil in crowded alleys,
Still must we toil in haunts of trade;
But here we may feel the green sward beneath us,
And woo the sunshine or the shade.

Here in the morn the youthful may gambol,
Here at high noon the aged may rest,
Here in the twilight lovers may wander
And mark the sunset's glow in the west.

Gladly we hail the bounteous givers,
Fondly we'll cherish their memories dear;
Long may our prayers like angels attend them
And guard their footsteps from year to year.

Time cannot chill the loving remembrance,
Nor from our hearts shall it e'er pass away,
And from the lips of future generations

Shall rise the anthems of this day.

Now let us all, with voices united,
Make every hill and valley to ring
And may the hearts of our benefactors
Beat to the notes of the song that we sing.⁵⁷

Like the ‘New Song’, this song speaks to, and for, more than one group of Dundee workers. Whether you toil in ‘crowded alley’ or a more respectable tradesman’s setting, the Baxter Park is for you. The park is a place to be free, of work and to an extent the social hierarchies inherent in a job title. Alluding to American pioneer songs suggests that fresh starts are also available at home, perhaps implying those who find the current social order does not for them would feel better if they embraced the park and its associated values. The united society presented in these descriptions of Baxter Park aligns with historians’ characterisations of the mid-nineteenth century in Scotland as a ‘time of consensus’ when the working-class, generally speaking, accepted their place within a free market capitalist society, with the tantalising promise of improved circumstances through personal hard work.⁵⁸ While land ownership and franchise debates were far from over in Dundee, there is little sign of ideological objection to the idea of wealthy social elites. Rather, there is an expectation that they should recognise their duty to the less well off. People were asking for benevolent paternalism, not revolution. The ‘self-made’ Baxters (in fact, they inherited a considerable amount of their jute empire) more than fulfilled these expectations, in distinct contrast to the landed gentry who owned the Law and Balgay estates.

As discussed above, the ethos of communing with an ordered nature as an improving activity was key to the ideology behind the design of Baxter Park. This tied in with contemporary ideas not only of poetry as an improving activity for the spiritual and

⁵⁷ ‘Rouse, Brothers, Rouse’, *People’s Journal*, 5th September 1863, p. 3.

⁵⁸ W.W. Knox, *Industrial Nation: Work, Culture and Society in Scotland 1800 – Present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 56-7.

moral health of the working-classes, but of the function of nature as inspiration for poetry. Gilfillan had always advised the poets he supported to choose topics within their lived experience, saying they should ‘write an ode on the Law, not Mount Olympus.’⁵⁹ This did not mean that they should concentrate their efforts on industrial or political poetry, though. For Gilfillan, the nature encountered in Dundee’s green spaces was the ideal inspiration for local poets, though their celebrations of it almost always stress that its value is defined in contrast to the hardships of industrial life. Adam Wilson’s ‘Lines written on seeing two Lovers reclined upon the slopes of the Baxter Park’ is representative of many poems written about the park:

Tw’as on a balmy simmer’s day
I through the Baxter Park did stray
 Whaur beauty’s to be seen
As o’er the slopes I wound my way
There I beheld two lovers gay
 Reclin’d upon the green.

How sweetly and neatly
Than any earthly queen,
She was drest of the best
Fabric garment of green.

And amid the flowr’s o nature
 I saunter’d slowly on
Amusing on that creature
 And nature’s flow’rs among
Her form like the morn
 Is before me every way
In my sleep her I keep

⁵⁹ Black, p. 158.

In my memory night and day

The sweet perfume of every flower
The jocund laugh within yon bower
 Gives health and joy to me;
The soft notes of the feath'ed choir
Can charm and cheer my innermost core
 As wandering there so free.

In the summer nights serenely -
 'Oh! The Baxter Park for me,'
Cries our lassies, none so queenly
 Than the bloomers of Dundee
And when the factory closes
 They seek their green retreat
Where the violets, and the roses
 Grow around the lovers' seat;
They spend the hours among the flowers
 Until it's dusk or dark
Then home they stray and bless the day
 They got a Baxter Park.⁶⁰

The young woman of the couple is of much more interest to Wilson than her companion: in her green finery, she becomes one with the park itself, an ethereal, transcendent part of nature, as restorative to observe as the flowers. Some of the more traditionally religious commentators in the 1860s were indeed concerned that Baxter Park was

⁶⁰ Adam Wilson, 'Poems and Songs', LC124/18. This is a small pamphlet of songs which appears to have been printed before he adopted the 'Factory Muse' name. It is undated, but is presumably one of his earlier works. I have not found any of the poems in this booklet printed in newspapers, unlike those in *Flowers of Fancy*.

becoming a place for young people to ‘see and be seen,’ and doubtless for many the potential meetings were a more attractive a reason to visit the park than the floral displays.⁶¹ Moving outwards from his own musings on the woman, Wilson reflects more generally on the Baxter Park and the working women of Dundee. Here the park is a calming, civilising influence to counteract the destructive forces that (particularly) women workers were seen as being exposed to through urban industrial life. The description of the ‘bloomers’ of Dundee reinforces the ‘woman as nature’ imagery introduced earlier in the poem. The reference to staying out until dark and ‘straying’ home may be a covert reference to less innocent activities in the park – while keepers were employed and the gates were locked in the evening, people had managed to get into the park while it was still closed on Sundays, so presumably getting out out-of-hours was also possible. The growing association of Baxter Park with courtship is in many ways a continuation of the use of green spaces in this way seen in traditional songs such as ‘The Magdalen Green’, but these associations are reinforced by practical considerations. In an overcrowded city where housing was small and scarce, parks provided a much-needed comparatively unsupervised social space. Adam Wilson’s established status as a poet who defended workers’ access to time off and to nature would also have affected the way the poem was received.

Wilson’s fellow factory poet David Tasker also wrote of a ‘Spring Morning Ramble in the Baxter Park’, set in the early morning before most workers awoke:

The long streets silent and deserted are,
An hour hence that with busy life will teem;
Pale, weary, toiling ones, from near and far,
Wending their way – some as if in a dream –

To the close factories and the dusty mills,
The livelong day to toil, amidst the din
Of clattering looms and whirling iron wheels –

⁶¹ *People’s Journal*, 20th August 1864

Wearing their young lives out to keep them in.

But now I've reach'd that Garden of the Poor,

Where all alike may come and taste the sweets
Of nature, here unfolded, to allure
The toilworn from the city's crowded streets.

Here, in the summer, 'midst the buds and blooms,

How sweet to breathe the pure, fresh, healthy air,
Rich with a thousand delicate perfumes,
Stolen from a thousand flowers as sweetly fair;

Or, resting 'mongst the long, cool, pleasant grass

In the green shade of the low rustling trees
To watch the white clouds through the blue sky pass,
And listen to the song-birds' melodies.

Truly a noble gift, and one which round

The donors' names hath cast a hallowed spell;
And, in the people's hearts, for them hath found
A home, there warmly cherished aye to dwell.

As o'er the elastic dewy lawn I tread,

The bracing morning air comes calm and cool;
The hardy crocus nods its golden head
While bends the pearly snowdrop beautiful.⁶²

The contrast between the calm of the park and the noise and crowds of the city is further emphasised through the temporal setting of the poem, as is the temporary nature of the

⁶² Tasker, *Musings*, p.29-30.

poet's relief. This poem was included in Tasker's *Musings in Leisure Hours*, published when the park was still new, in 1865. Gilfillan's introduction to this volume has been cited in the previous chapter as a classic example of the editor's view of the working-class poet. Within it, he also praised Tasker's 'breathings after the country,' characteristic and aspirational for his fellow 'children of toil.'⁶³ As Aileen Black discusses in her biography of Gilfillan, Tasker had no intention of becoming a professional poet, and in Gilfillan's opinion, his work was all the better for this.⁶⁴ The poetry and song composed around Baxter Park suggests a clear intended use as a reflective, calm, improving space, and there is little published at the time which suggests this was not a function the people of Dundee enthusiastically embraced. It would have been unlikely for a dissenter to get a poem in print, or to find success with their work, when the dominant mood in print media and, it seems, on the street, was so favourable to Baxter.⁶⁵

One Sunday evening in July 1863, a religious activist attempted to use the recently created Baxter Park as a preaching venue, an activity which would have been commonplace in the Magdalen Green. He was told in no uncertain terms (unfortunately the *People's Journal* reporter does not record by who, but it may well have been one of the groundskeepers employed by Baxter's endowment fund for the park's upkeep) that this was not the purpose of the park. 'If one were permitted to break the Sabbath quietness of the park,' the *Journal* opined, 'there would be no limit to either the sects or number of preachers or speakers, Christians or athiests [sic], turning the Park into an area of controversy, or a field for the dissemination of all sorts of opinions.'⁶⁶ Baxter Park was not an area designed for controversy: it was consciously set outside of the everyday political goings on in the town. The *Journal* went on to suggest that, for those wishing to harangue the citizens of Dundee, 'abundance of churches and halls may be

⁶³ Rev. George Gilfillan, 'Testimonial,' in Tasker, *Musings*, n.p.

⁶⁴ Black, p. 151.

⁶⁵ The *People's Journal's* 'To Correspondents' column, which frequently gave advice or sarcastic rebukes to would-be poets, makes no mention of any poem rejected on the grounds of unfavourable sentiment towards the park, though they probably would have mentioned it if there was.

⁶⁶ 'Preaching in the Baxter Park', *People's Journal*, 25th July 1863, p.2.

found in the town.’ The explicit forbidding of political or anti/religious speech is of course a reinforcement, or at least tacit acceptance of the status quo, and of the messages of improvement encoded in the park’s design and presentation in print: silence is never neutral. It is likely, though, that the idea of escaping to a quiet space would have been very welcome to a population used to working in literally deafening mills and factories. It was not always quiet, though. Occasional concerts and dancing on Saturday nights became a popular place for young Dundonians to look for partners.

Baxter Park’s functions and benefits appear to have been overwhelmingly agreed upon across Dundee society, not always the case when public parks were proposed in British cities.⁶⁷ While there is some debate in newspapers about the licensing of public houses in the area which hint that people may be taking their own alcohol into the park, there seem to be no reports in newspapers about Baxter Park being appropriated as a space for sex or violence in a way which inconvenienced its idyllic image. If anything, people were too enthusiastic about walking in the park, sometimes resorting to trespassing before the demands for Sunday opening were granted. While this raised concern for the moral health of young Dundee among the clergy, the Trustees of the park seemed happy to obey ‘the will of the people’ in this instance.⁶⁸ There were occasional petty incidents of vandalism such as the ‘abstraction of a fine geranium’ in the park’s early days.⁶⁹ Slightly more serious was the spate of attacks on Baxter’s statue which led to its removal to safety inside the Albert Institute in 1894. The statue was only comparatively recently reinstated to the park, in 1997, and Baxter’s image is now safely within the confines of the Pavilion.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ For example, the resistance to turning Mousehold Heath in Norwich into a ‘People’s Park’ is discussed by Neil MacMaster in ‘The Battle for Mousehold Heath 1857-1884: Popular Politics and the Victorian Public Park’, *Past & Present*, no. 127 (1990), 117-154. This resistance, MacMaster argues, was not purely a reaction to the imposition of ‘appropriate’ leisure, but also a resistance to the incorporation of a smaller distinct community into the social control of Norwich city itself.

⁶⁸ Whatley, ‘Altering images’, p. 86.

⁶⁹ ‘The Baxter Park’, *People’s Journal*, 11 July 1863, p.3. This incident which was said to have been ‘only the second’ act of vandalism since the park’s inception, though the newspaper was disappointed to report the culprit was ‘a grown man’ who they felt ought to have more sense of pride and respect for the park.

⁷⁰ Matthew Jarron, *Independent & Individualist: Art in Dundee 1867-1924* (Dundee: Abertay Historical Society 2015), p. 47.

Birds-nesting also became a problem within the first few decades of the park's existence, as evidenced by the poem 'Murder Most Foul,' published in the *People's Journal* in June 1871. The author, 'T.N.D.,' was moved to write after seeing five young linnets dead in the park, their nest 'torn and trampled on.' The opening verse portrays the park as an ecosystem within which the birds are due protection in exchange for the emotional and psychic benefits of their song:

By Baxter's bounteous hand this meadow fair,
With all these walks and lawns and shrubs arrayed,
Was given unto the People, with the wish sincere
That *all* would use it, and enjoy the shade
Of the green trees, and wander through those bowers
Where 'wood notes wild' would frowning brows unbend,
Soothe mingled griefs, and sweeten lonely hours,
Until each songster seems a rustic friend,
Who, for protection given, their heaven-born music spend.

The poem is a plea on the part of the author for adults to teach their children not to interfere with the families of the birds:

Ye sons of labour! men of stifling streets,
Ill smelling lanes and wynds, and dust and noise,
A warbler of the woods in sorrow greets,
And asks you to reclaim these blackguard boys.
Tell them *our* nestlings are not torture toys;
But that life beats in us with nervous glow.
We have our trials and cares, our fears and joys;
Our life is not all singing on a bough.
Protect your houseless songsters evermo'e.⁷¹

⁷¹ Blair, *Poets of the People's Journal*, p. 95.

The caged or mistreated bird, as Blair notes, is frequently used as a metaphor for the suffering of the working-class, and particularly working-class poets.⁷² The songbird, whose song is nature rather than art, is an analogy for the ‘natural,’ untaught creativity of the working-class poets, who also face survival in a harsh human ecosystem, often with little appreciation or respect afforded them in exchange for the benefits of their song. Vandalism was generally blamed on young ‘mischievous urchins,’ at a time when it was likely the songs their parents or grandparents sang to celebrate Baxter’s gift had long left popular currency.⁷³ It would have been highly unlikely for Baxter Park not to have lost some of its shine in the thirty years since its opening. While reports like those of the geranium incident confirm the obvious fact that there will always be multiple attitudes and responses within a community, this looks like the start of Baxter Park becoming a visibly contested landscape of various meanings in the same way the other spaces discussed had been for, in some cases, centuries.

Conclusion

First and foremost, the importance of these spaces to the workers of Victorian Dundee comes through clearly in these poems. The corpus of work produced by Adam Wilson and his fellow worker poets indicate that the city boundaries were not necessarily the limit of factory workers’ engagement with green spaces, as many describe hills, dens and other landscapes in Angus and Fife. These were generally in the context of holidays or workplace jaunts, an annual experience rather than a weekly one. The importance of having green places within a city which was growing ever more overcrowded and polluted should not be underestimated. As the spaces grew more precious in relation to the city around them, people’s engagement with them became more directed, as authority in the form of the Council or patrons were able to dictate the terms on which people got to use them.

⁷² Blair, *Poets of the People’s Journal*, p.95.

⁷³ For example, William Kidd, *Kidd’s Guide to Dundee* (Edinburgh and Glasgow: John Menzies, n.d.), p. 39.

This was by no means an unchecked power. Pressure from the Dundee Right-of-Way Association and the people who demanded Baxter Park's Sunday opening, for example, made real changes to the management of these spaces. Furthermore, had it not been for the intervention of the Council, there is a real possibility that the Law and Balgay Hill would not have survived as public spaces. The way in which these places were 'laid out' after being taken over for the benefit of the people was intended to benefit the people in a very particular way, which brought these spaces closer to the contemporary ideal of 'landscape,' but Baxter Park was the prime example of nature as art. While Baxter Park was, for its first few decades, a remarkably undisputed space, the poetry discussed above shows it to be part of a broad movement towards political and social consensus, at least in regard to the use of these landscapes.

The perspective poets and singers use to describe their interactions with landscape shifts from seeing them as a space for political action and traditional storytelling to spaces to reflect on personal emotion and describe the soothing effects of nature on the soul. The poet or singer becomes an observer, viewing place similarly to a landscape painter. There is a similar shift in the way in which people made use of these spaces for performance and composition. This is perhaps most evident in the development of verse centred on the Magdalen Green. From being a place where people gather, hear, display verse on banners and sing, it becomes a place where an individual would visit reflect on the changing seasons and their private emotions. The centring of an individual perspective in the creation of 'landscape' is part of a movement towards legitimising the idea of land as private property. The 'People's Park' encouraged every citizen of Dundee to view themselves as an owner: there is an important distinction to be made between collective ownership of the kind invoked by the Right-of-Way groups and the numerous individual owners implied by the rhetoric surrounding Baxter Park. The shift in poetry about the Law and Balgay Hill from invoking collective history to reflecting upon individual life stories also broadly follows this pattern.

I do not suggest that Victorian Dundee saw a simple linear progression of attitudes to landscape – while the development of certain attitudes can certainly be recognised, they did not neatly displace traditional and pre-existing attachments to place,

and it is possible to identify many co-existing contradictory beliefs within the same society. The ‘instability and variability’ of landscape as symbol which Elizabeth Helsinger identifies in nineteenth-century England is equally applicable here.⁷⁴ Protests took place on the Magdalen Green after Baxter Park had opened, and the same May which inspired George Watson’s romantic musings saw demonstrations demanding workers’ rights.

One theme which remains constant is the use of green spaces for courting, both in poetic representations and in practice: a combination of the timeless association between blooming plants and human fertility and sexuality, and the practical concerns of where courting could actually be done, within the spatial constraints of a busy city. This is a good point at which to restate the inherent connection between the concepts of landscape, leisure, and ownership mentioned above. These spaces, whether explicitly created for recreation as in the case of Baxter Park, or whether their use shifted over the nineteenth century, are primarily leisure spaces by 1900. Poetry itself has also become seen as an improving leisure pursuit, worth undertaking for its own sake, rather than only or primarily a means of communicating a message or story, and the wider context of improvement and self-education is the setting for the following chapter on literary societies. The theme of nature and access to it also continues there, with many societies having a shared focus on writing and natural sciences. In a wider sense, a growing civic pride in the city and its landscape is an important thread running through Dundee place poetry in general. In August 1875, a letter to a newspaper suggested the new Dundee ought to be celebrated by constructing a grand drive to link all these sites: ‘by the Esplanade, the Magdalen Green, Windsor Street, and the Perth Road to the Balgay Park; then from Balgay to the base of the cone of the Law, and from that again to the Baxter Park – making a town drive such as few cities possess.’⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Helsinger, *Rural Scenes and National Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.15.

⁷⁵ LC228/28.

Chapter 5: Meeting rooms, Literary Societies, and Manuscript Magazines

This chapter will trace the development of literary societies with a focus on self-improvement, both formal and informal, and their role in the cultural life of Dundee between c.1835 and 1890. Societies proved remarkably popular, particularly between 1840 and 1855, as a hub for the creation of literary work through both manuscript magazines and, less often, printed books or periodicals. Following a pattern seen in previous chapters, there is a general shift in the kinds of space used by societies, from the relatively public pub or shop as meeting place to the semi-private designated meeting room. Lauren Weiss' recent research, which focuses on Glasgow but considers it as part of a wider associational culture throughout Scotland and the north of England, has demonstrated that the Dundee societies were part of a very popular literary movement, and indeed were among the earliest such societies in Britain. These groups were run primarily by young working-class men as a way of providing opportunities to learn and develop their writing, thinking and debating ability. This chapter expands on Weiss' initial examination of the Dundee societies and further contextualises them as an essential part of Dundee's social networks at the time in question.

Societies required meeting places in order to function. While one early group met in an inn, the majority avoided pubs. This was largely due to the strong links between the temperance and self-improvement movements, but the desire for a space quiet and relatively private enough to accommodate the depth of discussion they aimed for probably played a part. There were a couple of valiant attempts to hold meetings in an attic or a mother's front room, but members rarely had the domestic space available to properly host a society. Without the availability of suitable venues, the societies would have foundered. In Dundee, Thomas Lamb's coffee house in the Murraygate was undoubtedly the centre of the literary societies' city, and represented a new way of socialising in Dundee. A venue composed of several small rooms, away from the

temptations of the ale house but open long after their working days had finished, was exactly what these groups sought. After early success with the literary societies, Lamb's business also grew, with the coffee house eventually turning into a large temperance hotel and adjacent tearoom on Reform Street, which was eventually run by his son, the collector Alexander Charles Lamb. The development of literary societies in Dundee, which as I will argue below was more influential for the literature of the area than has been previously acknowledged, was intrinsically linked with the central hubs Lamb's venues provided.

Literary societies were an important part of many poets' development, both as writers and as people. They generally took a holistic approach to self-improvement, in which creativity, scientific and historical knowledge, and a sense of mental wellbeing were seen as interlinked, and their achievement was best sought through a balance of study, debate and socialising. According to memoirs and biographies, such as those of James Scrymgeour and George Tawse, members tended to be in their late teens or early twenties when they became involved. Societies were seen as a beneficial intervention at a young and impressionable age. Many members were aiming to address a lack of prior educational opportunity, most commonly through having to start work at an early age. Weiss observed that the boom in society memberships in Glasgow coincided with an increase in the number of clerking and retail jobs available, which often saw people from working-class backgrounds becoming part of an emerging lower middle class.¹

While Dundee's society membership peaked earlier than Glasgow's, this social dynamic is still evident. Most of the poets' biographies, in publications like *Dundee Celebrities* or *Bards of Angus and the Mearns*, stress their lack of traditional schooling, and emphasise their successes in overcoming this through personal dedication and commitment. A fairly high proportion of the poets discussed here, in contrast to many of the mill-worker poets discussed in the previous chapter, found work in more white-collar occupations after having worked in more menial roles. There are several teachers, booksellers and clerks among the members of these societies. Christopher Whatley

¹ Weiss, 'Literary Clubs and Societies of Glasgow', p. 105.

posits that these relatively successful cases of self-improvement, while not the norm among Dundee's mid-century working-class, were more common than is often assumed.² These societies also maintained relationships with patrons or lecturers from middle or upper class backgrounds, and these relationships, combined with the smaller social circles in Dundee due to population size, may have contributed to the comparatively harmonious social relations Whatley identifies in Dundee in relation to, for example, Glasgow at a similar time period.³

This culture in itself was by no means unique to Scotland. The pursuit of education through mutual improvement societies was popular throughout nineteenth-century Britain, a scene which was in itself a development of eighteenth-century practices.⁴ Nineteenth-century literary societies in the north of England have been discussed by Brian Maidment and Martha Vicinus, among others. In 1841, the informal group of poets who met at the Sun Inn in Manchester became the formally constituted Lancashire Literary Association, with plans to begin a periodical, which did not materialise, and hold regular meetings to encourage and support Lancashire authors, which did.⁵ Poetry fulfilled numerous functions within these groups. As well as a source of personal consolation or inspiration to the author or reader, it could offer the possibility of wider social change, and an important opportunity for self-expression to a sympathetic group.⁶

Though geographically far removed from the focus of this study, Elizabeth Long's study of white women's reading groups in nineteenth and twentieth-century Texas offers relevant perspectives on the use of literary associations by disenfranchised groups. The formation of a constituted organisation as opposed to an informal group, Long argues, signalled members' seriousness, intellect and ability to participate in

² Whatley, 'Altering Images', p. 78.

³ Whatley, 'Altering Images', p.94.

⁴ Accounts of eighteenth-century Scottish literary societies include Alexander Dick's 'A Good Deal of Trash: Reading Societies, Religious Controversy and Networks of Improvement in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', (*Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38/4 (2015), 585-598), which examines the continuing relationship between Calvinist theology and reading societies in the late eighteenth century.

⁵ Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse*, p.160.

⁶ Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives* p. 186, Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* p. 158.

democratic structures. Requiring contributions from all members – a practice shared by the Dundee societies discussed here – further demonstrated their commitment to democracy, indicating that members’ intellectual input, rather than any pre-existing status, was what counted.⁷ In Long’s study, nineteenth-century groups were more likely to use society membership as a precursor to direct action than later ones. In Dundee, the growth of associational culture broadly coincides with the decline of the Chartist movement – for example, James Myles took on his role as bookseller and literary facilitator after rejecting the Chartist lecturing circuit, and James Scrymgeour made a similar rejection of Chartism, allegedly after becoming acquainted with the ‘dangerous classes’ in Dundee in the early 1840s.⁸ This shift from organised political activity to organised literary activity (as opposed to the loose meetings of Republic of Letters poets) perhaps indicates a similar intention to demonstrate effective citizenship through participation in formal societies, at an intellectual level which proved their ability to contribute to society in the wider sense. The sense of social responsibility surrounding these societies is compounded by their many links to the temperance movement, both through members’ outside activity and their meeting places in Lamb’s Coffee House. Literary associational culture also overlapped considerably with the emergence of historical writing about Dundee, as outlined in the introduction, and with a similar associational culture focused on natural history.

The poets discussed here are overwhelmingly male, as society membership seems to have been as a general rule, though women were invited to attend special events. There were occasions when women contributed to the periodical magazines run by societies, generally not under their own name but simply as ‘a lady.’⁹ Weiss’ research has also uncovered the existence of an 1848 manuscript magazine entirely by women,

⁷ Elizabeth Long, ‘Literature as a Spur to Collective Action: The Diverse Perspectives of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Reading Groups’, *Poetics Today*, 25 (2004), 335-359.

⁸ Norrie, *Celebrities* p. 133; Norrie, *Life of Scrymgeour* p. 31-2. I have been unable to pin down an exact date for Myles opening his shop, though the level of detail included in his satirical account of the 1842 Chartist march on Forfar indicates he might have still been involved at this point.

⁹ For example, in the Dundee Diagnostic Society’s published volume. It is also possible that among the unidentified pseudonyms of contributors are more women.

titled *La Bouquet or Dundee Ladies' Miscellany*.¹⁰ Its editorial preface, in adding the level of modesty expected of women to the level of modesty expected of amateur or working-class writers, barely stops short of telling the prospective reader not to bother: 'However much ladies in general, are disposed to self delusion, we can not imagine that our book or magazine, which has nothing to recommend it, can be recommended by the editor's preface.'¹¹ The magazine evidently had an interested readership awaiting it, though, as indicated by the inside cover bearing a warning that readers who keep the volume longer than two days will be fined. The contributions are very much in keeping with what men's societies were producing at a comparable time, including essays, a poem and short reflections on topics including Literature and Slavery.

The work these writers composed and published, both in semi-privately circulated manuscript magazines, and fully public periodicals or books, was part of a communal writing and reception process. This process was essential to the development of many working-class poets, and could take many forms, some of which have already been discussed. Goodridge's study of John Clare demonstrates the ways in which one poet was often part of many such writing or performance communities. While Clare was not part of a formal literary society, his ongoing correspondence with John Keats reveals a relationship of mutual respect, partially founded on a sense of class-based literary community as both poets dealt with the expectations of elite literary circles.¹² That the authors had a specific audience in mind is evident not only in the manuscript works, submitted with the expectation of feedback, but in the way in which literature is discussed and reviewed in their periodicals. The web of references and in-jokes surrounding published poems like 'The Halls of Lamb,' discussed below, is further evidence of the reach of these communities. Such networks of writers have been more important in the development of Scottish literary culture than previously acknowledged, as Kirstie Blair has recently demonstrated in relation to the 'poetic fraternities' behind the compilation of *Whistle-Binkie*. The construction of this collective was reliant on

¹⁰ Weiss, 'Literary Clubs and Societies of Glasgow', p. 192.

¹¹ Editorial, 'La Bouquet, or Dundee Ladies' Miscellany', Vol. 1 No. 1, p. 1 (LC266/2).

¹² John Goodridge, *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) p. 61-2.

cross-class friendship between editor and contributors, based on shared poetic aspirations. This was made clear both in public presentation and through private correspondence.¹³ Though friendly, relationships between working-class poets and editors, who were generally more financially secure and in a position to choose who was published, were necessarily subject to a power imbalance. The practical functions of poetic networks are again in evidence in Dundee. As well as sharing reviews and news of publications to encourage sales, on more than one occasion the self-improvement communities organised fundraising for a member, or their family, when in financial emergency. The foundations of both personal networks and ideas about knowledge and writing laid by these societies continued to influence Dundee's literary culture long after their 1840s heyday.

Literary societies, their focus and meeting places

In the 1830s, the 'Republic of Letters' group, already discussed in Chapter 3, met in Dundee. It is not clear whether this is a name they would have recognised themselves, or if it was applied later. The term appears in *Bards of Angus and the Mearns* and in *Dundee Celebrities*, but I have not found any contemporary references by members of the group using this name, and it seems likely it was applied retrospectively, particularly as the community at the time appears to have been loosely defined.¹⁴ Either way, the use of 'Republic' was no coincidence. As well as alluding to the use of the term to describe Enlightenment correspondents, many of the poets associated with this group were involved in Chartism, including James Gow and William Thom, whose work has already been discussed in relation to weaving culture. It may also allude to the group's collective poverty, in connection with a joke made by Thomas Hood that 'the phrase 'Republic of Letters was hit upon to insinuate that, taking the whole lot of authors together, they had not got a sovereign among them.'¹⁵ Other central figures in this group included John Mitchell, leader of the Chartist march on Forfar, William Gardiner, (poet and botanist),

¹³ Blair, *Working Verse in Victorian Scotland*, p.102-5.

¹⁴ *Dundee Celebrities* p.132.

¹⁵ Hood's joke was reprinted often, e.g. the *Courier*, 12th October 1853, p.4. Hood remained popular and oft-quoted in Dundee throughout the nineteenth century, partly due to his childhood visits to the city.

James Adie (journalist and geologist), Alexander Wilson (weaver, and father of the 'Factory Muse' Adam Wilson) and the bookseller and historian James Myles (1819-1851), whose Overgate bookshop provided one of the places in which writers congregated. The group also included poets by the name of Colville and Tough, whose work does not seem to have survived. Colville may be the printer Alexander Colville, whose father Thomas started some short-lived Dundee-based periodicals in the early years of the century.¹⁶ Other venues included Gow's weaving shed (as discussed in Chapter 3), as well as the Wheatsheaf tavern in Shepherd's Close, in which they were often found on Saturday nights.¹⁷ Biographies given by later nineteenth-century commentators, such as Norrie and Reid, often stress how brief the original schooling opportunities of members of this group were, and highlight the importance of later self-directed study. Interestingly, there was a competitive element to their gatherings, in which several of the poets would bring their recent work and decide between them whose efforts were the most accomplished. Prizes were not awarded, the satisfaction being purely in having the approval of their circle.¹⁸ This foreshadows the focus on coming foremost in the debates which characterised many of the more formal literary societies' meetings, though it may also suggest that they viewed writing as akin to a trade, as a skill which can be measured and judged objectively according to external standards.

William Gardiner (1809-1852) is a particularly strong early example of the focus on learning and improvement in all fields, and the intertwining of poetry with other forms of knowledge, which characterised nineteenth-century literary societies. His father, of the same name, was also a poet who published two collections of 'Poems and Songs,' mostly in Scots, in 1815 and 1818. The younger poet often signed his name as 'William Gardiner, jnr.' both to avoid confusion and acknowledge the connection.¹⁹

¹⁶ A.C. Lamb, *Bibliography of Dundee Periodicals* (excerpt from *Scottish Notes and Queries*, Vols III-IV, 1890-91, stored at Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D5548), pp.11-14; *Dundee Celebrities* p. 31.

¹⁷ *Dundee Celebrities*, p. 386.

¹⁸ *Dundee Celebrities*, p. 386.

¹⁹ There was also another poet by the name of William Gardiner (born in Perth c.1800) active in Dundee in a similar period, who wrote a popular song, 'Scotland's Hills', and contributed to *Whistle-Binkie*. He does not seem to have been connected to this Gardiner family.

Gardiner left school aged ten to be apprenticed to an umbrella-maker aged, and he would later resume education via evening classes. He inherited his father's interest in botany as well as in poetry, and focused his efforts in these areas, continuing to work as an umbrella-maker while resident in the Overgate. Gardiner became interested in poetry at an early age, and he was in the practice of collecting poems from a variety of sources by copying them out into scrapbooks from the age of seventeen. The 1824 'Literary Scrapbook and Prose and Poetical Miscellany' gives no indication of having been compiled for an audience beyond its author, but its title echoes those of the periodicals he was clearly familiar with. The collection is mostly poetry, from printed sources including *The Scots Magazine*, *The Literary Olio* and, what appears to have been one of his favourite sources, Thomas Tomkins' 1806 *Rays of Genius*, from which he has copied several poems. *Rays of Genius* was an explicitly educational work, 'to enlighten the rising generation,' of which Gardiner was a part. These are interspersed with occasional poems by local authors he does not record a printed source for, suggesting he encountered these poems in a different way. One of these, a celebration of local politician George Kinloch's return to Dundee, indicates an interest in the local reform movement as well as the poetry scene. His father's poem 'Spring' is included, and its overarching message, that the beauty of nature should awaken Christian faith, clearly foreshadows much of Gardiner's later work in *The Flora of Forfarshire*:

O man, thou chief fav'rite of heaven.
A wonder peculiar thyself;
Thy reason to thee ne'er was given
To become a vile Atheist elf!

The sun, that prodigious mass,
An atom of sand on the shore,
A field – yea a small pile of grass
Proves that there's an Almighty power.

How sweet is the spring of the year
A leisurely walking abroad,
We mark what we both see and hear,
And ascribe all the glory to God.²⁰

At the age of twenty-four, Gardiner compiled a manuscript magazine of poetry under the title ‘The Wreath of Wild Flowers’, which ran for at least three issues between 1834 and 1836. All the contributions are under classical pseudonyms. Gardiner appears as Sylvanus, and others wrote under names including Damon or Daphnus, although I have so far been unable to identify any other contributors.²¹ Similar to later literary society magazines, ‘The Wreath of Wild Flowers’ was circulated via a list of readers given inside the front cover. These names do not correspond with those generally given as regular members of the Republic of Letters, or with names which become well known in relation to later societies, indicating that the reading and writing communities we have records for are only a part of the full picture. Most of Gardiner’s readers were located in central and industrial areas, like the Scouringburn, Hawkhill and Wellgate, which implies a primarily working-class readership. The contributions are all written in Gardiner’s distinctively decorative hand. It does not seem to have been uncommon for an editor of such periodicals to do this, in order to increase the overall readability of the piece.²²

‘The Wreath of Wild Flowers’ appears to be an annual collection, appearing in March or April, with continuous pagination between numbers to indicate that each one becomes part of a larger whole. It also appears to have been circulated at the same time as another magazine created by Gardiner, ‘Gems of Poesy,’ which served as a companion volume. There are, again, three surviving issues of this in Gardiner’s hand, dated on the same months as ‘Wild Flowers,’ and the names on the readers’ list are the

²⁰ William Gardiner, ‘Literary Scrapbook and Prose and Poetical Miscellany,’ (1824), LC268/4, p.25.

²¹ ‘The Wreath of Wild Flowers’, (March 1834), Dundee Central Libraries Sp. Coll. D22011. An early draft of a poem, ‘A Thought,’ later published under Gardiner’s own name, as well as the inclusion of botanical references, are what allowed me to trace this volume to him.

²² Tawse’s reminiscences of the Dundee Literary and Scientific Institute state he did the same thing with their literary magazine, for ‘presentability.’

same for both magazines. ‘Gems of Poesy’ is again entirely in Gardiner’s handwriting, though rather than a collection of original poetry, it is a curated selection of particularly good, inspiring or relevant poetry from published sources, perhaps a means of making these poems more accessible at a time when the costs of printed periodicals were still prohibitive for many workers. Mrs Hemans appears most frequently, alongside poets such as Eliza Cook, Byron and Shelley. Generally, the original sources for these poems are not noted, though those that are include the *Athenaeum* and the *English Bijou Almanac*.²³ There is no indication of whether Gardiner himself selected all the content, or whether this too was collaborative, but the absence of any calls for suggestions may indicate he acted alone. The practice of collecting poetry from a variety of sources was also evident in Gardiner’s approach to original poetry, as the April 1836 issue of ‘The Wreath of Wild Flowers’ contains poems taken from ‘Juvenilia, a M.S. Monthly Magazine of Fugitive Pieces, by the Literary Society Dundee, No. X 1834.’²⁴ Gardiner’s own writing focuses primarily on pastoral or floral themes, and he includes several songs composed to traditional tunes, such as one titled simply ‘Song,’ which uses the tune Logan’s Braes for a pastoral love song set locally at Birkhill, and another, ‘Spring,’ to the tune Kelvingrove. Overall, pastoral themes are the primary topic for poems included in this magazine, perhaps unsurprisingly given the writing community’s links to natural history. The reader’s list includes William Jackson, another well-regarded self-taught botanist in Dundee, who was involved with the Watt Institution (or, possibly, his son of the same name, then in his early teens.)

Both the title and content of ‘A Wreath of Wild Flowers’ recall the idea, discussed in the previous chapter, that working-class poetry is somehow ‘natural’ and wild, set apart from the ‘cultivated’ verse written by canonical authors. Although Gardiner’s poetry in these early magazines takes more generic pastoral themes, poems specifically describing flowers, placed alongside scientific observations, form an important part of his later work. Gardiner made field trips within the Dundee and Angus

²³ ‘Gems of Poesy’, (March 1834- March 1836), Dundee Central Library Sp.Coll. D22012.

²⁴ ‘The Wreath of Wild Flowers’, (April 1836) p. 34. There do not appear to be any further surviving works from the *Juvenilia* magazine.

area to observe and collect plants as often as his work schedule would allow. Norrie's *Dundee Celebrities* recalls his struggles to collect samples with makeshift equipment: 'Being too poor to purchase a vasculum, he procured a basket, and covered it with some old oil cloth; and after his day's wanderings, what was his mortification to find that many of the valuable and rare plants he had collected had shrunk up and been destroyed by the heat of the summer's sun – his pseudo-vasculum proving too thin to withstand its rays!'²⁵ He published three books: one on the plant life and natural history of Forfarshire, one on the same in areas of Aberdeenshire, and one on mosses. The book *Flora of Forfarshire* is a field guide describing local native plants from observation, but also containing occasional poems using the plants as metaphors to make moral or philosophical points, such as in the below entry for the anemone:

Abundant in the woods and on the hills and mountains, and often beautifully tinted with blue and crimson. Though loving the shady charm of the woodland, this elegant flower seems more partial to the open heath, where it can more easily hold communion with the flaunting breezes and enjoy the genial sunshine.

When May's soft breezes fan the woods
And waft from May-flowers fragrance sweet,
With what delight, thou lovely gem,
Do we thy open blossoms greet.
They speak of Friendship, warm, sincere,
Of Love that cannot prove untrue,
Then oh! how beautiful, how dear,
Thy white flowers, crimson-tinged and blue!

In woodland fresh, where warbling voice
Of small birds charm the wanderer's ear,

²⁵ *Dundee Celebrities* p. 141.

And green trees, waving in the wind
 Make music to his heart as dear,
Thy lovely blossoms form the glade
 Look up towards a sunny sky;
Then earthward turn their modest glance
 As if afraid to look to high.

Their graceful forms, so bright, so fair,
 Arrest the wanderer's curious eye,
Who cannot fail to learn from them
 The virtue of Humility.
It is not merely then, sweet flower,
 Thy only mission to impart
Beauty and grace to heath and bower,
 But to instruct the human heart.²⁶

The metaphorical interpretation of the flower is clear: beauty is an important aspect of its appreciation, but it can only truly be understood when beauty is taken in conjunction with its moral message. In this case, the message is that humility is a necessary virtue. The world from which these moral conclusions are drawn is local and accessible to readers based in Dundee, and they are encouraged to observe nature themselves. Indeed, trips and picnics to places in Angus and Perthshire to see nature and history were run by societies, particularly later in the century when their focus shifted away from the production of writing.

Reviews of Gardiner's lectures and writings, both from before and after his death, show a great enthusiasm for his combination of scientific and creative methods. In 1852, the *Dundee Courier* described his 'poetical botany' as 'the great peculiarity in his mental character.' While 'mere collectors' of flowers may amass a lot of knowledge, the

²⁶ William Gardiner, *The Flora of Forfarshire* (Dundee: F. Shaw & W. Middleton, 1848), p. 2.

absence of love or appreciation for their subject means they are still lacking in true understanding. Gardiner's combination of knowledge and feeling – bringing 'all a child's and all a poet's delight' to his work – was, they implied, the true path to holistic learning.²⁷ Likewise, a report on a lecture he gave at the Watt Institution on natural history, featuring extracts from his own and others' verse, was praised in the press: 'If the language was still to be classed as prose, it had more of poetry in it than half the productions claiming the dignity of poems.'²⁸ These reviews suggest the development of a sense that culture, like the anemone, must combine beauty and usefulness in order to be of true value. Gardiner's scientific interest is treated similarly to working-class poetry, depicted as an innate, 'childlike' value rather than a learned discipline. His work, both poetical and botanical, has been largely forgotten since the nineteenth century, with the exception of Colin Wilson's 1976 article in *The Scots Magazine*, 'The Man Who Hunted Flowers.'²⁹ Wilson's praise for Gardiner's work echoes that of his contemporary critics, celebrating his enthusiasm and talent for bringing the subject of botany to life.

Poetry about flowers was particularly associated with female poets, as Fabienne Moine has explored in *Women's Poetry in the Victorian Era*. Flower poetry, deemed a suitable interest for middle class women, could become a route into the study of plants when the formal study of botanical science was denied them.³⁰ Her suggestion that similarities might be found between flower poetry by the women included in her study and nature poetry by recently rediscovered working-class male poets, who faced similar challenges to their poetic and scientific legitimacy, is borne out in relation to Gardiner's work.³¹ Louisa Campbell's poetry imbuing flowers with a double meaning, in which taxonomy and observation are combined with a religious message, was popular during the mid-Victorian 'fern craze,' and similar poems using the Biblical image of lilies

²⁷ 'William Gardiner, the Dundee Botanist', *Dundee Courier*, 23 June 1852, p.3.

²⁸ Unknown publication & date, cutting in James Scrymgeour's scrapbook, Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D21946, p. 99.

²⁹ Colin Wilson, 'The Man Who Hunted Flowers', *The Scots Magazine* 105/4, July 1976, 348-356. Here Wilson gives Gardiner's birth date as 1808, in contrast to the nineteenth century sources who give it as 1809, though he does not list a source for this information. (p. 351).

³⁰ Fabienne Moine, *Women's Poetry in the Victorian Era* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 52.

³¹ Moine, p. 273.

appeared throughout the century.³² Moine also notes the tendency for women's poems to be 'arranged' in anthologies, similar to the ways flowers themselves are arranged in bouquets or specimen books.³³ This is certainly similar to the ways poetry by working-class writers is often encountered in anthologies such as *Whistle-Binkie* or *Modern Scottish Poets*, but it also recalls Gardiner's 'self-anthologising' practice as he developed his poetic voice in manuscript magazines. There is an important difference between a bouquet, or wreath, of poems arranged by their own authors and one arranged by an editor removed from the writing community as Moine suggests editors of collections of women's poetry were.

Gardiner became well-known in botanical circles expanding beyond Dundee, corresponding with members of societies in Edinburgh and London, several of whom sent money to support him and his son during his illness in 1852. The business of asking for donations, which continued after Gardiner's death in aid of his now orphaned son (his wife had predeceased him), was undertaken by his friend James Scrymgeour, who had also helped George Gilfillan with the fundraising campaign for William Thom's family after his death.³⁴ Scrymgeour also preserved much of Gardiner's correspondence and personal effects, including some watercolour paintings of rural scenes made in his teens, in his scrapbooks.³⁵ There is much in Scrymgeour and Gardiner's personal collections which relate to the public periodical culture they were part of. Social networks are visible on the page, through cuttings of marriage notices relating to literary society members, personal notes and published verse by members of their social circle. There is also a possibility, given the scrapbook's early focus on Gardiner's life and later shift to Scrymgeour's, that they were begun by Gardiner and then taken over by Scrymgeour, first as a memorial to his friend and later a record of his own life; which would make the book an explicitly collaborative effort. The pages themselves do not contain Gardiner's handwriting, though, so this cannot be proven. As Brian Maidment

³² Moine, p.71, p.89.

³³ Moine, p.61.

³⁴ Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll D21495-6; Black p.144.

³⁵ Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D21495-6.

has argued, scrapbooking was not private but a ‘communal and sociable’ pursuit, and one which often partook in self-referential, meta humour.³⁶ In this way, Scrymgeour’s scrapbook appears as a continuation of the society’s activity.

A similar marriage of scientific and literary interest is described in the fictionalised account of a debating society meeting which Myles includes in *Chapters in the Life of a Factory Boy*. The intellectual collective of ‘working men, but earnest disciples of literature and science’ Myles describes were centred around an ‘intellectual clergyman’ who may represent Gilfillan, or possibly even James Inches Hillocks, though he may have been too young at this point to be a focal figure for societies.³⁷

It was a custom with a few of us to meet every Monday night in Denham’s Hotel, then situated in the Seagate, to enjoy a kind of family supper, and talk over our hopes and aspirations, and even indulge in gentle tilts on our favourite speculative dogmas. I acknowledge our opinions were somewhat extreme, they were the hot and burning scintillations of liberty-loving and imaginative souls, who in the hey-day of youth worship the ideal of beauty and reason, and wonder at all who do not bow before the same idols as they do.³⁸

The group’s discussion on the competing importance of feeling, as a spiritual and moral force, and reason is concluded with a reading by poet Robert Nicoll, of a new hymn written to celebrate the imminent tercentenary of the Reformation. Nicoll (1814-1837), who for a time ran a bookshop in Dundee, was very well-regarded as a poet, most famously described by Ebenezer Elliott as ‘Scotland’s second Burns.’ His hymn depicts the Reformation as an enlightenment, paving the way for the contemporary learning environment in which it was delivered:

Stern Ignorance man’s Soul had bound

³⁶ Maidment, *Comedy, Caricature and the Social Order*, p. 78-9.

³⁷ *Chapters*, p.60.

³⁸ *Chapters* p. 60-61.

In fetters, rusted o'er
With tears – with scalding human tears –
And red with human gore!

But men arose – *the* men to whom
We bend the freeman's knee,
Who, God-encouraged, burst the chain,
And made our fathers free!

Light dwelt where Darkness once had been –
The morn of Mind arose –
The dawning of that Day of Love
Which never more shall close.³⁹

Chapters in the Life of a Factory Boy was itself a part of this culture, written specifically to encourage others in a similar position to its young, impoverished protagonist to embrace the values of education, temperance and self-improvement. Their description as 'liberty-loving' also links this literary culture to political affinity. Nicoll was certainly known as a reformer, and contributed political articles to the *Dundee Advertiser* in the 1830s. By the time of *Chapters*' publication, Myles had drawn away from the direct action of Chartism, though, as discussed above, the significance of participating in literary societies in itself carried a sense of citizenship, and could be linked to political goals.

In the late 1830s and early 1840s, formally constituted societies, with committees, membership and set meeting dates became more popular, with Dundee soon amassing enough societies to enable them to run collaborative events and festivals. Several of the poets who are described as part of the informal 'Republic of Letters', including Alexander Wilson, James Myles and William Gardiner, also attended

³⁹ *Chapters* p. 63.

meetings of these various societies. Because of the lack of surviving society records, it is impossible to give precise dates and memberships for the existence of the many societies referenced in reminiscences and biographies. Many of the names which occur in conjunction with these societies recur later in Dundee's history in important civic roles. A case in point is that of James Scrymgeour, one of the original members of the first societies founded in Dundee. Due to his later role as a temperance campaigner, fundraiser and philanthropist, as well as father to two significant names in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Dundee culture, poet Norval and politician Neddy, Scrymgeour's life has been better recorded than some of his contemporaries'. Originally from Kirriemuir, he arrived in Dundee aged nineteen in 1840, following the failure of his father's ironmongery business. William Norrie's biography of Scrymgeour, an 'authorised' version published during the subject's lifetime, notes that 'almost from the time of his arrival in Dundee, he was 'intimately associated' with several of the Literary and Scientific Societies for which the town has now acquired some celebrity.'⁴⁰ These included a 'Tay Street society' in the house of an Alexander Maxwell, and the Watt Institution Mutual Improvement Society.⁴¹ It was through the latter that Scrymgeour's first printed work was achieved, entitled 'Elogie on the Death of Ann Spence, a Highland Woman,' based on a talk which he gave to this society. The period of 1829-38 has been characterised as 'the period of mutual instruction' within the history of the Watt Institution, partly due to the popularity of the approach, though possibly also because of a lack of funds to pay lecturers.⁴²

Scrymgeour was also one of the founding members of 'The Literary Coterie,' an unofficial name for a group which soon became the formally constituted Dundee Literary Institute. This group was formed c.1840, after a casual meeting of young men with literary interests, first held in Scrymgeour's mother's house, developed into a

⁴⁰ William Norrie, *Life of James Scrymgeour of Dundee* (Dundee: The News Bureau, 1887) p. 16.

⁴¹ *Life of Scrymgeour*, p. 16.

⁴² James V Smith, *The Watt Institution, Dundee, 1824-49* (Dundee: Abertay Historical Society, 1977) p 19-27.

regular occasion at Lamb's Coffee House in the Murraygate.⁴³ Another of the founding members was Peter Begg, then aged around twenty-two. Begg and Scrymgeour first met as children in Kirriemuir, where Begg's shoemaker father worked alongside Scrymgeour's, and the two had recently reconnected through attending evening classes at Meadowside in Dundee.⁴⁴ Begg would go on to become another well-known name in Dundee society, as the librarian of the *Dundee Advertiser* and a campaigner for free public libraries, and his role as editor of the short-lived 'Attic Journal' will be discussed below. Other members of the society at this time included three ministers, Rev John Hunter, Rev George Hunter, and Rev. David Farquhar. The group also included Peter Livingstone, who would later achieve local fame for the Hogmanay song 'A Good New Year to Ane an' A,' which remained popular well into the twentieth century and is still in circulation. Livingstone will be discussed further, below, in relation to the periodical he briefly edited. The group's weekly meetings, in which members would present talks on original subjects of their choice, were supplemented by occasions to practice their 'intellectual gladiatorship' through debates. Apparently, these were of interest to the wider population – whether because of their intellectual content or for their entertainment value – as crowds would gather below Lamb's windows while they were conducted.⁴⁵

A few years later, the similarly named Dundee Literary and Scientific Institute was formed. As far as Dundee societies are concerned, the 'institute' status implies that improvement is an explicit part of the function of the society, and that to achieve this regular written or spoken contributions will be required from the members. The success of the Literary Institute appears to have inspired the founding of the second organisation. Whether there were membership quotas, that would prevent every interested person from joining an original society is not clear, but such quotas would go some way

⁴³ *Life of Scrymgeour*, p. 17.

⁴⁴ *Life of Scrymgeour* p. 11. Scrymgeour's father died around the time of their move to Dundee, allegedly 'from a broken heart' due to his failed business, and young James' evening classes were paid for by Duncan Wilkie, a former Baron Bailie of Kirriemuir.

⁴⁵ *Life of Scrymgeour* p. 17.

towards explaining the later proliferation of small groups in central Dundee. George Tawse, one of the founding Literary and Scientific Institute members, wrote a light-hearted and affectionate recollection of the society's early days in 1846, in which he depicted its humble beginnings as eight or ten 'mere lads', meeting on Monday evenings in a 'mere garret – and a very poor garret – as garrets go[.]'⁴⁶ This garret was the attic of the Cramb family house, shoemakers 'of a political and intellectual cast, as shoemakers often are,' and was located at the east end of Dundee High Street, barely five minutes' walk from Lamb's rooms in the Murraygate.⁴⁷ Their first concerns were in discussing literary and scientific affairs, but their minds soon turned to the prospect of a manuscript magazine, as a way to 'vent' their energy and intelligence. The manuscript magazines will be discussed in more detail below. As well as Tawse and two brothers from the Cramb family, the original members included geologist and journalist James Adie, who emigrated to Canada around four years after the society's foundation. At the time, Adie was known among his friends for his love of verse, 'if in rhyme,' and his recitations of poems by Scott, Byron, and in particular James Hogg, from which he gained the nickname 'Kilmeny.'⁴⁸ James Scrymgeour later also joined this society.

An earlier recollection of the beginnings of the Literary and Scientific Institute was written by James Barnet, mostly in memory of Adie. This appeared in the periodical *The Scottish American* on the 21st of May 1890. He describes himself and three other boys 'just in their teens,' including Adie, who 'took it into their heads that they would form a mutual improvement society.' At the time of publication, Barnet said this took place 'around fifty years ago,' placing the events described around 1840.⁴⁹ Their meetings took place domestically at first, in Barnet's house and then in Adie's, before the 'first mutual improvement society in town' grew from the small group.⁵⁰ If Barnet joined the group when it met in Cramb's garret, Tawse does not seem to remember him.

⁴⁶ George Tawse (1883), LC265/17, p.1.

⁴⁷ LC265/17 p.1.

⁴⁸ LC265/17 p. 7; *Dundee Celebrities*, p. 161-2.

⁴⁹ LC256/15.

⁵⁰ LC 256/15.

As in the Literary Institute, the young members of this group took turns at presenting an essay at each meeting, but the focus on original work which characterises later literary society productions had not yet been established. Barnet, when nominated for the first essay, found a story about Genghis Khan in the *Chartist Circular* to read, despite a total prior lack of knowledge on the subject.⁵¹ Barnet's name does not, to the best of my knowledge, appear elsewhere in any of the surviving posters or manuscript magazines relating to Dundee literary societies, and the fact his writing appears in the Scottish American rather than a more local paper suggests he too may have emigrated.

As Tawse notes in his recollections, forming societies was increasingly popular in Dundee at this time.⁵² As well as the Dundee Literary and Scientific Institute, and the Dundee Literary Institute, there was a Dundee Literary Society. In 1852 their manuscript magazine opened with an outline of the formation of the society, which was officially founded on 31st January 1846 'for the mutual improvement of the members belonging to it.'⁵³ As with other societies, these were young men, often students, who agreed to spend one evening a week in the discussion of literary and scientific studies. They also stress that the Society 'met with the approval of several gentlemen of the town,' suggesting the benefits of membership could include not only an improved understanding of and standing among one's peers, but also potentially with higher levels of society.⁵⁴ James Myles became a well-known member of this society, along with historian James Thomson, and Robert Leighton and Thomas Latto, both of whom went on to become comparatively well-known and widely published poets outside of Dundee. Leighton, discussed further below, moved to Liverpool; and Latto emigrated to the United States in 1851. Of all the 1840s societies, it is the members of this one, and in particular those who collaborated on the humorous anthology *A Feast of Literary Crumbs*, discussed below, who had the most conventional literary success.

There was also a Dundee Diagnostic Society, with accompanying manuscript magazine, and Dundee Temperance Mutual Improvement Society, in which

⁵¹ LC 256/15.

⁵² LC256/17, p. 2.

⁵³ *Dundee Literary Society Magazine* 1852 p.1, LC406/4.

⁵⁴ *Dundee Literary Society Magazine* 1852 p.1, LC406/4.

Scrymgeour, again, was involved. References to the Magnum Bonum Society, Eastern Literary Society, St John's Literary Society, Dundee Dialectic Society, and the Literary Emporium also occur in recollections of society culture of the time. Of these five little is recorded, apart from temperance author and lecturer Rev. James Inches Hillock's involvement in the latter. In addition to the above, numerous churches ran literary groups, and there was a continuing lecture programme at the Watt Institution.⁵⁵ These societies did not always operate in isolation. In a comparatively small city – and its even smaller centre where appropriate meeting places were concentrated – it was perhaps inevitable that social circles overlapped. The spatial concentration of societies which resulted from Thomas Lamb's encouragement certainly seem to have fostered their development through close contact with one another.

The efforts of Thomas Lamb (c.1800-1869), the proprietor of Lamb's Coffee House in the Murraygate, were key in drawing the societies closer together. His premises encompassed a variety of suitable meeting rooms, and both the Literary Institute and the Literary and Scientific Institute made them their regular venue after outgrowing their initial domestic spaces. Lamb opened the establishment out of the conviction that young men in the city needed an alternative social space to pubs and taverns, and his own compelling conversion story possibly added to the attraction of the venue: formerly a successful spirit dealer, he attended some temperance lectures with the aim of understanding his competition, but became convinced of the cause's value. Having promptly destroyed his remaining stock of liquor, Thomas Lamb set about converting and expanding his shop's premises into a coffee house, and actively encouraged societies devoted to literature and self-improvement to host their meetings there.⁵⁶ A *Dundee Advertiser* correspondent described the coffee house as a welcome alternative to the 'bare and cheerless' church vestries and school rooms in which societies previously had to meet, with its warm fires, comfortable seating and carpeted

⁵⁵ LC5/18, *Life of Scrymgeour* p. 17; *Celebrities* p. 344.

⁵⁶ *Celebrities*, p. 342-3.

floors.⁵⁷ Lamb himself frequently attended meetings at these societies, and was often invited to take part in the proceedings. He felt paternal towards the young men in attendance, and was invested in keeping them on the right path, ‘dealing out friendly counsels with words of warning or appeal.’⁵⁸ Lamb was, in general, generously disposed towards the societies’ frequent ‘stormy meetings’ and late nights. On one notable occasion, he lost patience with Scrymgeour’s overrunning lecture on ‘The Poetry, Science, and Romance, Mission and Teachings of the Yellow Wall Lichen’, turning off the gas lamps and leaving society members to find their way out in the dark.⁵⁹ When Lamb expanded his business in 1852 to include a Temperance Hotel in Reform Street, this too became a popular venue for societies, particularly for their larger celebratory events, as well as for the workplace celebrations described in the previous chapter. Lamb’s venues became so associated with literary societies that when the *People’s Journal* ran a joke competition in association with Mr Sanger’s Circus in 1860, one of the runners-up was: ‘Why is Reform Street like a school? Because it has many inexperienced writers.’⁶⁰

The social element of society membership was considered equally important to, and essential for, their educational function. Sociability, too, came with a commitment to self-improvement, as the ability to express oneself in both writing and speech was a main goal of membership. Members of literary societies were expected to give a speech or lecture to the group at least once. In Dundee Literary Society, all new members gave an inaugural speech before they were considered fully initiated.⁶¹ Martha Vicinus has discussed the important confidence-building role this aspect of society life had for working-class participants who were likely used to hearing that their accent and/or dialect (in the case of her study, that of Manchester) was uneducated or inappropriate.⁶²

⁵⁷ ‘Reminiscences of Literary Society Meetings in the ‘Halls of Lamb’’, *Dundee Advertiser*, 1 November 1869, p. 2.

⁵⁸ ‘Reminiscences of Literary Society Meetings in the ‘Halls of Lamb’’, *Dundee Advertiser*, 1 November 1869, p. 2.

⁵⁹ *Celebrities*, p. 344.

⁶⁰ ‘Winners and Runners-Up’, *People’s Journal*, 7 April 1860, p. 4.

⁶¹ Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D22021.

⁶² Vicinus, p. 159. In Dundee, literary societies do not seem to have encouraged publication in Scots at first, though ‘poetic Scots’ is defended and used in other contexts by many of those involved.

Self-education could also assist new ways of being in society for people who found themselves presented with unfamiliar social contexts. This was another way in which literary societies were of practical use to young men whose new jobs brought them into more middle-class circles than the ones that they grew up in.

Participants' written memories of society membership often focus on the friendships formed during these days. George Tawse, reflecting on the Dundee Literary Institute, was grateful for it having instilled in him not only tastes for reading and literary culture, but for 'social enjoyment' through the 'feast of reason and the flow of soul – speeches, songs, recitations, flirtations, loud laughter and much happiness.'⁶³ Likewise, the anonymous editor of Dundee Literary Society manuscript magazine described the society's 'cultivation of Friendships of a true and abiding nature.'⁶⁴ To extend the social nature of society culture, several of the many active societies in Dundee put on collaborative events and joint 'festivals' featuring recitations, speeches and music, under the umbrella of Dundee Literary Societies' Union, formed c.1850.⁶⁵ Their first 'Grand Festival', held in Lamb's Coffee House (date unclear) included talks by 'Dundee's most notable man,' George Gilfillan.⁶⁶ Despite the aforementioned lack of admission of women to societies as members, socialising with them was evidently still a priority. Lamb's Coffee House also hosted Hogmanay events referred to as 'Festivals,' which required formal dress, to which each of the young men was requested to bring a lass. Tawse recalls: 'No sisters allowed, but this fence was I think occasionally broken down, especially when girls were scarce or our boyish modesty and natural shyness prevented us making the acquaintance of the fair.'⁶⁷

Schoolteacher John Sime (as 'Roger'), a member of Dundee Literary Society, celebrated the conviviality of the literary societies who met in Lamb's rooms in his poem 'The Halls of Lamb.' This was originally published as part of the comic anthology *A Feast of Literary Crumbs*, which is discussed more fully below. Like much of the

⁶³ Tawse, notes written in 1883 on the MS volume of Dundee Literary & Scientific Institute Vol. 2 (1846-7) (LC265/17, p. 4.)

⁶⁴ Dundee Literary Society Manuscript Magazine, 1852 (LC419/54).

⁶⁵ LC5/18.

⁶⁶ LC265/17, p. 3.

⁶⁷ LC265/17 p. 3.

material therein, it was presented as a look back to once-great departed men. An introductory note describes how ‘Roger’ recorded this poem from a ‘solitary orator’ lamenting in an empty room of Lamb’s coffee house: ‘It appears that some time before this there were several literary societies that met in Mr L---’s Coffeehouse for the purpose of mutual improvement. Of these one was named the ‘Institute,’ another was called the ‘Magnum Bonum.’ Both of them met together at stated times, and constituted what was called the ‘Union.’ Now they were all defunct, and this speaker, like the man of Uz’s servant, seemed all that was left to mourn their loss.’⁶⁸ The poem took on a life outside of the anthology as a representation of society culture, and is often referred to in later discussions of this period of Dundee’s history.⁶⁹ The version below is the one which first appeared in *A Feast of Literary Crumbs*:

The halls of Lamb! the halls of Lamb!
Where Scrymgeour fought and Henry sung,
Where, on the lips of Tawse and Cramb,
‘The Union’ once enchanted hung, -
The Old Gas Company lights them yet,
But all their ancient glory’s set.

Lowe, Livingstone, the ‘Mountain Muse,’
‘The Union’ and ‘the Institute,’
Have found a fame these walls refuse –
Their meeting place alone is mute
To sounds that echoed farther west
Than Millar’s shop, in days more blest.

John Cramb looked up to Paterson
And Paterson looked down on me,

⁶⁸ *A Feast of Literary Crumbs* p.26.

⁶⁹ For example, Black, p. 142 and Murray Scott, p. 54.

As if to ask if there was one
 In our endeared society
Whose potent eloquence might save
'The Union' from an early grave?

James Cramb sat by a window high,
 Which looks down on the Murraygate,
And loudly there did cadgers cry
 In chorus, 'haddocks, herrin', skate;'
But beamed around him faces gay –
I sit there now, but where are they?

And where are they, and where art thou,
 My Adie? – gone to Montreal;
And hushed the festive sounds are now
 Which then rung loud in T--- Hall;
And T--- weeps more than the rest
When thinking on these days more blest.

'Tis something now that we ne'er meet,
 Though linked amongst a grovelling race,
To feel my heart begin to beat,
 While sitting in their meeting-place.
Yet what is left the mourner here
For days gone bye? – a blush, a tear.

Must we but weep o'er days more blest?
 But weep – our fathers well nigh bled;
Oblivion render from thy breast
 A remnant of the dumb or dead;

Grant us but six of these men mute,
To form once more the 'Institute.'

What, silent still? And silent all!

Ah no! yet let me list again;
Alas! 'twas but the watchman's call,
And all I hear is 'half past ten.'
Yet, yet, methinks, I hear them say –
'We come, we come, clear, clear the way.'

In vain! I'll cease these watchings, for,
The hope is vain, however dear;
Fill high the cup with coffee, or
Bring in a bottle of ginger beer.
Hark! Rising to the ignoble call,
How answers Scrymgeour, Begg, and all.

'We have an Institute as yet –
Where is the 'Magnum Bonum' gone?
Of two such glories why has set
The greater and the better one?
You have 'Low's Mixture', think you he
Mixt them for such vile slaves as ye?

Fill high the cup with 'Bohea Fine' –
We will not think of themes like these –
It made Cramb's speeches half divine,
And even gave Tawze much power to please –
An orator he was, but then
He stammered more than other ten.

Fill high the cup with Congo tea –
 Alas! Thou fill'st it but with sighs!
Weep on, thou think'st on days when we
 Enamoured on thy lovely eyes;
Yet *all* uncertain of their hue,
Disputed whether they were blue.⁷⁰

The poem is a parody of Byron's 'The Isles of Greece', set within the longer *Don Juan* as a song performed by a court poet whose performances always mirror the 'typical' national verse of his location, in this case Greece. Byron's setting is an island belonging to the pirate Lambro, whose name may have suggested the parody. Choosing for a model verse by a fictional poet created by a real poet is also appropriate in the overall setting of the anthology, in which all the contributors have taken on alter-egos. The satirical tone of *Don Juan* overall, which included several unflattering references to Byron's contemporary poets, also makes it a suitable starting point for 'The Halls of Lamb' as a mocking, though far more affectionate, take on Dundee literary societies.

'The Isles of Greece' itself reflects on the past glories of the Greek nation, themes which Sime's parody comically domesticates through references to the Old Gas Company and fish cadgers. While the poem's first appearance in 1848 came at a time when the first flush of society membership was declining, the scene was far from defunct, as evidenced by the composition of the poem itself, as well as its publication and reception. The choice of mock-elegiac verse may be an exaggerated reference to the frequent hiatuses which societies, and particularly their magazines, seem to have undergone when members were scarce or busy. It is also concordant with the sense of history which these societies actively cultivated around their place in Dundee. The replacement of heroic wine drinking with tea or ginger beer is of course a humorous reference to the societies' temperance values, though drinking humour is a thread

⁷⁰ *A Feast of Literary Crumbs* p. 27-28. The poem also appears (at least) in 'The Attic Journal' no.1, January 1848 p. 40-44, 'copied verbatim from the recitation of Sime in Lamb's Coffe [sic] house'.

throughout *A Feast of Literary Crumbs* – the author claims to have heard the verse while on the way home from a tavern.

References to the various society members throughout ‘The Halls of Lamb’ are clarified, or occasionally confused further, by James Myles’ footnotes in the anthology. George Tawse and the Cramb brothers’ role in the Dundee Literary Institute will be discussed further below, as will Peter Livingstone, who is mentioned in the first line of the second stanza. There is some confusion as to the identity of the ‘Mountain Muse’ referred to here. The alias has been attributed to Alexander Wilson on several occasions, including by his son Adam in *Flowers of Fancy*.⁷¹ In ‘The Halls of Lamb,’ the footnote accompanying the name is ‘An appropriate cognomen assumed by a rhyming ‘Dominie,’ as his verses are better adapted to mountains than men.’⁷² This definitely refers to Peter Livingstone, whose poetry often included geographical themes and who worked as a teacher. A.C. Lamb also gives ‘The Mountain Muse’ as a name of Livingstone’s in his ‘Bibliography of Dundee Periodical Literature.’⁷³ Despite this, Livingstone’s name also gets a dedicated footnote in ‘The Halls of Lamb’, and the phrasing of the line suggests the reference is to two distinct poets.

Magazines and Periodicals

Communally composed manuscript magazines of poetry and essays became part of literary culture in Dundee even before formally constituted literary societies themselves did, as Gardiner’s 1835 ‘A Wreath of Wild Flowers’ demonstrates. At least three societies, Dundee Literary Society, Dundee Literary and Scientific Institute, and Dundee Diagnostic Society compiled semi-regular manuscript magazines during the 1840s and 1850s. The Attic Journal, launched in 1848, while not explicitly affiliated with a particular society, was edited by Peter Begg, a familiar name from the early days of the Literary Institute. Its readers included John Sime and two members of the Scrymgeour

⁷¹ Wilson, *Flowers of Fancy*, p. 89.

⁷² *A Feast of Literary Crumbs*, p. 27.

⁷³ ‘Bibliography of Dundee Periodical Literature’, p.37.

family, as well as a Gow (who may have been the poet) and unusually for Dundee manuscript magazines, two women, Miss Cook and Miss Cooper. The editorial contains references to meetings in Lamb's coffee house.⁷⁴ Manuscript was the preferred medium for most society magazines, not only because of its comparative affordability and availability, but because this medium allowed for the magazine to be circulated among members and non-members who would then annotate the pieces of writing therein.⁷⁵ Lauren Weiss' recent research into the magazines of self-improvement societies strongly suggests that the format of these magazines was inspired by the range of periodicals aimed at the working class, particularly after the repeal of taxes on periodicals in 1855.⁷⁶ Although at least two of the magazines discussed here were founded prior to 1855, James Barnet's recollections mention a lack of affordable literature in Dundee as a reason for starting their society. *Chamber's Journal* and *Chronicles of the Sea* were cited as exceptions, suggesting that an emulation of periodical form and style was what these societies had in mind.⁷⁷ This view is reinforced by the forays into editing printed periodicals made by members of literary societies. Editors of the Dundee magazines often re-wrote all submissions so that the magazine would all be in one hand, though this did not happen in every case. All the pieces in the surviving Dundee manuscript magazines are either anonymous, or submitted under a pseudonym or initials only. Further investigation may be able to match some contributions to later published work or style to identify the author. Weiss has demonstrated that the Dundee societies' magazines held in the AC Lamb collection are the earliest extant examples of such magazines in Scotland, though their genesis and format is very much in keeping with that which was popular elsewhere later in the century.⁷⁸

The rationale behind the Dundee Literary Society's launch of a magazine in December 1846 was mainly focused on extending its reach, allowing interested non-

⁷⁴ *The Attic Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 1, January 1848 (LC266/1). The editor here also positions himself in a 'garret,' and the name is probably a reference to the societies' rough and ready meeting places.

⁷⁵ Weiss, 'The Literary Clubs and Societies of Glasgow', p. 183-4.

⁷⁶ Weiss, 'The Literary Clubs and Societies of Glasgow', p. 189.

⁷⁷ Barnet in *The Scottish American*

⁷⁸ Weiss, 'The Literary Clubs and Societies of Glasgow', p. 187.

members to share in some of the benefits.⁷⁹ It is not clear whether the readership they had in mind were prevented by time restrictions or through being ineligible for membership because of its age and gender restrictions. As all surviving circulation lists are comprised of addresses in central Dundee, it is unlikely geography was the restriction. The extended reach would also benefit members, as a wider circulation would make authors try harder in their work, especially with the potential for scrutiny by a ‘higher class of readers than was to be found in the society itself.’ The magazine was published monthly between October 1846 and June 1848, at which point ‘several factors [...] obstructed its progress.’ The editor gives no more detail than this, though lack of enough regular contributions seems a likely reason. The revival, in January 1849, went ahead despite some opposition from members. The latest extant issue is from 1852, although this does not necessarily mean publication ceased after that year.

On more than one occasion, the magazines were used to reflect upon the benefits of the societies themselves, either in editorials or submitted pieces. In 1851, Dundee Literary Society’s magazine included a piece entitled ‘On the Influence of Literary Societies on Particular Aspects of the Character.’⁸⁰ The author notes the volume of recent public discussion on the benefits of literary societies – reinforcing their popularity – and reiterates the argument that these societies are good for improving members’ natural ‘vigour of mind’ and instilling modesty, particularly through the active habit of practicing virtue. The friendly rivalry which these societies can foster is also presented as a benefit, a more formalised version of the Republic of Letters’ weekly competitions, as the sense of rivalry was considered to only emerge among equals: ‘[the] peasant does not envy his wealthy master, yet in the rustic game he will do his utmost to excel.’⁸¹ The society was an equaliser on intellectual terms, encouraging members to apply themselves until they were a match for their most accomplished colleagues. The class-based metaphor employed here is interesting, as there was also a sense that these societies provided an opportunity for intellectual equality among the middle and

⁷⁹ Dundee Literary Society Magazine, 30 October 1852. (LC419/54.)

⁸⁰ Dundee Literary Society Magazine 1851, p. 167. (LC406/5.)

⁸¹ Dundee Literary Society Magazine 1851, p. 175. (LC406/5.)

working-classes. The metaphor is also explicitly rural. Perhaps there is a sense that the city is a place where these old feudal hierarchies can be overcome, but only with proper application and effort on the part of the workers to raise themselves. 'The Attic Journal' was explicitly class-conscious, responding to a sense that existing MS magazines' focus was too narrow, both in subject matter and in only aiming to improve their own contributors while 'millions of souls' existed in ignorance of their own value and with little control over their lives:

We know that the Journal will not circulate among the class on whose behalf it is originated, but we wish to create a sympathy among our own readers on behalf of their own less fortunate fellow mortals, and this sympathy once established, will extend itself and make its influence felt. [...] We chiefly desire to assert the dignity and claim the rights and privileges of man – to reach the hearts of the ignorant and degraded many by homely appeals, rather than captivate, by splendid literary productions, the souls of the intellectual few.⁸²

Here, the connections between participation in the literary society and society in the wider sense is made explicit. There is a sense that these magazines could bring about change in society through their effects on the minds of the young men who, it is implied, have the potential to become the next generation of decision makers in the city. Begg's poem in this issue, 'The Bonny Woods O Luthrie', shares the nature themes popular among Gardiner's circle in the previous decade, in which nature is a path to freedom but also demands man's humility before God. The final verses run:

So God protects the humble plants
Among the sons of earth,
And throws around them every charm
Of goodness, and of truth,

⁸² 'The Attic Journal', LC266/1, p. 3-4.

And tho' the proud may tread them down,
Or coldly pass them by
Triumphant they will rise again,
Protected from on Heigh.

Then fare-ye-well, ye bonnie Woods,
A long, a sad farewell,
You'll miss me now when Venus bright
The gloamin hour doth tell;
Nae mair I'll pu' the heather bell
Frae aff yer bosom fair;
Nor rob ye of the Violet sweet
That scents the e'ening air;
Still you will bloom as bonnily
Tho' I frae you hae fled,
And when Oppressor, and Oppressed
Are numbered with the dead.

Again farewell, ye bonnie woods:
I'll ne'er forget the hours
That I hae spent wi' Nature's book
Amang ye shady bowers;
And wheresoe'er I chance to roam
You'll still remembered be
But dark Oblivion shall contain
The wrong of Man to me.⁸³

In addition to the sense of nature as 'book' to be read, the plants here – vulnerable, but

⁸³ 'The Attic Journal,' LC266/1, p. 48-50.

spiritually victorious – could represent working-class writers as ‘natural’ in the way that references to songbirds often do elsewhere, and the poet, in the final line, appears to be threatened by his fellow men as much as the delicate plants are by human activity. The act of writing, and belonging to literary societies, is part of the process of survival and a step on the road to eventual ‘triumphant rise’. The importance of nature as a theme recurs in this magazine, with an essay by ‘Abillimo’ on Dundee’s green spaces, lamenting the local ‘desecration’ of the Den of the Mains and lack of access to Balgay Hill.

As debate and the sharing of opinions was encouraged in the meetings, so it was in the magazine. In the Dundee magazines, there are relatively few comments on pieces themselves, but many of the editors’ notes and correspondence make reference to previous articles, and a reference discussed below to a ‘magazine criticism night’ indicates there were opportunities to provide feedback face to face.⁸⁴ Learning to accept criticism, as well as use it for the basis of development, was part of the process of improvement the societies offered. Because the medium in which comments on work were delivered, and the focus on individual authorship and improvement was significantly different from when, for example, a new broadside song was received by the community, literary society magazines provide useful illustrations of nineteenth-century readers’ responses. Because of the specificity of the context, the responses in these magazines are not necessarily applicable across other formats or poetic contexts. For example, Weiss’ findings suggest suitability for reading aloud was not a primary concern for manuscript magazine authors, whereas it often was elsewhere.⁸⁵ This is borne out in the example I discuss below, though perhaps countered by the success of ‘The Halls of Lamb,’ which was certainly performed within Lamb’s rooms as well as appearing in society publications.

The acceptable topic, style and standard of poetry for inclusion in society

⁸⁴ Some of the Glasgow societies Weiss discusses also offered ‘magazine nights,’ where the journal was read aloud and feedback could be offered. (‘Literary Clubs and Societies’, p. 72).

⁸⁵ Lauren Weiss, ‘The Manuscript Magazines of the Wellpark Free Church Young Men’s Literary Society’, p. 107.

manuscript magazines is well illustrated by looking at entries which were deemed to fall outside of these standards. In February 1847, an anonymous contributor submitted a poem entitled ‘The Soutar of the Glen, after the style of G.H.I’s ‘Village of the Glen.’⁸⁶

Beneath yon ditch’s clammy sides,
Near by the steps of men,
Lies hid among the dirty grass,
The Soutar o’ the Glen.

How lang the sun had shone that day
The soutar didna ken
All were at work but he did sleep
The Cobbler o’ the Glen.

Now rustic lovers do walk out
Lovers both poor and rich
With boisterous mirth they often pass
The Soutar i’ the ditch.

At last upright he tried to stand
But down he fell again
His feet alas he could not keep
The Soutar o’ the Glen.

The Soutar’s wife, wi two three more
Who did their efforts len’,
All day had sought till now in vain,
The Soutar o’ the Glen.

⁸⁶Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D22021 p.99-100.

The dawning day saw them at work
And pretty near the spot;
Till all at once they heard a groan,
From the poor cobbling sot.

‘Rise up ye beast,’ his wife did cry,
‘Is’t thus ye mak yer bread?’
No answer came, - the reason’s plain,
The man was cold and dead.

Yes dead he was! God save his soul!
Let all now say, Amen,
And ponder well the fate of him,
The Soutar o’ the Glen.

This poem is unusual compared to others which appear in these magazines in several regards. Firstly, it is a comparatively straightforward narrative, rather than the philosophical or religious points made through often natural or pastoral metaphors which tended to find favour. The dialogue, and parts of the narrative itself, are in Scots, which is unusual among literary magazine submissions, though certainly not discouraged in the poetic culture overall. Another way in which ‘The Soutar of the Glen’ differs from literary society ideals is in its explicit building on, and likely parodying of, a source text, ‘The Village in the Glen.’ I have been unable to locate this original poem. The focus on the creation of original work was extremely important in the composition of pieces for society magazines, and thus the value of the finished work as providing education or entertainment for its readers was almost secondary to the value of the practice of researching and composing for the writer. While using an existing poem as inspiration may well have been acceptable, using it as the base for structure and narrative was not to be encouraged.

The specifics of the story bring the poem even further from the literary society magazine ideal, being an everyday tale of drunkenness – despite there being no explicit mention of alcohol, the classic setting of lying in a ditch, the use of the word ‘sot’ specifically and the marital quarrel scene more generally, all suggest the souter’s downfall is due to drink. While his death here certainly implies a temperance moral in keeping with the society’s ideals, the style in which it is communicated is more in keeping with popular verse traditions found elsewhere in the city in, for example, broadside or chapbook publications, though this poem would likely have been relegated to the ‘To Correspondents’ column had it been submitted to a newspaper. Literary society members were by no means oblivious to these traditions, and seem to have recognised their value in other contexts. For example, had this poem had a stronger iteration of a temperance moral in its final verse, it would not look out of place in James Scrymgeour’s scrapbook collection of newspaper and broadside verse. Responses from its readers demonstrate how incongruous it is here. A note in pencil by the first line labels it as ‘ridiculous,’ which may be intended specifically for the phrasing ‘yon ditch’s clammy sides’ rather than the piece in general, but there is a further note of ‘shocking’ by the wife’s address in stanza 7. Editorial correspondence included in the April magazine take the discussion further, with ‘A.I.’ from Broughty Ferry berating the editor for allowing such verse to be published:

I along with some, I may safely say the most, of your readers was very much dissatisfied with the piece of poetry that appeared in the columns of your February number, as also with the low slang phrases that pervade the writings of that aspirant after tale writing, DAB. Have you no power to keep these contributions from polluting our magazine, which otherwise would be a most creditable production to the young men of ‘Bonnie Dundee’, or do you say that there was nothing in these papers deserving of such a severe censure? The Soutar O’ the Glen is a poor imitation of the style of the author of the ‘Exile’s Return’ and ‘The Village in the Glen’, besides being pervaded by a total disregard of all

that is good.⁸⁷

A.I. went on to accuse the editor of being unfit for their position, to which they responded by defending their inclusion of the poem on the grounds that it had been read at society meetings and ‘much enjoyed’ there, and he felt ‘it would not have been in good taste had we reviewed their decision, while we certainly should have done.’⁸⁸ The difference in what is acceptable to perform and what is acceptable to publish is a strict line here, again in contrast with other popular verse cultures in the city. The tensions between performed and printed verse, and the unspoken boundaries of poetic taste broken by ‘The Soutar in the Glen’ are exploited for comic effect by Dundee Literary Society members in the early 1850s in the anthology *A Feast of Literary Crumbs*. The extended comic interactions evident in this anthology do raise the possibility that this, too, is an instance of people who knew each other in real life creating satirical written exchanges, particularly in the light of the reference to the poem’s successful performance at a society meeting. A.I. could be Alexander Ingram, who contributed to the *Literary Crumbs* as ‘A.E.I.’

Even if these are facetious comments, literary society criticism could be severe, and result in hurt feelings and potential factions within, or between, societies. The ‘Attic Journal’ republished a long letter sent by Peter Begg’s friend to the ‘Dundee Natural History and Literary Magazine,’ defending his poem ‘The Bonnie Woods of Luthrie’ after it met with harsh criticism there. The letter is signed with the pseudonym ‘Abillimo,’ so potentially this was in fact Begg writing in his own defence. The ‘hurried and thoughtless’ criticism, Abillimo suspects, must originate from ‘the debilitating influence of some secret antipathy towards the poet himself. Such ought not to be!’⁸⁹ Later, Abillimo makes more general comments on criticism in Dundee literary societies: ‘Criticism, in M.S. magazines, does no good. It has just now created divisions, and strife in the Lochee Literary Society, and the horrible scenes that took place on magazine

⁸⁷ Dundee Literary Society Magazine, April 1847 (LC265/17), p. 201-2.

⁸⁸ Dundee Literary Society Magazine, April 1847, (LC265/17), p. 207.

⁸⁹ ‘The Attic Journal’, (LC266/1), p. 5.

criticism night, at the Literary Institute, are beyond description. Believe me, it does no good.⁹⁰ While this account appears to have been written in the heat of the moment, and thus may overstate the level of disagreements, it certainly seems that Dundee societies had some trouble adjusting to the process of giving and receiving criticism. Potentially, these problems were more likely to arise when societies were formed from a social circle in which writers already knew each other, and pre-existing personality clashes and social politics encroached into literary discussion. The sheer number of societies simultaneously operating within a limited geographical space may also have contributed to rivalries. A flare-up of animosity may also be down to teething problems as societies attempted to find the right tone for providing criticism as they negotiated the process of gathering enough contributors while maintaining literary quality in new manuscript magazines.

In addition to manuscript magazines, literary society members occasionally ventured into the field of print periodicals. Through figures like bookseller James Myles, James Scrymgeour who worked for the *Northern Warder* in the 1850s, and Peter Begg who worked for the *Dundee Advertiser*, there were plenty of links between these social circles and those of Dundee's publishing industry. The medium of print was much more public facing than that of the manuscript magazine. Instead of writing to an audience who were known, named and limited to the readers' list, print periodicals actively sought a wider, anonymous audience. Periodicals started and edited by members do not state an official connection with literary societies, but as an extension of the social groups and reflections of the same concern they also shed light on this culture.

In April 1844, Dundee Literary institute member Peter Livingstone (1823-88) launched the *Aurora Borealis*, 'a weekly journal of literature and science' which cost one penny.⁹¹ Livingstone, mentioned above as the author of the popular song 'A Guid

⁹⁰ 'The Attic Journal', (LC266/1), p. 9.

⁹¹ AC Lamb, 'Bibliography of Dundee Periodicals', ((n.d., 1880s) (Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D5548) p.37; *The Aurora Borealis* No. 1, Saturday 27 April 1844 (Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D7327I). This price is low compared to newspapers like the *Advertiser* or *Northern Warder*, both of which cost 4 ½ pence in 1844, though *Aurora Borealis* is also considerably smaller in size.

New Year to Ane An' A''', was unusual among literary society members in that he actively sought remuneration for his poems, selling them on the streets of the city.⁹² The *Aurora Borealis* only lasted for two issues, and only the first seems to be extant.⁹³ While literary society magazines often went through periods of inactivity due to lack of submissions, and appear to have managed to restart without much loss of audience, this sporadic model proved unsuitable for a commercial print publication, with its added material costs and need for a regular consumer base. The first issue's statement of aims coincides with many of those expressed by literary societies: the publication of original essays, poetry, biographical sketches and scientific information in order to improve the reader's mind and 'make him a wiser and better being than what he really is.'⁹⁴ The moral considerations of acquiring knowledge are also explicitly present, as Livingstone warns readers that glory and fame should not be the reasons for self-improvement, and those who undertake work with these in mind often fall into 'literary hypocrisy.' His assertion that 'our readers may have known such individuals' perhaps hints that these comments were aimed at a particular subset of the Dundee literary community.⁹⁵

Aurora Borealis certainly intended to build a rapport with its readers, and aims to give the impression that the journal was born of demand from an existing community by including rejections of hopeful poets in the very first issue: 'We cannot insert the silly verses by F. Cannot our friends send us something sensible in prose? Already we are burdened with rhymes; most of which we cannot insert.'⁹⁶ The column also promises inclusion of readers' more suitable verses in the following issue. 'To Correspondents' columns answering queries were a common feature of many periodicals by the 1840s, and the practice of using them to criticise submissions of poetry which did not come up

⁹² Black, *Gilfillan* p. 152.

⁹³ Lamb, 'Bibliography of Dundee Periodicals', p. 37.

⁹⁴ 'To our Readers', *The Aurora Borealis* No. 1, Saturday 27 April 1844 (Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D7327I), p. 1 (The phrasing here, that the reader may become better than what he 'really' is, not 'already is' or similar, is interesting.)

⁹⁵ 'To our Readers', *The Aurora Borealis* No. 1, Saturday 27 April 1844 (Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D7327I), p. 1.

⁹⁶ 'To Correspondents', *The Aurora Borealis* No. 1, Saturday 27 April 1844 (Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D7327I), p. 8.

to editorial standards would become an extremely popular feature of the *People's Journal* in the 1860s.⁹⁷ Although Livingstone does not venture into quoting unsuitable verse here, one of the main attractions of the *People's Journal* columns, this is an early indicator that poetic communities in Dundee were picking up on the potential fun to be had from these columns.

The community in which the *Aurora Borealis* operated is also apparent in the review of local poet Alexander Wilson's collection *Frederick Roy, or the Changes of Glenmoreland; with other Poetical Pieces*, recommending that readers purchase it not only because of the quality of the poems, but also to assist 'a 'brother' in a time of urgent need.'⁹⁸ Although the details of Alexander Wilson's life are not recorded in great detail, he probably made his living as a handloom weaver, and thus was likely to be in similar poverty to James Gow and William Thom.⁹⁹ The bardic community again appears here as a practical network which could help with much-needed financial support, as well as in its ideological form of a 'brotherhood' of poetic feeling. In keeping with the literary societies' sense of poetic responsibility, the review does not eschew criticism because its subject is a friend. The lack of originality in several of the poems is raised, particularly 'The Tyranny of Man,' which is criticised for borrowing too much from Burns.¹⁰⁰

After the early closure of the *Aurora Borealis*, Livingstone continued to be active in Dundee poetic communities. His first collection, *Poems and Songs, Principally Relating to Scottish Manners and Customs* was published later that year, a mixture of English and Scots poems, including 'A Guid New Year' and several other songs which his introduction states are intended for performance 'to the most popular airs of the day'.¹⁰¹ The interest in natural history demonstrated in his periodical is further reflected

⁹⁷ Kirstie Blair, 'Let the Nightingales Alone: Correspondence Columns, The Scottish Press and the Making of the Working-Class Poet', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47/2 (2014), 187-207.

⁹⁸ 'Review', *The Aurora Borealis* No. 1, Saturday 27 April 1844 p. 2.

⁹⁹ Reid, *Bards of Angus & The Mearns* p. 503.

¹⁰⁰ 'Review', *The Aurora Borealis* No. 1, Saturday 27 April 1844 p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Peter Livingstone, *Poems and Songs, Principally Relating to Scottish Manners and Customs* (Manchester: Johnson & Rawson, 1848), p.v.

in his later poetry. In 1853, Livingstone moved to London, where he published a book entitled *Poetry of Geography and Journey Round the Globe*, and supplemented this income with occasional work as a teacher and geography lecturer.¹⁰² Politician George Howell, who became his friend in London, recalled Livingstone's life during this period as deeply troubled:

Drink was his besetting sin [...] The last time I saw him was in Bow Street, we met and shook hands as of old. He told me then that he was a Temperance lecturer and he showed me a song, a long one entitled 'The Bottle.' He asked me to buy one, I gave him a shilling for it, but he was even then far gone in drink.

That copy I still have, but it is worthless as a poem, as one might expect.¹⁰³

Although Livingstone was far from the only self-educated poet for whom alcohol would become dangerous, he seems to have been fairly unusual among the Dundee society poets of this era. Interestingly, Howell also perceived the 'waif' Livingstone to be 'more or less the creation of the Discussion Societies, so popular and general some thirty to forty years ago.'¹⁰⁴ While this likely also refers to Livingstone's good qualities, as Howell earlier professes an admiration for the poetry written in his younger days, and for his generous, gentlemanly behaviour, it also suggests a sense that these societies created poets with expectations they could never hope to fulfil.

James Myles also began a short-lived publication, *Myles' Forfarshire Telegraph and Monthly Advertiser: A Journal of Politics, Literature and Social Progress*. The first issue was published in January 1851, with further issues being prevented by Myles' death shortly after. As with *Rambles in Forfarshire*, the local history and verse culture of Dundee and its surrounding rural areas was a preoccupation for Myles. The front page

¹⁰² Black, *Gilfillan* p. 153.

¹⁰³ George Howell, 'Peter Livingstone', (extract from MS autobiography held in Bishopsgate Institute Library, London, Lamb Collection 366/47.)

¹⁰⁴ George Howell, 'Peter Livingstone', (extract from MS autobiography held in Bishopsgate Institute Library, London, Lamb Collection 366/47.) The date of his autobiography is not given, but presumably c.1890-1910 (Howell died in 1910.)

is devoted to the history of the comic poem ‘John O’ Arnha’’, a Tam O’Shanter-esque epic by George Beattie of Montrose. Now largely forgotten, the poem was hugely popular in nineteenth-century Forfarshire. Its first publication was in the *Montrose Review* in 1815; though an expanded version was later published separately, and it inspired a play in 1826, three years after its author’s death. ‘John o’ Arnha’ is referenced in several other nineteenth-century poems from the Dundee area, generally as shorthand for a delusional or exaggerating person.¹⁰⁵ The poem was inspired by a real man, John Findlay of Arnha’, who was ‘in the custom of seriously relating extraordinary tales of his own prowess and hair-breadth escapes in foreign lands [...] even though it was well known that he rarely, if ever, crossed the boundaries of Forfarshire.’¹⁰⁶ A typical incident from the poem is John’s encounter with a ‘kelpie’ (it appears very differently to standard descriptions of kelpies in folk tales):

When by the lightnin’s glare, he saw
A sight surpassing nature’s law,
A stalwart monster, huge in size,
Did straight from out the river rise;
Behind, a dragon’s tail he wore,
Twa bullock’s horns, stack out before;
His legs were horn, wi’ joints o’ steel,
His body like the crocodile,
On smellin’ John, he gaed a scoil,
Then plunged and gar’d the water boil:
Anon he stood upon the shore,
And did for vengeance loudly roar.

Now John his painfu’ silence broke,
And this in daring accent spoke:

¹⁰⁵ For example, the poem ‘Fizzy Gow’s Tea Party’ says of one character: ‘He’s been up an’ roon the moon/ Wi John O’ Arnha’.’ (Martin, *Dundee Worthies* p. 39.)

¹⁰⁶ ‘John O’ Arnha’’, *Myles’ Forfarshire Telegraph* issue 1, January 1851, p. 1.

‘Stand aff, you fiend, and dread my wraith,
Or soon I’ll steek your een in death;
Not you, nor all the hounds o’ hell
Can my undaunted courage quell.’¹⁰⁷

The poem itself, along with Beattie’s other work, which is in general darker in tone, but shares the supernatural and fantastical themes, has rarely been discussed since the nineteenth century and would merit further examination in its own right.¹⁰⁸ Myles’ centering of a strongly local poetic tradition as a foundation for this mix of ‘politics, literature and social progress’ is important, and might be seen as a precursor to Lamb’s collecting later in the century, with its focus not only on Dundee’s history but its contemporary culture. There is an interesting relationship between the joke in ‘John O’ Arnha’, that he is a parochial dreamer who believes himself a man of the world, and the comments levelled at Myles and his contemporaries by later critics.

Local literary networks also come to the fore in this publication, both through reviews and the publication of original poetry. Myles’ scathing review of James Inches Hillocks’ *The New Letter Writer* demonstrates that the animosities which made their way into the pages of manuscript magazines could continue as writers made their way into professional circles. Hillocks was a weaver from the Hilltown who, after attending services at School Wynd Church, became a particular protégée of George Gilfillan, and eventually became a minister and a writer of prose and poetry himself. By the time of this publication, he was resident in London but appears to have remained in contact with Dundee networks, often sending James Scrymgeour copies of his latest poems.¹⁰⁹ Hillocks claimed in one of his publications that he regretted the amount of time he had spent in ‘recreation rather than instruction’ in literary societies in his youth.¹¹⁰ In Myles’

¹⁰⁷ George Beattie, *John O’ Arnha’: A Tale. To which are added The Murderit Mynstrell, and other Poems* (Montrose: James Watt, 1857), p. 22-3.

¹⁰⁸ See for example Reid, *Bards of Angus & The Mearns*, p.35-40.

¹⁰⁹ Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D21495-6

¹¹⁰ Black, *Gilfillan*, p. 146. George Gilfillan later countered Hillocks’ regret, stressing the importance of social participation in developing ‘mental culture.’

review, Hillocks' latest work *The New Letter Writer* is dismissed as 'principally culled from the works of others,' and his *Passages in the Life of a Weaver* is 'full of the most ridiculous blunders', while his life history is 'flat and common-place.'¹¹¹ While this is certainly further evidence of the high standards expected for writing in these circles, the nature of Myles' complaints suggest an ideological disapproval of the author himself, particularly considering his admission that he would have been more likely to give a kind review 'were it by anybody else.'¹¹² The source of this disagreement is hard to imagine, though it may possibly be to do with Hillocks' previously published account of his life as a young mill worker. This perhaps fell into the category of mill memoirs Myles disapproved of for encouraging 'unhealthy mental appetites', inspiring his creation of *Chapters in the Life of a Factory Boy*.¹¹³ Hillocks, like Myles, was a champion of the self-improvement narrative and an enthusiastic temperance campaigner, so perhaps it is more likely their disagreement was personal. Given Myles' open suggestion of his dislike for Hillocks, their animosity was probably known to the rest of the literary society circles as well.

Original poetry was also intended to become part of the *Forfarshire Telegraph*'s regular features. 'If Thou Would'st Be A Poet', by Robert Leighton, writing under the pen name 'Robin,' was a meditation on the meaning and function of poetry itself. Robert Leighton (1822-1869) was also a member of the societies which met in Lamb's Rooms. His biography in *Dundee Celebrities* describes him as a particularly regular contributor to the Dundee Literary Institute's manuscript magazine, though reluctant to participate in debates.¹¹⁴ 'Robin' was a pseudonym he used to publish on at least one other occasion, and may also have been used for his entries to literary society magazines. He was born in Dundee, one of 'those who toil for daily bread,' though part of his childhood was spent in rural Fife.¹¹⁵ At the time of this publication, Leighton was twenty-eight, and working for his brother's shipping agency. A combination of work and marriage would

¹¹¹ 'Review', *Myles' Forfarshire Telegraph* issue 1, January 1851, p. 2.

¹¹² 'Review', *Myles' Forfarshire Telegraph* issue 1, January 1851, p.2.

¹¹³ Myles, *Chapters* (ed. by David Philips) p.2.

¹¹⁴ Norrie, *Celebrities*, p. 327-8.

¹¹⁵ Reid, *Bards of Angus & the Mearns*, p. 275.

later take him to Liverpool, where he was resident when he died. Leighton became perhaps the best known poet from the Dundee literary societies' circle, remembered in Scotland for Scots verse such as the sentimental 'The Wee Herd Laddie,' or the comic 'John and Tibbie's Dispute.' The majority of his published work was in English, and closer to the below example in tone and theme.¹¹⁶

If thou would'st be a poet, and have a mind
For beauty and high thought, and be not blind
To the fine haze that floats about the earth,
And give to seeming worthless things great worth –
Thou must not only be temperate and chaste,
Keeping from all wild stimulants that waste
The soul's inborn strength – thou also must
Be in thy heart most true, honest and just,
Believing that the cheater cheats himself,
And loses though he gain a world of pelf.
Oh, friend! That we should lose our trust in RIGHT,
And dream that there is any other light
But will mislead us! Let not such a dream
Be thine, dear friend; put all thy faith in Him
Who made the RIGHT, and gave us sense of it:
For he who wavers from that sense one whit
Can be no Poet truly, - Earth to him
Is nought but earth, and Heaven far off and dim:
The mind freeing mystery of Earth and Life
Is hidden from him, and the jar and strife
Of this work-world to him are what they seem!
He never dreams that they are but a dream.

¹¹⁶ For example, of his collected 'Poems' (London: George Routledge & Sons, 2nd ed. 1869), only twenty-one of the 146 included are in Scots.

This breeze that comes o'er the Atlantic wave
Brings nought but coolness to him; and the lave
Of ocean up the beach speaks with no tongue.
Nor is he like the Poet, ever young,
Loving to bask on sunny banks at noon,
Or wondering at the big red rising moon –
Drunk with the glory of her mid-way sailing, -
Or sadly, lonely watching her light failing
When struggling with the blue waves of the west.
Nothing in Nature can his soul invest
With that fine web she weaves for Poet's brains, -
She will have true hearts, free from slavish chains.

Let not the world have any hold of thee –
Surround it quite. Deal not with cheaters.
Think deeply – briefly speak; and then – ah me!
I would, my friend, I were as thou wilt be. ¹¹⁷

Poetry, here, is an escape from everyday problems and a path to a true understanding of the world. The path to poetry and to God are similar, and both involve faith, patience, and avoiding turning to alcohol or other mind-altering shortcuts. The eventual joy to be gained from appreciation and understanding of nature is worth the hard work – better to be ‘drunk’ on the glory of the moon than on whisky. It is for this inherent value, rather than for any externally conveyed recognition, that poets should strive. The state of constant improvement is emphasised by the Leighton's closing ‘I would, my friend, I were as thou wilt be.’ He does not assume he has achieved this state of poethood. Leighton's poem is not explicitly from a place of despair, but is wistful.

In addition to literary matters, *Myles' Forfarshire Telegraph* covered

¹¹⁷ ‘Original Poetry’, *Myles' Forfarshire Telegraph* issue 1, January 1851, p. 4.

international and domestic politics in a ‘summary of the month,’ and provided commentary on local news. The historical education of its readers was also an intended goal, with the juxtaposition of history and news simultaneously illustrating the ‘social progress’ referenced in the journal’s full title and strengthening the sense of Dundee and Forfarshire as a distinct historical entity. Historian James Thomson (1799-1864), another key associate of Myles, contributed several of the historical sketches which appeared in the first issue.¹¹⁸ Thomson was born in Dundee and raised more or less in poverty. In his youth, his right hand was disabled in an accident while working at Tay Street Mills, and this, ironically though not uniquely for the time, appears to have facilitated his career as a writer. Unable to do manual labour, Thomson turned to teaching, and also began to write his own work, both poetic and historical. His own writing soon became his primary concern, at least emotionally if not financially.¹¹⁹ As discussed in the Introduction, Myles and Thomson’s contributions to the historical narrative of Dundee are explicit in emphasising that knowledge should be accessible, and recognise the importance of the contemporary urban scene both as source of knowledge and as a way of sharing it.

James Thomson was also a poet, and produced a handwritten collection of poetry in 1827, before the literary society scene flourished.¹²⁰ Thomson became a central figure in the Dundee Literary Society, and particularly the sub-group who compiled the comic anthology *A Feast of Literary Crumbs* in 1848. This collection, which the sober and respectable society members compiled under the literary guise of street characters and ranting alcoholics, contains a mix of their ‘own’ poetry, including work which would later be published under their real names, and parody verse written in the character of their alter-egos. The authors, ostensibly, were ‘Foo Fozzle and friends, ancient citizens of Dundee,’ and the collection was edited by ‘Simon Strap, Esquire.’ Strap was Myles’ pseudonym, while Fozzle was Thomson’s. Other contributors were other contributors were ‘Robin’ (Robert Leighton), ‘Mickie’ (probably William McDougall), ‘L.L.’

¹¹⁸ Lamb, ‘Bibliography of Dundee Periodicals’, p. 43.

¹¹⁹ *Celebrities* p. 240; *Bards of Angus & The Mearns* p. 462.

¹²⁰ Reid, *Bards of Angus & The Mearns*, p. 462. Thomson’s poetry collection is held at LC317/4.

(Thomas Latto), ‘Roger’, (John Sime), and A.E.I., (Alexander E. Ingram), all of whom were members of Dundee Literary Society at the time.¹²¹ Reference is also made within the text to a Theodore Tindal, who may or may not have been another pseudonym. The collection is presented as a friendly tribute to the departed Foo Foozle, who, much like James Thomson in the below poem, is portrayed as a shambolic drunk. While Thomson was very much alive at the time of its publication, Reid’s biography of him suggests he may have been seriously ill at this point, which would make this aspect of the humour quite dark – though the anthology likely took some time to compile so may have already been in process by the time his illness occurred.¹²² Perhaps the greatest similarity between Thomson and Foozle is in their character, which Reid describes as convivial and parsimonious by turns.¹²³ Both Reid and ‘Simon Straps’ emphasise how their subject’s failings were overlooked by friends in favour of their genuine merits: ‘Foo Foozle was a boon companion and an honest man.’¹²⁴ Although not all poems included in the anthology are inherently comic – there are serious and sentimental verses and songs too – the overall whole is set in a recognisable yet surreal historical Dundee. These two categories merge in ‘The Halls of Lamb,’ discussed above, which first saw publication in this anthology. The rest of the collection is equally full of oblique references to Literary Society jokes.

While, as we have seen, the use of pseudonyms was common among literary society members, the creation of alter-egos and fictitious back stories in this manner was not. The practice recalls John Clare’s forged poetry, the first of which was written under the name Stephen Timms, who presents himself as a seventeenth-century rural poet through exaggerated dialect and tropes of country life, while including references to contemporary periodical correspondence in his accompanying letters. Goodridge characterises these poems as a literary ‘fancy dress party.’ For Clare, it was a way of exploring concerns about the role he was expected to play as peasant poet.¹²⁵ The Foo

¹²¹ *A Feast of Literary Crumbs* (Dundee: William Kidd, 1890 [reprint]), p. iiv.

¹²² Reid, *Bards* p. 463.

¹²³ Reid, *Bards* p. 463.

¹²⁴ *Literary Crumbs*, p. v.

¹²⁵ Goodridge, *John Clare and Community*, p. 28.

Foozle group were writing for an audience who were in on the joke, so they cannot be considered ‘forgeries’ in the same way, but, as I will explore below, the anthology exaggerates and subverts the poetic practice encouraged by literary societies, and comments on its place within the wider verse culture of Dundee.

The poetry in *A Feast of Literary Crumbs* was not the only such work composed to amuse fellow society members. Among A.C. Lamb’s papers relating to literary societies is a handwritten poem entitled ‘Jem Thomson the Queer and the Dirty Fish Nel: A parody on ‘Alonze the Brave and the Fair Imogine.’” There is no indication of authorship for this poem, but because of the similarities in topic, style and humour, it seems likely it was written by either James Myles or another of the group who produced *A Feast of Literary Crumbs*.

A Scribbler so bold & a Fish Cleanser tight
Sat in Tumbledown’s shop at the Well
Gay tipping the Whiskey with tender delight
James Thomson the Queer was the name of the Wight
And his consort was Dirty Fish Nel.

And Oh said the scrib since tomorrow I go
For to swill in the far distant Drukken dub
Your tears you will dry and your nose you will blow
And you’ll take to your arms I very well know
(For his coppers) some lousy old scrub.

Whisht Whisht wi your havers Fair Fish Nelly said
Sic insinuations to me
For gif ye be living or gif ye be dead
I swear by the bless’d there’s nain in your stead
Sae Guid-man to Fish Nelly be.

Gif I said forgetting James Thomson the Queer
Took up wi a wanwordy cuif
God grant that your Ghaist at my waddin appear
Tax me wi perjury, ca' me a lee'r
Sae dose me wi Sampson & dead Ginger beer
And tack me me awa to the Howff.

To Drukken dub hastened our hero so bold
His love she lamented him sore.
But scarce had a fortnight elapsed when behold
A Coal Porter cover'd with black dusty mould
Arrived at Fair Nelly's door.

His big leather bag & his beautiful plate
Soon made her untrue to her vows
He plied her with Whiskey both early and late
He fill'd her dead drunk & in that shocking state
He bore her away as his spouse.

And now had the Marriage been bless'd & the meat
And the 'Mastification' began
With Broth and Cow-heel & Sheeps head with the feet
And big dish of Tripe made the whole mess compleat
When a Bell from the Dirt-cart toll'd one.

Behold with amazement Fair Fish Nelly smoke
An old covey just placed by her side
With a sugar-loaf hat & dirty brown cloak
And look'd as with drouth he was taking to choke
First at the whisky – then at the bride.

His Sugar loaf down oer his phiz out of sight
He looked like an old Buggahboo
He tramp't on the dog set the cat in a fright
Till they flew on his shins & it served him right
While the red on his nose turn'd blue.

At length rose the Bride all so comely and fat
Said 'Guid man you're no cannie I fear.'
Tho' you're tramp't on the doug & fleggit the cat
You'll tak aff your cloak & your sugarloaf hat
And a Nipper in [?'Dauthyick] black beer'

The lady is silent the stranger gets up
To comply with Fish Nelly's request
He heeds not the Beer nor e'en touches the cup
But seized on the Whisky and left not a sup
For to rosin the gobs of the rest.

All wonder'd what next! When this Prince of Old Guys
To shew off his mug was disposed
First threw off his cloak and his napper likewise
Oh then what a sight met Fair Fish Nelly's eyes
How much the reverse of his only disguise
When Thomson! Dead!! Drunk! Was exposed.¹²⁶

The original ballad of 'Alonzo the Brave', published in 1796 as part of Matthew Lewis' Gothic novel *The Monk*, took on a life of its own in broadside circulation and is included

¹²⁶ LC433/22.

in the Roud folk song index (no. 4433). This parody turns the high supernatural drama of Alonzo returning from the grave to drag the bride to her death into comedy, punning on Thomson being ‘Dead!! Drunk!’ and cataloguing numerous slapstick scenes such as falling over the cat and noticing the whisky before the bride. The majority of the humour is derived from the central character’s drinking and the portrait of a chaotic, low-life Dundee populated by fish gutters and coal porters, who appear a world away from usual portraits of the ‘scribblers’ social lives. Presumably, the enjoyment in writing and reading or hearing this poem was derived from its deviation from the ideas of good taste and literary practice expressed in literary societies. Not only is it based on an existing poem, it is an obvious parody. The action is improbable and immoral, while the language is colloquial and grammatical conventions are ignored. Many of these factors are what caused such opprobrium to be directed at the author of ‘The Soutar in the Glen’, but done here on such a grand scale they can only be interpreted as parody. The use of James Thomson as a character was also a source of humour, deriving from the difference between his real actions and those of the drunken ‘wight.’

The character of Foo Fozzle is developed further in the *Literary Crumbs* anthology through ‘A Discourse on Beauty,’ the title of which would not be out of place in a literary society magazine. In a parody of their tradition of classical allusions and demonstrations of historical knowledge, the first section of this poem is a catalogue of historical men led astray by women:

What Beauty’s done let Solomon – let Hercules declare;
Let Samson too, who, by its wiles, lost all his crop of hair;
Because Delilah’s crown was bald, she felt so keenly on’t,
And coveted his curly locks to make herself ‘a front’.¹²⁷

Similarly, the poem continues with an essay-like setting out of how the author will discuss beauty’s causes and effects. This is done through a comically inappropriate

¹²⁷ *Literary Crumbs*, p. 6.

exposition of Fozzle's personal taste in women:

Now, as for me, I do prefer a girl smart and nice,
And never am particular, although I've asked her price;
And whether black, or brown, or fair, or squab, or short, or tall,
Or crooked legged or humphy backed, I welcome make them all
On any day, at any hour, in truth, at any minute;
If they are pleased, sure so am I, or else 'the devil's in it,'
As Wilson's wife said to her cat when she began to skin it.¹²⁸

After another page or so of verse in this vein, in which he describes his meeting with his wife and queries his children's paternity, the 'Editor' concludes with a note:

In the original manuscript of the Author there is here introduced a long prose dissertation on Beauty, profusely mixed with Latin and nonsense, and some *rather* pointed allusions to 'well known characters.'¹²⁹

This description recalls an exaggerated version of the kind of material which drew criticism when it appeared in manuscript magazines, and would have no doubt brought this to the minds of its first readers. This is not the only literary culture lampooned in the anthology. They also play on – and make genuine use of – the traditional song repertoire which formed the basis of contemporary popular performance traditions. The ballad Barbara Allan is referenced twice, once for a parody about 'drucken Barber Allan' and once as the tune of a sentimental song by 'Mickie,' 'The Deen' Beggar.'¹³⁰ Robert Leighton also contributed a song, 'Jenny Marshal's Candy, O' to the tune 'I'm ower young to marry yet.' A mostly affectionate ode to a popular local shop located in the Nethergate, the only controversial content is the penultimate verse:

¹²⁸ *Literary Crumbs*, p. 7.

¹²⁹ *Literary Crumbs*, p. 9.

¹³⁰ *Literary Crumbs*, p. 12, p. 31.

Some uses draps o' peppermint,
To kill the smell o' brandy, O,
But, by my shuith, I'm weel content,
Wi' Jenny Marshal's candy, O.¹³¹

The accompanying note states that this song was made very popular by the ballad singer Blind Hughie, leading Jenny to consult a lawyer to see if she could get 'that loon Bob Leighton punished for his impudence.'¹³² The lawyer part is presumably a joke, but the song does seem to have become popular in its own right, so it may well have been picked up by Blind Hughie.¹³³

Douglas Dunn's appraisal of *A Feast of Literary Crumbs* was fairly dismissive, characterising the humour as that of 'a cultivated literary provincial taste [which] rose at times to the attacking of parochial literary values and habits without in itself shedding the limited mentality it knew it ought to suspect.'¹³⁴ This analysis misses that the humour in *A Feast of Literary Crumbs* is not derived from mocking 'parochial' verse culture and setting up literary society poetry as superior. Rather, it is in the purposeful breaking of the rules to which these poets themselves ordinarily adhered, as they did in several of the 'serious' poems in the anthology. The anthology format itself plays on the style of popular publications like *A Dundee Cornucopia*, perhaps comparing the image of a 'horn of plenty' with that of a 'feast of crumbs', as well as more generally on the miscellanies found in literary society magazines. James Myles makes an arch reference to the nature of literary mediation in one footnote, when he appears as himself, in the role of the publisher: 'The reader must distinctly understand that the Publisher does not

¹³¹ *Literary Crumbs*, p. 58.

¹³² *Literary Crumbs*, p. 58.

¹³³ Gatherer, p. 113

¹³⁴ Douglas Dunn, 'Dundee Law Considered as Mount Parnassus,' p. 40. Dunn also appears to have confused Thomas Latto with William Duncan Latto, the *People's Journal* editor, who was never associated with the 'Foo Foozle' group. Both Lattos were born in Fife, in Kingsbarns (1819) and Ceres (1823) respectively, but do not appear to have been closely related.

identify himself in any manner with the peculiar spirit that pervades several of Mr Foozle's poetical compositions. He *only* occupies the position of publisher, and in that capacity does not presume to stamp his veto on all productions that do not exactly square with his notions of literary refinement and rectitude.¹³⁵ This recalls the debate over whether the magazine editor should eschew poems like 'The Soutar in the Glen', or publish them disapprovingly to allow members to come to their own conclusions. As the inclusion of 'The Halls of Lamb' in particular demonstrates, both the audience and authors of this publication were largely the same young men who contributed to these societies.

Conclusion: The Lasting Effects of Literary Societies in Dundee

For nineteenth-century literary societies, the practice of composing, reading and responding to poetry was multifunctional. While personal growth and enlightenment were an important part of this, the focus on friendship, conviviality and community often appears to be foremost. The community they spoke to was, on an immediate level, their contemporaries and fellow society members, but conceptually extended to encompass their city as a whole. As a bardic community – thinking of the term 'bard' as particularly referring to a poet who represents a specific place – they embraced nineteenth-century improvement values and incorporated them into their visions of the city. This is less evident in the texts of poems themselves than through the values expressed in the surrounding material: the reminiscences of George Tawse or James Myles' vision of the city as the centre of learning. Dundee's literary societies were, at least on one level, hyper-local. In their 1840s heyday, one coffee house was the focal point for upwards of five societies at a time, while others centred on the communities around churches. This geographical closeness likely contributed to the early, and apparently intense, proliferation of societies as success inspired emulation. Societies' practices make very clear the importance both of communities to the writing process, and of the process of writing to establishing a sense of community in Dundee.

¹³⁵ *Literary Crumbs*, p. 13.

The foundations laid by the literary societies of the 1840s and 1850s were built on through the increased interest in local history following the opening of the Albert Institute and the Improvement Act in the late 1860s and early 1870s, with Thomas' son Alexander as a central figure. Even then, responses in the national press to the British Association meeting there indicated the town was beginning to be characterised as an industrial success story, but one with little 'Culture.' As well as the growing pride in Dundee's urban landscape, there was a distinct pride in the city's literary heritage, evident through the success of publications like Norrie's *Dundee Celebrities of the Nineteenth Century* (1873) and Reid's *Bards of Angus and the Mearns* (1897), and the widespread interest in A.C. Lamb's collecting. In particular, Norrie's Preface reflects on not only the high proportion of eminent men (for the book is predominantly men – there are seven women) in Dundee given its population, but of those, the high proportion of whom are 'men who have risen' through a combination of 'spirit and ability.'¹³⁶ Many of the individual careers Norrie traces are seen as part of the city's wider narrative of 'social advancement,' and the profiles include many names familiar in literary society circles. Gardiner, Myles, Thomson, Leighton and Adie all appear, and there are detailed accounts of society meetings under Thomas Lamb's entry. Of those still living, Begg and Scrymgeour are thanked personally for providing information.

The literary societies which congregated in the 'Halls of Lamb' formed part of this history and seem to have been aware of it themselves. George Tawse's 1883 reflections on the early days of Dundee Literary and Scientific Institute were facilitated by Lamb reuniting him with the manuscript magazine during a visit to Dundee. While he makes no claims for the historical importance to the literary canon of the writing they produced, stressing youth and lack of practice, he makes a light-hearted but genuine case for the society's place in Dundee history, envisaging potential future readers for his recollections: 'The future antiquarian who may write the history of Dundee about the year 2000 may wish to know something of the above Institute or Society.'¹³⁷ He was, evidently, correct. Tawse expressed a wish that Lamb would retain the book as part of

¹³⁶ Norrie, *Celebrities* p.3.

¹³⁷ Tawse, LC265/17 p. 1.

his Dundee library. Even at this point, there was a sense that his collection was destined to become Dundee's official history, and a desire for it to one day become owned by the city itself. Tawse hoped that in the future, 'this little waif, along with many a more precious book shall be secured for preservation in the public library of the people of Dundee. Amen and Amen.'¹³⁸

Tawse was correct in his recognition of mid-century societies as belonging to a particular historical moment, though the influence of associational culture on Dundee's literary scene continued in later decades. Groups of young (mostly) men with literary interests continued to meet throughout the century. The Dundee Literary Society went on holding regular lecture and discussion meetings until at least the 1880s, maintaining an explicit focus on 'the higher literary culture of its members.'¹³⁹ Flyers and programmes held in the A.C. Lamb collection suggest that in the later decades of the nineteenth century, Dundee Literary Society's focus was on events and performances rather than publications. This is likely due to a shift in focus towards newspapers, in particular the *People's Journal* and *People's Friend*, as potential avenues to recognition for aspiring Dundonian poets from the early 1860s. Similarly, Weiss' research indicates that, by the 1880s and 90s, the focus had shifted from 'improvement' to social benefits for most Glasgow-based societies, though the Glasgow Orkney & Shetland Literary Society continued to stress the improvement aspect.¹⁴⁰ Regular semi-formal meals, dances and musical evenings were held, either in Gray's Rooms in the Nethergate or in Lamb's Temperance Hotel.¹⁴¹ These were accompanied by high-quality programmes printed by Leng's offices. An illustrator, John T. Duncan, often contributed to the programmes depictions of either famous composers or theatrical characters, situational cartoons, or drawings of the Literary Society committee themselves, unfortunately without linking names to faces. The menu for a 'Whitebait supper and dance' in April 1887 features the literary society committee caricatured as fish, listening intently to a

¹³⁸ Tawse, LC265/17 p. 4.

¹³⁹ LC5/17, p.11.

¹⁴⁰ Weiss, 'Literary Clubs and Societies of Glasgow,' p. 125.

¹⁴¹ LC5/17.

reading from a man on the bank, while all the other fish flock towards a crowd of women with fishing lines. The back cover's depiction of a boy carrying a dead fish on a serving plate, and indeed the fact the menu is almost entirely fish-based, might suggest they have made the right decision.¹⁴²

Following Robert Burns' centenary in 1859, the Dundee Burns Club was founded in 1860, with performance of Burns' works at meetings.¹⁴³ Towards the end of the century, the Dundee Highland Society was active in the Celtic Revival. In the 1890s, the United Recreative and Literary Association met in the Nethergate, and A.C. Lamb was personally invited to attend.¹⁴⁴ Continuing the early focus on holistic education, the society had a joint focus on literature, history and natural history, particularly that of the local area. Newport Literary Society, just across the Tay, was active in the 1880s and 1890s, running annual dances and 'conversaciones' in January. There was also a revival of associational culture in Lochee, with the Lochee Literary Association active again between c. 1875-1925.¹⁴⁵ Several of the churches in Dundee also ran literary societies at various points over the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The 1880s appear to have seen something of a resurgence in society membership, with a *Dundee Evening Telegraph* report noting the town's societies boasting 'an aggregate membership of over six hundred,' and again stressing the youth of most of the members.¹⁴⁶ The Quill and Quaver Club, dedicated to musical and literary matters, was active in the late 1880s and early 1890s. The copy of the constitution for this society held in the Lamb collection belonged to a Miss Smith, so this society at least went beyond inviting women to their events and allowed full membership.¹⁴⁷ The overall picture of associational culture is still overwhelmingly male, despite the rising number of women in Dundee as a

¹⁴² LC5/17, p.3-5.

¹⁴³ LC5/5, p.10. Christopher Whatley's *Immortal Memory: Burns and the Scottish People* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2016) discusses the meaning and function of Burns societies in this period more fully.

¹⁴⁴ LC5/14, p.6. There is no date for the invitation, but the other material in the envelope suggests a time period of 1893-5.

¹⁴⁵ LC5/22, p.23. Although the Association ceased to be active in the 1920s, the society's funds remained with solicitors until 1976, when the Trustees liquidated the account and donated the sum of £731.76 to Lochee Library for the purchase of local history material.

¹⁴⁶ *Evening Telegraph*, Saturday 12 March 1883, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ LC5/9, p.1.

proportion of the population towards the end of the century. This was probably another side effect of the factors discussed previously, including working women's lack of leisure time even in relation to men in comparable jobs. In addition, the social mobility discussed above rarely, if ever, extended to female labourers.

While literary societies appear to have largely ceased the production of manuscript magazines in Dundee by c.1860, by their nature they continued to attract writers and poets, and presumably thus influenced the creation of verse in an indirect way. The poet James Young Geddes was a member of Tay Square U.P. Literary Society in his youth. The exact dates are unknown, but he probably attended during the late 1860s or early 1870s. It was led by a Reverend Dr. McGavin and was then 'one of the best Societies of its kind in the town.'¹⁴⁸ Geddes clashed with McGavin, though whether this was primarily a religious or literary disagreement is not recorded, and he abandoned the United Presbyterian church in favour of the Congregational Church at Lindsay Street. Here, the minister's 'poetic temperament' was an attraction. The wording of his obituary in the *Dundee Advertiser*, which refers to his publication of *The New Jerusalem* 'shortly after forming this Association,' implies he may have set up a similar society in his new church.¹⁴⁹ Certainly by the early 1880s, he had become an active member of Dundee Burns Club, performing his sketch 'Dr Hornbook' at the 1881 Burns Night.¹⁵⁰ When he moved to Alyth at the end of that decade, he became a prominent member of the local Literary Society, which he remained involved with until his death in 1914. It is hard to say how much society membership affected Geddes' poetry itself, but his long-term involvement in literary societies of various kinds suggests he did see them as important factors in the development of literary culture. This involvement is partly what Gifford, Dunnigan and MacGillivray referred to in *Scottish Literature in English and Scots*, where they identified Geddes as 'the strongest – and last – great autodidact radical poet, in Scotland and possibly in Britain.'¹⁵¹ These practices of reading and writing

¹⁴⁸ 'Prominent Alyth Citizen Dead', *Dundee Advertiser*, 1 November 1914 (LC339/14).

¹⁴⁹ 'Prominent Alyth Citizen Dead', *Dundee Advertiser*, 1 November 1914 (LC339/14).

¹⁵⁰ 'Dundee Burns Festival,' *Dundee Courier*, 28 January 1881, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ *Scottish Literature in English and Scots*, ed. by Alan Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan and Robin MacGillivray

continued to have influence – and in fact, Alyth Literary Society is currently still active. In the following Conclusion, I will reflect further on the connections between the nineteenth-century poetic landscape of Dundee and its contemporary one.

(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), p.353. Whether Geddes was truly the last notable autodidact poet is debateable. For example, Mary Brooksbank was probably at least as ‘self-taught’ as Geddes.

Conclusion

This PhD was a Collaborative Doctoral Award, in partnership with Dundee Libraries, and for its duration I have been based in the Local History department of Dundee Central Library. The idea of outreach and working with the Dundonian community was built into the project from the start. Given how integral the ideas of place and community are to the poetry I have discussed here, this did not feel like an add-on to the research process, rather an essential part of it. Over the past three years I have spent much time reflecting on how the traditions have influenced and are echoed in cultural life in contemporary Dundee, and I will outline some of these reflections here.

The traditions I have discussed certainly continued – and continue – to influence Dundee’s culture. Edward Miller’s PhD thesis ‘An Ethnography of Singing’ picks up on the enduring importance of poetry and songs in forming a sense of place and community in Angus. Interestingly, at least within his interviews with the Weatherston and Davidson families, in the mid-twentieth century memorising and reciting poetry appears to have been done by women more than men.¹ These poetic ‘recitations’ were considered as separate to songs rather than interchangeable, but were, similarly to songs, both collected in scrapbooks and committed to memory. Janet Weatherston’s repertoire included nineteenth-century poems such as *Castles in the Air* and *Wee Willie Winkie*, two of the most popular poems from the *Whistle-Binkie* anthology. Her mother, known as Grannie Weatherston, knew three of Agnes Pringle Elliott’s series of four poems on the 1903 Elliot Junction rail disaster, which she had purchased on broadsides for ‘a few pence’ around Angus.² Grannie Weatherston, aged around 90 when Miller conducted his research in the late 1960s, was already at work in domestic service at the time of the accident. As well as individual broadsides, newspapers were a major source of poems

¹ Miller, p. 127.

² Miller, p. 128.

for Grannie. She kept a box of poems and cuttings from various local newspapers, including the *People's Journal* and other DC Thomson titles.

At the time of Miller's recording, the interest in collecting and memorising poetry was seen as being in decline: Grannie was certainly the person with the most poems in her repertoire, and she mainly learned them in her childhood, prior to the First World War. She had passed down some of the enthusiasm, with her daughter Tibbie also learning some poems, which were mainly recited in the house, at school gatherings and at occasional local concerts. There remained a very strong association of memorising these poems with memories of the place or events themselves, and particularly a link to local places – one poem about Glenisla was associated with knowledge of the glen itself.³

Dundee's urban landscape itself changed significantly over the course of the twentieth century, changes which are now generally considered to have been for the worse. Charles McKean and Patricia Whatley open their book *Lost Dundee* by questioning how the city 'lost its memory and identity.'⁴ The most dramatic instances of this are the demolition of two of the centre's oldest streets, the Overgate and the Wellgate, to be replaced by shopping centres (and, in the Wellgate, the new Central Library.) The Overgate, as the setting for many songs and the centre of Dundee's broadside history, is a particularly notable loss in this context. Perhaps because of this, ideas of Victorian Dundee are common in contemporary imaginings of the city. The Tay Bridge Disaster still looms large. Poems relating to the disaster are still written, and suggest the city still struggles to conceptualise its meaning. A recently published poem by Dundee's Makar, W.N. Herbert, reflects on the disaster's permanent effect on the place.

Tae loup intae nithin

Thi haill train flehan

³ Miller, p. 138.

⁴ *Lost Dundee*, p.2.

intae nocht, intae nicht, intae north
steam wings fauldit an faain

i the skreik o munelicht
i the glaik o midnight

wi Hastur as the Demon o the Air
and Buster fur an engineer

afore ye hit thi waatir
thi gas lichts' glitter

lyk quaartz in black sand.
Ye thocht ye'd understand -

ye thocht there wiz something
tae be understood...

Thon gap rebriggid huz differid space
Fae space: while in ut, beh some grace,

Aa's suspended, naewan's deid,
No yet, nor fur ilka time succeedin:

Ilk crossin is the same,
Altho thi river's no – time's tamed

and maks a Doldrum fae
Disaster, eternity fae this ae day.⁵

Here, the Dundonian Scots which was not established as a print convention in the nineteenth century allows new ways of expressing absence. Broken lines, and the extended gap between the sixth and seventh stanzas, invoke a breaking of history which Dundee cannot quite mend. Mark Fisher's comment on 'hauntology' in popular culture is appropriate here: 'What haunts the digital cul-de-sacs of the twenty-first century is not so much the past as all the lost futures that the twentieth century taught us to anticipate.'⁶ The nineteenth century likewise promised Dundee futures now lost or never realised.

As the importance of locality within the city suggested itself as a framework to approach the poetry, it also started to make sense as a way to approach exploring its resonance in contemporary Dundee. The importance of actually voicing the material was also on my mind: while I have attempted to stress the fact that the poems discussed often had several extra lives beyond the page, the fact remains it is very hard to ascertain what these might have been with any certainty. Nevertheless, I felt performing the Victorian material is often as important as reading it to get a sense of what the writers meant. And, because this was public poetry, it had to be performed publicly.

I began to explore the idea of 'poetry tours,' where I would compile routes through areas of Dundee using poems which connected to points along the way, and performing them, generally with added historical context, in the appropriate areas. This was a fairly experimental practice – the buildings and layout of Dundee have changed considerably since the nineteenth century, so in many ways it was harder to plan historically 'accurate' tours of the city centre than it would have been in many other locations. This could be worked around by finding a place with similar meaning to

⁵ W.N. Herbert in Andy Jackson (ed.), *Seagate III* (Dundee: Discovery Press, 2016), p. 15. This is one in a series of 'Dundee Doldrums' poems by Herbert, throughout which Dundee's past is a haunting presence.

⁶ Mark Fisher, 'What is Hauntology?', *Film Quarterly* 66/1 (2012), 16-24 (p. 16).

perform the poetry. Poetry complaining about the council's spending priorities works as well outside a modern office block as outside the now-demolished 17th century town hall. These tours were also a two-way process, in which people's reactions, questions and suggestions informed my research as it progressed. Most of the outreach events I planned were successful because of the existing creative communities in Dundee and their willingness to experiment with new themes and events.

Over the course of undertaking this PhD, I led several tours of the city centre and areas within Dundee in association with several supportive organisations and groups. Stobswell Community Forum helped me lead a poetry walk around Baxter Park as part of the Stobsfest festival in May 2016, and Friends of Dundee Law facilitated a group poetry reading on the hill in September of that year. Literary Dundee welcomed my suggestions for poetry tours as part of their festival programme in October 2016 and 2017, one of which explored the city centre and one of which used the Verdant Works jute museum as a venue to explore textile workers' poetry. Verdant Works also partnered with me in March 2017 for a tour based on Victorian women's poetry as part of Dundee Women's Festival. Creative Dundee and the historic ship HM Frigate Unicorn also supported my ideas on several occasions. I also enjoyed collaborating on several poetry, song and craft events with the singer and actor Lynne Campbell, whose recent work has explored the nineteenth-century Dundonian tradition of exchanging decorated herrings at Hogmanay. Admittedly, the closest I probably came to sharing the experiences of a Victorian performer during this PhD was not as part of an outreach event, instead being when I offered to help the poet Ana Hine sell copies of *Artificial Womb*, the feminist zine she edits. We used a performative approach, reading/shouting selections of the poems to catch the public's attention, and were moved on from the vicinity of a few respectable shops for being too noisy and political.

This reinterpretation of an important and often misunderstood period in Dundee's cultural history is timely. The city is once again being re-created both architecturally and conceptually. The long-awaited V&A Museum of Design has been the focus of most conversations about Dundee's cultural future (at least, those taking

place outside Dundee) for the duration of my research process. It is interesting that the name still celebrates Victoria and her husband, as there are similarities between the present situation and that Dundee found itself in in 1867, when the opening of the Albert Institute, now the McManus Galleries, and the BAAS meeting brought the media of the world to celebrate – or satirise – Dundee. During the final year of research, I took part in the McManus 168 project, which researched the original subscribers to the Albert Institute and their social networks.⁷ These included figures like John Leng and A.C. Lamb. On many occasions, my fellow researchers remarked how similar the situations they researched seemed to today. On the museum's opening weekend, protestors objecting to the sense that the V&A and its associated funding might 'solve' Dundee's social problems drew attention to the continuing, and deepening, parallels with Victorian levels of deprivation, centring on the Queen Victoria statue in Albert Square and labelling her the 'Famine Queen.'

As with the Albert Institute, the V&A is important, but far from the only expression of creative life in Dundee. The main way I built up a social life when moving to the city – much like many aspiring Victorian writers – was to attend social groups which, upon reflection, are not too far away from the literary societies which were so popular in the nineteenth century. The Literary Lock-In (sadly currently inactive) was a pub night theoretically devoted to talking about reading and writing. Hotchpotch, which has been running for at least a decade and still going strong, is an open mic night where you can read your own or a favourite writer's fiction or poetry. Unlike the Victorian societies, this is both judgement-free and subject to strict time limits on readings. What struck me about these groups, and the Dundee literary scene more generally, was the lack of separation between 'professional,' or published writers, and the aspiring or amateur ones. In the past few weeks, a new group has established itself in a coffee shop in the Murraygate, feet from Lamb's original rooms.

A recent study undertaken by Creative Dundee, as part of Dundee Place Partnership, showed how important a sense of locality within the city still is to people,

⁷ 'McManus 168', <<https://mcmanus168.org.uk/>> [Accessed 8 October 2018.]

and how much personal and social networks affect people's experience of 'being creative' in the city. The results challenged assumptions funders and arts organisations often have about what culture is, and does. Creative Dundee concluded:

'It's surely time to have a wider definition of the words 'culture' and 'creativity,' and place more importance in the social networks that are the foundations of our cultural/creative lives – using culture and creativity as a means to improve quality of life and reduce isolation!'⁸

This call for a new approach to Dundee's contemporary culture echoes the approach I have taken throughout my research. Culture – here, specifically poetry and song – is not only a descriptor of place, it is a fundamental part of the experience of place, and can be transformative.

⁸ Creative Dundee, 'Culture Connects: What We Learned', < <https://createdundee.com/2018/04/culture-connects-what-we-learned/>> [Accessed 3 October 2018].

Appendix: Images

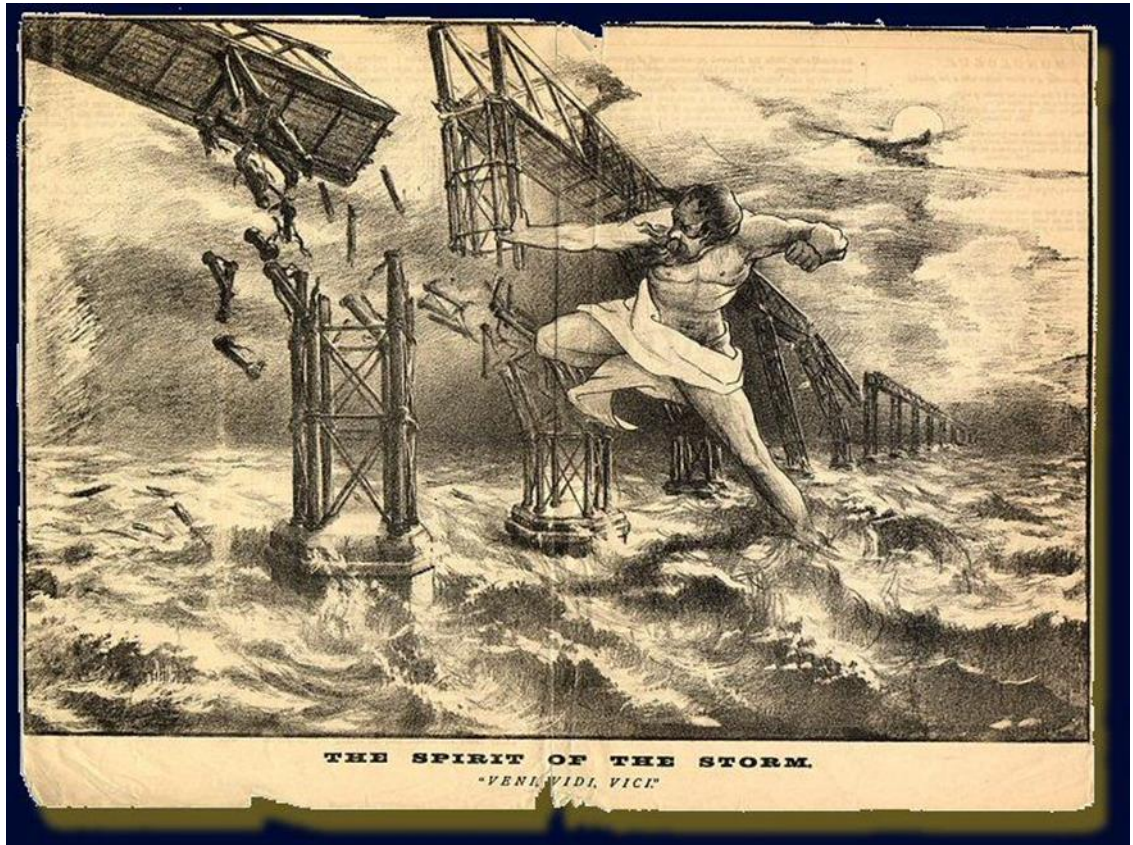


Figure 1, 'The Spirit of the Storm.'

"The Spirit of the Storm," *The Wizard o' the North*, January 1880 (Dundee: James P. Mathew & Co.)
Reproduced with permission of Libraries, Leisure & Culture Dundee.

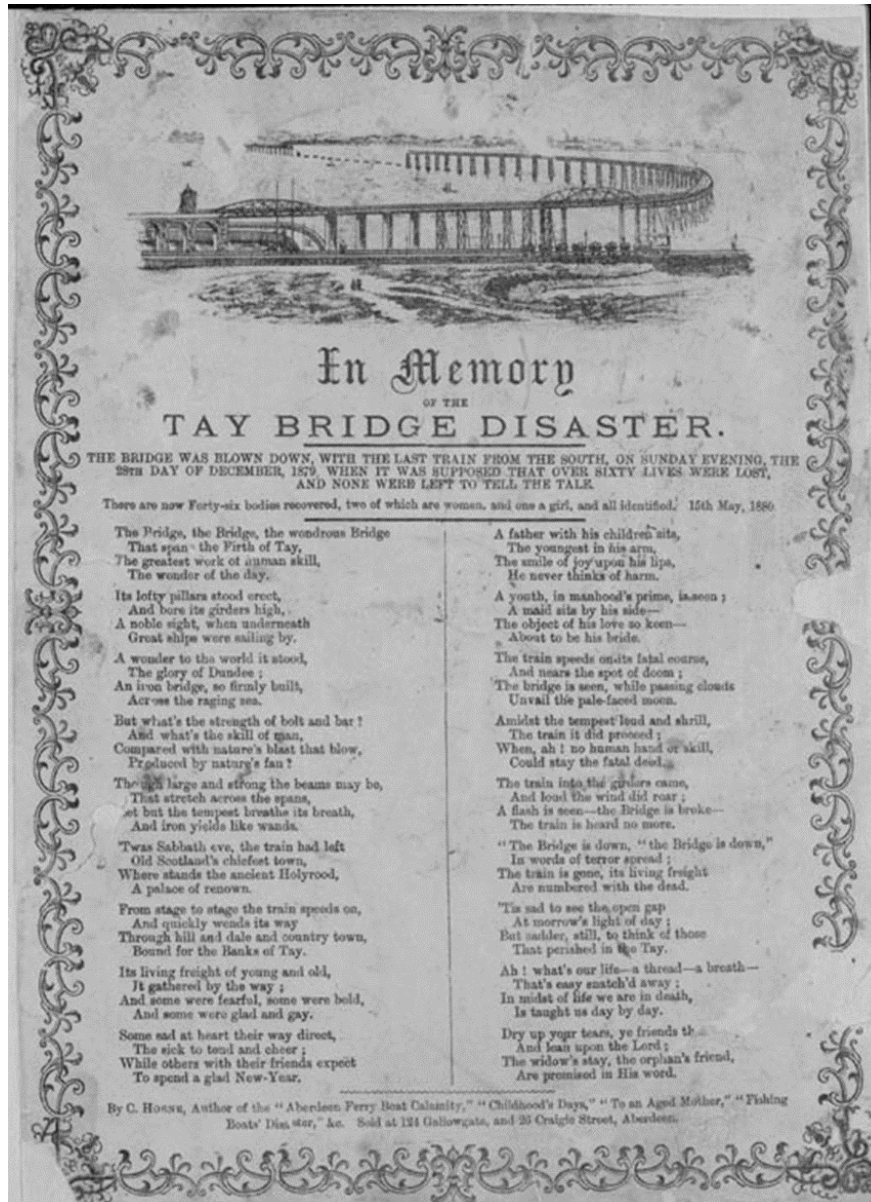


Figure 2, 'In Memory of the Tay Bridge Disaster,' printed by C. R. Horne, Aberdeen.

National Library of Scotland, <https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/view/?id=16622>.

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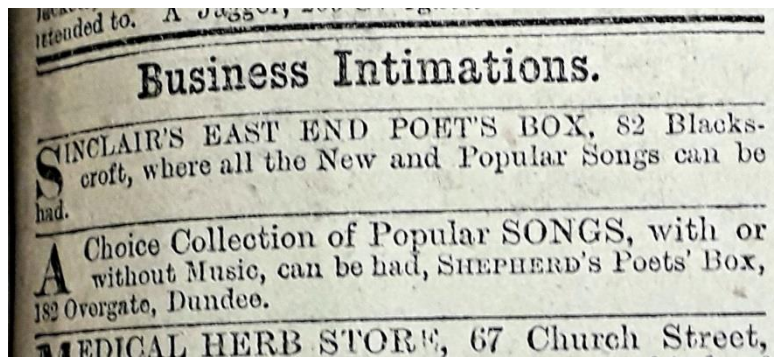


Figure 3: Poet's Box Adverts in the *Dundee Courier*, 21st April 1888. Reproduced with permission of Libraries, Leisure & Culture Dundee.



Figure 4, 'Magdalen Green before the Dundee to Perth Railway,' George M. MacGillivray (c.1838-1851.) Reproduced with permission of Dundee Art Galleries and Museums.

Sources and Bibliography

1. Newspapers and periodicals publishing poetry in nineteenth-century Dundee

All held at Dundee Central Library unless stated otherwise.

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The Dundee Advertiser (1861-1926)

The Dundee Courier and Argus (1801-1926; Dundee Libraries holds hard copies from 1846)

The People's Friend (1869-present; held in British Library and D.C. Thomson Archives.)

The People's Journal (1868-1986)

The Weekly News (1855-present; 1855-1950 microfilm only in Dundee Libraries.)

The Piper O' Dundee, 1879-1912 (Dundee: James P. Mathew & Co.)

The Wizard O' The North, 1886-1906 (Dundee: James P. Mathew & Co.)

2. Surviving issues of short-lived print periodicals in Dundee Central Library

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La Bouquet, or Dundee Ladies' Miscellany, Vol. 1 No. 1 (1848) (LC266/2)

The Dundee Monthly Magazine, April-May 1835 (Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D2865I)

Myles' Forfarshire Telegraph and Monthly Advertiser: A Journal of Politics, Literature and Social Progress, Issue 1, January 1851 (D7327I)

The Westgreen Garland, Vol. 1 No. 1, February 1893 (LC33/10)

See also: Lamb, A.C., *Bibliography of Dundee Periodicals* (originally published in *Scottish Notes and Queries*, Vols III-IV, 1890-91, stored at Dundee Central Library Sp. Coll. D5548).

3. Select list of manuscript magazines and verse in Dundee Central Library

The Attic Journal, Vol. 1 No. 1, January 1848 (LC266/1)

Dundee Literary Society Manuscript Magazine

- Vol. Ia (Dec 1846 – Dec 1847) (D22021)
- Vol. Ib (Jan-Jun 1849) (D22014)
- Vol. II (Jul-Dec 1849) (D22015)
- Vol. III (Jan-Jun 1850) (D22016)
- Vol. IV (Jul-Dec 1850) (D22017)

Later iterations of the MS Magazine did not use continuous volume numbering. The other surviving *Dundee Literary Society Manuscript Magazines* are:

- March- May 1851 (LC406/1-3)
- 1852 (LC 406/4)
- 1853 (LC406/5)
- Unknown year (LC406/6)

Dundee Literary and Scientific Society Manuscript Magazine

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- Vol. 2, 1846-7 (LC265/17)

Lamb Collection Box 5 contains flyers, posters and events programmes from literary societies' events, c. 1850-70.

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- *The Butterfly's Birthday and other Poetical Effusions* (1832, MS pamphlet with illustration.)
- *The Wreath of Wild Flowers* (March 1834- April 1836) (D22011)
- *Gems of Poesy* (March 1834-March 1836) (D22012)

[Many of Gardiner's botanical writings also survive in MS form in Dundee Central Library.]

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- MS *Select Poetry*, 1847 (LC267/7)
- MS poetry, n.d. (LC267/3)

[Several pieces of Thomson's historical writing also survive in manuscript form in Dundee Central Library.]

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- Two collections of MS poems, c. 1885-1904 (LC394/2; LC395)

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- *Life of James Scrymgeour of Dundee* (Dundee: The News Bureau, 1887)

Reid, Alan (ed.) *Bards of Angus and the Mearns* (Edinburgh and Glasgow: John Menzies & Co, 1897)

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