"A Very Poetical Town": Newspaper Poetry and the Working-Class Poet in Victorian Dundee

KIRSTIE BLAIR

In the assessment of Victorian periodical poetry, newspaper verse has received comparatively little attention. As Natalie M. Houston comments in her important article on newspaper poems, this is partly due to the "privileging of individual authorship" in literary criticism, meaning that anonymous poems tend to be devalued, and due to the fact that newspaper poems often "function as topical commentary" and are thus difficult to assess once extracted from their original contexts.[1] The sheer volume of newspaper verse is daunting: recent work in the field, by Andrew Hobbs, estimates that around five million individual poems were published in the nineteenth-century provincial press.[2] Spatially, as Houston notes, poetry is easily identifiable because its layout stands out on the page; but in terms of content and form, the title of newspaper poems alone often gives little clue about their theme, and in terms of authorship, pseudonyms acquire full significance only when situated within the content of the newspaper's readerly community. James Mussell's observation that without the "shared cultural resources" which contemporary readers took for granted, "we struggle to realize the meanings and effects such texts had for their readers . . . the familiarity or novelty of what was under discussion" is as true for the poetry column of the newspaper as it is for reports on contemporary events.[3]

This article approaches newspaper poetry via the local and (relatively) small-scale, by analyzing the presence of poetry in three newspapers published in Victorian Scotland—the *Dundee Courier*, the *Dundee Advertiser*, and the *Dundee, Perth and Forfar People's Journal*—in a brief but vital period for their development, 1858–60.[4] These were not the only papers published from Dundee. While space precludes detailed consideration of more than three papers, I also reference their closest competitors, *The Telegraph* and the *Weekly News*, published by Park, Sinclair and Co., Dundee. All five newspapers had benefited from the repeal of the Stamp

Duty in 1855 (and would do so further from the repeal of the Paper Duties in 1861), and were part of the massive expansion of the Scottish newspaper press after that period; in these two years, the *Courier*, facing decreased circulation and competition from rivals, merged with the *Daily Argus* and moved from weekly to Mon-Wed-Fri publication, the *Advertiser* to daily publication, and the short-lived *Telegraph* began, failed, and merged with the *Weekly News*. The two major weekend papers in Dundee, the older *Weekly News* and the new *People's Journal*, which began its run in 1858 and still survives today, were the success stories of this period.

Such expansion and development was mirrored by the general growth of the provincial newspaper industry across Britain. As Aled Jones comments, between 1855 and 1861 "137 newspapers were established in 123 towns in England where there had previously been no local newspaper."[5] By studying publications from the same town and the same years, I argue that one of the most important directions for the study of newspaper poetry is an examination of its relations to the provincial press, which enabled a remarkably strong kinship to develop between newspapers, the working-class poet, and local readership. The significance of the provincial press in creating "a sense of local identity and attachment," for working-class readers in particular, has been recognized by recent scholars, notably Hobbs in his work on the Lancashire press.[6] The role of poetry and the poetry column, however, still remains relatively unexplored.

In publishing poetry, Victorian newspapers frequently relied upon what Meredith McGill, considering a North American context, describes as the "culture of reprinting," designed to redistribute elite culture "in a variety of mass-cultural formats."[7] Tennyson and Longfellow, who both had an international reputation by 1860, are the most cited poets in the newspapers that I consider, and Tennyson's 1859 "Riflemen, Form!," originally published as a newspaper poem in *The Times*, is the single most reprinted poem. Yet as the regional press underwent rapid expansion in the early-mid Victorian period, newspapers aimed at attracting a readership from a particular area became invested in publishing poetry about that area, written by poets explicitly identifying themselves as locals. In promoting local poets, as a way of encouraging community pride and celebrating the literary and cultural traditions of a region, the new, moderately priced newspapers offered unprecedented opportunities for working-class writers. For ambitious poets lacking in money and connections, the best (often only) route into publication was through the local press. There are many examples, such as those given by anthologist Alexander G. Murdoch, who tells how William Miller (a Glasgow wood-turner, author of "Wee Willie Winkie") as a teenager "was in the habit of contributing to the poetical columns of the local prints." James Norval, a weaver from Glasgow's East End, "had so far overcome the obstruction of a defective

education as to be able to contribute with frequency . . . to the Poets' Corners of some of the better known of the local Scottish newspapers," while Thomas Stewart, a miner from the age of fourteen, "supplied the "Poets' Corner" of the local newspapers with Doric verses of homely but excellent merit."[8] Another anthologist, John Macintosh, identifies a substantial number of Victorian Scottish poets such as, in the newspapers I study here, John Mitchell, who "first made his mark as a contributor of poetry to the 'Advertiser' columns" and consequently became the assistant editor of the *Advertiser*, using poetry publication as a means to enter the newspaper trade.[9]

Most newspapers did not pay their contributors, but besides the cachet of being known in their community as a published poet, aspiring writers used newspaper publication to form relationships of patronage with influential editors and critics and as a stepping-stone towards volume publication (which usually required both sponsorship by a patron and enough local reputation to attract subscribers), or in some cases, a new career. Published volumes by working-class poets are the tip of the iceberg compared to the vast corpus of largely unstudied newspaper verse by these writers. Following Mike Sanders' important work on the poetry columns of the Chartist press, and William Donaldson's highly influential study of popular fiction in Victorian Scottish newspapers, I argue that even when these poems seem at first glance to be derivative, conventional, and commonplace in form and sentiment, they repay further study because, when placed within the context of a newspaper column and located within a specific community of readers, they operate as sophisticated and often politically charged reflections upon current events, as well as upon the practice and purpose of poetry.[10] We cannot appreciate the scope and complexity of Victorian working-class poetics unless we focus on the local contexts in which readers first encountered these poems.

Victorian Dundee, as one of its most influential public figures, George Gilfillan, observed, "does not get the credit of being a very poetical town."[11] In the years considered here, Dundee was at the cusp of becoming a major industrial center as the jute trade developed. Its development as a city of substance was marked by two differing works of construction taking place in the early 1860s: the establishment of one of Britain's most significant mid-Victorian civic parks, Baxter Park, a space donated by a family of mill-owners to provide recreation for the lower classes; and the building of the Camperdown Dock as Dundee harbor underwent expansion.[12] Both of these developments were regularly celebrated in verse in the local press, by poets including Ellen Johnston, "The Factory Girl," who moved to Dundee in 1861 to seek work.[13] While on the surface this burgeoning industrial city might seem "unpoetical," in fact Dundee possessed a number of assets as a center for working-class poetical activity. It had a substantial literate

and politicized community of artisans, in trades such as handloom weaving, shipbuilding, carpentry, masonry, engineering, and textiles, who generally enjoyed good relations with the Dundee middle-classes and who had supported a number of literary societies and discussion groups in the 1840s.[14] It also had Gilfillan, minister and noted public speaker and critic. In the late 1850s, chastened by his lampooning by W. E. Aytoun in the "spasmodic" controversy, Gilfillan focused his considerable acumen on fostering the careers of working-class poets from the Dundee area and beyond, many known to him personally. Lastly and most importantly, through the Hull-born newspaper proprietor John Leng, a close associate of Gilfillan's, Dundee became the headquarters for a significant working-class publication, the *Dundee, Perth and Forfar People's Journal.*

Launched in 1858, specifically to a literate working-class audience, within the two years of my study the *People's Journal* boasted that it had nearly tripled its circulation to 31,000 to become the most popular "of any weekly paper printed out of London" (November 2, 1861, p. 2). While such claims should be treated with some scepticism—among other things, this comment is a dig at the *Weekly News*, a direct competitor which explicitly satirized Leng's efforts—the *People's Journal* became one of the great success stories of the Victorian press, and in terms of popular fiction and poetry, it is an unparalleled resource.[15] In its early years, as Donaldson notes, the newspaper marketed its "unique openness to its readers, its eagerness to act as a platform for their opinions and experiences, its genuine readiness to enter into dialogue with them."[16] While Donaldson's study concentrates exclusively on prose, much of this "dialogue" concerned the poetry column. William Latto, the *Journal*'s most important contributor in the early years, and from 1860 its editor, came from a radicalized working-class background and had himself started out publishing poetry in the *Fife Herald* and elsewhere (Murdoch, p. 236). The support offered by the *People's Journal* to aspiring poets, both critical and celebratory, was vital.

Poems from the *People's Journal* will dominate my discussion, because of its significance for newspaper poetry and poetics and for Victorian working-class poetry. But for contrast, I have also assessed poetry in the *Dundee Advertiser* and the *Dundee Courier*. Reading across three newspapers clarifies how local, national, and international affairs intersected in the Scottish press. The *Advertiser*, also owned by John Leng, was liberal in outlook, whereas the *Courier* was originally a Tory paper with strong clerical associations.[17] By the 1860s, as Aileen Black notes, it still "ostensibly represented the Tory interest in Dundee" Black's "ostensibly" indicates the fact that the *Courier* was not particularly devoted to its cause (Black, p. 51). Its editor, Charles Alexander, was a loyal member of Gilfillan's church, and his paper is conservative only by comparison with the openly liberal and sometimes

outspoken views of Leng's newspapers. All three papers devote significant column space to what they saw as the most significant events of this period: Garibaldi's Italian campaign, the American Civil War, the 1859 Burns Centenary, and Queen Victoria's inspection of the Rifle Corps in Edinburgh. While they provide the latest international and national news, supplied "by electric telegraph," at least fifty percent of the column space in the Dundee editions was local news.[18] The *Advertiser* for instance, which was aimed at a middle-class readership, includes full accounts of local events such as social dinners, concerts, soirées, lectures, as well as reporting on crimes, court cases, workplace accidents, and other instances of injury, illness and death, and obituaries. News items were listed by place-name on the second page, and, judging by samples of January 11 and 14, 1859, most locations were within one hundred miles from Dundee. Readers opening the newspaper would be able to see at a glance whether anything of import had happened in their immediate locality.

Given the establishment of the *People's Journal* as a sister-paper to the *Advertiser*, published from the same offices, it is not surprising that the *Advertiser* largely cedes the publication of local poetry to the *Journal*. Nonetheless, while the *Advertiser* did not sustain a separate poetry column, it published poems at least every two weeks. The *Advertiser* signals its appeal to a more highly educated and literate audience—readers who could afford to buy books and who would be familiar with and interested in both well-known and up-and-coming British and American authors—by its republication of poems by established writers.[19] It includes extracts from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and "Sea-Dreams" on their publication, for instance, and poems by the American poets Harriet Beecher Stowe, R. W. Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and George Washington Doane, plus a number of anonymous comic poems from *Punch*.[20] The republished material was from deliberately eclectic sources, so that poems from highly respected transatlantic periodicals such as the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Good Words*, *Blackwood's*, *Macmillan's* or *Harper's Monthly Magazine* rub shoulders with local British publications such as the *Carbondale Advance*, the *Preston Chronicle*, the *Liverpool Albion*, the *Aberdeen Herald*, and the *Inverness Courier*. It also included translations of poems by Goethe, Friedrich Krummacher and Hans Christian Andersen, among others.[21]

Thus, the *Advertiser* saw poetry's function as underlining the newspaper's simultaneous commitment to international and local British contexts, and as improving and entertaining. Poems on current events are outnumbered by religious poetry, love poetry, and domestic poetry, and virtually all poems are relegated to the final page. The *Advertiser* did, however, also use poems and reviews to suggest that Scotland held a significant literary place on the world stage and made deliberate appeals to its local Scottish readership. The translations of Goethe

are by Aytoun, of Edinburgh, from his 1859 edition, and Gilfillan's editions of Spenser and Vaughan and Thomas Campbell's edition of Petrarch are also reviewed and quoted, suggesting the importance of Scottish poets and editors in circulating canonical English and European poetry.[22] In publishing poems by Charles Mackay (born in Perth, and a former editor of the *Glasgow Argus*) and Isa Craig (a Scottish woman poet who rose to fame as the winner of the Burns Centenary Competition; the *Advertiser* also publishes a poem addressed to her by Mary Cowden Clarke), the paper drew attention to Scottish-born writers operating from London and writing in Scots as well as English.[23] It additionally highlighted Dundee's presence in the national press by reprinting, for example, *Punch*'s "The Benefactor of Bonnie Dundee," a poem on the Baxter Park plans.[24] And it emphasized Dundee's status as a cultural center by reminding readers, in reprinting a poem by Gerald Massey, that they had heard him recite it in a recent lecture in Dundee.[25]

Massey was at this time probably Britain's most successful working-class poet, and his presence in the *Advertiser*, along with that of Mackay, whose anti corn-law rhymes had been an immense popular success, and the Chartist poet Ernest Jones, signify the paper's reforming sympathies. While in later decades the *Advertiser* played a significant role in publishing radical working-class poets (notably James Young Geddes), in these particular years, when it expands its poetic remit to include poems about local events and places or by poets self-identifying as local and working-class, the poems published are relatively conservative compared to those in the *Journal*.[26] The only working-class poet in these years to have a poem published in both the *Advertiser* and the *People's Journal* is the pseudonymous "A Son of St Tammas, Arbroath." "St Tammas" references location, as the ruined Abbey of Arbroath was dedicated to St Thomas; this poet, David Carnegie, was a power-loom worker who made it into print with *Lays and Lyrics from the Factory* in 1879.[27] In his poems for the *People's Journal*, one of which is discussed below, "A Son of St Tammas" celebrates his marriage and domestic working-class life but also publishes on political and nationalistic themes. His *Advertiser* poem, "The Fate of Genius," is explicitly about the difficulties faced by the Burns-like "lowly bard":

> The lowly Bard, whose heartfelt lays,
> Nor Pride nor Power can e'er extol,
> Who cannot bow to Wealth for praise,
> But sings the promptings of his soul,
> Can scarce expect to find his name
> Inscribed upon the Mount of Fame. (December 27, 1859, p. 4)

In espousing a powerful but highly derivative image of the sympathetic lower-class poet, whose poems are the direct expression of untutored feeling and who will die tragically unremembered, "A Son of St Tammas" adds to a construction of working-class poetry and poets that was particularly palatable to middle-class audiences. It celebrates the working-class poet and invokes sympathy for his fate, but it also renders him reassuringly ineffectual and resigned. This poem contrasts with the vigorous and highly ambitious working-class poetic culture evident in the *People's Journal* and is also more apolitical than the poems by "A Son of St Tammas" published there, suggesting that either he or Leng and Latto had a sharp sense of what appealed to the *Advertiser*'s different readership.

While poetry has less of a footprint in the *Advertiser* than the *Journal*, it still has a notable presence, much more so than in the *Dundee Courier*. This is doubtless in part due to Leng's influence, but it also suggests, given that the *Advertiser* and *Courier* reported on similar content and with a similar readership, that a solidly respectable Tory paper appealing to a middle-upper class readership might be less interested in encouraging the literary education and endeavours of its readers than its Liberal counterpart. Like the *Advertiser* and the *People's Journal*, the *Courier* has a predictable fondness for Longfellow, a poet who had very strong cross-class appeal in Victorian Britain. Longfellow's "The Rope-Walk" and "Enceladus" (the former describing a spinning-factory, and thus of interest to readers in the weaving industry, and the latter a Risorgimento poem, appealing to the broad political sympathy in Dundee for the Italian cause) are the only complete poems by a named, established poet published in the *Courier* in 1858 and 1859.[28] The *Courier* is uninterested in supplying its readers with inspirational verse. With the exception of its reports on the Burns Centenary, it clearly deploys poetry as light relief from the more weighty business of the news.[29] *Courier* poems are usually on the final page in the "Miscellanea" column, they are predominantly comic, and they mingle with humorous anecdotes, puns, and prose. "Miscellanea" does include the occasional poem on the key themes of religion, love, family, and Scottish history by a Scottish poet, such as "The Last Scottish Martyr" by "A.M., Dundee," on the death of a Covenanter, or "A Poet's Love" by "Ivan, Edinburgh," but these are rare.[30]

Comic and satirical poetry in the *Courier* could, however, also have an acute political edge. In October 1858, for instance, the paper published a clever parody of Tennyson's "Come into the garden, Maud" in the "Miscellanea" column:

Come to Confession, Maud
  And kneel at my priestly throne,
Come to Confession, Maud,

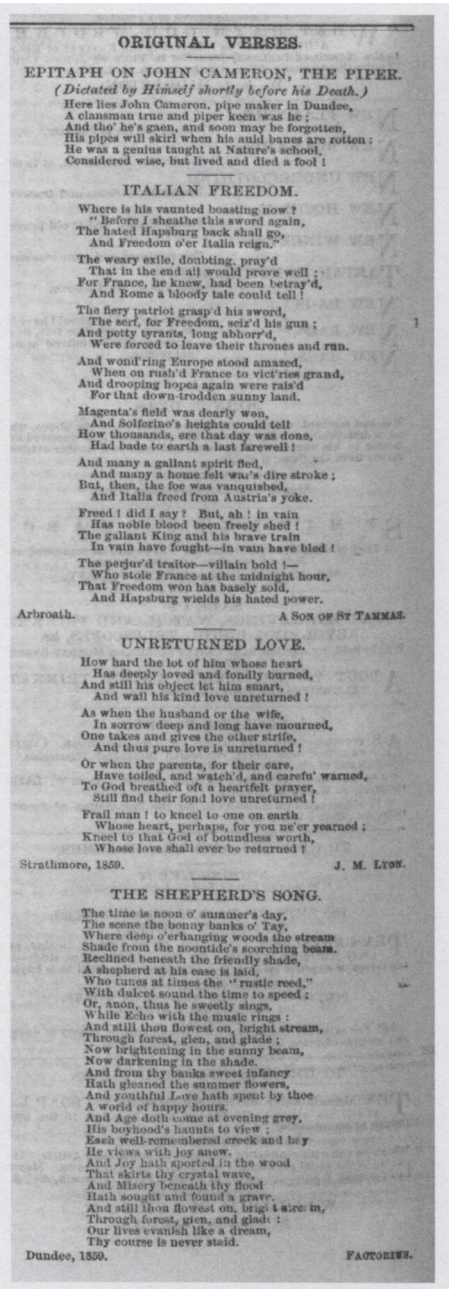
And say to what sins you are prone;
For I'm a Tractarian Curate
And I want to see you alone. (October 13, 1858, p. 4)

The speaker, whose insinuating questions begin to verge on the indecent, "Do you want to be married, my love? / Can you tell me how it feels?," embodies contemporary anti-Catholic paranoia about the dangers of the confessional for young women, and about the (Anglo) Catholic priest as seducer. In common with much of the verse and prose published in this column, no author or original source is identified. But the *Courier*'s choice of this parody not only appeals to a staunchly Protestant and predominantly Presbyterian readership, but is also almost certainly a subtle dig at Alexander Forbes, Episcopalian Bishop of Brechin and minister of St Paul's Church, Dundee. He was a leading Tractarian, had controversially defended the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Eucharist in 1857, and was to be tried for heresy on these grounds by the Scottish Bishops, in a process dragged out through late 1859 and early 1860 and reported fervently by the Dundee press. The *Advertiser* and the *People's Journal*, while disapproving of Forbes's theological stance, are strongly sympathetic to him as a clergyman known for his devoted work in the slums of Dundee and as one of the leading advocates for working-class education. The *Courier*, this poem might suggest, was not so sure. That "Come to Confession, Maud" seemed especially relevant to Dundee at this moment is also indicated by its instant republication by the *Telegraph*, on October 15, 1858. The *Telegraph*, appearing on Fridays, often lifted poems wholesale from that Wednesday's *Courier* (as the *Courier* also did with poems from the *Telegraph*) particularly when the poems seemed attractive to a local audience.[31]

In the *Advertiser*, the *Courier*, and the *Telegraph*, poetry was usually on the final page after the news. Poetry in the *Journal* generally appeared on the second page—the location of editorials and major headlines, since the front page of every paper was occupied by advertisements. Its rival weekend paper, the *Weekly News*, also published poetry on the second page, but as part of a humorous series of dialect sketches set in a barbershop, in which the characters occasionally launch into poem or song. While some of these poems may have been contributed by locals, they tend to be treated satirically and are secondary to the surrounding prose conversation.[32] The *News* did launch a "Poets' Corner" featuring established works by poets including Charles Kingsley, Amelia Opie, and Barry Cornwall in March 1860, but it was short-lived.[33] In contrast, the *Journal* explicitly foregrounded literary contributions from its community of Scottish working-class readers. Its second issue launched the first of several poetry competitions (after a reader offered a topic and a book as a prize) (January 9, 1858, p. 2), and a week later the

editor reported receipt of twenty-nine poems, "a body of evidence attesting the intelligence of those classes whom we specially address" (January 16, 1858, p. 2). The second competition, in late February, received forty-six entries, judged by Gilfillan. In May the number was fifty-three, and another minister, D. Cook, was the judge. Particularly notable about these competitions is that the editorial does not merely mention numbers of poems received, but lists them by locality and pseudonym, so that for the May competition, readers could see that Dundee headed the list with seven entries, Alyth and Montrose came second with three, and nineteen other locations could boast of supplying one poem each (May 8, 1858, p. 2). In other words, one function of poetry competitions was to bolster local pride: readers could instantly see how many poets their community could boast. The standard practice of signing poems with either initials or a pseudonym based on the author's employment, age, or gender (e.g. "Apollo," "A Lassie of Fifteen Years," "A Young Mother"), plus location and date ("Apollo, Alyth, January 1859" [see editorial May 8, 1858, p. 2]) meant that location was the poets' primary identifier. Sometimes this caused problems. On December 24, 1859, for instance, Mr. Burgess of Baintown angrily complained that his tiny village assumed he had written a "Baintown" poem selected for critical commentary, nicely implying that the authorship of *People's Journal* poems was the subject of lively local speculation (p. 2).

The commentary by Latto and the judges on the quality of competition poems slid, by 1859, into one of the features of the *People's Journal*, the "To Correspondents" column, which functioned as a humorous critical study of rejected poems that frequently took more column space than the "Original Poetry" column.[34] According to recurring editorial complaints, the newspaper was deluged with poems—"we receive every week much more poetry than we can possibly insert" (August 21, 1858, p. 2), "poetical contributions are setting in on us in . . . overwhelming numbers" (December 24, 1859, p. 2)—to the extent that in January 1861 Latto published a comic account, "The Murder of the Innocents," about scrapping mounds of accumulating poetry. As was typical for the *Journal*, this was followed with a set of humorous responses, in poetry and prose, from readers lamenting the slaughter: "There were wailin' an weepin' an tearn o' hair" ("Miserable Comforters," February 16, 1861, p. 2). In "The Murder of the Innocents," Latto suggested that the correspondents' column serve as "a sort of poetical competition" each week (January 19, 1861, p. 2), formalizing its function. Latto addressed aspiring poets directly: "J. A.'s song 'The Lasses O' Bonnie Dundee' is an orthographical curiosity. He must really study the spelling-book before he ventures to climb Parnassus" ("To Correspondents," January 7, 1860, p. 2). Or, "the exact number of feet in each line is not very well preserved, and the rhymes



ORIGINAL VERSES.

EPITAPH ON JOHN CAMERON, THE PIPER.

(Dictated by Himself shortly before his Death.)

Here lies John Cameron, pipe maker in Dundee,
A clansman true and piper keen was he;
And tho' he's gaen, and soon may be forgotten,
His pipes will skirl when his auld banes are rotten:
He was a genius taught at Nature's school,
Considered wise, but lived and died a fool!

ITALIAN FREEDOM.

Where is his vaunted boasting now?
"Before I sheathe this sword again,
The hated Hapsburg back shall go,
And Freedom o'er Italia reign."

The weary exile, doubting, pray'd
That in the end all would prove well;
For France, he knew, had been betray'd,
And Rome a bloody tale could tell!

The fiery patriot grasp'd his sword,
The serf, for Freedom, seiz'd his gun;
And petty tyrants, long abhorr'd,
Were forced to leave their thrones and run.

And wond'ring Europe stood amazed,
When on rush'd France to vict'ries grand,
And drooping hopes again were rais'd
For that down-trodden sunny land.

Magenta's field was dearly won,
And Solferino's heights could tell
How thousands, ere that day was done,
Had bade to earth a last farewell!

And many a gallant spirit fled,
And many a home felt war's dire stroke;
But, then, the foe was vanquished,
And Italia freed from Austria's yoke.

Freed! did I say? But, ah! in vain
Has noble blood been freely shed!
The gallant King and his brave train
In vain have fought—in vain have bled!

The perjur'd traitor—villain bold!—
Who stole France at the midnight hour,
That Freedom won has basely sold,
And Hapsburg wields his hated power.

Arbroath. A SON OF ST TAMMAS.

UNRETURNED LOVE.

How hard the lot of him whose heart
Has deeply loved and fondly burned,
And still his object let him smart,
And wail his kind love unreturned!

As when the husband or the wife,
In sorrow deep and long have mourned,
One takes and gives the other strife,
And thus pure love is unreturned!

Or when the parents, for their care,
Have toiled, and watch'd, and carefu' warned,
To God breathed oft a heartfelt prayer,
Still find their fond love unreturned!

Frail man! to kneel to one on earth
Whose heart, perhaps, for you ne'er yearned;
Kneel to that God of boundless worth,
Whose love shall ever be returned!

Strathmore, 1859. J. M. LYON.

THE SHEPHERD'S SONG.

The time is noon o' summer's day,
The scene the bonny banks o' Tay,
Where deep o'erhanging woods the stream
Shade from the noontide's scorching beam.
Reclined beneath the friendly shade,
A shepherd at his ease is laid,
Who tunes at times the "rustic reed,"
With dulcet sound the time to speed;
Or, anon, thus he sweetly sings,
While Echo with the music rings:
And still thou flowest on, bright stream,
Through forest, glen, and glade;
Now brightening in the sunny beam,
Now darkening in the shade.
And from thy banks sweet infancy
Hath gleaned the summer flowers,
And youthful Love hath spent by thee
A world of happy hours.
And Age doth come at evening grey,
His boyhood's haunts to view;
Each well-remembered creek and bay
He views with joy anew.
And Joy hath sported in the wood
That skirts thy crystal wave,
And Misery beneath thy flood
Hath sought and found a grave.
And still thou flowest on, bright stream,
Through forest, glen, and glade;
Our lives evanish like a dream,
Thy course is never staid.

Dundee, 1859. FACTORIUS.

Figure 1.

are, in some cases, faulty" ("To Correspondents," February 11, 1860, p. 2). Thus, he guided his working-class readers towards writing particular kinds of poems: ideally short, lyrical (he explicitly discouraged blank verse), harmonious, musical, and formally conservative, particularly in relation to meter. Rather than taking as models experimental contemporary poems such as Tennyson's *Maud* (1855) or Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Latto advised readers to look to the canonical eighteenth-century works. Latto must have been aware, in advising "J. R., Tayside" to read "Cowper, Bloomfield and Kirke White" (August 20, 1859, p. 2) that editions of eighteenth-century poetry were cheaper and easier to access for artisan readers. But his advice also suggests a preference for familiarity and accessibility. When he writes, tongue in cheek, about poetic clichésm, he is both mocking and supporting these clichés:

> We would therefore recommend our rhyming friends to hang up their harps . . . and to wait with patience until the month of May or June, when they will have "scented flowers," "tuneful warblers," "balmy breezes" and all those delightful things to sing about. (February 11, 1859, p. 2)

A poem dated "June" should contain these natural images, just as a poem titled "A Snow Storm" has to be published in February. Indeed, the use of clichéd language demonstrates that working-class poets have grasped poetic tradition. Latto advises them to imitate, not to innovate, because imitation is a means of signaling that they have a working knowledge of British poetry, and this in turn displays cultural aspiration and educational achievement.

The bulk of "Original Verses" can be roughly divided into poems on international and local current events (Garibaldi's campaign in Sicily was particularly popular), poems about romantic love or parental love, and poems on nature or specific locations. Often all three might appear simultaneously. For example, "Original Verses" on September 17, 1859 included the unsigned "Epitaph on John Cameron, the Piper (Dictated by Himself shortly before his Death)"; "Italian Freedom" by A Son of St Tammas, Arbroath; "Unreturned Love," by J. M. Lyon, Strathmore; and "The Shepherd's Song" by Factorius, Dundee (see fig.1). An epitaph, a political song on the Risorgimento, a hymn-like religious poem on seeking God's love, and a pastoral that opens in rhyming couplets: the poems themselves, with the possible exception of the last, are not formally varied, but if we view the column as a unit, then readers encountered four very different genres and styles of poetry.

They also encountered highly diverse subject matter. Cameron was a well-known local "character" and the author of newspaper poems and broadsheet

songs and verse, whose death was reported in a previous issue of the *Journal* and in the other local papers.[35] His "Epitaph" states:

A clansman true and piper keen was he;
And tho he's gaen, and soon may be forgotten,
His pipes will skirl when his auld banes are rotten:
He was a genius taught at Nature's school
Considered wise, but lived and died a fool! (September 17, 1859, p. 2)

"His pipes will skirl" suggests both that the music he was known for will live on, and that the instruments he produced as pipe-maker will survive him—as does his "music" in the form of this short verse. On the one hand, a self-authored epitaph evades the middle-class tradition of elegizing and sentimentalizing the achievements of the working classes, as in a poem every literate reader knew, Gray's "Elegy." On the other, the fact that Cameron apparently committed suicide (another instance where published accounts have to be supplemented by readers' local knowledge) adds a sense of melancholy to this epitaph, locating him within a tradition of despairing self-taught poets doomed to die.[36] Moreover, this "Epitaph" raises the question of the mutability of local, working-class poems between various modes of publication, because it exists in at least one different form, as a single sheet undated poem signed "Piper Cameron" probably either intended for distribution at Cameron's funeral (a common practice) or as an advertising poem circulated by Cameron himself. The opening lines in this version describe the "Substantial workmanship an' brilliancy of tone" of his pipes, continuing:

His pipes'll match the best that's made in Britain.
For forty years he's been kent in Dundee
A clansman true an' piper keen to be.
Tho' he were dead, an' soon may be forgotten,
His pipes'll ring when his auld banes are rotten.[37]

This version implies that that the crucial final couplet in the *People's Journal* version, discussed above, which abandons dialect and informality for familiar poetic diction, was most likely added by an unknown hand for the newspaper version, precisely because it writes Cameron into an existing (poetic) tradition.

Where Cameron's "Epitaph" assumes local knowledge and deploys Scots dialect, "Italian Freedom" assumes knowledge of current international affairs and is written in standard English. The opening line, "Where is his vaunted boasting now?," assumes that the reader will know who "he" is:

Where is his vaunted boasting now?
"Before I sheathe this sword again,
The hated Hapsburg back shall go,
And Freedom o'er Italia reign."

The weary exile, doubting, pray'd
That in the end all would prove well;
For France, he knew, had been betray'd,
And Rome a bloody tale could tell! (September 17, 1859)

Louis Napoleon, we assume. The poem directly references events such as the key Battle of Solferino, June 24, 1859. Support for the Risorgimento (and disgust at political negotiations as constituting "betrayal") is standard in the *Journal* and *Advertiser*, where it always has an extra edge given that Scottish middle and working-class readers identified with Italy's struggles for self-definition in the face of French and Austrian interests, as paralleling historic Scottish battles for independence. As local readers would also know, "A Son of St Tammas"'s home town, Arbroath, had suffered substantially from the crash of the late 1850s. The *Journal* reported that "The prospects of the working classes are of the most gloomy description. . . . At present there are many hundreds out of employment" ("Arbroath," January 23, 1858, p. 3). Uneasy local relations between wealthy employers and unemployed artisans are echoed in a poem on the whole-scale betrayal of a nation's hopes by untrustworthy aristocrats.

Formally and generically, the most interesting poem in this column is "The Shepherd's Song":

The time is noon o' summer's day,
The scene the bonny banks o' Tay,
Where deep o'erhanging woods the stream
Shade from the noontide's scorching beam.
Reclined beneath the friendly shade,
A shepherd at his ease is laid,
Who tunes at times the "rustic reed,"
With dulcet sound the time to speed;
Or, anon, thus he sweetly sings,
While Echo with the music rings:
And still thou flowest on, bright stream,
Through forest, glen and glade;
Now brightening in the sunny beam,

Now darkening in the shade.
And from thy banks sweet infancy
Hath gleaned the summer flowers,
And youthful Love hath spent by thee
A world of happy hours. (September 17, 1859, p. 2, ll. 1–8)

Rhyming couplets in iambic tetrameter, to set the scene, shift to abab 4.3.4.3 rhythm to signal the shepherd's song, though the layout does not signal any separation between song and setting, and, in contrast to much pastoral, the poem ends with the close of the song rather than returning to its original scene and form. Rhyme, meter, and vocabulary are regular and melodious enough to meet Latto's standards. Yet there is a clash between the poetry's pleasures and the signature "Factorius, Dundee": this poet is not a rural labourer but an industrial worker. What seemed standard pastoral tropes are heavily ironized by the reader's knowledge that this poem is a fantasy, in its account of leisure ("reclined . . . at his ease") that factory workers did not possess, and in its suggestion of changelessness, formally encoded in the repeated refrain, "And still thou flowest on, bright stream." Many Scots, young men in particular, emigrated in this period, or at the least moved from country to city and between cities and farms in search of work.[38] Nostalgic invocations of a rural childhood were commonplace in working-class poetry, though subsequent loss and displacement are often explicitly articulated. Picturing the poet wandering or lying at ease by the banks of a beautiful Scottish river was also, of course, a staple theme of Scottish verse in this period, taking its cue from well-known songs such as Burns's "The Banks o' Doon." As readers of the Dundee newspapers were well aware, however, not only were many parts of the Tay (Dundee's major shipping river) already heavily industrialized and polluted, its shores were also in the process of being privatized as land was bought up for housing and by the railway companies. William Leng, John Leng's elder brother, who moved to Dundee in 1859 to work for the *Advertiser*, ran a substantial campaign in his editorials on this issue (Millar, p. 30). Ten days before the publication of "The Shepherd's Song," the *Advertiser* noted that the finest parts of the Tay shores had been "given to the railways for almost nothing" (August 30, 1859, p. 2). Leng warns his readers that the consequence of depriving the "weaver panting homewards from his loom, and the mechanic in search of recreation" of access to "all-bounteous nature" will ensure that "no preaching of contentment will make the people indisposed to listen to communistic teachers" (p. 2). While this seeks to impress higher-class readers with the dire consequences of inaction, later editorials advocate direct action (tearing down fences, knocking down walls) in defence of "the rural walks

in which their fathers delighted . . . the right of access to the hilltops above them or the river at their feet" (September 28, 1860, p. 2).

"The Shepherd's Song" engages with the classical pastoral tradition as imagined by English verse, a tradition that, as Nigel Leask and Bridget Keegan have most recently shown, was inevitably political and held significance for Burns and the Scottish laboring-class tradition as well as for laboring-class poets outside Scotland.[39] The quotation marks around "rustic reed" suggest the poet recognizes that the flute-playing shepherd is a well-worn image for the rural poet, while Echo's presence might remind us of the extent to which this poem—like other pastorals—echoes its predecessors and borrows their tropes. Even outside its publication context and unsigned, this poem would be an interesting if derivative instance of pastoral from this period. But the markers of Tay, Dundee, "Factorius," and the 1859 *People's Journal* poetry column, whether by the poet's intention or not, enlist this poem in a topical local debate touching on broader questions about industrial development and its effect on the Scottish countryside.[40]

Other poems and columns struggled with the same issues. Indeed, the poets of the *Journal* anticipate the *Advertiser's* concerns in a set of poems published in 1858, "Complaint and Petition of the Muir of Alyth," "Consolation to the Muir of Alyth" and "Eik to Petition of the Muir of Alyth." The "Muir" initially complains, in habbie stanzas, that she is to be drained and built upon:

> Nae mair, when ends the Autumn days
> The laddies rin to licht the blaze,
> On stane and lime they noo maun gaze
> Instead o' whins,
> An' ower the ance broom covered braes
> The street noo rins. (January 23, 1858, p. 3)

This is an outstanding environmentalist lament, the more striking for its intelligent use of Scots, creating a parallel between disappearing Scottish landscapes and the language and cultural practices (such as curling on the frozen moor) associated with them. The response poem, however, "Consolation to the Muir of Alyth," signed "Trebor," takes a different tack. Here the poet suggests that the Muir might rather celebrate its "regeneration" and "cultivation" as a site of working-class housing and agriculture, supplying construction work to the unemployed and eventually feeding the poor:

> They'll rid ye o' yer tatter'd claes,
> Yer whins an' broom, an' bogs an' braes,

An' dress ye up, frae tap to taes,
In verdure green,
An then ye'll bless the navvies' days –
That will be seen.

And when yer dressed and made a field,
An' stappit full o'seed an' dreel'd
Ye'll gladden mony a cozie beild
Wi' milk an' meal,
An' pack the wymes o' mony a chield
Wi' spuds an' kale! (January 30, 1858, p. 3)

The lack of affordable good quality working-class housing was a frequent topic in the Dundee press. This response poem suggests that nostalgia for the Scottish countryside is self-indulgent: if bogs and stones can be converted to cosy homes, then such progress should be welcome. In the third poem in the argument, opening with an address to the "Alyth Gentry," the Muir counters by arguing that rather than building housing where "the puir man's parritch pot" will "aye boil," the intent is to sell the land to the railway and to Dundee commuters:

But I had heard, an' think it's true,
A Railway's to be brought tae you;
"An' then," I says, "am thinkin' noo
Twill be a case
They'll houses big for Dundee crew,
An' me disgrace!"
An, thinkin' sae, I almost grat,
But noo I houp you'll no do that. (February 27, 1858, p. 2)

The poems embody in serio-comic form an ongoing contemporary debate, again, about who owns the land and what profit they might take from it. "Noo I houp you'll no do that": in the conceit of these poems, a specific, named and familiar local area gains its own voice and uses it as a call to political action.

Nineteenth-century Scottish poetry has been routinely criticized for its alleged "unhealthy and anachronistic movement towards evasive ruralism," with poets "preserving an anachronistic discourse which suggested that they were farmer-shepherds." "A huge amount of literary production in the century was tainted with distortion or avoidance of the real social and political conditions and issues," Douglas Gifford observes.[41] But this seems considerably less accurate if we relocate this kind of poetry to the space in which it was intended to be read. "A

Shepherd's Song" then seems much less like "evasive ruralism" and more like a sophisticated work reflecting upon the place of pastoral in mid-century Dundee, while the "Muir of Alyth" poems not only offer sharp insights into a complicated current debate, but also indicate the vitality of the newspaper poetry column as a space for dialogue between poets, and its reliance on a regular readership who remembered earlier poems and could follow a pattern of publication and response that stretched out over weeks or months.[42] Newspaper poems never exist as single units, but in relation to other publications within the same issue or paper, and as part of a constantly evolving body of literature associated with a particular paper. Reconstructing the poems' local contexts and original newspaper readership restores their richness and emphasizes the importance of the cultural work that Victorian poetry performed for the regional and local press, as well as the cultural work that the press in this period performed for working-class writers.

Notes

I am grateful for the assistance of staff in the Local History Centre at Dundee Central Library. Research for this article was also supported by a travel grant from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland.

1 Natalie M. Houston, "Newspaper Poems: Material Texts in the Public Sphere," *Victorian Studies* 50 (2008): 234.

2 Andrew Hobbs, "Five Million Poems, or the Local Press as Poetry Publisher, 1800–1900," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 45, no. 4 (2012): 488–492. See also Hobbs' essay in this special issue.

3 James Mussell, *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2012), p. 3.

4 The *Dundee Courier* is available via the British Library's British Newspapers database, though the run for 1860 is missing. I consulted the *Weekly News* and *Telegraph* on microfilm, and the *Dundee Advertiser* and *People's Journal* in hard copy in Dundee Central Library: the former has been recently digitized for British Newspapers Online and is available to consult on a pay-per-page view basis.

5 Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), p. 23. On the circulation of provincial newspapers and their attraction for working-class readers, see also Alan J. Lee's seminal *The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855–1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1976). Lee notes that the expansion of the provincial press by the 1870s was "remarkable, and far outstripped the growth of the metropolitan press" (p. 71).

6 See Andrew Hobbs, *Reading the Local Paper: Social and Cultural Functions of the Local Press in Preston, Lancashire, 1855–1900*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Central Lancashire, 2010. On the question of "provinciality" in the press, see Hobbs, "When the Provincial Press Was the National Press (c. 1836–c. 1900)," *International Journal of Regional & Local Studies* 5, no. 1 (2009): 16–43 and the entries for "Provincial

Newspapers" (Aled Jones) and "Local Press" (Andrew Hobbs/Margaret Beetham) in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, gen eds., *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (Academia/British Library: Gent and London, 2009), pp. 514, 371–372.

7 Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 7. On the reprinting of syndicated columns in the British provincial press, see Bob Nicholson, "'You Kick the Bucket, We Do the Rest!': Jokes and the Culture of Reprinting in the Transatlantic Press," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17, no. 3 (2012): 273–286.

8 Alexander Murdoch, *The Scottish Poets, Recent and Living* (Glasgow: Thomas D. Morison, 1883), pp. 34, 139, 363.

9 John Macintosh, *The Poets of Ayrshire, from the Fourteenth Century till the Present Day* (Dumfries: Thomas Hunter, 1910), pp. 196, 172; A. H. Millar, *The Dundee Advertiser, 1801–1901: A Centenary Memoir* (Dundee: John Leng, 1901), p. 30.

10 Michael Sanders, "Courtly Lays or Democratic Songs? The Politics of Poetic Citation in Chartist Literary Criticism," in *Class and the Canon: Constructing Labouring-Class Poetry and Poetics, 1750–1900*, ed. Kirstie Blair and Mina Gorji (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 156–174; and *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009); William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland: Language, Fiction and the Press* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen Univ. Press, 1986).

11 Letter to Editor, *People's Journal*, January 15, 1859, p. 2. Further references given in the text. Gilfillan's comment refers to the fact that there were 101 competition entries, of which, according to Gilfillan, 19 out of every 20 were "the productions of the humbler classes."

12 See Louise Miskell, Christopher A. Whatley, and Bob Harris, eds., *Victorian Dundee: Image and Realities* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), particularly William Kenefick, "The Growth and Development of the Port of Dundee in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," pp. 38–50 and Louise Miskell, "Civic Leadership and the Manufacturing Elite: Dundee 1820–1870," pp. 51–69.

13 Johnston published poems in the *People's Journal* shortly after the period studied here. See H. Gustav Klaus, *Factory Girl: Ellen Johnston and Working-Class Poetry in Victorian Scotland* (Peter Lang: Frankfurt, 1998).

14 See Aileen Black, *Gilfillan of Dundee, 1813–1878: Interpreting Religion and Culture in Mid-Victorian Scotland* (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2006) on literary artisans in Victorian Dundee, particularly pp. 141–174.

15 A poem satirizing Leng, for instance, appeared as "The Consequential Editor" in "The Barber Shop" column, *Weekly News*, October 22, 1860, p. 2.

16 Donaldson, p. 29. See also Christopher A. Whatley, "Altering Images of the Industrial City: The Case of James Myles, the 'Factory Boy' and Mid-Victorian Dundee," in Miskell, Whatley, and Harris, p. 87.

17 See Robert McNair Wilson Cowan, *The Newspaper in Scotland: A Study of its First Expansion 1816–1860* (Glasgow: George Outram, 1946), p. 150.

18 The place of local news items is complicated by the fact that a successful provincial newspaper might have a number of local editions. The *People's Journal*, for instance, had eleven different editions "each prepared for a separate district" by the mid-1860s (Millar, p. 50). Local news items would therefore vary, but centralized features (including the poetry column) were syndicated across editions.

19 I take the term "established" from Paul Thomas Murphy, *Toward a Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals, 1816–1858* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1994), p. 4.

20 *Dundee Advertiser*, July 19, 1859; January 6, 1860 (Tennyson, extracts from "Sea-Dreams" and from *Idylls of the King*); December 4, 1860 (Stowe, "Lines to the Memory of 'Annie'"); January 3, 1860 (Emerson, "Italy 1859"); August 23, 1859 and elsewhere (O. W. Holmes, "Saint Anthony"); November 6, 1860 (Doane, "Stand Like An Anvil"). All poems reprinted on p. 4.

21 *Dundee Advertiser*, January 7, 1859 (Goethe, "The Spirit's Greeting"); December 20, 1859 (Krummacher, "The Little Church"); May 21, 1861 (Anderson, "The Kiss in Death"). All on p. 4.

22 W. E. Aytoun and Theodore Martin, *Poems and Ballads of Goethe* (Edinburgh, 1859). For reviews of Gilfillan's editions, see *Advertiser*, April 19, 1859, p. 3; October 14, 1859, p. 3. Campbell's edition of Petrarch is reviewed on September 9, 1859, p. 3.

23 *Advertiser*, July 12, 1860, p. 4 (Mackay, "The Bonnie Wee Bird"); February 8, 1859 and February 18, 1859, p. 4 (Craig, "To the Princess Frederick William"; Cowden Clarke, "To Isa Craig").

24 "The Benefactor of Baxter Park," *Advertiser*, August 3, 1860, p. 2.

25 "The Little Child With Radiant Eyes," *Advertiser*, March 1, 1859, p. 4.

26 Geddes is one of the relatively few Scottish working-class poets to have attracted attention. See Douglas Gifford and Hazel Hynd, "James Young Geddes, John Davidson and Scottish Poetry," in *Scottish Literature in English and Scots*, ed. Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan, and Alan MacGillivray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2002), pp. 349–378.

27 David Carnegie, *Lays and Lyrics from the Factory* (Arbroath, 1879). As Carnegie does not link the "A Son of St Tammas" pseudonym to his name here, I will continue to use the pseudonym for his newspaper poems.

28 *Dundee Courier*, October 6, 1858, p. 4 (Longfellow, "The Ropewalk"); November 16, 1859, p. 4 (Longfellow, "Enceladus").

29 On the cultural significance of the Burns centenary, see Christopher A. Whatley, "Robert Burns, Memorialization, and the 'Heart-beatings' of Victorian Scotland," in *Robert Burns in Global Culture*, ed. Murray Pittock (Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2011), pp. 204–228

30 *Courier*, March 30, 1859, p. 4 (A.M., "The Last Scottish Martyr"); June 15, 1859, p. 2 (Ivan, "A Poet's Love"). Further references to the *Courier* given in the text.

31 Searching available databases produces no other instances of "Come to Confession, Maud," but one apparent reference to it in another satirical poem reprinted in *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post or the Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser*, March 11, 1868. While

this suggests that it did not appear in *Punch* or a journal of similar stature, it does imply that it may have circulated in less well-known journals and newspapers. For another instance of the *Telegraph* reprinting a Wednesday *Courier* poem on Friday see also "The Wee White Rose," *Telegraph*, February 26, 1859, p. 4. The *Courier* also reprinted *Telegraph* poems, though usually with less immediacy: "The Last Scottish Martyr," for example, first appeared in the *Telegraph*, March 6, 1859, then in the *Courier* on March 30.

32 For example, on February 26, 1859, the barber, Rasper, recites "My Auld Horse and Me," signed "P.D., Queen St, Dundee," telling his carter friend that it is "the pure and simple production o' ane o' yer own brethren of the whip-cord." Another recurring character, Treddle, greets the poem with "Oh fie, barber! What's the use o' stiflin's wi' stuff like that?" ("The Barber Shop," *Weekly News*, February 26, 1859, p. 2). The great majority of poems published in "The Barber Shop" are unsigned and were probably written by the column's anonymous author.

33 *Weekly News*, March 10, 1860, p. 5. The column appears to have ended in May 1860.

34 The *Weekly News*, again probably in response to the success of the *Journal's* column, launched its own "Notes and Queries" column on March 10, 1860 (p. 5). It does not appear consistently and its comments on poems received are occasional. However, the *News* had a more established correspondents' column by the 1870s and published increasing amounts of "original" poetry.

35 The Lamb Collection in the Local History Centre, Dundee Central Library, contains several examples of penny broadsheet poems and song lyrics by Cameron, dated by reference to contemporary events to the mid-1850s (Box 125).

36 See Alan Reid, *Bards of Angus and the Mearns: An Anthology of the Counties* (Paisley, 1897), p. 85. Reid's account of Cameron as a deranged suicide might be treated with some skepticism, since the year of death he gives is inaccurate.

37 Lamb Collection, ref. 125/11. The collection includes a substantial number of memorial poems from mid-Victorian Dundee printed with similar borders and clearly used at funerals; it also contains instances of poems distributed as advertising material.

38 See M. Anderson and D. J. Morse, "The People," in *People and Society in Scotland*, vol 2. 1830–1914, ed. W. Hamish Fraser and R. J. Morris (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), p. 22.

39 See Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), especially chap. 2; and Bridget Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730–1837* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2008).

40 The *Weekly News* also weighs in on this debate in 1860, agreeing with the need to preserve rights of way while critical of Leng's involvement. See the discussion in "The Barber Shop," October 20, 1860, p. 2. For a wider discussion of land rights in this period, see T. M. Devine, *Clearance and Improvement: Land, Power and People in Scotland, 1700–1900* (Birlinn: John Donald, 2006).

41 Gifford, "Scottish Literature in the Victorian and Edwardian Era," in Gifford, Dunnigan, and MacGillivray, pp. 324–325. Gifford does, however, state later in the essay

that further exploration of the "achievements of broader popular culture" might present a more nuanced picture (p. 330).

42 Ellen Johnston published a selection of her poems with poetic responses from the *Penny Post* poetry column in her 1864 volume. See Judith Rosen, "Class and Poetic Communities: The Works of Ellen Johnston, 'The Factory Girl,'" *VP* 39, no. 2 (2001): 207–228.