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Robert MacLean
University of Glasgow

Gerard Carruthers
University of Glasgow

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A NEW JANET HAMILTON MANUSCRIPT

Robert MacLean and Gerard Carruthers

In early November 2017 a previously unrecorded poem in the hand of Janet Hamilton (1795–1873), the working-class poet from Coatbridge, was identified at University of Glasgow Library Archives & Special Collections. A user of the Special Collections reading room had requested the first volume of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (London: S.O. Beeton, 1852 [1853]; University of Glasgow Library Sp Coll RB 2772). The catalogue record gave no copy-specific information, provenance detail, or hint that the volume might contain a manuscript. When the user finished consulting it, the book was handed back to Robert MacLean at the supervisor's desk, and as he flipped open the cover to confirm the shelfmark, he was confronted with a handwritten poem, pasted to the inside cover, signed "Janet Hamilton," and recognised the name as one of the poets investigated in a current research project. This Carnegie Trust-funded project, "The People's Voice: Scottish political poetry, song and the franchise, 1832–1918," examines the neglected impact that local poetry and song cultures had in Scottish popular politics in the Victorian and early twentieth century eras.¹ Gerard Carruthers, one of the project investigators, was advised of the find and confirmed the Hamilton attribution by matching the handwriting with published examples.

The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine, subtitled "an illustrated journal, combining practical information, instruction & amusement," was a popular and affordable monthly periodical aimed at lower-middle class women. It was published by Samuel O. Beeton and edited by his wife Isabella Mary (who became famous as "Mrs Beeton" for her household tips and recipes). It was issued in 2 shilling monthly parts, initially of 32 pages, in octavo format, with contents including everything from serialised fiction, poetry, articles, and reviews, to recipes and dress and needlework patterns. The periodical began in May 1852 with a circulation of around 5,000 but

¹ For more information on this project, funded by the Carnegie Trust, 2016-2018, see "The People's Voice" project website: <https://thepeoplesvoice.glasgow.ac.uk/>

was increasingly successful, selling upwards of 60,000 copies of each issue by the early 1860s.² It has been variously described as “the most successful and influential of British Victorian middle-class women’s periodicals”, “the first ‘cheap’ magazine for women of the dispensing of practical information and advice on domestic management” and “the first British women’s magazine to achieve anything approaching mass sales.”³ The insertion of a Hamilton manuscript poem in a bound volume of this magazine suggests she had recognition and readership beyond the category of “working-class poet” within which she is often viewed.

The volume with the newly-discovered Hamilton poem is the first annual compilation of *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine’s* monthly parts, following serial publication from May 1852 to April 1853. It is in a purple embossed cloth-case edition binding (19.5 x 13 cm), with a gold-tooled-effect title on the spine, and illustrated with attractive wood engravings. The contents include essays on female education, a biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe, information on curing diseases in apple trees, and a whole range of what the index describes as “things worth knowing.”⁴ A paper label has been affixed near the head of the spine with a pen inscription “Autograph inscription by Janet Hamilton.”

Pasted to the inside front cover of the volume is a slip of blue writing paper printed with two vertical red rules at the margins, cut to size to fit the inside of the octavo cover and measuring 10 x 10 cm. Between the red rules a two stanza poem has been written in black ink in Hamilton’s distinctive hand employing a mixture of upper and lower case letter forms. Regardless of whether upper or lower case, the letter height remains reasonably uniform

² John S. North, ed., *The Waterloo directory of English newspapers and periodicals, 1800-1900* (Waterloo, ON: North Waterloo Academic Press, 2003); entry for *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* online at:

<http://www.victorianperiodicals.com/series3/showarticlespecial.asp?id=91784>.

³ Katherine Ledbetter, *British Victorian Women’s Periodicals: Beauty, Civilization, and Poetr.* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 267; Pauline A. Nestor, “A New Departure in Women’s Publishing: *The English Woman’s Journal* and *The Victoria Magazine*,” *Victorian Periodicals Review*. 15:2 (1982), 93–106 (94); and David Doughan, “British Women’s Serials,” in J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. Van Arsdell, eds., *Victorian Periodicals: A Guide to Research, II* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1989), 67–73 (67).

⁴ Hamilton’s poem, “Lines Written at the Birth of the Year, 1853” refers to Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Janet Hamilton, *Poems, Essays and Sketches* etc. [Glasgow: J. MacLehose, 1880], 63-4) and she also pens “Lines Addressed to Mrs. H.B. Stowe, On the Occasion of her visit to Glasgow, April 13, 1853”, Hamilton, *Poems, Essays and Sketches* etc., 352.

without ascenders much above the line or descenders far below, lending the overall appearance a blocky almost printed aspect.

The verses are headed by a three-line title “Lines inscribed To Miss Margaret Young daughter to John Young author of Poor House Lays etc.”⁵ Beneath this is the poem itself in two four-line stanzas signed in the same blocky script with the author’s name “Janet Hamilton.” The poem reads:

Dear girl while the blossom of youth
in their fragrance and beauty are thine,
May the tendrils of virtue and truth
with the flower of affection entwine.
May the bounties and blessings of grace
May the dews and the breathings of heaven,
to cherish, to guard and solace
To the dutiful daughter be given.

Written below the autograph, in pencil, in a different hand, is the date, 1861, and a transcription of the verses, presumably added as an aid to decoding Hamilton’s unusual blocky script, though the transcription is scarcely more legible than the original. These pencilled additions, as probably also the paper label added to the volume spine, are the hand of a previous owner of the volume, George Dunlop (1842–1909).⁶

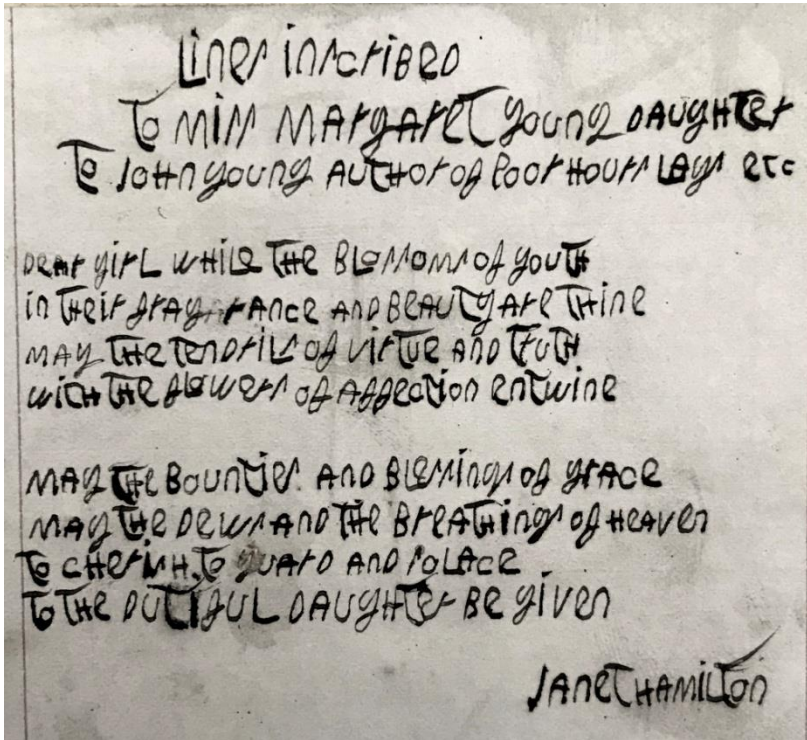
According to a bookplate affixed to a thin paper flyleaf this book was presented to the University of Glasgow Library in 1951 by George B. Dunlop (d. 1950), proprietor of the *Kilmarnock Standard* newspaper. An obituary for George B. Dunlop in the *Kilmarnock Standard* for 12th October 1950 specifically mentions his library: “Mr Dunlop was ... the possessor of an extensive library, which included a considerable number of volumes of Ayrshire interest, many of which had been passed on to him by his father.”⁷

After he died, his widow Annie Isabella Dunlop (1897–1973) presented the University of Glasgow with 170 volumes of English and Scottish literature from his library. A decision was taken on accession to distribute the collection amongst the general stock, although sometimes books from it be identified by a Dunlop book stamp or, as in this case, a gift bookplate.

⁵ John Young (1825-91). For references on Young’s work, and discussion of his interaction with Hamilton, see a later section of this article.

⁶ We are grateful to Jane R. Siegel, Librarian for Rare Books & Bibliographic Services, Columbia University, New York, for providing scans of George Dunlop’s handwriting: see letter from William Young to Dunlop (11 September 1902) with accompanying note in pencil in Dunlop’s hand (George Dunlop Papers, 1716-1908, MS #0371).

⁷ “‘Standard’ proprietor’s death,” *Kilmarnock Standard*, October 12, 1950, at: <http://www.kilmarnockchessclub.co.uk/gbdunlopobituary.htm> (last accessed May 2018).



Janet Hamilton, "Lines"

Image courtesy of University of Glasgow Libraries

Dunlop's father, George Dunlop (1842–1909) had also been editor and joint proprietor of the *Kilmarnock Standard*. A lengthy obituary for Dunlop senior describes him as a great lover and collector of rare books and autographs:

His library—a very extensive one—contains the works of the best authors and embraces thousands of volumes. These are arranged in such a methodical manner that he was able to lay his hands at once upon anything that he had acquired in the way of reference.... Mr Dunlop had one great hobby—the collecting of rare books, manuscripts, and autographs, and it is quite safe to say that his collection of these is not only valuable but in some respects unique. His autographs, in particular, form several highly interesting albums, embracing the names of famous statesmen, poets, authors,

philosophers, musicians, soldiers, and heroes of every description, not only of Great Britain but of various foreign countries.⁸

The obituary identifies Dunlop as a knowledgeable enthusiast for Scottish literature; he was a past President of the Kilmarnock Burns Club, was an Executive Committee member of the Burns Federation, wrote on Robert Burns, Hew Ainslie and others, and edited a life of Ainslie.⁹ A 4-box collection of letters, manuscripts and autographs collected by Dunlop including letters from Robert Burns, Samuel Johnson, Hester Thrale Piozzi, Edgar Allan Poe, and Abraham Lincoln, is now held by Columbia University Library in New York, gifted in 1972 by Dunlop's granddaughter, Nora Elizabeth Scott.¹⁰

As the manuscript heading indicates, the newly-discovered manuscript verses were written (and presumably composed) by Janet Hamilton for Margaret Young, the teenage daughter of Hamilton's fellow working class poet and collaborator John Young (1825–91).¹¹ Hamilton's connection with the Young family is interesting in that John, like Hamilton, was a poet living with a disability. In 1853 a workplace accident rendered him unfit for work, and for a number of years he found himself in Barnhill Poorhouse in the north of Glasgow. His first book, published in 1860, was titled *Lays from the poorhouse: being a collection of temperance and miscellaneous pieces, chiefly Scottish* (Glasgow: George Gallie, 1860).¹² In later life, Young was, like Hamilton, badly sight-impaired. The 1860 subtitle suggests he also shared Hamilton's strong temperance beliefs. Young's memoir of Hamilton states that the two poets first met, following earlier correspondence, in the early summer of 1861, so this inscription is unlikely to precede that event.¹³

⁸ *Kilmarnock Standard* (3 July 1909) "In memoriam our editor: Mr George Dunlop." Transcribed by Heather Dunlop, Burns Monument Centre. With thanks to Heather Dunlop and East Ayrshire Leisure Trust, Burns Monument Centre, for the assistance and permission to quote from the transcription.

⁹ Dunlop's obituary and the publisher's preface indicate this was Thomas C. Latto's "Life of Ainslie," appended to Hew Ainslie, *A Pilgrimage to the Land of Burns* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1892).

¹⁰ On the George Dunlop papers, 1716–1908 (Columbia U.L. MS#0371), see: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/archival/collections/ldpd_4078717/.

¹¹ The 1861 Census shows the Young family living at 4 Stirling St, Cowcaddens, the same address he used in November 1860 in the preface to his book. Young's occupation is given as "literary author," his wife (also Margaret) was 5 years older than him. The census entry shows no children 5-15 at home attending school, so his daughter Margaret, born 1846, so then 14, can't still have been in school.

¹² For Young's publications, see Catherine W. Reilly, *Mid-Victorian Poetry 1860-79: An Annotated Bibliography* (London and New York: Mansell, 2000), 514.

¹³ John Young, *Pictures in prose and verse; or, personal recollections of the late Janet Hamilton, Langloan. Together with several hitherto unpublished poetic pieces*

Hamilton was completely blind by 1866, which provides a *terminus ante quem* for the inscription.¹⁴

Under which circumstances might a poem like this be written? Perhaps the best clue lies in Young's second published volume *Lays from the Ingle Nook*, in his poem "Lines to my daughter Maggie, on her fifteenth birth-day, September 21, 1861."¹⁵ This poem celebrates Margaret's coming of age in thirteen stanzas. This event took place shortly after Hamilton and Young first met, and the contents of Hamilton's lines would certainly seem to lend them to such an occasion. A closer reading of the two poems might even suggest that they are in dialogue with one another. Hamilton's title "Lines inscribed to Miss Margaret Young" is a direct echo of Young's own title "Lines to my daughter Maggie." Hamilton's lines can be read as a response to Young's hopes that his daughter's path through life might be easier than his own:

Thy path through life be smoother far
Than mine has been,
May Bethlehem's transcendent star
Brighten the scene;
Sweet flowers along thy pathway spring,
And, till the azure welkin ring, [welkin: heavens
With merry birdies may'st thou sing,
My Maggie.¹⁶

Both poems employ botanical floral imagery, and Hamilton was at least arguably developing the image in Young's line "sweet flowers along thy pathway spring" in her own opening stanza:

Dear girl while the blossom of youth
in their fragrance and beauty are thine,
May the tendrils of virtue and truth
with the flower of affection entwine.

The relationship between the Hamilton manuscript and the bound volume in which it was found remains a matter of conjecture. Can we be

(Glasgow: George Gallie, 1877), 28; copy in University of Glasgow Library "Store 19th Cent. English MY80.P4 1877".

¹⁴ Young, *Pictures* (1877), 35; Florence Boos, "Janet Hamilton," in William Thesing, *Victorian Women Poets*, [Dictionary of Literary Biography] (Columbia, S. C.: Brucoli, Clark, Layman: 1998), 149–58 (151), online from Prof. Boos's website: <http://myweb.uiowa.edu/fsboos/questions/workingclass.html> (accessed April 3, 2018), and from the Gale/Cengage Literary Resource Center.

¹⁵ John Young, *Lays from the Ingle Nook: a collection of tales, sketches, &c. dedicated with permission to Alexander Ewing, Esq., Chairman of the Barony Parochial Board, Glasgow* (Glasgow: George Gallie, 1863). See University of Glasgow Library "Sp Coll BG60-h.38".

¹⁶ John Young, *Lays from the Ingle Nook* (1863), 38 (35-39).

sure that the poem, and the book have always been together or might they have been married up at some later point? Other than the pasted-in poem there are no signs of Hamilton elsewhere in the volume—no ownership signature, no marginalia, no signs of intervention. The magazine contents match well with the sentiments of the poem (for example, the very first article is an essay on the subject of female education), and plausibly the book was presented to Margaret in 1861 as a gift accompanying the poem. If this were the case, though, why not write the poem directly onto an endpaper or flyleaf rather than onto a separate piece of paper, and why is there no gift inscription or ownership signature in book itself? One possibility is that the poem was originally sent as part of a letter from Hamilton to the Youngs, and that John or Margaret later cut it out and, to preserve it, pasted it in the endpapers of the book, which might have been a gift from Hamilton, or associated with her in some way, but perhaps simply a treasured but unrelated volume. It seems less likely that it was pasted into an unrelated volume by a later owner, especially by an autograph collector such as George Dunlop.

With recent research, the extent of Hamilton's work is becoming more evident, but occasional verses such as these, and scattered manuscript material, have been less fully explored or catalogued. Brief in themselves, such discoveries round out scholarly knowledge and awareness of Hamilton's voice, recurrent imagery, and contemporary readership. As her characteristic hand becomes more widely recognized, it seems very probable that there are further such discoveries to be made in other collections.

University of Glasgow