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LOCATING SCOTTISH COSMOPOLITANISM IN THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE

Alison Chapman

Where do we look for Scottish cosmopolitan poets? Recent scholarship has addressed poetry in specific periodicals dedicated to Celticism and revivalism, such *The Pagan Review* (1894) and *The Evergreen* (1895-1897).¹ But Scottish cosmopolitan poetry was also disseminated through other kinds of British serial print. Locating this bibliodiversity offers opportunities to redefine cosmopolitan poetry in mainstream serial print that seems at odds with the anti-materialistic and anti-commodification associations of cosmopolitan aesthetics, especially as leading aestheticist periodicals, most notably *The Yellow Book* (1894-1897), defined themselves against periodical culture. At the same time as the aestheticist and decadent movements, in Stefano Evangelista's words, attacked the "nineteenth-century cult of progress and materialism," Victorian Scottish cosmopolitanism was circulated in non-cosmopolitan serial print apparently associated intimately with a very non-cosmopolitan worldview, such as *Good Words* and *Chambers's Journal*.² And, in addition, some of these most prominent print venues for mass circulation of cosmopolitan poetry were closely affiliated with Scotland.

Such contradictions are readily apparent in a digital literary archive, which affords the discovery of poetry publication patterns across a large

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¹ For example, Michael Shaw, *The Fin-de-Siècle Scottish Revival: Romance, Decadence and Celtic Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021); Julian Hanna, "Manifestoes at Dawn: Nation, City and Self in Patrick Geddes and William Sharp's *Evergreen*," *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 8 (2011): 1-15.

² Stefano Evangelista, "Decadence and Aestheticism," in Dennis Denisoff and Talia Schaffer, eds, *The Routledge Companion to Victorian Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020), 106.

corpus. This article examines these issues in one particular archive, the in-progress *Digital Victorian Periodical Project* (DVPP).³ DVPP has a threefold aim. First, to index all poems (and poem translations into English) in Victorian periodicals based on the University of Victoria's Special Collections holdings, adding page images, bibliographical metadata, and poem attributions. Currently DVPP encompasses 21 periodicals and almost 15, 500 poems. Second, DVPP encodes a poem sample (based on decadal years from 1820 to 1900) for poetical and material features (such as rhyme scheme and genre). Third, DVPP has a substantial personography of Victorian poets, translators, and illustrators, with biographical metadata (such as nationality, birth and death dates, gender) on almost 4,000 individuals. There are also advanced search pages in development, for example allowing users to discover poets based on nationality. Of course, these results depend on the project knowing the historical identity of pseudonymous or anonymous poets, of whom there are many (currently DVPP incorporates 3,473 pseudonymous poems and 4,139 unsigned poems).

With these caveats, the corpus currently includes 366 Scottish poets, translators, and illustrators who participated in a diverse ephemeral British print network over the long Victorian period. From 1880 to 1901, currently 56 Scottish poets and 9 translators are identified in this corpus, including many well-known names such as William Sharp, John Davidson, James Thomson, Margaret Armour, Douglas Ainslie, Katharine de Mattos, Andrew Lang, Ronald Macfie Campbell, Kenneth Grahame, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Marie Clothilde Balfour. While not all the 65 Scottish writers participated in cosmopolitanism, the vibrancy of late Victorian Scottish poetry in these British periodicals offers a literary culture that cosmopolitanism both defined itself against and participated in.

The parameters of this corpus rely on periodicals representative of a range of kinds of literary serials over the long Victorian period, from working-class radical newspapers to feminist magazines to highbrow periodicals.⁴ Some are aligned with late Victorian aestheticist and decadent movements. *The Yellow Book*, in particular, featured Scottish poets. Many of the mass-produced titles, not affiliated with aestheticism or decadence, also published Scottish poets and feature Scottish themes, often as part of their implied or overt editorial mission. In DVPP, searching for Scottish poets publishing in the late Victorian period reveals patterns of publication of many of the leading cosmopolitan figures in non-cosmopolitan

³ Alison Chapman, ed., *The Digital Victorian Periodical Poetry Project*: <https://dvpp.uvic.ca/>.

⁴ For the list of periodicals see <https://dvpp.uvic.ca/periodicals.html>.

magazines. Prominent examples are John Davidson and William Sharp, both Scottish cosmopolitan poets largely exiled in London.

Davidson, a member of the Rhymers' Club and well known for his *Fleet Street Eclogues* (1893, 1896), published six poems in *The Yellow Book* over 1894 and 1895. But earlier, in 1893, he had placed "Chrysanthemums" in *Good Words*, under the pseudonym "Menzies Macdonald."⁵ *Good Words*, a non-sectarian religious magazine aimed at middle-class family reading, was closely associated with Scotland. The initial publisher of *Good Words*, Strahan & Co, was founded by the Scot Alexander Strahan with William Isbister, and based at the outset in Edinburgh, before moving to London in 1862.⁶ The first editor, Church of Scotland minister Norman MacLeod, was succeeded in 1872 by his brother Donald, a Scottish chaplain for Queen Victoria.⁷ *Good Words* was a commercially successful mainstream periodical, attracting leading writers and illustrators. While the magazine contained miscellaneous content conventional for a monthly magazine, it frequently featured Scottish writers and Scottish themed contributions. Davidson's poem in *Good Words*, under a doubly Scottish pseudonym, signals the poem as an overtly Scottish contribution in a popular monthly. As Shaw outlines (175-81), Davidson had an antipathy to Scottish revivalism and believed that Scottish national identity should be assimilated into Britishness.⁸ And so, in the context of *Good Words*, Davidson's pseudonym seems satirical. The poem is exuberantly illustrated by A. Chalon, with visual codes signifying a restrained domesticated aestheticism, with the flowers tumbling out of a large vase in the upper corner, peacock feathers on the wall opposite, and in between a seated mother in a loose flowing gown holding a child clinging tightly and imploringly around her neck. John Sloan identifies the authorship of this poem, as well as two other prose contributions in *Good Words* with the same pseudonym, pointing out that these publications directly arose out of Davidson's friendship with William Canton, who was

⁵ John Davidson, "Chrysanthemums," *Good Words* 34 (September 1893): 383. John Sloan identified the pseudonym in "New Poems by John Davidson," *Review of English Studies*, 44.176 (1993): 548-51. Menzies is a speaker in Davidson's *Fleet Street Eclogues*. For Davidson's poems in DVPP, see "Davidson, John," https://dvpp.uvic.ca/prs_374.html.

⁶ Damian Atkinson, "Strahan, Alexander Stuart, (1833-1918)," in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, eds, *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (Ghent and London: Academia Press and the British Library, 2009), 604; Patricia Thomas Srebrnik, *Alexander Strahan, Victorian Publisher* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1986).

⁷ Amy Lloyd, "Good Words (1860-1911)," in *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, 254; Srebrnik, 38-47.

⁸ Shaw, *Scottish Revival*, 175-81.

General Manager of William Isbister and Company, as a favour to Davidson after the success of the first series of *Fleet Street Eclogues*, published in April 1892, when he was suffering from ongoing financial distress. Sloan dismisses “Chrysanthemums” as “a slight but charming piece of magazine verse.”⁹

But this poem is worth a closer look. The speaker declines to tell the child a story for the first four stanzas, instead referring backwards to another child in the past who had also requested a bedtime story from their mother, and how that mother also in turn responded by telling her about yet another child who was “crossed”: “Still backward was the tale referred / To weary her.” This child, however, refuses to be satisfied by the speaker’s resistance to the “irksome story-telling duty,” and so is finally told the beginning of a story: “‘Once on a time,’ low, slow, and steady.” The child immediately falls asleep. In a poem placed within a popular commercial family magazine, Davidson makes a poem out of a refusal to take a request until the very end. Looming over all poem, and facing it in the full-page illustration, are the chrysanthemums: “At tea-time in the ruddy light— / Chrysanthemums were in their glory.” Chrysanthemums, an autumnal flower, are appropriate for a poem published in September, and periodical poems frequently signal seasonality in their poems. The glorious chrysanthemums that frame the poem, and loom disproportionately large, stand as a figure for presence and loss. The genus in the illustration appear as Chinese chrysanthemums that, according to Kate Greenaway’s *Language of Flowers* (1884), symbolise “cheerfulness under adversity.”¹⁰ For a Scottish poet exiled in London and in acute financial distress, these flowers are resonant. This is a playful, perhaps even mocking poem, not as conventional as it first appears, and not as slight as Sloan suggests. It refuses to give the requested “good words” that are “worth much and cost little” of the magazine’s motto, to perform quite as expected for the family magazine. But in the end the story demanded by the child on the speaker’s lap begins—with the conventional “Once on a time”—and the target audience promptly falls asleep. The pseudonym removes any trace of Davidson’s authorship, as he pockets the much needed money and provides a superficially appropriate family magazine poem. This is not at first sight an identifiable cosmopolitan poem in the pages of *Good Words*, and is certainly dramatically different from Davidson’s contributions to the *Yellow Book*, which began publishing Davidson’s poems six months later in April 1894. But “Chrysanthemums” nonetheless suggests the importance of tracking late Victorian Scottish poets’ work in mass

⁹ Sloan, “New Poems”: 549.

¹⁰ *Language of Flowers*, illustrated by Kate Greenaway (London: Routledge and Sons, 1884), 12.

publications, as a dissemination and mediation of cosmopolitanism poetry. Although it seems out of place in Davidson's better known nihilistic poetry, the resistance and the coded mockery are not.

Between 1878 and 1893, William Sharp also published poems in *Good Words*.¹¹ All except one of his eight poems date from the period before he became involved with Geddes' *Evergreen* circle, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the invention of his alter-ego "Fiona Macleod," and the withdrawal of "the approved veils of Convention" announced in *The Pagan Review*.¹² Nonetheless they develop a mystical Celtic aestheticism. Like Davidson, Sharp's periodical poems also arose out of pecuniary and professional necessity, as well as to establish his literary identity.¹³ Also, like Davidson, Sharp's *Good Words* publications arose from a friendship with the editor, from whom he possibly derived part of his "Fiona MacLeod" pseudonym, and from whom he also deepened his knowledge of Scottish legend and mysticism.¹⁴ Sharp's *Good Words* poetry seeded his developing Celtic aestheticism in a distinctly non-aestheticist magazine. The four nocturnes, the earliest of these poems, celebrate the sensuous sounds and silences of the night. "A Nocturne of Chopin's," published in January 1878, the year Sharp moved to London and met Dante Gabriel Rossetti, establishes his Celtic Pre-Raphaelitism based on a mystical sense of place and a poetics of echoic repetition (the rhyme scheme is based on a single rhyme word in each stanza or octet, alternating with unrhymed lines).¹⁵ The poem imitates the mood of an unidentified Chopin nocturne, and also includes references to Christina Rossetti's "Echo" and Tennyson's "Break, break, break." These echoic poetics are also repeated in later *Good Words* poems, and indeed the nocturnes seem very similar to each other, as if Sharp is repeating and replicating himself as well as other poets, and establishing a Celtic dreamscape based on a poetics of fragmentary repetition. The two sonnets that make up "'Am Meer.' (Schubert.)," or "By the Sea," published in 1880, are loosely based on Heine's song set to music by Schubert, turning Heine's lyric of unrequited love into an isolated oceanic nocturne.¹⁶ This nocturne is based on Heine as well as Schubert, creating a version of the Petrarchan sonnet that moves from "The long

¹¹ "Sharp, William," https://dvpp.uvic.ca/prs_1044.html

¹² "Foreword," *The Pagan Review*, (August 1892): 2.

¹³ Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp: A Memoir* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), 58.

¹⁴ See William F. Halloran, ed., *The Life and Letters of William Sharp*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018), I, 272, 643.

¹⁵ William Sharp, "A Nocturne of Chopin's," *Good Words*, 19 (January 1878): 454.

¹⁶ William Sharp, "'Am Meer.' (Schubert.)," *Good Words*, 21 (December 1880): 310; Heinrich Heine, "Am Meer," transl. Richard Wigmore, *Oxford Lieder* (2022) <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/996>.

moan of the monotonous sea” to the “harsh echo” of the sea surf in the caves, to the “wild release” of silence as the storm ends. In Sharp’s “Am Meer,” Heine’s lyric and Schubert’s setting are incorporated but at the service of the agency of the sea itself. We are told to “Hark!” and to “Hush!,” at each Petrarchan turn, but there is no human agency represented in the sonnets. This multi-sensory, literary and musical oceanic nocturne, set in “unknown shores,” creates a strangely dislocated European cosmopolitanism poetics that is then placed within Scottish-affiliated print culture.

An uneasy displacement is also evident in Sharp’s next three poems for *Good Words*. In “A Ballad of Tennis” (1885), the summer pastoral fun of a tennis game becomes the venue for a romantic frustration wryly expressed in a closed verse form.¹⁷ The ode “May in Surrey” (1886) exuberantly celebrates “this divine rebirth” of Spring and the birdsong, as a blissful sensuous golden dream.¹⁸ But, as the last stanza admits in a parenthesis, over it all is the thought of winter: “(ah, hush! thou dubious thought / That dost recall the waning of the year— / The bleak, drear, wintry death).” Sharp’s next poem, “The Yellowhammer” (1887), figures the speaker as “a little lonely bird” that sings his “morning song” loudly and easily: “Out on the waste, out on the waste, I flit all day as I sing / *Sweet, sweet, sweet is the world—dear world—how beautiful everything!*” His song is of the “wild free moorlands” and “golden gorse”: “And little perhaps of the joy of the world is that which I taste.”¹⁹ In what seems to be a foreshadowing of Sharp’s later paganism, the reiterated “sweet” song recalls Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “A Musical Instrument” (1860), where Pan makes music “sweet, sweet, sweet” and even “Piercing sweet by the river” that revivifies nature but at the cost of the river nymph from whom he crafted his pipes.²⁰ Sharp’s yellowhammer sings only of the moorland waste, not the metropolitan or human world, and the cost of his excessively sweet poetic song and his freedom is loneliness and displacement.

The last identified poem that Sharp publishes in *Good Words*, “Into the Silence. A Death in the West Highlands” (1893), is another Petrarchan sonnet that offers an elegy for the Scots Gaelic ways as well as for

¹⁷ William Sharp, “A Ballad of Tennis,” *Good Words*, 26 (1885): 765.

¹⁸ William Sharp, “May in Surrey,” *Good Words*, 27 (1886): 309.

¹⁹ William Sharp, “The Yellowhammer,” *Good Words*, 28 (1887): 527-28.

²⁰ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “A Musical Instrument,” *Cornhill Magazine*, 2 (July 1860): 84-85. For importance of Pan and paganism to Sharp see Shaw, *Scottish Revival*, 167-71.

Sheumais, a West Highlander who has died and “gone into the Silence.”²¹ This poem seems to fit into the many Highland-themed contributions in *Good Words*, commemorating and memorializing Highland culture. Rather than presenting an opposition between Highland culture and the outward facing Scottish cultural revivalism, some fin-de-siècle writers recovered and reclaimed Highland culture as part of the broader redefinition of Scottish modern identity, as Shaw argues, and especially as an argument against national stadialism.²² This poem by Sharp does seem to demonstrate a Scottish romanticised nationalism, made even more pronounced by its publication in the pages of *Good Words*, that is replete with Highland nostalgia, especially as the very next contribution is a lighthearted essay on “Highland Seers.” In this print context, Sharp’s poem is placed as a sentimental tribute to Scots Gaelic ways of life, which are going “into the Silence” along with the dead Highlander: “And everywhere there is a sense of loss.” The sonnet form, however, complicates this reading. As with the two sonnets that form “Am Meer,” which loosely translate Heine’s words and Schubert’s setting to produce an echoic oceanic nocturne, so “Into the Silence” also deploys a Petrarchan sonnet to tell of the communal lament as another kind of symbolic cultural translation. Sharp was extremely accomplished at sonnet writing as a supremely self-conscious form, publishing his 1886 anthology *Sonnets of this Century* with a prefatory essay on the genre as a marker of the century’s modernity through revitalizing old European forms, arguing too (in opposition to Hall Caine) that the English national sonnet is not in fact a pure indigenous invention, but derivative of older Italian forms.²³ Sharp concludes this essay by mentioning that he is writing near Ben Ledi, in the Trossachs, Highland scenery that prompts him to reflect that nature surpasses art, and “that the sincerest poetic function—for sonneteer as for lyricist or epicist—is not the creation of what is strange or fanciful, but the imaginative interpretation of what is familiar, so that a thing is made new to us.”²⁴ In this light, Sharp’s “Into the Silence” places familiar Highland culture into an old Italian form, to make both new to us within the pages of a popular Scottish monthly. But, while this last poem in *Good Words* does not separate out Highland nostalgia from cosmopolitan internationalism and modernity, the familiar *Good Words* gothic typeface used for the subtitle seems nevertheless to insist on archaism and, undoubtedly, Sharp

²¹ William Sharp, “Into the Silence. A Death in the West Highlands,” *Good Words*, 34 (September 1893): 196. This poem is in the same volume of *Good Words* as “Chrysanthemums.”

²² See Shaw, *Scottish Revival*, 33-87.

²³ William Sharp, ed., *Sonnets of this Century* (London: Walter Scott, 1886), lx-lxi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, lxxx-lxxxi.

also needed the fee from this family magazine. Consolidating the diverse periodical publications of Scottish cosmopolitan poets is not seamless, but instead suggests displacement, an uneasy cosmopolitanism that troubles a coherent sense of late century print culture. The *Good Words* poems of Davidson and Sharp place their outward looking cosmopolitanism, their citizenship of the world that disdained the “general public” and Victorian earnest progress and consumerism, back within a commercial print culture associated with Scottish nostalgia.²⁵ But their poems also seeded a cosmopolitan poetics within mainstream mass-circulated print culture.

The Scottish poets in DVPP publishing from 1880 also disclose the significance of another popular commercial periodical associated with Scotland: *Chambers's Journal*, another unlikely venue for cosmopolitan poetry. This weekly periodical, begun in 1832 with the aim of democratizing knowledge through cheap improving print, was associated in particular with Edinburgh, although the city was dropped from the title in 1854. Like *Good Words*, *Chambers's* was an immense commercial and popular success, that was at the vanguard of Victorian mass publication initiatives as Aileen Fyfe explores, with a broad mandate to entertain and edify, and also with a miscellaneous range of topics and genres that included a consistent emphasis on Scottish writers and Scottish topics.²⁶ A search of the DVPP corpus for Scottish poets publishing at the end of the century reveals two women poets with Edinburgh connections, each members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, who published in *Chambers's* in the 1890s, participating in the fin-de-siècle occultism that was intrinsic to Scottish cultural revivalism. Francis Annesley Brodie-Innes (1853-1942), an English writer based in Edinburgh, published four poems in 1900 and 1901 as “Francis Annesley.”²⁷ She was married to William Brodie-Innes, a major figure in the Edinburgh temple of the Golden Dawn, of which she was also a member.²⁸ Her poems in *Chambers's*, all sonnets, are invested in typical occult themes of the spirits, the infinite, and the mysterious hereafter. The Scottish poet and spiritualist Violet Tweedale (1862-1936), a member of the London temple of the Golden Dawn, published three poems in *Chambers's Journal* in this

²⁵ “Foreword,” *The Pagan Review* (August 1892): 1.

²⁶ Aileen Fyfe, *Steam-Powered Knowledge: William Chambers and the Business of Publishing, 1820-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

²⁷ See “Brodie-Innes, Francis Annesley,” https://dvpp.uvic.ca/prs_3783.html; attribution made through the Chambers publishing ledgers in the National Library of Scotland (NLS Dep 341/371).

²⁸ See Sally Davis, *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn: Biographies of Members*, Version 2.0.0 (20 March 2021): <https://zenodo.org/record/1101071#.YdN5UBPMJ0I>.

period. Tweedale was the granddaughter of Robert Chambers, one of the founding editors, and had worked as an informal editorial assistant.²⁹ Their *Chambers's* poetry seems conventionally feminine, and superficially appropriate to occupy the regular definitive filler poetry spot on the lower right corner of the issue's last page. But their poems have an overt occultist investment in tropes of renewal—winter to spring, death to life, sleeping to wakefulness, decay to delight— as if the echoic and repetitive poetics can bring about the cultural revival of nature, culture, and the spirit world together. Tweedale's "New Year," published in December 1901, for example, sees mystic rebirth in the turn from the old to the new year:

Behold! another year from sable night
Is born unto us, robed in pallid light.
Creeps on once more the eternal mystic birth
Upon the waiting, hoary-headed earth.³⁰

The poem channels nature's call to "Arise! arise!" and then "Awake! awake!," with the spheres echoing the earth's call for the strength and resurgence of Spring. At the poem's end, the echoes become re-echoes, part of the ancient call for revival: "Again the psalm of life re-echoes strong, / Harmonious, sweet, through all the ages long." Tweedale's poems in *Chambers's* are all in couplets, and while this might seem a simple and even naive form, they lend themselves to gnomic chanting. In the very end corners of *Chambers's* weekly issues, by the end of the century a byword for earnest Victorian reading material, they give room to the Scottish twilight movement, couched in context perhaps as another derivative filler poem to some readers, but nonetheless channelling the occult revival aesthetics. Despite the fact that fin-de-siècle occultism rejected Victorian materiality and commercialism, the Celtic twilight movement takes advantage of the filler spot in mass published magazines to perform its ritualised poetic and occultist work.

The bibliodiversity of Scottish cosmopolitan poetry in DVPP is most readily located through searches for writers and nationality, and then filtering for publications from the 1880s. Within the DVPP corpus, the association of cosmopolitanism with late nineteenth-century Scottish movements—especially cultural revivalism, Celtic aestheticism, decadence, occultism—does suggest a spectrum of poets, poetry, and print dissemination, and an uneven and dislocated literary cosmopolitanism. And yet because these broad searches within a large corpus depend on the nationality metadata of person records, they also potentially reinscribe conventional understandings of Scottish cosmopolitanism. If "Menzie's

²⁹ "Tweedale, Violet," https://dvpp.uvic.ca/prs_3807.html.

³⁰ Violet Tweedale, "New Year," *Chambers's Journal*, ser. 6, 5 (28 December 1901): 64.

Macdonald” was not identified in DVPP as a pseudonym for John Davidson, would “Chrysanthemums” still be a cosmopolitan poem? And if “Francis Anneseley” was not attributed to Brodie-Innes, would her sonnets seem anything other than conventional feminised periodical filler? While this discovery of Scottish cosmopolitanism in the DVPP corpus is largely dependent on the personography metadata, identifying the range of cosmopolitan poetry can also be achieved through searching the dataset for poetic features and styles associated with the movement, such as (in the case of the poets discussed here) closed forms, couplets, echoic rhyme schemes, and innovative variations to Petrarchan sonnets. DVPP is completing TEI markup for poetical features in the encoded poetry sample, with a poetics search page that will allow for a wide variety of advanced search queries. These kinds of wide-angled searches within a large dataset would help interrogate the association between poetics and national identity, as well as the varieties of serial print culture that participated in Scottish cosmopolitanism. Is a Scottish cosmopolitan poetics specifically identified with only Scottish poets? And how to identify a variety of Scottish national affiliations, when many poets moved across the border in both directions, and had differing and complex identifications with Scotland and Scottishness, as with all four poets discussed here? These future poetry-centric, as opposed to person-centric, searches, can, potentially, help locate a capacious and dispersed Scottish cosmopolitan poetry without losing a sense of cultural and national coherence. To adapt Sharp’s essay on the sonnet, the challenge from such poetry is not to create something strange or fanciful, but to make Scottish cosmopolitanism anew.

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