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Advertising Poetry, the Working-Class Poet and the Victorian Newspaper Press

In late September 1867, a number of British newspapers gleefully reported on the alleged intrusion of an American boot-polish manufacturer into Alfred Tennyson's home:

> 'The affair which brings me here,' resumed the American, is more important to you than to me. You know that the great British blacking-maker Warren & Co. keep a poet, and that business has increased in consequence of his verses. I am a blacking maker at Boston, and it strikes me that we might hit it off together. You make the verses, and I will make the blacking!'…'Get rid of him, get rid of him!'' shouted the poet, in accents of horror and despair.[1]

The story is amusing both because it satirizes the supposed commercial instincts of Americans as a nation, and because it plays on a perceived Tennysonian ideal of the poet as entirely above the crass associations of poetry and commerce. It is also a joke about a British advertising campaign which at this point was over forty years old. Warren's 1820s blacking advertisements, often in verse, were some of the most famous of their period, and the anecdote that Mrs Warren had smugly responded 'We keeps a poet', when asked about the reason for their success – and that this poet was

I am indebted to Andrew Hobbs for previous discussions of his research into advertising poetry in the Northern press and for sharing his work in this field.

[1] 'The Poet Laureate and the Blacking Maker', *Leeds Mercury*, 30 September 1867, p.1.

Lord Byron – was very well-known.[2] The American is considerably behind the times in his vision of modern British advertising.

By early October, one of Britain's most prolific contemporary verse advertisers, the tailor Hyam's (a London-based company, but one which primarily operated in major industrial cities, including Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Glasgow) had in turn converted this story into a poem in 'The Laureate and the Blacking Manufacturer.' After relating the American's visit, the final verses criticize Tennyson's 'horror':

The Laureate gets confused, 'tis clear!
  (We think we can espy him);
He fears his winged nag to risk
  With Pegasus of HYAM.
Besides, the Laureate Tennyson,
  Writes only for a class,
While HYAM's laureate writes for all
  The great industrial mass.

B. HYAM's object purely is
  High prices to abolish
And needs not the bright lustre of
  The Tennysonian polish.

[2] For an account of Warren's advertising, and William Frederick Deacon's famous parody volume, *Warreniana* (1824), see John Strachan, '"The Praise of Blacking": William Frederick Deacon's *Warreniana* and Early Nineteenth-Century Advertising-Related Parody', *Romanticism on the Net* 15 (1999), 22 paragraphs.

His Goods are all the choicest wool,

His styles and fashions chaste

Skilled workmen who can always please

The most fastidious taste.[3]

Hyam's poem rebrands Tennyson's supposed distaste for advertising verse as pricy snobbishness. Unlike Tennyson's exclusive and expensive verse, Hyam's laureate's products are available to all the working-class readers of the provincial press. Moreover, the simplicity, or the crudity, of Hyam's advertising poem, with its awkward metre and hudibrastic rhyme ('espy him/Hyam'), is reimagined here as a virtue. 'Tennysonian polish' is a form of deceit only necessary if the basic quality of the goods is doubtful. 'Chaste', in opposition to 'bright lustre', is designed to indicate that Hyam will not dazzle customers with false promises and over-priced goods. His clothes are affordable, accessible, and simple – and so is the poetry chosen to advertise them. Tennyson may fear to sully his talent with advertising verse, but this is a sign that he, unlike Hyam's laureate, is out of touch with the masses.

Hyam used a great deal of inventive advertising poetry, filled with references both to contemporary events, and to the literary canon. It is not an exaggeration to say that working-class consumers in the 1860s *were* more likely to be reading 'Hyam's laureate' than to be reading Tennyson. The tension between such advertising poems and the conventions of 'poetry', drawn out so well by this anecdote and Hyam's

[3] 'The Laureate and the Blacking Manufacturer', *Glasgow Weekly Mail*, 12 October 1867, p.1. A bankruptcy hearing for Hyman Hyam's Sheffield branch of the Hyam business reported that his father Laurence Hyam had spent 'a million of money in the North of England' and was highly regarded in the woolen trade. 'The Affairs of Mr Hyman Hyam', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 31 December 1874, p.7.

response, is in part the subject of this article. What I wish to argue, however, is less that this tension is in itself productive for nineteenth-century poetics – this case has already been amply made for Romantic-era poetry and literary criticism by John Strachan and Nicholas Mason – than that it is vitally important for working-class poetry and poetics.[4] Unlike Tennyson, working-class poets could not afford to be horrified by the suggestion that verse-making was a commercial enterprise. Most desperately hoped that it might prove so. And it is in the nexus of poetry and advertising, I argue, that we see this occluded relationship between working-class poetics, consumerism and commercialism most clearly. Advertising verse tends to be playful, self-conscious, and self-aware about its transactions, and it also expects this awareness from the consumer. As I will show, the provincial working-class poets who authored most verse advertisements are alert to the possibilities that the formal qualities of typical newspaper poems (short, memorable, standing out visually from prose, and can potentially be sung as well as read) render poetry as a genre particularly valuable both in selling goods, and in selling itself.

Most studies that touch on advertising verse, and indeed most studies of British nineteenth-century advertising in general, are London-centred.[5] Strachan and Mason's primary concerns are how advertising shaped established literary cultures,

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[4] John Strachan, *Advertising and Satirical Culture in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007) and Nicholas Mason, *Literary Advertising and the Shaping of British Romanticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

[5] A significant recent exception to this rule is Strachan and Claire Nally's *Advertising, Literature and Print Culture in Ireland, 1891-1922* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2012), though its focus is primarily on the early twentieth century. It cites several Irish advertising poems but does not assess poetry as an advertising genre.

including satire and criticism, using case-studies of writers who moved in relatively elite literary circles, such as Byron and L. E. L.. Theirs are highly valuable accounts. In focusing on London, and on national newspaper and periodical cultures, however, histories of advertising and literary culture have tended to pay less attention to developments in the provincial press, and how its stunning rise in the second half of the nineteenth century created new forms of advertising for working-class consumers. No critic or historian, moreover, has examined verse advertising in the period from the 1840s to the start of the twentieth century, though there are important studies of Victorian advertising culture and the novel.[6] Yet it is a medium that has obvious and immediate significance for the working-class poet in particular. Advertising verse is part of working-class poetry, in that it was almost certainly either written by a talented employee of the company or by a local poet commissioned by the company; advertisers *funded* popular poetic production in ways hard to discern today. While verse advertisements may, as Henry Sampson claimed in 1874, have passed their heyday in London and the national press by mid-century, they continued to appear with regularity and ingenuity in the new provincial press that had sprung up after the abolition of the Stamp Duty and paper duty.[7] Tradesmen who skillfully deployed poetry, especially comic and satiric verse, like the Liverpool 'Butterman' discussed

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[6] See Sara Thornton, *Advertising, Subjectivity and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: Dickens, Balzac and the Language of the Walls* (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2009) and Jennifer Wicke, *Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement, and Social Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

[7] Henry Sampson, *A History of Advertising from the Earliest Times* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1874), pp.258-60. Most commentators agree with Sampson that the golden age of poetical and literary advertising was just prior to the Victorian period: George Robins the auctioneer and Thomas Bish the lottery agent are nostalgically recalled by Sampson and others as exemplary of this style.

by William Smith in his 1863 advertisers' manual, produced memorable advertisements that assisted to create 'an immense business.'[8]

At the same time, provincial newspapers were offering more extensive opportunities to working-class poets to see themselves in print in poetry columns dominated by local verse.[9] 'Original Poetry' columns and individual poems did not simply appear in the same edition as poetic advertisements, they were often contiguous, because editors used poems to fill in awkward spaces, such as the spaces on the front page to left and right of the paper's letterhead. This meant that poems, unlike lengthier news items, were more liable to be located immediately next to advertisements. What I argue here, using examples drawn primarily from the Scottish press, but relevant to the British provincial press as a whole, is that the uneasy borderland between advertising poems and 'real' poetry is particularly evident to and indeed exploited by working-class writers. The overt Victorian ideology that poets wrote for love of the art and without hope of worldly gain – indicated, for instance, in the fact that editors did not pay poets for newspaper contributions – exists, in newspaper verse, in tension with local poets' desire that their literary skill should result in tangible benefits.

One of the effects this creates is a subgenre of 'original poetry' that falls into the category of the 'disguised puff', 'one of the most prominent forms of newspaper advertising', as Clarence Moran wrote in 1905, in which a newspaper item positioned as editorial commentary, news, prose or poetry will suddenly begin to praise a

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[8] William Smith, *Advertise. How? When? Where?* (London: Routledge, Warne and Routledge, 1863), p.46.

[9] On poetry in the provincial press, see Andrew Hobbs, 'Five Million Poems, or the Local Press as Poetry Publisher, 1800-1900', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 42 (2012), 488-92.

particular commodity.[10] A newspaper poem beginning 'She never smiles, no happy thought/Lights up her pensive eye', for instance, which seems from this opening to be a standard sentimental poem, entertains the reader with the twist in the final line that 'Ah, no! she never smiles, because - /*Her front teeth are decayed!*'. This is an American comic poem, and whether it originated as advertising verse is unclear, but it becomes a 'disguised puff' for visiting dentist Dr Abernethy in the 1850 *Dundee Courier*.[11] Another subgenre is the more open 'puff', in which an enterprising poet sings the praises of particular goods, either on commission or from their own initiative. Both were established forms. An 1843 *Chambers* article on 'The Puff-Poets' sardonically notes that 'Intense and irrepressible must that love of poetry appear to strangers' eyes, which bursts forth on such themes as coats, coffee, candles (moulds and dips), razors, macassar oil, fish, anti-bilious pills, snuff, sauce, and scented soap.'[12] Poems composed to advertise a local product, however, sometimes in local dialect, and written by local poets, have a different valence to an internationally-circulated poem like 'She never smiles', and are far more ambiguous in intent. The line between deliberate 'puff-poetry', as opposed to poems offering genuine appreciation for a product, is often blurred in the provincial press, as is the distinction between advertising verse and verse which satirizes the conventions of advertising.

[10] Clarence Moran, *The Business of Advertising* (London: Methuen, 1905), p.35. Mason discusses the rise of the 'puff' in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century (pp.34-48).

[11] *Dundee Courier*, 2 January 1850, p.3. The *Dumfries and Galloway Courier* prints this poem on 8 August 1849 as an amusing find from the *Boston Post*, with no mention of advertising intent (p.3). Its circulation helps to suggest the major influence of American advertising modes in this period (see, for instance, the discussion in Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p.12.).

[12] 'The Puff-Poets', *Chambers' Edinburgh Magazine* 582 (25 March 1843), pp.73-4, p.73.

The prominence of complex forms of advertising poetry in the newspaper press intersects with the common practice of advertising *poetry*. That is, given the tendency of working-class newspaper poets to write poems in praise of their own work and that of their fellow-poets, and to celebrate forthcoming poetry volumes, newspaper readers were used to encountering verse which 'puffed' poetry itself. There is nothing new about poets praising each other, of course, yet rarely has there been such closeness on the printed page between poems intended to sell poetry, and poems intended to sell other forms of goods.

In extensive research into British working-class poetry, I have never found an instance of a named poet admitting that he or she was paid to write advertising verse. There was a very clear stigma attached to being an advertising poet. Mark Lemon's fictional Stamper Jingle (a Warren's blacking poet) in his 1836 play, *The P.L., or 30 Strand* and Charles Dickens's Mr Slum in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, also a would-be Warren's poet, are both negative portrayals of opportunistic and impoverished 'slumming' writers for hire.[13] 'Ask the perfumers, ask the blacking-makers, ask the hatters, ask the old lottery-office-keepers – ask any man among 'em what my poetry has done for him, and mark my words he blesses the name of Slum,' is Slum's pitch to Mrs Jarley, offering her an acrostic ('the name at this moment is Warren, but the idea's a convertible one') at five shillings, 'cheaper than any prose.'[14] In *Bentley's* 'Miseries of a Poetical Genius' from 1851, a clerk given to sentimental verse is more

[13] On Lemon see Strachan, p.140.

[14] Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brennan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.216. Dickens himself was rumoured to have written advertising verse while working at the blacking manufacturer's, though this has never been proven (Strachan, p.137).

horrified at the manager's comparison of his poetry to advertising verse than he is at being dismissed for neglecting his work:

> "Perhaps one of the advertising tailors might give you a berth – *Po*try's more in their way than ours." I heard no more – I rushed from the room, frantic with rage, and my own humiliation.[15]

The editor of the Dundee *Weekly News* delivered a crushing blow to an aspirant poet's hopes, and demonstrated the perceived difference between advertising poetry and 'poetry', poetaster and poet, when he advised 'G. J.', misguided submitter of 'An Auctioneer's Advertisement' that he:

> will, after a little more practice, be able to compete for the post of resident poetaster to Moses and Son, H. B. Hyam or some other advertising tailor; but if he wishes to see his verses in our columns he must try some more ambitious theme.[16]

No matter how entertaining or talented Hyam's unknown poet might be, comparing a would-be writer to an advertising poet was an insult.

Although it seems that no aspiring poet wanted to admit that they had been hired by a company to write their adverts, poets did, however, frequently put their names to verse praising consumer goods. Sometimes such poems are clearly related to the poet's profession. Lanarkshire tailor-poet Alexander Wardrop's 'Millar's Corner', a rare example of such a poem reprinted in a volume, opens:

> Men or women wantin' dressed,
> Ca' at Millar's Corner,
> There are bargains o' the best –

[15] 'Miseries of a Poetical Genius', *Bentley's Miscellany* 30 (July 1851), 572-77, p.577.

[16] 'Local Bards' Column', *Dundee Weekly News*, 23 September 1865, p.4.

Cheaper far than or'nar;[17]

Being compared to 'resident poetaster' for a tailor is highly insulting for someone who wishes to be seen as a poet, but being a tailor who is capable of writing poetry simply highlights the possession of an extra, potentially useful, skill. Similarly, Glasgow engineer-poet Alexander Murdoch was happy to include two poems explicitly praising Singer sewing machines in one of his collections.[18] Both instances show the difference between local and syndicated advertising. Singer's choice of Glasgow for its company was a great source of pride, and whether or not Wardrop himself was employed by the draper's he celebrates, its presence in Coatbridge is perceived as a local advantage. This form of advertising poetry, in which local writers celebrate local goods and services, is also politicized, in its valuation of working-class consumerism and access to modern, labour-saving amenities as vital for the progress of the working classes. There may, indeed, be a specific political charge to Wardrop's poem if 'Millar's Corner' refers to the co-operative draper's opened in central Coatbridge in 1873.[19]

Peter Gurney has recently examined how nineteenth-century radical and liberal ideologies 'harnessed mundane acts of buying and selling in order not merely to tinker at the margins but to change the world', deploying the notion of the worker

[17] Alexander Wardrop, *Mid-Cauther Fair: A Dramatic Pastoral; With Other Poems, Songs, and Prose Sketches* (Glasgow: Aird and Coghill, n.d. [1887]), p.147.

[18] Alexander Murdoch, 'The Shooin' Machine: A Rale Fack, Done Up in Scotch Rhyme', and 'The "Singer" Sewing Machine', in *Rhymes and Lyrics* (Kilmarnock: James McKie, 1879), pp. 71, 92.

[19] Alexander M. Bissett states that Wardrop was the cutter to a co-operative society in Coatbridge in the early 1870s (*The Poets and Poetry of Linlithgowshire* (Paisley: J. and R. Parlane, 1896), p.227). The Coatbridge Co-operative Society was founded in 1871 and opened a draper's shop in December 1873.

as consumer for varying ends.[20] ‘Liberal consumerism’, he argues, underpinned popular liberalism (primarily associated with William Gladstone) from mid-century onwards, managing ‘to combine an image of the good life dependent on the spread of commodities with a commitment to fairness.’[21] Given that the majority of newspapers cited here were openly Liberal in politics, they display this liberal consumerism both by promoting poems in praise of consumer goods, written in many instances by the same poets contributing pro-worker and pro-Reform verse to their columns, and by supporting poetry more broadly. Poetry, we should remember, was also a commodity newly and cheaply available, via new publishing and printing outlets, for working-class consumers bent on self-betterment

Liberal consumerism is particularly evident, for instance, in an advertising poem celebrating Stewart Dawson & Co’s Liverpool watches by William Church of Newry, which argues that this company have democratized the ownership of a personal timepiece. ‘Watches were too expensive, we were told’, he writes, but now ‘Thanks to thee, STEWART DAWSON’,

> The horny-handed son of toil may own
> What once belonged to rank and wealth alone.
> A nation’s benefactor! poor man’s friend!
> Thy praises on our lips shall never end.[22]

This 1881 poem appeared in the British newspaper then most overtly devoted to promoting working-class literary endeavour, the Dundee *People’s Journal*. It was, in

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[20] Peter Gurney, *Wanting and Having: Popular Politics and Liberal Consumerism in England, 1830-1870* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2015), p.18.

[21] Ibid., pp.259, 314 and passim.

[22] *People’s Journal*, 17 September 1881, p.1.

fact, a competition winner in a poetry competition run by Stewart Dawson, with a generous prize of over £5. Their advertising campaign built upon the famed Christmas literary competitions held by the *People's Journal*: as in these competitions, the desirable prize offered by Stewart Dawson was not just cash but publication in the newspaper. Considerable numbers of entries were allegedly received, since the shortlist, another advertisement informed readers, was twenty poems long. By choosing the *Journal* as a key venue for this competition, the company knew that they would attract a cohort of qualified poets who were genuine working-class consumers (publishing the name and address of the prizewinners alongside their poem certified this for readers). Stewart Dawson also neatly represented themselves as a company which agreed with the *Journal*'s mission and would forward its efforts to use poetry to encourage working-class self-culture – with a catch, since entrants to *their* competition had to purchase a watch to be eligible for inclusion. Church's poem looks like Gurney's liberal consumerism in action, and arguably it is, but it is also a poem written to order and designed to profit both the poet and company. The ideologies of working-class self-improvement espoused by newspaper editors and newspaper poets were bound up with the concerns of the marketplace. Visions of improvement sell papers as well as goods, and as a genre very strongly linked with efforts at cultural betterment, poetry is an ideal marketing tool for such visions.

The most unambiguous form of advertising verse was, like Stewart Dawson's prize poems or Hyam's productions, presented as an advertisement, bounded by the classified columns and generally on the front page. Using verse here was another strategy (like variations in font size and layout) to attract the reader's attention through format, distinguishing an advertisement from the others on the page. Advertisers frequently used eye-catching capitalized titles referring to contemporary

affairs to draw the reader into perusing the poem, which would present itself as a meditation on current events for the first two or three stanzas, before suddenly introducing the name of the manufacturer. An 1859 *Athenaeum* article describes such tactics as ‘the rudest form of advertising literature’ and particularly associates them with the provincial press. [23] Hyam’s ‘Do Ladies Ever Sit in Parliament?’, for example, in the Glasgow press and elsewhere, is an election poem which uses this provocative headline to attract readers; after two stanzas and a historical note indicating that women have previously appeared in Parliament but resigning the question to ‘abler hands than ours’, the advertisement asks readers to ‘vote for sterling men/ Who act as HYAM does:/ He saves your pockets, guards your rights, /And sells you splendid clothes.’[24] ‘Sterling’ is a smart pun: those who protect your pounds sterling, are equally those with the best political qualities. Providing ‘splendid clothes’ cheaply and standing up for working men’s (and women’s) rights are again effectively synonymous.

Hyam’s advertisements were nationally syndicated, but the more ‘local’ an advertiser, the more they could appeal to consumers on behalf of local as well as national causes. The *Aberdeen Herald*, in the early 1860s, printed a series of verse advertisements from ‘Samuel Martin, Hatter to the People, 24 Union Street’, in which Martin cleverly combined political headlines such as ‘Volcanic State of the Continent!’ or ‘Disastrous News from America’ with paragraphs of ‘news’ content, pictures of top hats, and political verse on both national and Aberdonian campaigns. The ‘Volcanic State of the Continent!’ advertisement, occupying an entire column,

[23] J. H., ‘Advertising Literature’, *The Athenaeum* 10 (September 1859), 338-40, p.339.

[24] *Glasgow Citizen*, 4 April 1857, p.1.

contains a poem on the Rifle Volunteers, heroes of countless newspaper poems in this period:

> Forward to drill, Militia and Riflemen!
>
> Shoulder your arms, and march in close order.
>
> If on your shores foes attempt to land,
>
> Charge them in style, make them fly in disorder.[25]

Unless 'style' implicitly refers to Martin's superior hats, there is no mention of his product here. Nor does it feature in his local campaign, carried out in a series of verses over a year, to get 'The Dismal Churchyard Railing' removed from Union Street. Immediately below the Rifle Volunteers poem, 'The Dismal Churchyard Railing' opens:

> Provost Anderson, it has been thought
>
> That you're the coming man –
>
> For Aberdeen improvements
>
> To have some noble plan.[26]

'Men of taste', Martin observes, deplore this blot on the street:

> Get it down, and soon, my lord
>
> All men of taste agree
>
> It spoils the look of Union St
>
> As anyone may see.[27]

This campaign was successful: on 6 October 1860 the town council discussed the churchyard railing and moved that 'the present railing and pillars be removed, and a

[25] *Aberdeen Herald*, 2 June 1860, p.1.

[26] Ibid., p.1.

[27] *Aberdeen Herald*, 22 June 1861, p.1.

plain light railing be erected in its place'.[28] Martin kept the council up to the mark with constant reminders that they needed to carry out this work, 'Which none seem much to speak about/ Was it not for MARTIN THE HATTER', and by July 1861 he could smugly state in his 'Disastrous News from America' advert that 'Good Taste' was 'in the Ascendant. Hurrah! The Churchyard Railing Down At Last!', 'Martin early thanks the Council, for/ Carrying out his bright suggestion.'[29] By presenting himself as an up-to-date champion of local improvement and good taste, invested in his particular locale of Union St and holding the Council and Provost to their word, Martin cleverly indicates that he is on the side 'of the People' of Aberdeen. He also implies that his goods, like the new church railing, will be modern and tasteful. He ensures that his name is memorable for readers of the paper, and he gives them topics to discuss within his shop other than simply hats. Though his poetry is again almost deliberately crude, the fact that he produces quantities of it may also be part of this self-presentation as an improving retailer, someone literate, humorous and invested in producing journalistic copy that offers news and entertainment alongside information about his wares.

Some of the most inventive poetic advertisements in the Scottish press use Scots, as in Wardrop's 'Millar's Corner', to signal a product's likely attractiveness for local readers, and to position the speaker in the advertisement either as a satisfied consumer or a merchant who is part of the Scottish community and understands their needs. This is undoubtedly also true for English local advertisements. One late example of a front-page advertisement in Lancashire dialect (for Woods' Perfection Flake tobacco) opens:

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[28] 'Town Council Proceedings', *Aberdeen Herald*, 6 October 1860, p.6.

[29] *Aberdeen Herald*, 22 June 1861, p.1 and 27 July 1861, p.1.

A mon that I know varra weel

Says to me t'other day

"What soart o' bacca does ta put,

Bill, into thi owd clay,"[30]

This advert is titled 'Th' Factory Poet', which serves a dual purpose. It implies that factory operative Bill is inspired by Perfection Flake to produce this poem, and it misleads readers who might see this as a headline introducing a new local working-class poet. As William Donaldson has most trenchantly argued for Scots, non-standard English underwent a revival through the means of the new provincial press:

> Papers tended to sell within homogenous speech communities where vernacular usage was the central feature of local identity and they often adopted the local form of Scots in their role as representatives of the people.[31]

Larry McCauley's important reassessment of dialect poetry in England argues that it served as 'the sign of a set of values that the working-class identified with themselves – honesty, self-sufficiency, industriousness, and group loyalty'.[32] It is evident why advertisers would wish to associate themselves, and their products, with these values. Advertisements like 'Th' Factory Poet' show how the revival of interest in dialect could be commercially exploited. Dialect in advertising poetry is both a cynical attempt to cash in on the wider popularity of dialect verse and a sophisticated way to target regional groups of consumers. For Henry Sharpe, a Lanarkshire grocer, for

[30] 'Th' Factory Poet', *Lancashire Daily Post*, 11 November 1899, p.1.

[31] William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland: Language, Fiction and the Press* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), p.53.

[32] Larry McCauley, '"Eawr Folk": Language, Class, and English Identity in Victorian Dialect Poetry', *Victorian Poetry* 39.2 (2001), 287-300, p.298.

instance, Scots is a means to present a verse advertisement as informal speech to the 'guidwives' of the area and their miner or ironworker husbands:

Tobacco pure, nae dockin' blades,
And pipes to smoke for a' the trades;
Anither boon I maist forgot,
My Boots and Shoes – an awfu' lot.

Twa thousand pairs, wi' tackets shining;
The very *Cure* for chaps that's mining.
Bairnies tae, an' auld wife's slippers;
For Sunday Swells I've got the tippers.[33]

By writing in the first person – a notable difference between such poems and 'company' poems like Hyam's – Sharpe represents himself as a proud local resident ('lang may our mines an' ironworks flourish!'), he concludes – and as a trustworthy and honest worker, like his readers, aware of those who might, for instance, supplement tobacco with dried dock leaves, but far removed from them.

Tea and coffee merchants around Glasgow – probably taking their cues from each other – were especially invested in Scots advertising poetry purportedly written by consumers, rather than, as in Sharpe's example, written by the merchant. 'The Cup That I Like Best', advertising William Anderson, a Glasgow tea and coffee merchant, opens in the style and language of a temperance poem:

Give me the cup that I like best,
'Tis not the Barley bree,

[33] 'How to Save Money and Make Home Happy', *Airdrie Advertiser*, 10 November 1866, p.4.

But what you find much better far,

Is Anderson's charming Tea.[34]

Scots features most trenchantly in the final verse: 'Then gang ye a' to "ANDERSON'S",/ Ye'll ne'er deceived be.' More extensive Scots was deployed by the rival 'London and North of England Tea Company', advertising its six Glasgow branches under the heading 'The Auld Wife's Experience and Advice':

I'm noo a wife, aged sixty-nine,

And you may guess that in my time

I've been at mony a "*cookey shine*   *cookey-shine – a 'bun-fight'*

And jubilee,

And, therefore, able to define

What's *real guid Tea*.[35]

Stumbling 'by guid luck' on the Champion Pekoe of the London and North of England Tea Company, she tells readers:

Its Quality, for strength, is great,

And then the flavour's sic a treat,

Just try it ance, there's nae mistake,

You'll aye gang there,

The price I pay is "*Two and Eight,"*

And naething mair.

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[34] 'The Cup That I Like Best', *Airdrie Advertiser*, 1 October 1864, p.3.

[35] 'The Auld Wife's Experience and Advice', *West Lothian Courier*, 26 April 1869, p.4. The poem appears more than once in this paper as well as elsewhere in the Glasgow/Lanarkshire press. All definitions of Scots words are drawn from the Dictionary of the Scots Language: www.dsl.ac.uk.

But that’s no a’, I’ll tell you mair,

They gie you presents, rich and rare,

Sets of gilt China and Stoneware,

Even Coral Beads,

In short, you do get a’ things there

A Housewife needs.

Just try this shop, you’ll ne’er repent,

Its *70 Trongate*, noo weel kent,

By saving there you’ll pay your Rent

Guid honest people.[36]

By composing an advertisement in the style of an elderly, thrifty female consumer, this company makes a direct appeal to female working-class readers, those who, as the speaker recognizes, might have difficulty stretching the household budget to afford both relative luxuries like pekoe tea and their rent. Using the popular habbie stanza, most frequently used for comic, satiric and epistolary verse, situates this advertisement within Scots poetic tradition, rebranding a London and English company as local to Scotland.

Similarly, a form of cattle feed, ‘Lactina for Calves’, is advertised through a poem ‘Brokie and Towsie: or The Twa Calves’ which consciously recalls Robert Burns’s ‘The Twa Dogs’, a political dialogue between a hungry working dog and a pampered upper-class dog. Perhaps because ‘The Twa Calves’ is directed to a more

[36] Ibid., p.4.

rural, agricultural audience, and the calves echo their speech, its Scots is more pronounced:

> "Man Brokie, but ye're big and sleekit,
> Ye're hurdies weel wi' fat are shreekit; *hurdies – buttocks*
> What reemin' cogs o' milk ye'll swallow, *reeming - foaming*
> Tae mak ye sic a buirdly fallow." *buirdly - stalwart*
>
> "Milk! Towsie lad, milk's no the feedin'
> That's made o' me a beast o' breedin';
> I'm daily on LACTINA feastit,
> The brawest browst ye ever tastit."[37] *browst - brew*

In this reimagining of Burns, equality and 'breeding' will be achieved through modern consumer products that improve upon nature, making both poor calves and poor farmers 'sleekit'. Local agent David Hunter, the advertiser, suggested that this poem had been supplied 'By a Perthshire Lady who reared between 30 and 40 calves on LACTINA last season.' Presenting the poem as a testimonial, rather than the presumed composition of the agent or seller of the product, attempts to situate it as disinterested advice, supplied without thought of profit for the poet. Language and form here operate in counterpoint to the marketplace developments discussed by James Vernon, who suggests that in the Victorian period:

> Markets that had once been structured around local and face-to-face interactions were remade as abstract spaces with impersonal forms of exchange that made it possible to do business with strangers. At the heart of

[37] 'Lactina for Calves', *Hamilton Advertiser*, 5 April 1884, p.6.

> this transition lay the ability of print culture to abstract information from person and place and disseminate it across distance.[38]

Such hyper-local verse advertisements consciously work to locate themselves in opposition to 'impersonal forms of exchange', using the resources of modern print culture to do business with strangers, while imagining those strangers as locals, with a body of shared cultural and linguistic knowledge and shared desires as consumers.

These poems were still presented in the advertising columns and were company-sponsored. As the presence of poetry in the local papers increased in the 1850s and 1860s, however, the genre of satisfied consumer verse by supposed local readers began to escape the advertising columns, and appear in the 'Original Poetry' sections or on the news pages, thus being reinvented as part of a newspaper's broader commitment to publishing improving local verse. The most marked difference between these poems and advertising poems, other than their location within the paper, is that they are usually signed by an individual, even if only with initials or a pseudonym. 'Athole's Pies', by 'The Factory Muse' (Adam Wilson, a Dundee factory worker), is a good example:

> Awake, my mirky muse! oh rise
> And sound the praise o' Athole's pies.
> For cheapness, quality, and size,
>   Nane can them beat,
> The sappy lumps that take the prize,

[38] James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), p.125.

For they’re a treat.[39]

The opening raises the possibility of satire, but the poem, though enjoying the bathetic qualities of an ode to pies, also presents itself as genuine in its praise of, and pride in, a local product.[40] It did not appear on the front page of the paper, amid the advertising columns, but on the second page, where most original verse from *People’s Journal* contributors was published. So did Bill Sparley’s ode to a new meat shop in Dunfermline, Fife, from the same paper, though in his case it is the novelty rather than traditional nature of a foodstuff which is attractive:

Come, let us a’ hae faith an’ hope,
Nae mair we’ll need tae pine an’ mope,
Dumfarlin’s got a new beef shop
In Chalmers Street,
Tae sell New Zealand mutton chop
An’ butcher meat.

This Meat-preserving Company
The quality will guarantee,
An’ unbecoming word or lee
I winna utter
They sell hale cans o’ kitchen fee *fee - fat*

[39] ‘Athole’s Pies’, *People’s Journal*, 1 June 1872, p.2. Reprinted in *The Poets of the People’s Journal: Newspaper Poetry in Victorian Scotland*, ed. Kirstie Blair (Glasgow: ASLS, 2016), p.107.

[40] I have been unable to trace any named ‘Athole’s’ bakery in Dundee and surroundings during the period, but this could have been a local nickname, or a more transient shop or street stall.

As good as butter.[41]

Preserved meat from New Zealand is a product of modern developments in science and technology, enabling more rapid transport of commodities around the world, and better preserving techniques. Sparley celebrates the networks which bring this modernity to a small Scottish town and permit working-class consumers to afford meat, traditionally a luxurious item in their diet. Although Sparley's community in 'let us a'' is implicitly the consumers of Dunfermline, the *People's Journal* did have a substantial number of readers not simply with ties to New Zealand through emigration, but *in* New Zealand; so this is an advertisement for the products of a new nation with strong ties to Scotland, not just one shop, and likely to be of interest to residents (or intending residents) of New Zealand. As far as we know, Wilson and Sparley had no paid connections to these shops. By signing himself 'The Factory Muse', indeed, Wilson makes it clear to readers that he is a customer rather than a bakery employee. Given that working-class poets were often paid in kind for their work, however, it is highly likely that Wilson and Sparley would have expected some free gifts for their promotional efforts.

'Preserved Beef and Mutton' is a good example of advertising verse which belongs to a broader category of poems celebrating modern achievements in industry and technology, and particularly labour-saving devices that might transform the working-class home, as in Murdoch's poems on Singer's sewing machines. Numerous other poems appeared on sewing-machines, including Mary Bowskill Hair's celebration of the first sewing machine to reach Airdrie, 'Mrs Binnie's Sewing Machine':

[41] 'Preserved Beef and Mutton', *People's Journal*, 6 April 1872, p.2.

Whirr awa', my wee machine,

There's music in thy foot and tension;

A boon thou'lt prove to sewing folk,

My wee machine, the newest invention![42]

This poem, almost certainly published first in a newspaper, though it only survives in a later anthology, celebrates a product while directing readers to a particular retailer, Mrs Binnie and her dressmaking business. M. W. W.'s 'My Washing Machine' is another 'puff indirect', because its pleasure in a modern machine turns out to be linked to a specific manufacturer. The implicitly female speaker praises the 'Washing and Wringing and Mangling Machine' for cutting the hours spent on a large wash from eight to four, concluding:

We publish its merits wherever we go,

And whate'er be your judgment, this one thing I know

That we're deeply indebted to Bradford & Co.

For their Washing and Wringing and Mangling Machine.[43]

Thomas Bradford & Co were not a local firm: they were based in London and Salford. But M. W. W.'s stated location, Coupar Angus, is local for readers of the *People's Journal*. Like a number of the other poems quoted here, 'My Washing Machine' presents itself as bringing news about new and exciting products from elsewhere in Britain, or indeed from overseas, to a regional Scottish audience.

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[42] Reprinted in James Knox, *Airdrie Bards, Past and Present* (Airdrie: Baird and Hamilton, 1930), p.288. According to Knox, Hair was the widow of a teacher: she worked as a printer in Airdrie for part of her life.

[43] *People's Journal*, 14 January 1871, p.2. Reprinted in *Poets of the People's Journal*, p.93.

That such poems, despite their overt pose of disinterest, were seldom read as genuinely free from thoughts of profit, is clear from a satirical advertising poem, also in the *People's Journal* in this period, by the outstanding comic poet, 'Poute' (the pseudonym of Alexander Burgess, dancing-master in Fife). Poute was one of the best-known *Journal* authors, writing from the much-loved poetic persona of a rustic and uneducated Fife worker who was particularly obsessed with his vegetable garden. It is therefore an in-joke that his mock-advertising poem celebrates the manure produced by Goulding's, an Irish company which was expanding its reach into Scotland – advertisements for new agents for the firm also appeared in the *People's Journal*. Like 'Athole's Pies', Poute begins in a mock-heroic mode:

> Hail! Hail! Al Hail! thou goulding's Grate spiseefik!
> that makes deff erth eeld etibles prolific.
> Thou Wundir of the World! Grate Fertilizer!
> Aksepp this pome from Me thine advertizer.[44]

This is comic not simply because of the deliberate bathos, and because of Poute's standard phonetic spelling and haphazard punctuation and capitalization, but because in describing himself explicitly as an 'advertizer', Poute breaks the unspoken rule that separates advertising poetasters on the make from 'genuine' poets who happen to wish to praise specific products. Poute's poems display extensive familiarity with popular eighteenth-century verse – his couplets and capitalization speak to this mode – and it is likely that he knew and is referencing the georgic verse of poets like William Cowper, who celebrated 'smoking manure' in Book III of *The Task*.[45]

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[44] *People's Journal*, 18 November 1871, p.2. Reprinted in *Poets of the People's Journal*, pp.101-3.

[45] William Cowper, *The Task, and Selected Other Poems*, ed. James Sambrook (London: Routledge, 2013), p.128.

‘Gouldings Manur’, by forcing the reader to contemplate, in a detailed description, the likely unsavoury contents of this manure (‘Hors-Banes – Swine lugg – Cod-liver Saat and Soot’), is a tongue-in-cheek take on the relative politeness of Cowper. It is also a satirical allusion to the tendency of the Scottish provincial press in this period to publish extensive articles lauding new and improved techniques, tools and inventions in agriculture. Poute’s forty lines of praise of the improbably giant vegetables and flowers created by modern manure mock the increasing competitiveness of Victorian flower and vegetable shows, and the tendency to celebrate agricultural and gardening success as another signal of improvement.

His final lines, in an unusually long 70-line poem, give his rationale:

Now Gouling lad – I hop ye’ll mind this *ae-thing*
if ye Don’t Send a bocks to me for – nae-thing
i niver Mor, will Lift my Pen to prays –
Thy golden Ceerip – NIVER AL MY DAYS![46]

The self-interest in Poute’s position as ‘advertizer’ thus becomes apparent: the poem is designed as a direct exchange for a free box of Goulding’s product. Well aware of the forms of advertising verse appearing in the *People’s Journal* and elsewhere, Poute’s seeming ignorance of the usual conventions of the disguised puff (that it should never admit to a direct relationship with the manufacturer), invites readers’ suspicion of the motives behind poems such as ‘My Washing Machine’. Moreover, this poem is significant because, as I argue elsewhere, it is only the most salient example of Poute’s satirical failure to recognize that newspaper poetry was expected

[46] *Poets of the People’s Journal*, p.103.

to present itself as an uncommercial mode.[47] Resentful that successful newspaper poets such as himself are not paid for their labour, Poute's poems repeatedly reference the monetary value of his verse ('If i got a peny a line the Above would come to 20 pense') and its function in helping to sell copies of the newspaper.[48] *All* his poems, not simply this advertising poem, are comically represented as valuable products of labour, somewhat equivalent to his prized vegetables, which newspaper editors fail to value at their true worth.

The *People's Journal* extensively advertised Poute's own collection of poetry, which was published by the newspaper office, and also published poems advising readers to buy it, such as 'The Saat-Maker Poute' (Poute claimed to work in the Fife salt pans) by 'An Auld Fifer':

> I see by the *Journal* he's printin' a book,
> So bestir yourselves, Fifers, frae Cottar to Duke,
> Subscribe for the volume, and don't leave a doubt
> Of the thorough success o' dear saat-maker Poute.[49]

Such poems are another form of puffery, and appeal to pride in local products in the same way as poems like 'Athole's Pies'. Mason notes the 'incursion of advertising logic into the production and dissemination of literature' from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, particularly studying how periodicals and critics created literary

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[47] See Kirstie Blair, 'McGonagall, "Poute" and the Bad Poets of Victorian Scotland', *The Bottle-Imp* 14 (November 2013): http://asls.arts.gla.ac.uk/SWE/TBI/TBIIssue14/Blair.pdf.

[48] 'Apostroffe to the Rainbow', *People's Journal*, 30 January 1864, p.2. Reprinted in *Poets of the People's Journal*, p.47.

[49] 'The Saat-Maker Poute' [Air – 'The Laird o' Cockpen'] by An Auld Fifer, *People's Journal*, 20 Feb 1875, p.2.

celebrities.[50] The tendency of later working-class literary communities, and newspaper editors supportive of their work for political and personal reasons, to advertise each other's wares is another version of this. William Cadenhead, for instance, newspaper poet and one-time fellow factory worker and close friend of William Anderson, another newspaper poet, produced a typical poetry-advertising poem, 'Epistle to William Anderson', in the *Aberdeen Herald*:

> I thought ere this time to have seen
> 'The Bow Brig' and 'The Folk o' the Green,'
> 'My Lucky Minnie's Kist,' and eke
> At 'Eppie's Aumrie' got a keek,
> Or seen 'Jean Findlater's bauld loun,'
> And a' the droll things o' the toun
> (Wi' mony a sweet and canty lay
> Yet yearnin' for the licht o' day),
> That have been sung sae weel by you,
> Out in a buikie lang ere noo![51]

Cadenhead's 'Epistle' is disingenuous. He would have known that Anderson's book was in press, and this late November poem promotes it in time for the Christmas gift market. It helpfully reminds local readers that Anderson is the author of a number of specific poems they will have read in the *Herald*, as well as providing praise. Anderson's newspaper poems here are like free samples: they whet the reader's

[50] Mason, p.45.

[51] 'Epistle to William Anderson', by W.C. [William Cadenhead], *Aberdeen Herald*, 30 November 1850, p.2.

appetite for a possible volume, or indeed incite readers to write to the paper and ask for a volume.

Unlike most of the literary puffery discussed by Mason, newspaper poetry advertising the poet's own works or those of his or her friends and colleagues features on the same pages and in the same form, style and language as advertisements for other goods and services. It is also produced by the same people. Murdoch's volume, for instance, contains a poem heavily promoting his friend Robert Ford's planned collection, 'Epistle to Robert Ford, On Reading his Prospectus Intimation of a Projected Volume of Poems', a few pages before his first poem promoting a sewing machine.[52] This does not mean that such poems are insincere, of course. If there is a potential tangible benefit for a local working-class poet in seeing a fellow poet succeed in the marketplace, since it may enhance their own chances of publication, many also supported poets they admired on the grounds of mutual friendship or a fannish admiration that did not expect reward.

Poems promoting poetry – or verse advertising verse – are in one sense qualitatively different to poems which advertise pies, or washing machines, or superior tobacco, because in marketing other poems they also always market themselves. Yet there are often occluded comparisons between newspaper poems and other kinds of advertised goods, in that poetry is also represented as soothing and alleviating the cares of life, refreshing and restoring – even fertilizing – the mind. Moreover, like the excitingly modern commodities accessible through Britain's new transport, communication and print networks, the poems that flooded provincial newspaper offices, many written by industrial workers, are creations of these

[52] Murdoch, p.62.

networks. Working-class poets, as these examples show, frequently found the links between their poems, advertising, and consumer culture, both entertaining and productive. Rather than being overly anxious about the notion of poetry as a commodity, they tended tacitly to acknowledge and exploit this. Advertising poetry shows us that these writers always had the market value of their skills and their productions in mind, and that poetry played a vital, unrecognized role, as promoter and product, in the rise of a liberally-minded working-class consumer.