

**COSMOPOLITANISM AND THE SCOTTISH WORKING-  
CLASS WRITER: JOHN PARKINSON/YEHYA-EN-NASR  
AND ISLAM IN AYRSHIRE**

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Cosmopolitanism and the Scottish working-class writer, at least in the long Victorian period, is not a subject that has attracted much attention. Indeed, in my own book-length study of Scottish working-class poets, there is only one mention of cosmopolitanism, on the opening page, in the context of the poet W. C. Sturoc of New Hampshire stating that while he “would like to be as cosmopolitan as any one,” this is undermined by his attachment to his home town of Arbroath.<sup>1</sup> Sturoc, who moved from a provincial town in Scotland to a provincial town in North America, mentions cosmopolitanism only to reject it immediately in favour of a valued sentimental attachment to home and the local. By stating that he “cannot but confess” that he retains “considerable interest and pride” in Arbroath’s literary achievements, he implicitly suggests that a cosmopolitan identity and an identity as an Arbroath native are opposed. Most Scottish working-class poets professed a similarly strong attachment to the local, the provincial, and to the nation of Scotland, in part because it made their work more marketable.

Yet, as I explore here, the opposition that Sturoc sets up is never very evident in practice. Using as a case-study an Ayrshire millworker, John Parkinson, who also wrote under his Islamic name of Yehya en-Nasir, I argue that his remarkable career, rooted in Ayrshire and embracing global Islam, exemplifies what Michael Cronin has identified as the “micro-cosmopolitan complexity of places and cultures which are outside the critical purview of the urban metropolis.”<sup>2</sup> Parkinson and his peers

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<sup>1</sup> Kirstie Blair, *Working Verse in Victorian Scotland: Poetry, Press, Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Cronin, “Global Questions and Local Visions: A Microcosmopolitan Perspective,” in *Beyond the Difference: Welsh Literature in Comparative Contexts*, ed. Alyce von Rothkirch and Daniel Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 196.

demonstrate the ways in which cosmopolitan and local identities are intertwined, and mediated via exchanges between local, national and global print cultures.

Amanda Anderson influentially defined cosmopolitanism as a “reflective distance from one’s original or primary cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity.”<sup>3</sup> This “understanding of other cultures and customs” was in some respects more difficult for working-class writers to achieve. Where they differ from the British Victorian cosmopolitan authors who have attracted most scholarly attention—in the field of poetry, writers like Browning, Barrett Browning, Swinburne, Arnold and Kipling, all of whom travelled or lived overseas—is that they could not afford the time or expense of regular foreign travel. Yet many Scots were, of course, mobile, because they migrated temporarily or permanently in search of employment. Alexander Angus, for example, worked for the Dundee and Arbroath railway line for over twenty years prior to his death; before this, however, he served in the army in India, where he “mastered Hindustani.” His collection *Musings by the Way* (1897) contains a number of poems on India and an “Ode from Hafiz,” suggesting an interest in Persian literature.<sup>4</sup> In this sense working-class writers are less akin to the established Victorian writers who embraced cosmopolitan sympathies, and more like the migrants or radicals, whose complex cosmopolitan experiences have been discussed in influential work by Kwame Anthony Appiah, Bruce Robbins and others.<sup>5</sup>

Even for those writers whose entire working lives were spent in provincial Scotland, access to information about the language, literature, and customs of other cultures was not difficult to find, for those invested to seek it out. Local newspapers and regular public talks by guest lecturers (a practice well-established by the fin-de-siècle), meant that even in the smallest village an aspiring young man (or woman, where a greater load of domestic duties permitted) could keep up with, for instance, European literary movements. For example, the *Fifeshire Journal*’s “Art, Literature,

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<sup>3</sup> Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 63

<sup>4</sup> Alexander C. Angus, *Musings By the Way* (Arbroath: Brodie & Salmond, 1897), 49.

<sup>5</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 91-114; Bruce Robbins, “George Orwell, Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice,” and Leela Gandhi, “Utonal Life: A Genealogy of Global Ethics,” both in *Cosmopolitanisms*, ed. Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta, 40-58; 65-90. See especially Gandhi, 72-76 on fin-de-siècle socialism in Britain.

Music &c” column on 16 December 1880 discussed the publication of a new work by Saint-Beuve, the literature of Mormonism, efforts to fundraise for a monument to Shelley in Viareggio, the movement to start a national gallery in Adelaide, a Parisian scholarly controversy over Molière’s *Misanthrope*, and the latest classical play at the Théâtre du Gymnase. One of the longest items in the column was on Heinrich Heine:

The admirers of Heinrich Heine will hear with interest that Dr Lowenstein, of Lemberg, has given lectures at Vienna, in which he draws comparison between Heine and Abdul-Hassan, or rather Juda ben Halewi, a lyrical poet who flourished at the end of the twelfth century in Spain. He wrote both in Spanish and Hebrew and his name at least will be familiar to Heine’s readers.<sup>6</sup>

What is important here is that this piece, when reprinted in Fife and across the provincial press, addresses local readers as “admirers” of Heine and assumes familiarity with his works. Furthermore, it presumes their interest is sufficient that a reprinted report of this lecture (which highlights Heine’s cosmopolitanism) is of interest.

In fact, this was not an unreasonable assumption. Heine is a good example of a European writer who was well-known in Scotland, because of the accessibility of his lyrics in translation and as songs, the attraction of his radical political views, and his admiration for Scotland and for Robert Burns (a poet to whom he was often compared). His works had been translated, partly into Scots, by Theodore Martin in 1878, and translations appeared across the press. Heine’s life and work was a regular subject for talks at assorted local societies, and he was the subject of numerous poems: James Slimmon, for instance, an aspiring poet and local businessman in Kirkintilloch, included an ode to “Heinrich Heine” in his 1898 poetry collection.<sup>7</sup>

Alexander Anderson, or “Surfaceman,” one of Scotland’s best-known working-class writers, a railway poet and leading contributor of Scots verse to the Dundee *People’s Friend*, published a privately circulated edition of Heine translations as his last work, in the late 1890s. Anderson’s enthusiasm for reading European literature in its original language involved a devotion to self-education which was both extraordinary and typical for an ambitious working-class author:

It was while employed in the quarry and on the railway that he began that course of self-culture which so greatly influenced his future career ... with the aid of “Cassell’s Popular Educator” and a French grammar, it was not long before he acquired a knowledge of

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<sup>6</sup> Anon. “Art, Literature, Music, etc.,” *Fifeshire Journal*, (16 December 1880): 3.

<sup>7</sup> James Slimmon, *The Dead Planet and Other Poems* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1898).

French sufficient to enable him to read the works of Racine and Molière. The ambition to be able to read the works of the great masters in their own tongue led him on by the same means to the study of German and Italian. At a later period he added to these the study of Spanish.<sup>8</sup>

Though Anderson's biographer does not say where he acquired his books, the rise of free or inexpensive local libraries and reading rooms across mid-late Victorian Scotland meant that a wide range of reading became accessible. Within the limits imposed by specific organizers, funders and committees, these supplied key resources for the study of other cultures and literatures. Selecting only one of many possible examples, in 1899 the Falkirk Free Public Library added to its holdings the *Family Life of Heinrich Heine*, by Ludwig von Emden. Alongside other works on European, American and Canadian history and literature, Falkirk additionally invested in local readers' interest in India in this round of purchases, adding *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, translated by Charles Metcalfe; *Chitral: The Story of a Minor Siege*, by George Robertson; *Reminiscences of an Indian Police Official*, by T. C. Arthur; *Our Vice-Regal Life in India*, by the Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava; *Enchanted India*, by Prince Bojidar Karageorevitch; and *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*, by Sir W. H. Sleeman.<sup>9</sup>

The remainder of this article discusses a dramatic instance of the way in which cosmopolitan literary interests had a lasting impact on the life and career of one Scottish working-class poet, John Parkinson or Yehya en-Nasir, and on the history of Islam in Britain. Parkinson was the son of an Irish emigrant, born in Kilwinning, Ayrshire in 1874 and brought up by his maternal grandparents after his mother's death. He started working in a foundry aged around 12, and by 14 was employed in the nearby Busby Spinning Mill, where he stayed, rising to become foreman. By age 16, both his grandparents had died and he was left without family support. He published in the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, a local newspaper which strongly supported Ayrshire talent. He simultaneously published in *The Crescent* and the *Islamic World*, formally converted to Islam around 1901-1902, resigned from the mill, and moved to Rangoon as a newspaperman in 1908. In 1909 he became Vice-President of the British Muslim Association, before returning to Ayrshire in 1910. Parkinson died in Kilwinning in 1918. Recently, he has begun to attract scholarly attention as

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander Anderson, *Later Poems of Alexander Anderson*, "Surfaceman", intro. Alexander Brown (Glasgow: Fraser, Asher & Co., 1913), xix-xx.

<sup>9</sup> Anon. "Falkirk Free Public Library: New Books," *Falkirk Herald*, (16 August 1899): 6.

one of Britain's leading Islamic converts of the period, with Timothy Winter and others investigating his life and publishing his poems.<sup>10</sup>

Parkinson is a vital case study for Scottish cosmopolitanism at grassroots level, not because he developed his interests in such a way as to "escape" the local and provincial for an international and cosmopolitan outlook, but because his local Ayrshire contexts were inextricably intertwined with his literary and religious identities. As Seema Alavi has explored, one of the outcomes of the "exceptional concern for the Muslim subject" evident from the 1860s to the 1880s (a period when the British Empire was responsible for millions of Islamic citizens) was that the Ottoman Empire became invested in a concept of pan-Islamic solidarity across nations and empires. Men like Alavi's subject, Siddiq Hassan Khan, aimed for unity via an "inclusive cosmopolitanism that was exemplified as Muslim virtuous conduct."<sup>11</sup> A young man in Ayrshire whose interest in amateur science and astronomy had led him to start reading about "the religious systems of the world, both past and present, into mythology and ancient history and literature," and who had then become especially interested in Islamic history and literature, illustrates how this inclusive Muslim cosmopolitanism drew in converts via the medium of the popular press.<sup>12</sup>

Parkinson's move beyond his local publishing contexts began in 1901, when he persuaded the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald* to accept twelve articles on the rise of Islam, a topic pitched to readers on the basis of the need to understand imperial Muslim citizens: "How are we to govern our Islamic Empire justly unless we study their religion, their ethics and social life, and by so doing know their wants and learn their highest

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<sup>10</sup> See Abdal Hakim Murad [T. J. Winter], ed., *Muslim Songs of the British Isles* (London: Quilliam Press, 2005), and Yahya Birt's post "Abdullah Quilliam's Obituary of Yahya Parkinson (1874-1918)" (16 July 2016), at: <https://yahyabirt1.wordpress.com>. Parkinson, as part of the Liverpool community, is briefly discussed in several essays in Jamie Gilham and Ron Geaves, eds, *Victorian Muslim: Abdullah Quilliam and Islam in the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Seema Alavi, "Siddiq Hassan Khan (1832-90) and the Creation of a Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 54 (2011): 3, 4.

<sup>12</sup> John Parkinson, "John Yer-en-nasr [sic]: An Autobiography," *The Islamic World*, 7.83 (n.d. [1902]): 381-4 (383). Digitized British Library issues of *The Islamic World* are undated, dates are estimated based on its usual publishing schedule of 6-10 issues per year. Full text available at <http://www.abdullahquilliam.org> [consulted 26 October 2021].

aspirations?”<sup>13</sup> Whether by chance, or because Parkinson had heard about the group of Islamic converts in Liverpool and contacted them, W. Abdullah Quilliam of *The Crescent: A Weekly Record of Islam in England* noted on 17 July 1901 that “the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald* of the 5<sup>th</sup>. Inst. contains the opening article of a series of papers by ‘Ingomar’ upon ‘The Sword of Islam.’ In an early issue we hope to be able either to reproduce the article or a considerable extract from the same.”<sup>14</sup> (“Ingomar,” Parkinson’s pseudonym, is drawn from a mid-century play by Austrian Friedrich Halm, which was popular in English translation). Quilliam was a Liverpool lawyer of Manx heritage, and an indefatigable public speaker, writer and campaigner for the cause of Islam. Parkinson’s articles were reprinted from 24 July to 20 November in *The Crescent*. In December 1901 he signed a new article “Muhammed and His Power,” with “J. Parkinson,” rather than his pseudonym. Less than a year later, on 6 August 1902, the paper has the first mention of him as “Brother John (Yehya) Parkinson”—he was in Liverpool giving a lecture at the Liverpool Mosque—and from 10 September 1902, his contributions, now largely consisting of poetry, are signed “Yehya-en-Nasir.” Around 1902 he also started publishing prose articles and poetry in *The Islamic World*, a monthly periodical also edited by Quilliam.

*The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* presented themselves as proudly cosmopolitan periodicals with an international readership. Adverts on the front page of *The Crescent*, in January 1900, were from merchants in Singapore, Bombay, and Smyrna. The list of subscribers in arrears with their payments, in February 1900, contained addresses in Pennsylvania, Taiping, Paris, South Africa, Lucknow, Hong Kong, Patna, Ahmedabad, and Queensland, as well as Britain. Quilliam himself had diverse cultural interests and wrote a series of articles for *The Crescent* on topics such as Norse and Icelandic myth. Quilliam and his fellows were part of broader moves to represent Islam as a faith that was considerably more democratic and egalitarian than modern British Christianity, and thus should appeal to the working classes: a number of members of the Liverpool mosque and *Crescent* authors were from the artisanal classes, including a bootmaker, a railway worker, and a civil engineer. As Quilliam wrote:

It was Mohammed who taught the sublime principle of the equality of men and universal brotherhood in Arabia for the first time with success.... He did away with all the distinctions between the

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<sup>13</sup> John Parkinson, “The Sword of Islam, Part V ‘Al Koran’,” *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, (23 August 1901): 2.

<sup>14</sup> Anon. “Editorial Notes,” *The Crescent*, (17 July 1901): 41. Full text available at <http://www.abdullahquilliam.org> [consulted 26 October 2021].

classes and the masses.... In fact, Mohammed was a self-made man.<sup>15</sup>

This theme is expanded on in the opening of Quilliam's *The Faith of Islam*, which extensively quotes Canon Isaac Taylor's controversial 1887 address on Islam in Africa, "Islam introduces a civilization of no low order, including a knowledge of reading and writing, decent clothing, personal cleanliness, veracity and self-respect."<sup>16</sup> Such arguments also associated Islam with two principles crucial for Victorian working-class radicalism: the abolition of slavery, and temperance. Both of these causes, along with the broad commitment to educate the working classes (the Liverpool Mosque had a library, reading room and Young Men's Debating Society), strongly appealed to Parkinson. His Ayrshire civic duties included being Vice-President of the Kilwinning Junior Liberal and Radical Association in 1899. He was given gifts by the local Rechabite temperance organization and the Co-operative Society on his departure for Rangoon in 1908; he is also probably the "Bro. John Parkinson" listed as office-bearer in Kilwinning's Good Templars, the most radical of the temperance organizations, in 1894.

These activities suggest a high level of involvement in "improving" causes, typical for an industrial worker engaged in literary pursuits. The primary difference between Parkinson and other Scottish working-class writers is that he had no affiliations to Christian groups or churches. Indeed, before and after his conversion, he was a leading light of the North Ayrshire Rationalist Society. On 25 March 1904, for instance, he was continuing his series of lectures for this society on Darwin and evolution, and he defended its beliefs in public via newspaper letters.<sup>17</sup> Late nineteenth-century rationalism was not necessarily in conflict with religious belief, though it had strong links to freethought movements.<sup>18</sup> Parkinson personally inscribed a copy (now in the National Library of Scotland) of *Lays of Love and War*, his book of Scottish and Islamic poetry, to J. M. Robertson, a radically inclined Liberal politician and famed freethinker. There was no contradiction here for Parkinson in relation to his faith, because he viewed Islam as a culture and religion which had historically valued science ("Baghdad and Cairo taught the world literature, science and art, grammar, rhetoric, medicine, astronomy,

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<sup>15</sup> W. Abdullah Quilliam, "The Democracy of Islam," *The Crescent*, (2 June 1893): 158.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor's address was reported in *The Times*, (8 October 1887), cited Quilliam, *The Faith of Islam* (Liverpool: Willmer Bros, 1892), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Anon, "Threshings," *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald* (25 March 1904): 5.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview, see Joshua Bennett, "A History of 'Rationalism' in Modern Britain," *Modern Intellectual History*, 15.1 (2015): 63-91.

geometry and chemistry”) and was far more progressive than late nineteenth-century Christianity, welcoming to a questioning and cosmopolitan spirit.<sup>19</sup> *The Crescent* seemed an entirely appropriate venue for him to publish a poem like “Zola”, extolling both Zola and champions of free-thought and science “Ingersoll, Huxley and Darwin,” as “the masters” and “the century’s men.”<sup>20</sup>

As a would-be cosmopolitan Muslim convert, Parkinson was both aware of and defiant about the limitations he experienced as an Ayrshire millworker. His early historical articles on Islam are self-conscious about his reliance on secondary and potentially outdated materials:

In the investigation of extinct civilizations, various difficulties crop up; present day writers must rely on archaeological research and on the writings of previous historians in various languages; the price also of the large works places them out of the reach of most of us. These difficulties prove almost unsurmountable.<sup>21</sup>

His autobiography also emphasizes how “My great difficulty always was to get books, and being in lodgings when I did get them getting a place to keep them.”<sup>22</sup> After his conversion, when he was employed to write for the *Islamic World*, he commented:

How are the brethren getting on in Turkey, Persia, Arabia and Egypt? I don’t know; how can I? ... I have no doubt but that there are papers devoted to Islamic intelligence, but if they are printed in Arabic, Turkish, Persian or Urdu they are of very little use to the British Muslims, the greatest number of whom have had no opportunity for making themselves proficient in Oriental languages.<sup>23</sup>

Parkinson appeals to the international community reading the journal to send him updates, in English, which he can then report onwards, and he urges greater speed in translating key Islamic works into English.

While such articles emphasize the physical, intellectual and practical barriers separating him from the wider Islamic world, Parkinson also used this self-positioning as an Ayrshireman both to signal the reach of that world, and to highlight perceived connections between Scottish and Islamic history. In “April Showers in Ayrshire,” he links the history of Ayrshire to Wallace, Bruce, and the “day of freedom,” representing these noble heroes in terms echoing the several articles he had just published on

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<sup>19</sup> John Parkinson, “Muhammed and His Power,” *The Crescent* (28 December 1901): 388.

<sup>20</sup> Yehya en-Nasir, “Zola,” *The Crescent* (15 October 1902): 254.

<sup>21</sup> Ingomar, “The Sword of Islam,” *The Crescent* (24 July 1901): 59-60.

<sup>22</sup> Parkinson, “An Autobiography”: 381.

<sup>23</sup> Yehya en-Nasir Parkinson, “Islam and the World, and the World and Islam,” *Islamic World*, 8.87 (n.d. [1903]):83.



“The Dawn of Islamic Chivalry” and its famous knightly warriors. He then positions himself within modern industrialized North Ayrshire:

The Garnock banks are studded with villages and towns. Large brick buildings “adorn” the riverside from its rise till it enters the Clyde; inside the incessant swish of belting and rattle of machinery; outside towering chimney stalks, row after row of bricks in endless monotony marking the ascent; from the top pillars of smoke, like grimy serpents, climb heavenward, black as Erebus, darkening the pale blue of the ether and eclipsing the lustre of the stars.... To the south the Garnock winds, a silver streak, till it is lost in the distant waters of the Firth. In the east the gibbous moon wades through a sea of cloud; the fresh, free air, keen as a Damascus scimitar, has roused my appetite, and, as Al-maghrib proclaims the coming of Al-laïl, I hie me home to satisfy it.<sup>24</sup>

The allusion to ancient Greek in “Erebus” draws together “Western” and “Eastern” knowledge. But note the way that Parkinson’s turn to the simile of a “Damascus scimitar” combines with his use of Arabic terms such as “maghrib” (the west) and “laïl” (night), which may also allude to the Maghrib prayer, at sunset. The effect is to bring together his dual identities as a Muslim journalist and an Ayrshire worker.

Parkinson’s poems have a still more pointed interest in showing how Scottish and Islamic themes can not only co-exist, but speak to each other, and how familiar forms from British verse can be adapted to Islamic topics. His “The Death of Khalid Ibn Walid, ‘The Sword of God,’” for example, is a dramatic monologue spoken by this famous early Islamic convert, who served Muhammad. As a legendary warrior looking back on his glory days, Khalid Ibn Walid’s regret and nostalgia is consciously reminiscent of Tennyson’s “Ulysses” (Tennyson had also, late in his career, written a notable dramatic monologue spoken by a Muslim leader, “Akbar’s Dream”):

Not thus,  
Not thus should Khalid die. What ho! my spear,  
My mail, and helm, and gleaming tahali;  
Harness my steed, and lace this wasted frame  
In iron garb of war; and bear me ’mid  
The crashing corps, where Islam’s foes are dense  
As heavy grain that for the sickle waits;  
That I, before I die, may reap the swathes  
For Islam, swathe on swathe.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> John Parkinson, “April Showers in Ayrshire,” *The Crescent* (21 May 1902): 323-4.

<sup>25</sup> John Parkinson, *Lays of Love and War* (Ardrossan: Arthur Guthrie, n.d.), 47.

“Tahali” is a Spanish term for a sword belt worn over the shoulder. Whilst it is probably anachronistic in this context, it is designed to associate Khalid Ibn Walid with the Moorish knights of Cordova, the subjects of a number of Parkinson’s poems and articles. A substantial number of the poems in *Lays of Love and War* are about jihad, or battling the foes of Islam. Parkinson’s autobiography in *The Islamic World* comments that his favourite reading as a child was “deeds of daring-do and stories of chivalry,” especially by Alfred Phillips, whose now-forgotten works included *Don Zalva the Brave; or The Fortune-Favoured Young Knight of Andalusia* and its sequel.<sup>26</sup> Language such as “What ho!” speaks to this genre, which was likely the origin of Parkinson’s first interest in Moorish Andalusia.

These children’s books about adventure and noble knights are also, of course, successors to Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*. Parkinson’s Muslim warriors, in his poems, adjoin poems on Scottish knightly heroes using the same language and themes, with the only difference being the lightly sketched settings in which heroic action takes place. “Roland and Ellen,” for instance, is concerned with an Ayrshire knight who fights for Robert the Bruce; the poem relays his parting with his patriotic beloved, Ellen, before he goes to war:

With the cry: “The Bruce! The Bruce!”  
 On they come the southern cohorts,  
 Like a river foaming free,  
 With their shields and lances glitt’ring  
 Sweeping in a crystal sea;  
 Onward swept the inundation,  
 Wave on wave its billows rolled;  
 Every cuirass flashing sunlight,  
 Every helmet burning gold.<sup>27</sup>

On the succeeding page, the scene of war has changed, in “Sons of Islam,” and the form has shifted to heroic couplets, but the language remains the same:

On! On! To war, each fearless desert child.  
 From every eye flashing the battle-light,  
 On every cheek the Arab blood was bright.<sup>28</sup>

The effect is to link Scotland’s wars for independence with early Islamic campaigns, as Parkinson connects Scottish and Muslim chivalry. Such parallels and echoes work to explain why Parkinson first became invested

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<sup>26</sup> Parkinson, “An Autobiography,” 381.

<sup>27</sup> *Lays of Love and War*, 77.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

in Islamic history and culture and make his new allegiances to Islam seem less alien to Scottish poetic contexts.

Parkinson was far from being the only Scottish poet who was drawn to legends from Islamic history and the romance of Moorish Spain; orientalist fantasies drawing on literary texts are a familiar presence in the works of all minor Victorian poets. Indeed, he was not the only Ayrshire working-class poet to write about the life of Muhammad. In the early 1800s John Wright, a handloom weaver in East Ayrshire, “commenced a Tragedy, which he entitled “Mahomet; or the Hegira,” at which he wrought with unceasing study until it had extended to upwards of 1500 lines, all of which he retained in his memory, which he was necessitated to do owing to his inability to write it down.”<sup>29</sup> (If Wright published this poem, it has not yet been located). Parkinson had the late-century advantage, however, of being able to situate his literary constructions of the Islamic world within an Anglophone Islamic periodical culture and a British Muslim community, neither of which were options for Wright in 1805. This gave him the chance to live and work in the East. Though Parkinson’s stint as a Rangoon journalist was relatively brief, he would have encountered there a “vibrant, multi-ethnic port city,” a hub for anti-colonial and radical ideas and, as Su Lin Lewis has shown, a city with a very lively newspaper culture: in 1902, she notes, Rangoon had “twenty-six newspapers, sixteen of which were in English, eight in Burmese, one in Tamil and one in Gujarati.”<sup>30</sup>

When Parkinson’s career as a Muslim writer took off, the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, which had launched this career, was both supportive and slightly bemused. His poetry collection was reviewed by the paper without any mention of Islam, with the reviewer concluding that he was “the latest and not the least of Ayrshire’s poets.” In 1902, the paper noted:

The articles formerly published in the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald* on *The Sword of Islam* have attracted considerable attention in the Moslem world and have caused flattering enquiries about their author, our townsman Mr John Parkinson. On 25<sup>th</sup> July he visited, at Liverpool, the chief of the Mohammedan faith, and was entertained there for several days as his guest, seeing there many of our Empire’s defenders of the Islamic faithful amongst our Colonial troops.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> John Wright, *The Whole Poetical Works of John Wright, with a Sketch of His Life*, ed. John Moore (Ayr: McCormick and Gemmell, 1843), xxii-xxiii.

<sup>30</sup> Su Lin Lewis, “Print Culture and the New Maritime Frontier in Rangoon and Penang,” *Moussons: Social Science Research on Southeast Asia*, 17 (2011), 127-144 (para 22): <https://journals.openedition.org/moussons/583>.

<sup>31</sup> Anon., “Kilwinning: Abbey Chimes,” *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald* (15 August 1902): 8.

This seems rather like an effort to reassure readers of Parkinson's continued loyalty to imperial Britain, if not to Christian Britain. "It is an odd thing, surely, that the Sultan of Turkey should be moved to recognize the talent of a gifted Ayrshireman," one 1905 comment noted, but concluded that "he is a man of whom Ayrshire should take care that it does not lose sight."<sup>32</sup> Parkinson's *local* identity, as an Ayrshireman, trumps any suspicion of him as a cosmopolitan Muslim. He is always "Mr John Parkinson of Kilwinning," even as he is also "the honoured of Abdul."<sup>33</sup> Ayrshire's literature is enriched by a Scottish-Islamic poet, and Islam is enriched by an Ayrshire convert. Articles on Islam written in lodgings in Kilwinning move seamlessly from a provincial Scottish paper to a Liverpool Islamic paper, and from there to subscribers across the globe, who read about the author's walks in the Garnock valley. It is such micro-interactions which highlight the complex ways in which cosmopolitanism might operate in provincial Scotland and in working-class communities.

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<sup>32</sup> Anon. "Notes by the Way," *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald* (29 September 1905): 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*