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A New Janet Hamilton holograph manuscript discovered

Robert MacLean and Gerard Carruthers

In early November 2017 a previously unrecorded poem in the hand of Janet Hamilton (1795–1873) was identified at University of Glasgow Library Archives & Special Collections. A user of the Special Collections reading room requested an item with shelfmark, “Sp Coll RB 2772”, listed in only the briefest detail in the online catalogue as, *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* Volume One published by S.O. Beeton and dating from 1852. No copy-specific information was provided in the catalogue hinting at provenance or at the manuscript inscription within. When the user finished consulting it, the book was handed back to Robert MacLean at the supervisor’s desk and as he flipped open the cover to confirm the shelfmark he was confronted with a manuscript poem signed “Janet Hamilton” written on a piece of blue paper pasted to the inside cover. As he read the poem it dawned on him that he recognised Hamilton’s name: Janet Hamilton (1795–1873), the working-class poet from Coatbridge, who was one of the poets investigated in “The People’s Voice: Scottish political poetry, song and the franchise, 1832–1918”, a 2016-18 Carnegie Trust-funded research project examining the neglected impact that local poetry and song cultures had in Scottish popular politics in the Victorian and early twentieth century eras.¹ Gerard Carruthers, one of the investigators on the project, was advised of the find and he was quickly able to confirm the Hamilton attribution by matching the distinctive handwriting with known published examples.

Pasted to the inside front cover of this copy of volume 1 of *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* Volume One is a slip of blue writing paper printed with two vertical red rules at the margins, cut to size to fit the inside of the octavo cover and measuring 10x10 cm. Between the red rules a two stanza poem has been written in black ink in an unusual hand employing a mixture of upper and lower case letter forms. Regardless of whether upper or lower case, the letter height remains reasonably uniform without ascenders much above the line or descenders far below, lending the overall appearance a blocky almost printed aspect. The verses are headed by a three-line title “Lines inscribed To Miss Margaret Young daughter to John Young author of Poor House Lays etc.”² Beneath this is the poem itself in two four-line stanzas signed in the same blocky script with the author’s name “Janet Hamilton”. The poem reads:

Dear girl while the blossom of youth
in their fragrance and beauty are thine,

¹ For more information on this project, see “The People’s Voice” project website:
<https://thepeoplesvoice.glasgow.ac.uk/>

² John Young (1825-91) published his first volume of poetry in 1860, *Lays from the poorhouse: being a collection of temperance and miscellaneous pieces, chiefly Scottish* (Glasgow: George Gallie). As well as speaking to Hamilton’s strong temperance beliefs, the connection with the Young family is interesting in that John, like Hamilton, was a poet suffering from disability. In 1853 a workplace accident rendered him unfit for work and he found himself eventually in Barnhill Poorhouse in the North of Glasgow for a number of years. In his later life he was also, like Hamilton, badly sight-impaired. For Young’s work, see Catherine W. Reilly, *Mid-Victorian Poetry 1860-79: An Annotated Bibliography* (London and New York: Mansell, 2000), 514.

May the tendrils of virtue and truth
with the flower of affection entwine.

May the bounties and blessings of grace
May the dews and the breathings of heaven,
to cherish, to guard and solace
To the dutiful daughter be given.

Beneath the autograph, in a different hand, written in pencil is the date, 1861, and a transcription of the verses, evidently added to obviate interpreting the unusual blocky script. This is in the hand of previous owner of the volume, George Dunlop (1842–1909).³

The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine, subtitled "an illustrated journal, combining practical information, instruction & amusement", was a popular and affordable monthly periodical aimed at lower-middle class women. It was published by Samuel O. Beeton and edited by his wife Isabella Mary (who became famous as "Mrs Beeton" for her household tips and recipes). It was issued in 2 shilling monthly parts, initially of 32 pages, in octavo format with contents including everything from serialised fiction, dress and needlework patterns, poetry, recipes, reviews and themed articles and illustrated throughout with attractive wood engravings. The periodical began in May 1852 with a circulation of around 5,000 but was increasingly successful, selling upwards of 60,000 copies of each issue by the early 1860s.⁴ It has been variously described as "the most successful and influential of British Victorian middle-class women's periodicals", "the first 'cheap' magazine for women of the dispensing of practical information and advice on domestic management" and "the first British women's magazine to achieve anything approaching mass sales."⁵

The "book" in which this handwritten poem is found is volume 1, the first annual compilation of parts, covering the year May 1852 to April 1853, published in a purple embossed cloth-case edition binding (19.5x13 cm) with a gold-tooled-effect title on the spine. It includes essays on female education, a biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe, information on curing diseases in apple trees, numerous poems, needlework patterns and recipes and a whole range of what the index describes as "things worth knowing".⁶ A paper label has been affixed near the head of the spine with a pen

³ The authors are grateful to Jane R. Siegel, Rare Book Librarian at Columbia University, New York, for providing scans of George Dunlop's handwriting: see letter from William Young to Dunlop (11 September 1902) with accompanying note in pencil in Dunlop's hand (George Dunlop Papers, 1716-1908, MS #0371).

⁴ John S. North (ed.), *The Waterloo directory of English newspapers and periodicals, 1800-1900* (Waterloo, Ontario: North Waterloo Academic Press, 2003). Entry on *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* available online via [Victorianperiodicals.com](http://www.victorianperiodicals.com): <http://www.victorianperiodicals.com/series3/showarticlespecial.asp?id=91784> <Last accessed 3 April 2018>

⁵ K. Ledbetter, *British Victorian Women's Periodicals: Beauty, Civilization, and Poetry*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 267; Pauline A. Nestor, "A New Departure in Women's Publishing: The English Woman's Journal and The Victoria Magazine" in *Victorian Periodicals Review*. 15 [3], 1982, 93–106 (94); and David Doughan, "British Women's Serials" in J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. Van Arsdel (eds) *Victorian Periodicals: A Guide to Research, II*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1989, 67–73 (67).

inscription “Autograph inscription by Janet Hamilton”. It is probably also written in the hand of previous owner George Dunlop (1842–1909) but it is difficult to be certain. According to a bookplate affixed to a thin paper flyleaf this book was presented to the University of Glasgow Library in 1951 by George B.[ie. Brown] Dunlop (d. 1950). Dunlop was the proprietor of the Kilmarnock Standard newspaper. Following his death his widow Annie Isabella Dunlop (1897–1973), presented the University of Glasgow with a collection of 170 volumes of English and Scottish literature from his library. A decision was taken on accession to distribute this collection amongst the general stock and as such it no longer survives as a coherent collection, although examples can sometimes be identified due to a Dunlop book stamp occasionally found or, as in this case, a gift bookplate. An obituary for George B. Dunlop in the *Kilmarnock Standard* for 12th October 1950 specifically mentions his library: “Mr Dunlop was [...] the possessor of an extensive library, which included a considerable number of volumes of Ayrshire interest, many of which had been passed on to him by his father.”⁷ Dunlop’s father, George Dunlop (1842–1909) was editor and joint proprietor of the *Kilmarnock Standard*. The contents of a lengthy obituary for Dunlop senior mark him out as a fitting owner of the volume; he is described as a very literate man and a great lover and collector of rare books and autographs:

His library—a very extensive one—contains the works of the best authors and embraces thousands of volumes. These are arranged in such a methodical manner that he was able to lay his hands at once upon anything that he had acquired in the way of reference. [...] Mr Dunlop had one great hobby—the collecting of rare books, manuscripts, and autographs, and it is quite safe to say that his collection of these is not only valuable but in some respects unique. His autographs, in particular, form several highly interesting albums, embracing the names of famous statesmen, poets, authors, philosophers, musicians, soldiers, and heroes of every description, not only of Great Britain but of various foreign countries.⁸

⁶ Hamilton’s poem, “Lines Written at the Birth of the Year, 1853” refers to Stowe’s *Uncle Toms’ Cabin* (Janet Hamilton, *Poems, Essays and Sketches* etc. [Glasgow: J. MacLehose, 1880], 63-4) and she also pens “Lines Addressed to Mrs. H.B. Stowe, On the Occasion of her visit to Glasgow, April 13, 1853”, Hamilton, *Poems, Essays and Sketches* etc., 352.

⁷“Standard’ proprietor’s death” in *Kilmarnock Standard* (12 October 1950). See this obituary hosted on Kilmarnock Chess club website: <http://www.kilmarnockchessclub.co.uk/gbdunlopobituary.htm>
<Last accessed 29 May 2018>

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

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

These are verses composed (presumably) and written by the celebrated Scottish working class poet Janet Hamilton (1795–1873) to Margaret Young (b. 1846), the daughter of fellow working class poet and Hamilton collaborator John Young (1825–91).¹¹ We are told in a memoir by Young that while they had previously corresponded he first met Hamilton in the early summer of 1861, so this inscription is unlikely to precede that event.¹² According to Young and Florence Boos, Hamilton was completely blind by 1866 which provides a *terminus ante quem* for the inscription.¹³ Under which circumstances might a poem like this be written? Perhaps the best clue lies within Young's second published collected volume *Lays from the Ingle Nook* which contains the poem "Lines to my daughter Maggie, on her fifteenth birth-day, September 21, 1861".¹⁴ This poem celebrates Margaret's coming of age in thirteen stanzas. Not only did this event take place shortly after Hamilton and Young first met but the contents of Hamilton's lines would certainly seem to lend them to such an occasion. A closer reading of the two poems might even suggest that they are in dialogue with one another. And Hamilton's title "Lines inscribed to Miss Margaret Young" is a direct echo of Young's own title "Lines to my daughter Maggie". Moreover both poems employ

⁹ According to the obituary this editing work was undertaken on behalf of the publisher Gardner of Paisley. The publisher's preface confirms that this was Thomas C. Latto's 'Life of Ainslie' appended to Hew Ainslie, *A Pilgrimage to the Land of Burns* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1892). Available online from Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/apilgrimagetola00lattgoog>

¹⁰For details of Columbia University Library's George Dunlop papers, 1716–1908 (MS#0371) see: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/archival/collections/ldpd_4078717/

¹¹ In the 1861 census entry, John Young is listed at 4 Stirling St, Cowcaddens (the same address he lists in Nov 1860 in the preface to his poetry collection *Lays from the Poorhouse* [1860]) with an occupation of "literary author". It confirms that his wife (also Margaret) was older than him by 5 years and that they had no children aged 5-15 attending school (Margaret would have been 14 at time of census, in April 1861 so can't have been at school).

¹² John Young, *Pictures in prose and verse; or, personal recollections of the late Janet Hamilton, Langloan. Together with several hitherto unpublished poetic pieces* (Glasgow: George Gallie, 1877), 28. See University of Glasgow Library "Store 19th Cent. English MY80.P4 1877".

¹³ Young, *Pictures in prose and verse* (1877), 35; Florence Boos, "Janet Hamilton" in William Thesing (ed.) *Victorian Women Poets, Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Columbia, S. C.: Brucoli, Clark, Layman: 1998), 149–58 (151). Available online from Professor Florence Boos's website: <http://myweb.uiowa.edu/fsboos/questions/workingclass.html> <Last accessed 3 April 2018>

¹⁴ John Young, *Lays from the Ingle Nook: a collection of tales, sketches, &c. dedicated with permission to Alexander Ewing, Esq., Chairman of the Barony Parochial Board, Glasgow* (Glasgow: George Gallie, 1863). See University of Glasgow Library "Sp Coll BG60-h.38".

botanical/floral imagery with Hamilton's poem arguably developing an idea found in line 5 of Young's second last stanza, "sweet flowers along thy pathway spring," by responding with the four-line stanza:

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

These lines can be read as a response to Young's hopes that his daughter's path through life might be easier than his own:

Thy path through life be smoother far
Than mine has been,
May Bethlehem's transcendent star
 Brighten the scene;
Sweet flowers along thy pathway spring,
And, till the azure welkin ring, [welkin = evening star or Venus
With merry birdies may'st thou sing,
 My Maggie.¹⁵

Other than the pasted-in poem there are no signs of Hamilton elsewhere in the volume—no autographs, no marginalia, no signs of intervention. Therefore can we be sure that these items (the poem, and the book) have always been together or might they have been married up at some point? This is impossible to answer definitively. On the side of original separateness, we might ask had the poem been intended by Hamilton to accompany the book, then why not write it directly onto an endpaper or flyleaf rather than onto a separate piece of paper? That said, the choice of book-text seems overall highly consistent with the sentiments of the poem (for example, its very first article is an essay on the subject of female education). It is possible that the poem was originally part of a letter from Hamilton to the Youngs and that John or Margaret cut it out and pasted it in the endpapers of a fitting volume; perhaps a volume also given by Hamilton, or associated with her in some way. However, the exact relationship between the poem and the volume is now lost and will, unfortunately, likely never be known with certainty.

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¹⁵ John Young, *Lays from the Ingle Nook* (1863), 38 (35-39).

