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Catherick and Laura Fairlie—are also the two characters who assume the least personal control (Mrs. Vesey excepted) of their own identities and who are most complicit in the attempts of others to inscribe them into roles. The pliable Laura in particular becomes student, lover, wife, and even madwoman almost literally on command. By contrast, every man or woman in the text who actively tries to remake an identity succeeds. Over months in the jungles of Central America, Hartright remakes himself into a modern knight errant; over years in the “civilised desolation” (503) of Welmingham, Mrs. Catherick rebuilds herself from a fallen woman into the formidable Mrs. Grundy of her community. Pesca transforms himself from radical Italian freedom fighter to peaceable “English” tutor, and Fosco, once a radical Brotherhood member alongside Pesca, transforms himself into ... well, Fosco. Even Sir Percival, with a relatively impressive display of ingenuity, forges his way back into a cherished identity he has been in danger of losing.

That Collins would attempt such an ambitious, panoramic, and pointed treatment of Victorian identity should perhaps not be a surprise. Tamar Heller has pointed out in a recent review essay that the concept of character “hybridity” (“Masterpiece” 364) seems central to many of Collins’s projects, from the gender doublings of *The Woman in White* to the strange half-white, half-dark hair of Ezra Jennings in *The Moonstone*. But in this essay, Heller also implies that modern scholarship on Collins has kept pace with its subject’s complexity, and I think this position would be harder to support. In the novel’s preamble, the narrator, Hartright, asks readers to approach the book as a collection of evidence—and we have—but he also asks us to treat every element of that evidence as fundamentally connected—“the course of one complete series of events” (33)—and there we have been less successful. While our various theoretical tools have given us greater analytic strength, they also seem to inhibit synthetic thinking, encouraging scholars to assert, when a text responds to the issues favoured by a specific theoretical position, that we have found the key to that text. Nor does it solve this problem to collect our diverse readings in casebooks or essay collections, where they most often remain a set of opposed or diverging monologic positions rather than forming true problem-solving dialogues.

In the same way that the theft of Lady Glyde’s identity was too complex and ingenious a crime for a single detective to solve, literary texts such as *The Woman in White* may be both too diverse to be illuminated by any single critical position and too significantly unified in overall purpose to be understood piecemeal. Precisely because it has been almost uniquely successful at responding with intriguing answers to the full range of our current critical inquiries, however, *The Woman in White* might have unique potential to serve as the key to a dialogic reengagement among Victorianists. Like the East End neighbourhood where Walter, Marian, and Laura go to ground, it may provide the best place for us to gather and learn to better pool our resources, genuinely share our knowledge and perspectives, and plot our next strategic moves together.

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Janet Hamilton, “A Plea for the Doric” (1870)

FLORENCE BOOS



Forgi’e, oh, forgi’e me, auld Scotlan’, my mither!
 Like an ill-deedie bairn I’ve ta’en up wi’ anither; [ill-behaved child]
 And aft thy dear Doric aside I hae flung,
 To busk oot my sang wi’ the prood Southron tongue.

They say that our auld hamlet tongue, my ain mither, [homebred]
 Is deein’, and sune will be dead a’thegither;
 Whan thy callants hae ceased to be valiant and free, [lads]
 And thy maids to be modest, oh juist let it dee!

Shall the tongue that was spoken by Wallace the wicht, [valiant]
 In the sangs o’ thy poets sae lo’esum and bricht, [lovely/tender; bright]
 Sae pithy an’ pawkie, sae tender an’ true, [sly, roguish]
 O’ sense and slee humour an’ feelin’ sae fu’;

Shall the tongue that was spoken by leal Scottish men,
 Whan they stood for their richts on the hill an’ the glen—
 Oh, say, maun it dee, when the last words that hung [must it die]
 On the lips o’ the martyr war ain mither tongue?

Oh, think ye the tongue that at red Bannockburn
 Bade charge to the onset—think ye it maun turn
 to a thing o’ the past, that our bairns winna ken [wouldn’t know]
 To read mither tongue on that mither’s fire en’?

Just think gif the “Cottar’s ain Saturday Nicht”
 War stripped o’ the Doric, wi’ English bedicht—
 To the leal Scottish heart it wad ne’ever be the same;
 Wi’ sic truth and sic feelin’ it wadna strike hame.

At the saft gloamin’ hour, “when the kye’s comin’ hame,”
 And the young heart is loupin’ to hear the dear name,
 What tongue like the Doric love’s saft tale can tell,
 ‘Neath the lang yellow broom, an’ the red heather-bell?

I’m wae for Aul Reekie, her big men o’ print [Edinburgh]
 To Lunnon ha’e gane, to be nearer the mint;
 But the coinage o’ brain looks no a’e haet better,
 Though Doric is banish’d frae sang, tale, and letter.

But there’s a’e thing I’m sure o’—ere lang I maun gang,
 Yet aye when I dow I maun lilt a bit sang; [while I can]
 And sae soun’ shall I sleep ‘neath the auld mossy stane,
 That I’ll never hear tell whan the Doric is gane.

JANET HAMILTON’S “Plea for the Doric” may be seen as part of a proud tradition of non-canonical works that embraced chants, odes, ballads, and blank verses by authors from all walks of life. Among these were itinerants, labourers, factory workers such as Ruth Wills, successful journalists such as Eliza Cook, and active socialists and feminists such as Ethel Carnie. Against the background of that tradition, “Plea for the Doric” may also be interpreted as a blunt critique of certain norms and expectations imposed by “Lunnon”’s “big men o’ print.” Reformist authors who created arresting working-class characters—the singer in Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*, for example, or the seamstress in Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh*—never found a place in their works for a working-class writer.¹

Janet Thompson Hamilton (1795–1873) was a Scot with no formal education. She grew up in Langloan, a tiny rural village later engulfed by the coal mines of Coatbridge, a town in North Lanarkshire, east of Glasgow. Taught to read by her mother, Hamilton married at thirteen, bore ten children, composed verse in her head, organized a modest local circulating library, learned to write in her early fifties, and worked at the tambour-loom until she could no longer see.

Keenly interested in temperance, anti-slavery campaigns, and worker education, she was also an appalled witness of the industrial “progress” that made her little village one of the most ravaged areas in all of Victorian Britain—the subject of her scathing satire “Oor Location.”

Partially blinded by her work at the tambour-loom, Hamilton became totally blind in her sixties and dictated her verse thereafter to James Hamilton, one of her sons. Her narratives and reflective “ballads of memory” (written in Scots as well as English) found a modest but faithful audience, and the success of her “Sketches in Prose of Scottish Peasant Life and Character in Auld Langsyne” may have emboldened her to draft her “Plea,” which appeared in *Poems, Essays and Sketches* three years before her death in 1873.²

The original “Doric” was a rural, rustic northern dialect of ancient Greek. Hamilton’s “Doric” was the Lallands Scots of her native southwestern Lanarkshire (not the vernacular of northeastern Scotland, its usual sense in present-day use). Hamilton’s national reputation had derived in large part from the success of John Cassell’s publication of her English-language essays in London, so her “plea” was more than a rhetorical ploy:

Forgi’e, oh, forgi’e me, auld Scotlan’, my mither!
 Like an ill-deedie bairn I’ve ta’en up wi’ anither;
 And aft thy dear Doric aside I hae flung,
 To busk oot my sang wi’ the prood Southron tongue.

Thomas Carlyle, on the other hand, as well as semi-expatriates such as W.H. Henley, Margaret Oliphant, and Robert Louis Stevenson, profited much more from their willingness to subordinate their natural dialect to the master’s tongue.³

I’m wae for Aul Reekie, her big men o’ print
 To Lunnon ha’e gane, to be nearer the mint;
 But the coinage o’ brain looks no a’e haet better,
 Though Doric is banish’d frae sang, tale, and letter.

As fellow-cantors in the bare, ruined choirs of Scottish identity, Hamilton summoned ancient icons of Scottish history and culture such as “Wallace the wicht” and Robert the Bruce, as well as more recent figures such as the martyred Covenanters (one of whom was an ancestor), the long lineage of unsung singers and balladists, and the more formal poetic tradition of Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson, James Hogg, and Robert Burns.

At the end of her poem, of course, as in individual and cultural life, there was silence, but also a still small lilting voice:

... there’s a’e thing I’m sure o’—ere lang I maun gang,
 Yet aye when I dow I maun lilt a bit sang;

And sae soun' shall I sleep 'neath the auld mossy stane,
That I'll never hear tell when the Doric is gane.

It is obvious why there will always be limited audiences for such poems, for their *raison d'être* presents difficulties to many who would sympathize in principle. But the glosses given above may help readers "hear" Hamilton's melodic flourishes and grace notes in the language she mourned ("Wallace the wicht," "sae pithy an' pawkie," "sense and slee humour an' feelin' sae fu," "to read mither tongue on that mither's fire en," "Bannockburn / ... turn," and "winna ken / ... fire en").

Thus understood, "A Plea for the Doric" is a witty and sophisticated poem, at once homely and subtle, angry, and resigned. The exodus of Edinburgh's literary figures to London and conflicts of Scottish history are now distant matters of historical fact, but the patterns Hamilton observed are not—they simply have more current (and more pedantic) names for them: "hybridity," "post-colonialism," and "marginalization," for example—names that express the fates of what Delueuze and Guattari called "minor literatures."

But Hamilton's deeper and more universal point—the aching ambivalence of assimilation and repression of cultural identity in all its forms—has continued to haunt authors of works in the commercial and imperial "Latin" of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It will haunt those who displace us in their turn.

Notes

- 1 More information on these poets and their works may be found in Florence Boos's *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian England: An Anthology* (Broadview, 2008), which also contains a bibliography of "Some Little-Educated or Working-Class Victorian Women Poets Who Published Books" (350–51). The "Victorian Working-Class Women Poets Archive," edited by Meagan Timney, is now hosted at wcwp.english.dal.ca, and an "Archive of Working-Class Literature" is under development at Liverpool John Moores University by Helen Rogers and others.
- 2 During her lifetime, Hamilton published four volumes: *Poems and Essays of a Miscellaneous Character on Subjects of General Interest* (Glasgow, Edinburgh and London, 1863); *Poems of Purpose and Sketches in Prose of Scottish Peasant Life and Character in Auld Langsyne, Sketches of Local Scenes and Characters* (Edinburgh, London and Glasgow, 1865); *Poems and Ballads* (Glasgow, 1868); and *Poems, Essays and Sketches. A Selection from the First Two Volumes, "Poems and Essays" and "Poems and Sketches," with Several New Pieces* (Glasgow, 1870). An enlarged version of the latter, *Poems, Essays, and Sketches*, edited by James Hamilton, was published after her death, in 1880 (reprinted 1885).
- 3 Hamilton scorned Scotland's geopolitical subordination in "Auld Mither Scotland":

It's England's meteor flag that burns
Abune oor battle plains;
Oor victories, baith by sea an' lan',
It's England aye that gains.
It's England mak's an' signs the peace
Whan nations tire o' fechtin';

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Gilbert Scott, The Albert Memorial (1872)

KATE FLINT



THE ALBERT MEMORIAL is an extraordinary artifact—a triumph of excess. It stands on the south side of London's Hyde Park, symbolically positioned on the spot where a line drawn through the length of the Crystal Palace site intersected with the central axis of the 1851 Commissioners' estate. It was erected at the point where Prince Albert's greatest material achievement encountered its future, in the form of the nearby South Kensington museums that were to give permanent and educationally important homes to the arts, the sciences, and the natural world. Prince Albert himself, in all his golden glory, is seated unassumingly on a backless stool with a copy of the Great Exhibition catalogue in his hand. He is dwarfed by his surroundings: by the Gothic revival shrine and spire that protect him, by the frieze and mosaics and statuary that decorate these, and by the monumental aspects of the whole design, with steps leading up to the central edifice and each of the four corners of the base adorned with emblematic representations of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. Among these, incidentally, only America is seen in motion, looking to the future rather than commemorating the past.

This crowded, earnest design has been mocked since its inception. A year after the monument opened to the public, in the fall of 1872, the *Builder*—the most influential contemporary journal of architectural design—sneered at the manner in which Gilbert Scott, the architect, had, as they put it, laid gingerbread over box girders (27 July 1873). Inevitably, this gilt confection quickly discoloured in the grimy London air. In 1914, by which time cleaning and restoration were already necessary, Lionel Earle, secretary to the Board of Works, wrote to the Treasury requesting funds, remarking that he hoped "regilding will be avoided as much as possible. It is so much less ugly dull" (qtd. in Turner, 348). A year or two later, the future philosopher R.G. Collingwood used to walk past it daily on his way to work at the Admiralty Intelligence Division, and it began, by degrees, to obsess him. "Everything about it was visibly misshapen, corrupt, crawling, verminous," he wrote in his *An Autobiography*. "For a time I could not bear to look at it, and passed with averted eyes; recovering