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# The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women's Writing

Edited by Glenda Norquay

narrator and Edith comment on the contrast between the English countryside and the 'more picturesque beauties' of the Highlands (2: 205; 2: 270). Edith's joy at exchanging 'the crowded streets and stifling atmosphere of London for the silent glens and free mountain air of her dear Highland home' (2: 413) may denote political commentary or simply personal preference. Less equivocally, Edith's return 'home' signifies social and spiritual restoration. Similarly (and like Brunton's Henry Graham), Ronald must make a redemptive return to Scotland to recover his true identity, end his self-exile and claim Edith as his love. Accordingly, he instructs her to meet him at Inch Oran: 'There let me find you – there let me claim you' (2: 384).

Juliet Shields' suggestion that *Destiny* prescribes a model of 'national division of moral labor' is problematic.<sup>26</sup> The novel essays a more complex engagement with national identity than this segregation of Highland virtue from southern rapacity implies. The vital point (as Shields admits) must be that these characters return to Scotland with enlightened and broadened perspectives, having learnt the value of cultural relativism. When Penshurst expresses regret that Edith 'should have been made acquainted with so unfavourable a specimen of English taste and manners' as the Ribleys' set, Edith replies 'I am more in the way of losing prejudices than of acquiring them. I have already got rid of a few since I came to England.' He responds: 'So have I, since you came to England' (2: 214). Reiterating the point, Edith informs Admiral Conway that 'England has rid me of some of my Celtic prejudices' (2: 272). She has learnt that moral virtue is not embedded in nationality and money is a 'universal idol' (2: 213). Meanwhile, Ronald embraces his British national identity when he remarks: 'I was not aware it was more fortunate to have been born an English than a Scotchman, since both are alike Britons' (2: 284). *Destiny* concludes with Mrs Macaulay rendering an 'old Hieland distich' into English so that Admiral Croft may understand it (2: 423–4). The readiness demonstrated by both mediator and recipient to engage in this act of linguistic accommodation ends the novel on a positive note, promising greater British national harmony via mutually sympathetic cultural exchanges. Brunton's and Ferrier's novels invoke an ambivalent dialectic of tradition and experimentation; romance and realism; sentiment and satire; regionalism and nationalism; nationalism and Unionism. Exploring these dualistic impulses in their feminine domestic fiction enabled them to negotiate the public sphere and engage with key questions about personal and national identity in nineteenth-century Scotland and Britain. Such fracturing subverts reader expectations and demands renewed interest in their fiction from a modern readership.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Janet Hamilton: Working-class Memoirist and Commentator

*Florence S. Boos*

Drawing on information from census reports and marriage registers and a minimal definition of literacy as the ability to sign one's name, historians have estimated that roughly 25 per cent of Scottish working-class women were illiterate in 1855, seventeen years before the Scottish Education Act of 1872 permitted (but did not require) districts to arrange for primary education.<sup>1</sup> Against a background of baseline estimates such as these, it hardly seems surprising that penury, cultural bias, familial subordination, and exclusion from secular working-class organisations reinforced the 'absence among working-class women of the self-confidence required to undertake the unusual act of writing an autobiography' which David Vincent mentioned in *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*.<sup>2</sup> It was a striking event, therefore, when Elizabeth Storie's *Autobiography of . . . A Native of Glasgow: Who Was Subjected to Much Injustice at the Hands of Some Members of the Medical, Legal and Clerical Professions* appeared in 1859.<sup>3</sup> And it was even more striking when a working-class Scottish woman's insights in Janet Hamilton's twenty-four essays, 'Sketches of Village Life and Character', and more than two hundred poems found an unexpectedly wide public audience, making her possibly Victorian Scotland's best known working-class author.<sup>4</sup> (Scottish working-class women poets who published volumes before 1870 included Jane Adams, Catherine Pringle Craig, Margaret Crawford, Sarah Parker, Susanna Hawkins, Elisa Leslie, Margaret Mackintosh, Emma Price, Mary Pyper, Janet Reid, Elizabeth Soutar, Jane Stevenson, and Isabella White. As might be expected, many of the poems in their volumes are conventional in sentiment and expression. The volumes of poetry published by Scottish working-class women after 1870 exhibit a marked rise in self-confidence and sophistication.)

That Hamilton's prose as well as poetry attracted readers seems apparent from responses to her two volumes. Reviewers for the *Morning Journal* and *Liverpool Albion* of her 1863 *Poems and Essays*, remarked that 'the essays [. . .] are elegantly, nay, eloquently written' (1 June 1863); and 'The prose sketches at the end of the volume, are at least equal in merit to the poetry; if

anything, we are inclined to think them superior, while so rich is the grace and purity of the English in which they are written, that even a professedly literary man might study them with advantage' (4 March 1863). A faint undertone of Samuel Johnson's 'surprise [. . .] to find [writing by a woman] done at all'<sup>5</sup> hovered in the *Morning Journal* review. But other 'professedly literary men'— the *Athenaeum* reviewer, for example — considered the 1863 volume 'one of the most remarkable that has fallen into our hands for a long time past. It is a book that ennobles life, and enriches our common humanity' (June 1863). The 1865 *Athenaeum* reviewer (perhaps the same man) singled out her prose 'Sketches' for particular praise: 'Still more animated and characteristic are her prose sketches [. . .] Occasionally an anecdote is told which owes its charm less to incident than the shrewd and kindly veracity of the narrator'.<sup>6</sup>

The breadth of Hamilton's audience suggests that her reminiscences and opinions particularly reflected the inherent aspirations and frustrations of her working-class culture, as well the uniquely Scottish history of 'The Killing Time' and her ambivalent, often sceptical view of Victorian 'progress'. This chapter explores the background to Hamilton and the particular dynamics of her role, as she moves beyond poet to cultural commentator.

### Life

A girl without formal education, an ardent reader from childhood, a married woman at 13, a mother of ten children (seven of whom survived), a matron who taught herself to write in her 50s (she had committed her own verses to memory), Hamilton lost much of her sight when she was in her 60s and was fully blind at 70.<sup>7</sup> Born Janet Thomson on 14 October 1795 at Shotts in Lanarkshire, Hamilton was the only child of James Thomson, a shoemaker and sometime agricultural worker, and his wife Mary Brownlee Thomson, who moved together to the village of Langloan (now a subdivision of Coatbridge) when Janet was seven. Mary Thomson accompanied her husband during two years of field labour, then worked as a tambourer (embroidress), teaching her daughter the same occupation. Janet Thomson's mother was the great-granddaughter of John Whitelaw, executed for his Covenanter beliefs at the Old Tollbooth in 1683,<sup>8</sup> and deeply devout. James Thomson, described by Gilfillan as 'an ardent reformer' (PES, p. 13) was a man of parts, who subscribed to the new village library, which offered access to 'much good and solid reading',<sup>9</sup> and apparently had an interest in science which Janet Hamilton later memorialised with characteristic humour. Janet also remembered his anger and disgust when a neighbour, 'Auld Auntie Jamieson' punished little Janet severely for reciting a poem on the Sabbath, and his scorn and contempt when a local

radical threatened him with violence if he failed to join a proposed 1819 uprising (PES, p. 422).

Her mother also reappeared frequently in Hamilton's recollections as an instructor in reading and religion:

for as soon as I could read, she made me read a chapter from the Bible every morning, and this practice was never omitted for a single day, till I married and left the house; and [. . .] every night when I laid my head on the pillow, my mother's mouth was close at my ear, praying for me, and teaching me to pray for myself.<sup>10</sup>

She was less broadminded than her husband, however, and somewhat more austere:

My mother, who was a very pious woman, did not at all approve of my ballad singing, poetry, and novel reading, and would often threaten to burn my precious store [of ballads], but a good fit of crying, on my part, always saved them. (ix)

Hamilton recorded one such encounter in 'Pictures of Memory'. When shown a volume of fairy tales and ballads by her eager daughter, Mary Hamilton responded that 'such reading may amuse,/ But will not make you good and wise'. Janet persisted, however:

'Oh, you shall hear,' the child replies:  
Then warbled clear an old Scotch ditty.  
The mother's heart was moved; her eyes  
Were brimming o'er with love and pity.]

and Janet, 'like a dancing sunbeam, pass'ed/ Away into the summer air' (ll. 25–8; 31–2 PES, pp. 271–2). Hamilton seldom praised herself in print, but in this instance the power of the word evidently took precedence over the power of the Word. Hamilton told Gilfillan in later years that that she had nursed each current infant while reading, and had quickly hidden her copy of *Blackwood's* or Shakespeare in a carefully prepared niche in the wall when someone entered.

Many working-class autobiographers have expressed their yearning for education as a source of inner and outer fulfilment — life's great romance, as it were<sup>11</sup> — and Hamilton's longest prose account of her youth (three pages in all) consisted almost entirely of recollections of her early reading:

I was never taught, never knew, do not know even now, any of the rules of grammar in composition [. . .]

I do not remember when I became mistress of the alphabet, but I read Bible stories and children's half-penny books with eager delight before I was five years of age. When about eight, I found to my great joy, on the loom of an intellectual weaver, a copy of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and a volume of Allan Ramsay's *Poems*. [. . .] I soon became familiar with, and could appreciate the gorgeous sublimity of Milton's imagery. [. . .] With Ramsay I was at home at once, for I was beginning to get rich in the Ballad treasures of my country about that time; and a pathetic 'Aul Warl Ballant' would put the sweetie shop to a discount at any time when I was mistress of a bawbee.<sup>12</sup>

In old age she also recalled in conversation with Alexander Wallace that she 'could scarcely remember the time when her love of books was not her ruling passion', and that she had continued to read till two in the morning each day of her sighted life.

Adolescent conflicts between Janet and her mother may have been averted by her marriage in 1809 to her father's assistant John Hamilton, with whom she lived until her death in 1874. Wallace described him as a man who regarded his wife 'with singular devotion', (*PES*, p. 21), faithfully supporting her love of reading and bringing her armfuls of books from distant libraries (*PES*, pp. 16–17). Seven of their ten children survived to adulthood, five born before Janet reached the age of 20, and the last, a daughter, dying at five weeks when Janet was 30.

Implausible as it may seem, the unschooled ardent reader Janet Hamilton did not learn to write for many years: when she began to compose religious poems in her head at seventeen – and the mother of two – John transcribed about twenty of them. If these were the verses published as 'sacred poems' in the posthumous volume of her works, they are noticeably less sophisticated and more biblical in tone than later poems. After her third child was born she apparently left off composition for many years, but when she was about fifty taught herself to write a rough but firm 'printed' script (*PES*, p. 13).

Hamilton published four books in her lifetime, and her son James edited her posthumous *Poems, Essays and Sketches*. Age and complete loss of sight severely limited her production after 1870, but James's recollections provide a glimpse of her linguistic precision and independent character even when she could not see:

Having been my mother's amanuensis, I may say that when I wrote a piece from her dictation, and afterwards read it over to her, she rarely made a correction on it. When her books were being printed, although unable from want of sight to read a line, she never would allow any one but herself to make any corrections on the proofs. I read them; she sat and listened, and an alteration of a word or a syllable from her own she would detect at once. She said if her writings

possessed any merit, it would be her own; and if there were blemishes in them, they, too, would be her own. (*PES*, p. vii)

### Early Publications

Almost all working-class women poets whose work has survived benefited from the help of one or more reformist middle-class editors; Hamilton was no exception. Her first known appearances in print came at 55, in the publications of John Cassell, a publisher committed to the cause of popular education, the freehold land movement, and working-class political advancement. In 1850 he launched three self-help ventures specifically targeted at working-class audiences: the penny weekly *The Working Man's Friend and Family Instructor*; an essay competition for readers of *The Working Man's Friend*; and a companion volume, *The Literature of Working Men*, composed entirely of essays submitted for the competition.

Cassell's undertaking was extremely radical. The idea of a contest soliciting working-class writing which would then be published was literally 'empowering' to disenfranchised working-class readers: his call brought 800 submissions.<sup>13</sup> *The Literature of Working Men* was a unique instance of a nineteenth-century publication of works composed entirely by and for working-class writers, and its existence changed Janet Hamilton's life. In a period of tacit as well as explicit male discrimination, her submissions were accepted for publication in all three of Cassell's subsidised publications. Six essays were published in *The Literature of Working Men*, making her the most frequent contributor to the volume, and another submission on temperance appeared in *The Working Man's Friend*, in which Cassell included 'The Wayside Well', a poem praising his efforts on behalf of the working-class.<sup>14</sup> Cassell also published two of Hamilton's temperance essays, two essays on education and, in 1851 'To the Working Women of Britain', perhaps the most original of her early polemical essays. 'Sketch of a Scottish Roadside Village Fifty Years Since' (1851) later became the first of her 'Sketches of Village Life and Character'.<sup>15</sup> Cassell also sponsored a separate prize competition for 'social science essays' composed by members of the working class: Hamilton's remarks on 'Self-Education' brought her £2 for third place in 1859.<sup>16</sup>

No one had quite expected such accomplishments from an elderly working-class woman, and it was to the credit of Cassell's editorial staff as well as Cassell himself that they welcomed them. As Benjamin Parsons, an early feminist and one of *The Literature of Working Men's* sub-editors, wrote in his introduction,

Only think that the spouse of a working man [Hamilton had described herself as a shoemaker's wife rather than as a tambourer] should write a discourse on

'The Uses and Pleasures of Poetry to the Working Classes,' and that the ease and elegance, and sentiments and composition, would be such as would do no dishonor to Mrs. Ellis or the Hon. Mrs. Norton.<sup>17</sup>

When Cassell's working-class competitions and compilations closed down a year later for lack of money, his project's circulation had both created a wider readership for Hamilton's work, making her, for example, 'an established favourite' with 'the readers of the [*Airdre and Coatbridge*] *Advertiser*'<sup>18</sup> and fostered her identification with the workers' movement. She dedicated her third volume in 1868 'loving and respectfully . . . to her Brothers/ THE MEN OF THE WORKING CLASSES' and followed it with a few lines of verse:

Ah, not low my aspirations,  
High and strong my soul's desire,  
To assist my toiling brothers  
Upward, onward, to aspire.

In her final volume in 1870, she also expanded this dedication to 'her brothers and sisters of the working-classes'. Such gestures clearly expressed her gratitude for the encouragement and solidarity she found in the contemporary workers' movement.

### Hamilton on Education and Alcoholism

The range of Hamilton's essays was determined to some extent by John Cassell's interests, but their topics – literacy, education and alcoholism – were natural for an autodidact who raised seven children and apparently endured the abuse of an alcoholic son. Her earliest essays were relatively formal and didactic, but the force of personal conviction and experience was apparent in their successors. In 'The Uses and Pleasures of Poetry for the Working-Classes' in *The Literature of Working Men* (1850) she expressed the hope that workers of sensibility, denied formal education and foreign travel, would seek comfort in 'that which remained behind' – imaginative literature as a source of inspiration, contemplation, social critique and consolation. Appropriately for her topic, she graced her plea with fourteen quotations from British poets from Milton onwards (whose works would have been available in cheap editions). An ardent supporter of independence movements, she also urged her readers to heed the words of Thomas Campbell's 'Pleasures of Hope' and support European democratic stirrings in general and the efforts of Hungarian revolutionaries in particular. Robert Burns was another of her heroes, along with the 'Corn Law Rhymer' Ebenezer Elliott.<sup>19</sup> The chief 'use' of poetry was ethical self-culture, however, and in her peroration, she concluded that 'amidst blasted hopes and wasted aspirations [the working

man who loves poetry] may imbibe the very spirit of courage, patience, and resignation (p. 435).

Her political sympathies were more muted in 'Social Science Essay on Self-Education' (the essay which brought her the £2 prize), but her principal examples of 'self-made men' were a tailor and cooper who became ministers of the faith. She also addressed herself directly in this essay to those whose situations resembled her own, '[w]orking-women, daughters of working-mothers with families' who 'could not be spared for years to attend school' (p. 446):

I venture to give my humble opinion that the proper study of womankind is woman; and I dare to say that the woman who takes up and thoroughly studies that interesting and sometimes intricate subject, will find ample scope for the exercise of her mind . . . and, above all, in the study and culture of her heart, affections, and feelings. (p. 447)

In a society in which a mandate for elementary education was a generation away, she accepted the inevitability of partial home-schooling, urging women entrusted with this to acquit themselves of it as well as they could, for the 'habits of religion, prudence, and industry' depended on their work. She also warned parents of the destructive effects of narcotics commonly given children, urged them to guide through affection rather than discipline, and asked them to educate themselves to read and discuss books with their children.

In 'To Working-Women' finally, she directly broached a painful topic, 'a sister addresses you, one of your class – the daughter, wife, and mother of working-men' (p. 456):

Working-women, shall I here make the sad supposition that there are amongst us those who either cannot read at all, or do it so imperfectly that the sense is obscured or lost in the attempt? Alas for the woman who is thus engaged in the battle of life! She is indeed unarmed and undefended. (p. 458)

Even the relatively educated, however, have failed to fulfil their potential: 'we have [. . .] fallen immeasurably short of the standard attained by the females of the upper and middle classes, who [. . .] adorned the literature of their country' (p. 460). And for the first time she criticised her beloved 'Brothers [. . .] of the Working Classes' for their interest in matter not mind: 'is it not true that in early manhood the qualities you admire [. . .] consist chiefly in dress, complexion, and figure, with a piquant manner of uttering [. . .] silly repartees, and pretty nothings' (p. 461). Hamilton's essay is a rare instance of an address by a working-class woman to her fellow women. Her scorn for what would now be called 'women's socialisation' was not unique, but had the sting of personal experience and long observation, as did her confrontation of her 'toiling brothers' and the leaders of worker-education

movements for their *de facto* devaluation of women. Perhaps alluding to the fact that adult education courses for workers were generally designed for men, she urged 'the necessity [. . .] of including the females of your class, and more particularly the young [. . .] in every movement for furthering the intellectual advancement of our order' (p. 462).<sup>20</sup>

Hamilton also devoted five of her early essays to denunciations of alcohol as an opiate of the working classes. The first European temperance movement arose in the west of Scotland, and its mutual aid societies and 'Band of Hope' activities for young people were as much parts of working-class life as were the densely packed pubs on its streets.<sup>21</sup> Hamilton contributed six poems to *The Adviser*, the Scottish Temperance League's illustrated magazine for children, in 1853–4, and dedicated her first volume to a local landowner who supported the cause.<sup>22</sup> In 'Counteracting Influences', her first temperance essay, Hamilton concluded with a poem in which a 'mourning mother' raged at the mysterious power of addiction:

I have had, I have still, a stern warfare to wage  
With a monster so hideous, so hateful, and dire,  
It seems as I moved in a circle of fire. (PES, p. 484)

For all her fervour, however, Hamilton was a 'moral suasion' temperance advocate, not a 'Prohibitionist'. The Scottish temperance movement preferred education and propaganda to prohibition in this period, and Hamilton was openly sceptical of the likelihood of governmental intervention through the force of law:

It were useless in this matter to invoke the aid either of churchmen or statesmen; for, generally speaking, the domestic usages of the one, and the rich results accruing to the revenue in the other, will always sufficiently account for the cold neutrality in the cause of temperance maintained by the first, and the negative encouragement given by the last, to the unlimited manufacture, sale, and consumption of all kinds of excisable liquors. (PES, pp. 478–9)

Hamilton's predictions were more or less accurate: employers as well as the Church of Scotland opposed temperance initiatives. As Elspeth King observes, the Church had its own problems: 'The Reverend Mr. Houston of Gorbals Parish Church was one of the worst cases, having been charged nineteen times in five years with being "drunk on the streets, drunk in the house of God, drunk when performing the marriage ceremony and drunk in his own house".'<sup>23</sup>

Probably as a result of her defence of temperance and the importance of maternal teaching, Brian Maidment has characterised Hamilton's writings as a 'compendium of ferociously conservative attitudes'.<sup>24</sup> I see her as princi-

pally animated by basic ideals of autonomy and mutual aid. She did not, for example, believe that women should defer to men; that self-education should substitute for schools; that abstinence should be imposed by fiat rather than persuasion; or that statesmen have an *ipso facto* claim on respect. She believed in working-class solidarity, and drew on these ideals and her personal experience to suggest ways in which her brothers and sisters might find a better life.

### 'Sketches of Village Life and Character'

Hamilton published ten 'sketches' of the village life of her childhood, in which she recreated the customs and legends of her ancestors and gently rebuked or deconstructed some of their more manifest exaggerations.<sup>25</sup> As she put it in her preface to *Poems of Purpose and Sketches [. . .] of Scottish Peasant Life and Character*, her motive was a 'desire to hold at times sweet (some will say uncouth) converse with dear old Mother Scotland, before her native Doric, her simple manners and habits, are swept away by the encroaching tides of change and centralization' (p. 5). In the opening 'Sketch' she appeals to her authority as participant:

to give a true and graphic sketch or sketches of Scottish peasant life and character in 'days of langsyne', it is necessary that the writer should not draw his information from tradition and hearsay alone, but should, from childhood, have lived, moved, and shared, for a time at least, in the usages, customs, and opinions; in a word, in all the habits and actings both of the inner and outer life 'of that bold peasantry, their country's pride' – a class which is fast losing its identity. (PES, p. 351)

According to Hamilton, one pronounced characteristic of traditional Scottish 'peasant character' was a belief in revenge, ennobled as 'the actings of the retributive Providence'. Hamilton tried to mine such views for anagogic significance and to understand those who held them. She narrated a tale told by her maternal grandfather (1704–1801) about orphaned Mysie Fairlie, a servant who became pregnant by her employer's son, and was told by him that he would forfeit his right hand if he failed to marry her. After jilting her for a wealthier bride, he called Hamilton's grandfather on his deathbed to exhibit his putrid hand, blackened from gangrene, and to beg Mysie's forgiveness. Other examples of 'divine intervention' included a powerful dream which had allegedly appeared to Hamilton's great-grandfather, leading him on awakening to exchange his previous mode of life for sobriety and devotion. Hamilton does not 'suppose that this relation [. . .] will receive an unhesitating assent to the reality of the dream' (pp. 356–7), but duly offered for consideration the fact that he did alter the course of his life



afterwards. On the other hand, she commended her grandfather for rejecting the narrow sectarianism of the period 'freely indulged in both by Seceders and Churchmen', as exhibited by publicly walking out of the kirk with his little son when a minister compared the Church of Scotland to the 'mother of harlots' (p. 365).

Other reminiscences record some of the many crises of remote rural life or describe her childhood awe of witches' charms and the country people's fear of '[ghostly] visitations [which] were sometimes fatal' (p. 378). As with the religious dream vision, she suspended judgement about 'the reality of [...] ghost[ly] intrusions'. In short, Hamilton respected her frugal ancestors' virtues, and drew on their 'auld warl' fables as sources for her 'sendings [...] set in my heart' ('Grannie's Tale', l. 8), but carefully distanced herself from their more extravagant details.

In 'Sketches of a Scottish Roadside Village Sixty Years Since' Hamilton expressed gratitude for the modest recompense of her work at the tambour frame, an obsolete profession which had once been 'amply remunerated': 'an industrious girl could not only earn a comfortable living for herself, but also assist her parents with the younger portion of the family' (p. 385). She recalled with respect the independent weavers of her region who 'by a moderate application to work for eight or nine hours a day, would earn a sufficient competence for all the purposes of life – his leisure hours being chiefly employed in the culture of flowers' (p. 385). She also described the traditional Scottish but and ben cottage in which she was reared, and averred that taken as a [vanished] class, [hand weavers] were the most intelligent, enlightened, and by far the most independent body of working men in the kingdom' (p. 386). In 'A Scottish Out-door Communion Sabbath in Times Gone By' Hamilton reproved some of the excesses she remembered from her ferociously conservative youth – the oppressive tedium of Sabbath observances '[...] leavened with something of Judaical strictness and austerity' (p. 396). She also deprecated the practice of outdoor preachments from ten in the morning to six in the evening, accompanied by a well-lubricated day-long feast and scenes in which drunken men fought near the church, 'surrounded by shrieking women, their Sunday clothes torn to tatters, blood streaming from their faces, and uttering the most horrid oaths' (p. 404).

By way of counterpoint, Hamilton also remembered people who lived marginal and unremarkable lives in quiet dignity, among them 'auld Robin', a lover of broadsides, and 'Auld Kirsty Dinsmore', an elderly spinster (in the literal sense of the word), who lived in a tiny round dwelling behind her family's cottage and taught her ballads:

How often when my peering, laughing face darkened the small panes, would  
that little, wrinkled round face, set in its rim of snow-white hair, turn round

with a look of kindness in its pale blue eyes, and she would say – 'Come in, my bairn, an' I'se sing thee the sang thou likes sae weel.' (429)

Here and elsewhere, the elderly Hamilton remembered with particular affection the kind souls who had fostered her childhood gifts.

Aversion to armed conflict remained a deep and consistent feature of her thought. An ardent opponent of slavery, she recoiled from the carnage of the American Civil War, and wrote at least nine unreprinted anti-war poems for the 1863 and 1865 volumes, as well as a poetic meditation on 'The Horrors of War' (1870) in which she anticipated a bloody pan-European conflict. She also displays scepticism about the Napoleonic Wars of her youth. Citing lines on the devastation of war by the Scottish poet Hector MacNeill,<sup>26</sup> she sardonically recalled 'the days of Nelson and naval victory', when for 'too many of our village politicians it was sufficient atonement for the wasted blood and treasure of the nation that we could blow up the ships of the French at sea, or slaughter them by thousands on land' (p. 386).

In 'Reminiscences of the Radical Time – 1819–20' Hamilton described an abortive uprising and neighbours who threatened to seize her home and tried to impress her father and brother into a doomed battle with troops encamped in nearby Airdrie. Even so, Hamilton sadly recalled 'the deep distress of the hand-loom weavers, occasioned by depression in trade, great reduction in prices, and scarcity of employment' (pp. 404–5), and the desperation of the insurgents as they marched through the village, 'with their lean, pale faces, unwashed, unshaved, and uncombed, thinly clad, and out at knees and elbows' (p. 405). Her final appeal was for peaceful reform, asking: 'who shall say that if our misguided brethren [...] had enjoyed the same privileges [as we], they would ever have, even in their trying circumstances, have supplied us with materials for writing Radical Reminiscences?' (p. 412).

In the end, Hamilton's 'people's history' left her with much to mourn, most conspicuously the ravages wrought by coal and iron smelting in her once-green and pleasant land. In 'Local Changes', the last essay in her last volume, she recalled a morning walk graced by bird songs on the banks of the Luggie in the spring of 1820, and observed that: 'the lover of nature has exchanged the whistle of the blackbird and the song of the thrush for the shrieking, hissing, and whistling of steam, and the once clear waters of the Luggie for a sink of stench and pollution' (*Poems*, p. 389).

A more personal burden in Hamilton's later years was her blindness. She sought to soothe her grief with appeals to redemptive memory. In 'A Ballad of Memorice' she wistfully recalled 'the [f]rien's o' my youth – a' gane, a' gane!/  
An' I sit blinlins here ...' But even yet:

the star o' memory lichts the past;  
But there's a licht abune

To cheer the darkness o' a life  
 That maun be endit sune.  
 (ll. 57–60)

In one of her last poems, 'The Skylark – Caged and Free', a woman who had enjoyed acute perception of visual detail recognises the bird's plight: 'the bard within thee burning,/ Heaven in thine eye, the dull earth spurning', as also her own: 'Thy prison song, O bird beloved,/ My heart hath strangely, deeply moved.'

### Conclusion

There is a sense in which the trajectory of Hamilton's life was genuinely unique. Few literate working-class women had her literary gifts, strength of character and a measure of domestic encouragement for her efforts. Even fewer benefited from anything like the window of opportunity briefly opened by John Cassell. And fewer still had the grandmotherly authority to make impassioned appeals for women's education in Victorian Britain, or reflect on the mixed effects of 'progress', and have a chance that they might be heard.

A gifted woman raised in an essentially oral culture, Janet Hamilton survived long enough to become an astute mediator between shifting cultural views, and a cogent translator of her 'people's history' into written form. The topics she chose – education, temperance, regional history – were generally approved by the workers' movements of her time. But she infused them with more individual qualities: her wry sensibility; her temperamental pacifism; her faith in mutual aid and solidarity; her passionate advocacy of women's education; and her sage reveries of the 'auld mither Scotland' which lived on in her 'ballads of memorie'. Her assessments of the losses and gains of 'progress' expressed the ideals of her class, place and time, and her evocative essays remain among the best sources we have for an understanding of the lives and attitudes of the 'respectable' poor from within.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Private Writing

*Aileen Christianson*

This chapter considers the concept of 'private writing' in relation to letters, diaries and memoirs by nineteenth-century Scottish women. In most cases (although not all) they initially wrote for themselves, their family and other intended recipients, rather than for publication. Can their texts be read as 'private' or are they (however 'private') as much part of literary production as fiction or non-fiction intended for publication? One author discussed is Margaret Oliphant (1828–97), consummate professional published writer who began her autobiography as a private record but continued it as a piece of work to be published posthumously to provide financially for her niece.<sup>1</sup> Defining herself in relation to other more 'successful' writers and always driven by the need to make a living to support her family, she claimed a role more generally assigned to the male in the family in Victorian times. But other nineteenth-century women, without professional writing roles, produced private memoirs which gained posthumous life, for example, Elizabeth Grant's *Memoirs of a Highland Lady* (1897) and the scientist Mary Somerville's *Personal Recollections from Early Life to Old Age* (1873).<sup>2</sup> One text intended for publication from the outset is the 'Autobiography' of Ellen Johnston (1836?–74?), the 'Factory Girl', written and published as an introduction to her *Poems and Songs* (1867) to promote her hopes of an income from writing. The letters of novelist Susan Ferrier (published 1898) merit attention in their own right as well as illuminating her published writings.<sup>3</sup> The pre-eminent 'private writer' of the nineteenth century is Jane Welsh Carlyle (1801–66); with an entirely private function for her writing during her life, she became the most public of writers with the posthumous publication of much of the extraordinary archive of her letters. Through these texts, this chapter explores the way in which 'private writing' claims a public life by the end of the nineteenth century, with accompanying expectations and ambivalences in reception.

The 'private' in 'private writing' is generally assumed to belong with the non-public nature of the material, that is letters, journals, memoranda books, written for private consumption. Karina Williamson's 'literature



15. Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, pp. 81–2.
16. See Susan Ferrier, *The Inheritance* (Glasgow: Kennedy and Boyd, 2009), pp. 311–14.
17. Juliet Shields, *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity, 1745–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 136–7.
18. Loraine Fletcher, 'Great Expectations: Wealth and Inheritance in the Novels of Susan Ferrier', *Scottish Literary Journal* 16: 2 (1989), p. 60.
19. See Cullinan, *Susan Ferrier*, pp. 115–16.
20. Susan Ferrier, *Destiny* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1882). All references are to this edition.
21. Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 105.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
23. Vineta Colby, *Yesterday's Woman: Domestic Realism in the English Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 100–1.
24. Fletcher, 'Great Expectations', p. 72; See also Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 60.
25. Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel from Smollett to Spark* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 67.
26. Shields, *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity*, p. 135.

#### Chapter 6 – Boos

1. David Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 10.
2. David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiography* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 203. For little-educated working-class poets, see Boos, *Working-Class Poets of Victorian Britain: An Anthology* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2008), pp. 350–1.
3. Glasgow: Richard Stobbs, 1859. Brief memoirs also appeared in Ellen Johnston, *Autobiography, Poems and Songs* (Glasgow: W. Love, 1867 and 1869); Elizabeth Campbell, *Songs of My Pilgrimage* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliott, 1875). Later nineteenth-century Scottish autobiographers and diarists included Jane Stevenson, *Homely Musings by a Rustic Maiden* (Kilmarnock, 1870), Janet Bathgate, *Aunt Janet's Legacy to Her Nieces* (Selkirk: G. Lewis, 1894), and the posthumously published *The Christian Watt Papers*, ed. and intro. David Fraser (Edinburgh: Paul Harris, 1983).
4. For reassessments of working-class Victorian Scottish poetry see: Valentina Bold, 'Beyond "The Empire of the Gentle Heart": Scottish Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century', in D. Gifford and D. McMillan (eds), *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 246–61; William Findlay, 'Reclaiming Local Literature: William Thom and Janet Hamilton', in D. Gifford (ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature: the Nineteenth Century* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988),

- pp. 353–75; Florence Boos, 'Janet Hamilton', in William Thesing (ed.), *Victorian Women Poets. Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Columbia, SC).
5. James Boswell, *The Life of Dr. Johnson* (London: Charles Dilly), vol. 1, pp. 205–6.
6. 'Opinions of the Press', *Hamilton, Poems* (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1870), p. 397.
7. See autobiographical sketch in the second edition of her 1863 *Poems and Essays* (Glasgow: Murray); prefaces by George Gilfillan and Alexander Wallace to the *Poems, Essays and Sketches of Janet Hamilton*, ed. James Hamilton (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1880), hereafter PES; and John Young, *Pictures in Prose and Verse; or, Personal Recollections of the Late Janet Hamilton, Langloan* (Glasgow: George Gallie, 1877).
8. John Whitelaw was the subject of Hamilton's 'Lines Sacred to the Memory of Mr. John Whitelaw' and 'Ballad of the New Monkland Martyr', PES, pp. 56–7, 212–15.
9. *Poems* (1870), p. ix.
10. *Poems* (1870), pp. ix–x.
11. See memoirs of Campbell; Bathgate; Hannah Mitchell's *The Hard Way Up* (1968); Peig Sayers's *Peig* (1938). See Boos, 'The Hard Way Up: Victorian Women and the Education Acts', in Teresa Mangum (ed.), *Berg Cultural History of Women on the Age of Empire* (Oxford: Berg, 2012).
12. *Poems* (1870), p. viii.
13. Two hundred of these were for *The Working Man's Friend*: when this inspired Cassell to commission two supplementary volumes of *The Literature of Working Men*, six hundred more poured in. See Boos, 'The Homely Muse in her Diurnal Setting: The Periodical Poems of "Marie", Janet Hamilton and Fanny Forrester', *Victorian Poetry* 39: 2 (2001), pp. 262–9, 282–3.
14. Cassell published a second poem, 'Summer Voices', in *The Working-Man's Friend*, 1853, n. s. 3., and 'Lines on the Calder', in his temperance publication, *The Quiver*, 18 July 1863.
15. The nomenclature is confusing. Her first (1863) volume reprinted 'Sketches of a Scottish Roadside Village Sixty Years Ago'; the 1865 volume included 'Sketches of Scottish Peasant Life and Character in Days of Auld Langsyne' as a separate piece, along with three 'Local Sketches' and seven 'Sketches of Village Life and Character', of which one, 'Local Changes', is more properly characterised as an essay. In the posthumous *Poems, Essays and Sketches*, the category 'Sketches of Village Life and Character, and other Essays' includes nineteen instances of prose.
16. *Social Science: Being Selections from John Cassell's Prize Essays, by Working Men* (London: Cassell, 1861); 'Social Science Essay – On Self-Education' in the 1863 volume. Since Cassell's other volumes based on these competitions have apparently not survived, it is impossible to tell whether Hamilton won others.

17. Benjamin Parsons, sub-editor for *The Literature of Working Men* (London: Cassell, 1850, vol. 1) wrote *The Mental and Moral Education of Women* (London, 1842), an appeal for equal education of women at all levels.
18. *Poems*, p. 304.
19. Elliott (1781–1849): volumes by the ‘Corn Law Rhymer’ were widely published in the working-class press: *Corn Law Rhymes* (1831) and *The Poetical Works of Ebenezer Elliot: The Corn-Law Rhymer* (1840).
20. The first Working Men’s College was founded in London in 1854; a Working Women’s College ten years later.
21. See Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* (London: Faber, 1971); Elspeth King, *Scotland Sober and Free* (Glasgow: Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, 1979).
22. See Boos, ‘The Homely Muse’, p. 282.
23. King, pp. 10–12.
24. Brian Maidment, *Poorhouse Fugitives* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1987).
25. ‘Sketches of a Scottish Roadside Village Sixty Years Since’ appeared in *The Literature of Working Men* (1851); nine more followed in *Poems and Purpose and Sketches of Scottish Peasant Life and Character in Auld Langsyne* (1865); three were reprinted in *Poems* (1870); all but ‘Maggie Gibson’ were included in the posthumous *Poems, Essays and Sketches* (1880).
26. MacNeill (1746–1818): *Scotland’s Skaith, or the History of Will and Jean* (1795), gained him a wide reputation, with 14 editions in its first year. A 1796 sequel, ‘The Waes of War’, was also popular.

#### Chapter 7 – Christianson

1. See Chapters 9 and 10 for discussion of Oliphant’s work in other contexts.
2. For discussion of Somerville in relation to intellectual circles, see Perkins, Chapter 4.
3. On Ferrier’s fiction see McIntosh, Chapter 5.
4. Karina Williamson, ‘The Emergence of Privacy: Letters, Journals and Domestic Writing’ in Ian Brown et al. (eds), *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature. Volume 2* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 57.
5. Elizabeth Grant, *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, vol. 1, ed. Lady Strachey (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988), 2 vols; p. 134.
6. *Ibid.*, preface and p. 225.
7. Williamson, p. 58.
8. Jane Welsh Carlyle and Thomas Carlyle, *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, 1849, vol. 24, ed. C. R. Sanders, K. J. Fielding, I. Campbell, A. Christianson et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970–2011), p. 272.
9. Dorothy McMillan, ‘Selves and Others: Non-fiction Writing in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries’, in Douglas Gifford and

- Dorothy McMillan (eds), *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 72, 74.
10. Williamson, p. 65.
11. Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, vol. 1 (London: Virago, 1983), pp. 3–4.
12. Welsh Carlyle, 1843, vol. 16, p. 35.
13. Welsh Carlyle, 1858, vol. 34, p. 49.
14. Welsh Carlyle, 1859, vol. 35, p. 248.
15. Welsh Carlyle, ‘BUDGET of a Femme incomprise’, 1855, vol. 29, p. 251.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
18. Welsh Carlyle, ‘Much ado about Nothing’, 1849, vol. 24, pp. 159–71, 214, 171.
19. Welsh Carlyle, ‘The simple Story of my own first Love’, 1852 vol. 30, p. 194.
20. Carlyle, 1866, vol. 30, p. 184.
21. Williamson, p. 69; T. Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, eds. K. J. Fielding and Ian Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1881] 1997).
22. For a discussion of the way that Carlyle laid claim to his place in her life in his *Reminiscences* while acknowledging but containing her talents, see Aileen Christianson, ‘Jane Welsh Carlyle’s “Private Writing Career”’, in Gifford and McMillan (eds), *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing*, pp. 232–3.
23. For further discussion, see A. Christianson, *Jane Welsh Carlyle, Biography and Biographers* (Edinburgh: Carlyle Society, 2008); James Anthony Froude (ed.), *Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle, Prepared for Publication by Thomas Carlyle*, 3 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1883).
24. Elizabeth Grant, *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, ed. Lady Strachey (Edinburgh: R & R Clark, 1897); for a later edition, see, for example, Elizabeth Grant, *Memoirs of a Highland Lady* (London: John Murray, 1928).
25. Susan Ferrier, *Memoir and Correspondence*, ed. John A. Doyle (London: Eveleigh Nash & Grayson, [1898] 1929), vol. 4 of *The Works of Susan Ferrier*.
26. Ferrier, 1929, vol. 4, p. 68.
27. Cited by Rosemary Ashton, ‘Introduction’, Susan Ferrier, *Marriage* (London: Virago, 1986), p. x.
28. Ferrier, 1929, vol. 4, p. vii.
29. Peter D. Butter, ‘Elizabeth Grant’, in *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing*, p. 210.
30. Grant, 1988, vol. 1, p. 34.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
33. Mary Somerville, *Queen of Science: Personal Recollections of Mary Somerville*, ed. Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), p. 1.
34. *Personal Recollections, from Early Life to Old Age, of Mary Somerville* (London: John Murray, 1873).
35. McMillan, ‘Introduction’, Somerville, 2001, p. xx.