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- [4] M. Oliphant (2000) "The Open Door", *A Beleaguered City and Other Tales of the Seen and the Unseen*, ed. Jenni Calder (Edinburgh: Canongate), pp. 176, 188. For a fuller discussion of "The Open Door" and "The Library Window", see Jenni Calder, (1993) "Science and the Supernatural in the Stories of Margaret Oliphant", in *A Question of Identity, Women, Science, and Literature*, ed. Marina Benjamin (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press).
- [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 177, 190, 197, 203, 204.
- [6] *Ibid.*, p. 207.
- [7] *Ibid.*, pp. 191, 201.
- [8] "The Library Window", *ibid.*, pp. 365, 379.
- [9] *Ibid.*, pp. 372-373.
- [10] *Ibid.*, pp. 391-392, 395, 401-402.
- [11] M. Oliphant (1988), *Miss Marjoribanks* (London: Virago Press), pp. 29, 48-49.
- [12] *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 107.
- [13] *Ibid.*, pp. 138, 192, 195-196.
- [14] *Ibid.*, pp. 270, 272-273.
- [15] *Ibid.*, p. 463.
- [16] *Ibid.*, pp. 398, 401, 397, 498-499.
- [17] M. Oliphant (1984) *Hester* (London: Virago Press), p. 25.
- [18] *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 31, 30.
- [19] *Ibid.*, p. 210.
- [20] *Ibid.*, pp. 278, 279.
- [21] *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144
- [22] *Ibid.*, p. 296.
- [23] *Ibid.*, p. 316.
- [24] *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 44.
- [25] *Ibid.*, pp. 352, 353.
- [26] *Ibid.*, pp. 355, 358, 361.
- [27] *Ibid.*, pp. 401-402.
- [28] *Ibid.*, pp. 430, 433, 439, 440.
- [29] *Ibid.*, pp. 443, 455, 482.
- [30] *Ibid.*, p. 495
- [31] M. Oliphant (1880) "The Grievances of Women", *Fraser's Magazine*, May 1880.

The "Queen" of the "Far-Famed Penny Post": "The Factory Girl Poet" and her audience

FLORENCE BOOS

ABSTRACT The brief *floruit* of Ellen Johnston (c. 1835-1873) offers rare insights into the obstacles a working-class woman needed to overcome to find a receptive audience for her verse. Alexander Campbell, an elderly radical and editor of the *Penny Post* from 1860 to 1868, published her work as well as the epistolary exchanges it evoked, arranged for the printing of her volumes, and exhorted his readers to buy subscriptions to *Autobiography, Poems, and Songs* (Glasgow, 1867 and 1869). This article considers the thematic and stylistic progression of Johnston's verse, and offers evidence that Campbell's personal kindness and his readers' many gestures of poetic solidarity brought forth a rich range of autobiographical resonances absent from her earlier work. Johnston's poetic correspondence with "Edith" and other readers in Campbell's columns enabled her to articulate the poetic identity of a woman who overcame adversity to find community with sympathetic readers. The article also examines her silence between her publication of these poems and her anonymous death, four years after age and ill-health forced Campbell to relinquish editorship of the *Penny Post*. In a sequence of verses in the *Autobiography's* second edition, Johnston entrusted her poetic legacy to an unnamed friend. If this was Campbell, it suggests that she was aware of her need for the support of a principled editor and responsive working-class audience to publish at all. Such evidence and the near-uniqueness of her brief rise to local prominence, suggest that such striking forms of editorial and working-class solidarity may have been necessary prerequisites in the nineteenth century for the emergence of a distinctive and determined working-class woman's poetic voice.

Hundreds of Victorian British workers saw their verses printed in regional and working-class periodicals, and some managed to publish a book, but little is known about the ways in which readers responded to their work. Even less well understood are the ways in which working-class women struggled to establish local poetic reputations and get their work reprinted between covers.

About three dozen Scottish working-class women poets, for example, managed to publish one or more books [1], but only one is known to have worked in factories throughout her adult life: Ellen Johnston, whose *Autobiography, Poems, and Songs* (Glasgow, 1867 and 1869) [2] briefly reached an extensive working-class audience. In what follows, I will argue that unusual

forms of interaction between Johnston, her editor and her enthusiastic readers opened her precarious path to fleeting prominence, and that careful study of these interactions offers new insights into her alternately triumphant and foreboding verse.[3]

Alexander Campbell, editor of the *Glasgow Penny Post* from 1860 to 1868, printed and fostered Johnston's work in the paper's "Notices to Correspondents", and his indispensable aid made it possible for her to bring out both editions of her book. Ben Brierley, the eponymous editor of *Ben Brierley's Journal* (Manchester, 1869-91) [4], later furthered the career of the factory worker Fanny Forrester in more limited ways (offering information on her life and a line-drawing portrait for interested readers) [5], but Campbell's efforts on Johnston's behalf were pioneering and unusually systematic.

Forrester never saw her poems reprinted between hard covers, for example, but Campbell helped gather subscriptions for Johnston's book, actively promoted it, and kept his readers informed about her activities throughout his tenure at the *Penny Post*. One can therefore attribute Johnston's brief but intense *floruit* to the fortunate conjunction of her own ambition and accomplishments, Campbell's active help, and the support of a remarkably responsive working-class audience.

The *Penny Post* appeared variously in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and London between 1856 and 1877, and its several proprietors in other stages included establishment figures such as Robert Buchanan (1855) and James Cruickshank (1858). In the three decades before Alexander Campbell assumed the editorship in 1860, he had distinguished himself as an early socialist and co-operator, and suffered imprisonment in Edinburgh in the 1830s for his advocacy of an unstamped press.[6] In an excerpt he later reprinted from an 1865 speech to departing emigrants, Campbell described himself as a "friend of the cause of working people", who was involved in the production of several newspapers. Among these were the *Glasgow Sentinel* [7] and the *Penny Post*, which he published and printed as well as edited until his apparent retirement in 1868.[8]

Campbell's redaction of the *Penny Post* mixed extensive coverage of sensational crimes, "edifying" fiction on Scottish themes, fragments of international news, and sympathetic background articles about the conditions of miners, farmers, and industrial labourers. He printed ardent editorials in support of the 1867 suffrage bill, information about labour markets and conditions in Canada and Australia, and informative articles about the Confederacy's treatment of slaves and the devastating effects of the Civil War. He also expressed a consistent interest in the working conditions and legal rights of women, and his encouragement of Johnston's work clearly reflected a personal desire to widen the opportunities open to working-class women.

When Campbell assumed publication of the *Penny Post* in 1860, its circulation was about 30,000 – much larger than the readership of *Ben Brierley's Journal*, but much smaller than that of the popular Dundee *People's Journal*,

whose circulation rose from 50,000 in 1864 to 110,000 in 1867.[9] Campbell carved out a niche for his middle-sized, mildly radical *postille*: working-, lower-middle-class, and middle-class people bought the *People's Journal*, and readers with more radical leanings bought the *Penny Post*. [10] That the *People's Journal* found 100,000-odd readers in southern Scotland in this period was remarkable in itself. More so was the fact that Campbell's radical and working-class audience bought and shared with others 30,000-odd copies of the *Penny Post*.

Campbell clearly considered his paper a means to help inform and educate as well as divert his audience, and his readers' many poetic contributions provided a kind of oblique confirmation of the need for an enlarged franchise. Johnston's poems, in particular, proved that a talented woman could arise from the grinding labour of the mills. It may be no coincidence that Campbell helped her bring out the first edition of her poems in 1867, the year in which Parliament debated and passed the Second Reform Bill.

More generally, Campbell's "Notices to Correspondents" in the *Penny Post* set a friendly, unpretentious and distinctly Scottish tone. He blended praise, personal news of contributors, and appreciative comments on the current issue's poems, especially the leader which appeared on the front page. The corresponding columns before and after his tenure conspicuously lacked his personal zest, love of the region, and active interest in working-class and other forms of literature.

Ellen Johnston's poems appeared regularly in the *Penny Post* from March 4th, 1865 to June 20th, 1868, when she published the poignant "Last Lay of the Factory Girl". Born around 1835, Johnston was therefore about thirty when her first poems appeared in Campbell's paper. What little we know about her comes from self-descriptions in her brief notes to the poems, and from a brief account of her travails and dislocations in an "Autobiography" which preceded her volume (twelve pages in the first edition, seventeen in the second).[11]

Johnston's father was a stone mason of poetic tastes and ambitions who left his wife Mary Bilsland and daughter to emigrate to the USA.[12] After he left, Bilsland married again when Ellen was eight, and her despotic second husband forced the eleven year-old Ellen into factory work, and apparently abused her for several years, a circumstance Johnston later described in carefully guarded terms. As an adolescent, Ellen fled home several times, considered suicide, and in 1852 gave birth to her own daughter, Mary Achenvole.[13] She did not tell us whether the father was her stepfather, a defecting lover, or someone else.

Johnston began submitting verses to weekly newspapers as an adolescent, and her gift brought a measure of triumph in 1854, when the *Glasgow Examiner* published "Lord Ragland's Address to the Allied Armies". This "made my name popular through Great Britain and Ireland" (p. 11), and brought a gift of ten pounds from Lord Ragland's secretary. At some point during the next three years, a doctor warned her that she would die if she continued to work in the

factory without "a change of air", and she sent "An Address to Napier's Dockyard, Lancefield, Finnieston" to her employer, Robert Napier, who offered to help her establish a small business. She asked for ten pounds, and used it instead to support herself, her daughter, and her now-incapacitated mother and stepfather for five months.

In 1857, when Johnston was twenty-two and her daughter five, ill health and her family's continuing need for money prompted her to leave Mary with her grandmother and seek work in Belfast and Manchester. She published more verses there, and "the little boys and girls used to run after me to get a sight of 'the little Scotch girl' their fathers and mothers spoke so much about" (2nd edn, p. xix). She returned to Scotland "much improved in body and mind", found little Mary "growing prettier every day", and enjoyed a more peaceful family life, "the past forgiven and forgotten".

In Glasgow she found work at Galbraith's Mill, and continued to publish poems in the local papers, but suffered two new shocks. Twenty years after his departure for an unknown destination in the USA, her biological father wrote from Maine to plead for a reunion, and committed suicide when he learned that his now-ailing wife had long since remarried. Shortly afterward, Johnston's mother died at forty-five. In the second version of her autobiographical sketch, Johnston remarked that her father's letter and suicide left her "disappointed of a promised home ... which I was not destined to enjoy, [and] I therefore made up my mind to go to Dundee" (2nd edn, p. xx). The second edition also expunged the sketch's allusion to Mary's "illegitimate" birth, perhaps in response to the "generous criticisms and kindly hints respecting my Autobiography" provided by "Editors of the daily and weekly press".

It is hard to evaluate Johnston's motives and circumstances in the brief "Autobiography"'s small glass. She was clearly a woman who survived an unhappy childhood, laboured to earn her living, and sought earnestly for romantic fulfilment, but her otherwise expressive writings made no mention of Mary as an adolescent or young adult, and she addressed her (then six year-old) daughter in only one of her poems – "A Mother's Love", written about Johnston's departure for Belfast in 1858 ("[O]ur parting brought sorrow, known only to Him / Who can see through the heart's depths – my Mary Achin"). Johnston also mentioned no survivors in "The Factory Girl's Last Lay", her poetic farewell, and "Mary Achin" may have died in later childhood, or simply left home in her turn.[14]

In any event, Johnston left for Dundee in 1861 to seek work after her mother's death, and hoped to stay there with her one remaining close relative, an Aunt Phemie, who, however, "measured all my faults, considered not my wrongs" (p. 45), and refused to take her in. This difficult move seems to have marked a divide in Johnston's poetic life, for during the next decade she made sustained efforts to exorcise the ghosts of her troubled past.

Johnston's Early Poems

As Judith Rosen observes, Johnston's self-designation as "Ellen Johnston, The Factory Girl" in her 1867 *Autobiography, Poems and Songs* "reassert[ed her] class and gender as important markers of identity" as well as her refusal to separate the identities of woman, worker, and poet.[15] The volume itself appeared with a brief "testimonial" preface from the well-known Dundee critic and patron George Gilfillan, which Rosen calls "a brief, gruff bark of qualified approval".[16] Gilfillan – who was more generous in other contexts – acknowledged that he had "looked over" Johnston's poems with interest and pleasure, and expressed the somewhat patronising hope that publication would encourage her "to cultivate her mind, [and] read to correct the faults in her style – arising from her limited opportunities".[17]

Johnston divided the volume into "Poems", "Poetic Addresses and Responses", "Songs", and an "Appendix", and she seems to have drafted more than half of the volume's 232 pages of poetry before she began to write for the *Penny Post*. [18] Eight poems addressed to fellow Scottish poets and her "Muse" (pp. 113-122) appeared in the *Penny Post*, along with all those included in "Poetic Addresses and Responses" (pp. 145-195) and the "Appendix" (pp. 227-232), and three of the four poems added in the 1869 edition.

In his 1997 monograph on Johnston – the only single-author work anyone has ever devoted to a British working-class woman's poetry – H. Gustav Klaus has correctly observed that "[h]er poetry stands out for the range of subjects and styles broached".[19] Many of Johnston's early poems praised specific audiences or venues – a workingmen's club, an employer, or her workplace [20], and the responses they convey have prompted Valentina Bold to suggest that "Johnston's work offers a curious blend of peace-making and incitement to rebellion".[21]

Others recorded romantic attachments, promises, and losses ("Lines to a Lovely Youth, A Boatbuilder Leaving the Town", "Lines to a Young Gentleman of Surpassing Beauty", "Lovely Johnnie White", "My Cousin Bill", and others) [22], and at least five recorded grievances, attacked enemies, or satirised people she disliked ("Your Wee Neighbor Nell", "The Shaemaker's Wife", "Wee Poet Nell", "A Satire on a Pretended Friend", "The Peacock"). She also commented caustically on the straits of workers in several poems, including two in Scots, "O Come Awa' Jamie" and the powerful dramatic monologue, "The Last Sark, Written in 1859". A passage in the autobiography also recorded that she had won a lawsuit against her employer but was then "persecuted beyond description – lies of the most vile and disgusting character were told upon me, till even my poor ignorant deluded sister sex went so far as to assault me on the streets, spit in my face, and even several times dragged the skirts from my dress" (p. 14).

Several of Johnston's early poems anticipated her later autobiographical mode. In "Childhood's Flowers: The Gowan and the Buttercup", for example,

"fickle fate" "changed those happy childhood hours / To years of grief and woe; / And in my breast in place of flowers / She made rank weeds to grow", and in "The Factory Exile", "God alone can only tell how I have been betrayed". "The Suicide", a dramatic monologue, recalled pains suffered in adolescence, and a female poet rejected a self-destructive attachment in "Love Outwitted". In "The Lay of a Scottish Girl", Johnston's speaker told an Irish audience that "still I love the land wherein / I've borne a thousand wrongs, / And spent youth's years in sighs and tears, / Whilst others sung my songs". The unnamed speaker in "The Happy Man" learned to value generous actions more than appearance:

When in my young and thoughtless years fair beauty was my pride,
I mused upon it day and night, and longed to be its bride.
Now, I feel the man is worth a world who acts a generous part,
And a paradise of beauty is centred in thy heart.

Johnston gradually honed and refined her calls for independence, allusions to early wrongs, and expressions of pride in poetic accomplishment in the *Penny Post*. She remained openly assertive, undevout, and independent, however, and clearly clashed with contemporary stereotypes of the meekly virtuous working-class woman and mother (compare the spitting incident mentioned earlier). Yet she also conducted an ardent poetic romance in the pages of the *Penny Post* with a poetic admirer she had never met, and grieved at his silence and indifference.

Many of Johnston's working-class readers clearly admired her bluntly rhapsodic poetic *persona*, sympathised openly with her romantic frustrations, took vicarious pleasure in a promised union of kindred souls, and offered affectionate sympathy when her hopes for love dissolved. Johnston's working-class *ressentiments* and romantic projections moved her readers because her smouldering anger and frustrated ambitions resonated with their own condition, and many clearly saw in her a working-class heroine, who embodied and defended their own aspirations for recognition, and leapt over obstacles and disappointments in search of fame and love.[23]

"Correspondents" and Epistolary Friends

Ellen Johnston was the first woman poet to appear in Campbell's "Notices to Correspondents" in this period, and for three years her verse and others' responses to it enlivened and sometimes dominated the *Penny Post's* poetry columns. Other poets achieved their own distinctive tones, but none matched the confessional, almost Byronic dramatic qualities of Johnston's urgent sense of grievance and desire to tell her tale.

Johnston signed her first poem in the *Penny Post* as "The Factory Girl, Cheapside Factory, Dundee". In "My Childhood's Hours", which appeared on March 4th, 1865, she asked:

... where are those days, now, of innocent gladness?
Oh! tell me, cruel Fate, the cause of this change;

And why are those pleasures grown sorrow and sadness,
Hearts that were kind then are cold now and strange.

No more shall I wander through Cathkin's green wildwood,
Nor feel e'er I die as I felt when a child.

In "To My Aunt Phemie", her first poem to appear on the paper's first page (July 8th), Johnston reproached her once-loving aunt for her censure and "scorn" (quite possibly of Ellen's single-motherhood):

Till death my tear-dimmed eyes doth close, I'll ne'er forget the look
Of haughty scorn thou gavest me – thy cold and stern rebuke.

Dear aunt, thy heart is changed now – some spell has thee beguil'd,
Or thou wouldst ne'er have turned thy back upon thy brother's child;
For couldst thou think as I have thought, and feel as I have felt,
Yea, though thy heart was adamant, my name that heart might melt.

On October 14th, "E.J., the Factory Girl" began a long series of epistolary poems of friendship with "Lines to R.H.P., Parkhead", in which she thanked "R.H.P." (the pen-name of John Pettigrew) for a "lovely flower-wove token", quite possibly a poem. Pettigrew later proved a faithful friend. He contributed two laudatory poems to her volume, and ordered copies for himself and other subscribers, as did two other poets, David Morrison of Caldervale and Daniel Syme of Lanark.[24]

As Judith Rosen remarked, some of Johnston's readers clearly conflated love of her verse with love of (or attachment to) her.[25] In the October 21st issue, for example, G(eorge). D. Russell of St Ninians, Stirling made an effusive but indirectly worded romantic offer:

If e'er another spirit join
With thee to paint the scenes of life,
Oh! may his goodness e'er shine
In the bright halo of his wife!
May he be truly one with thee,
The high-souled maiden of Dundee!

Shortly before Russell left for Australia a few weeks later, he published a second poem in the *Penny Post* for December 9th in which he pledged (counterfactually, as it turned out) that "I was and shall be ever thine". Johnston responded rhapsodically in the same issue, under the title: "Lines to G.D. Russell, Late of St Ninian's, Stirling, Who sailed from London for Queensland Nov. 18th, 1865".

I loved thee e'er I saw thee; a strange and mystic spell
Like a spirit, moved within me, and language cannot tell

All the loving thoughts I nourished, the deep sincere regard
My blighted bosom cherished for St Ninian's noble bard.

The issue for December 30th brought more measured verse-tributes from Andrew Dickie of Kilmarnock and R.H.P., and Johnston's reply to the latter. Dickie gallantly proclaimed that if he were younger he would "clasp to my bosom the maid of Dundee", and R.H.P. sent her a Bible, his "*carte de visite*", and lock of hair. Ellen's answering poem expressed the hope that she would meet him in heaven, promised to put the strand of hair with Russell's tokens in her locket, and proclaimed gratitude for the happiness and friendship her publication in the *Penny Post* had brought.

In "The Factory Girl's Address to Her Muse" (February 17th, 1866), she expressed deep gratitude to the *Penny Post* itself in language that evoked what she saw as her arduous mission and heroically successful poetic calling:

Art thou not crowned an empress of soul-inspiring theme --
A fair and beauteous poetess -- thine own bard's angel dream?
Could more honour'd names be given to thee beneath the sun,
Save to style thee Queen of Heaven -- a name none ever won?

Ah! sing on, my muse, with gladness strain thy harp's every chord;
Thou hast fought, yea unto madness, thy pen has been thy sword;
From the field thy foes are driven, and victory is thy boast,
Give thanks to God in Heaven, and the far-famed Penny Post.

Nine more Johnston poems appeared in 1866. In "Lines, With My Carte de Visite, to Mr. G.D. Russell, Queensland" on June 16th, she grieved for Russell's absence, worried at the effect of grief on her appearance, and expressed fear that "A death-shade round this bosom coils, / That soon may feed the hungry worm". With unconventional bluntness, she also asked him directly to:

... gaze upon this little *carte*
The emblem of thy promis'd wife,
And say could'st thou till death regard
Her as the love-star of thy life.

Is she thy choice? Then take this hand,
This heart thou priz'st more than gold,
By heaven's decree, by fate's command,
The Factory Girl to thee is sold.

Other poems, addressed to other male poets, communicated her own sad memories of the dead to the grieving H. Smith of Glasgow (May 5th), and commiserated with Daniel Syme of Lanark's grief for the death of his infant son (December 15th).

"Edith", Isabel and Other Sisters

Johnston had poetic sisters as well as brothers, epistolary lovers and kindly editorial grandfathers, and these women poets gradually assumed more prominence in Johnston's public exchanges. Inspired, perhaps, by Johnston's example, six women poets -- "Elsbeth", "Jessie, A Bookbinder", "The Ploughman's Wife", "Edith", "Isabel", and a "Glasgow Lassie, C.R." contributed new poems to the *Penny Post*, and the last three elicited direct poetic responses from Johnston.

Johnston urged "Mr. David Morrison, Caldervale, by Airdrie" at one point to honour the "famed Ploughman's Wife, / Who hath nobly fought in sweet minstrelsy's strife", but the "sister" who became most important for her was "Edith", a middle-class reader who deeply identified with Johnston's works. In reply to a poem in which Edith solicitously asked Johnston what had led her to write verse, "The Factory Girl" responded on April 7th, 1866 with a poetic review of her romantic disappointments, and expressed a hope that she might meet "gentle Edith":

Edith, farewell, may joy be thine,
Perchance with thee I yet may meet,
When I shall press thy hand in mine,
My kindred sister's love to greet.

She attached to the poem a six-sentence, third-person autobiographical sketch, in which she recorded that:

When she was eight years old her mother, being a widow, married a second husband, a power-loom tenter, and removed from her grandmother to a stepfather's reign of terror. When she was ten years old she was placed in Bishop Street Weaving Factory, where she first became a factory girl, Dundee being only the land of her adoption.

In a postscript, she added that "My stepfather is dead. Peace be to his soul!" Under Edith's prompting, Johnston had begun to unburden her unhappy past.

In "Edith's Reply to the Factory Girl" (not published in the *Penny Post* but included in her *Poems*, pp. 159-162), Edith described her own childhood (raised by a poetically inclined father in a vale by the Esk River, near the Clyde), expressed sympathy with Johnston's troubled memories and factory labours, and alluded briefly to her own disappointments in love. In "The Factory Girl's Reply to Edith" on July 14th, 1866, Johnston responded with a more detailed autobiographical account:

A father's love I never knew,
He left me when an infant child,
And sailed Columbia's shore to view,
And chase ambition's fancy wild.

He was a bard – 'tis from his veins
 That my poetic blood doth flow;
 His were the wild and mystic strains
 Such as in Byron's breast did glow.

Eight years on Time's iron wings had fled,
 When Hope's gold star began to wane;
 My mother, dreaming he was dead,
 Joined in wedlock's band again.

The grief that I have borne since then
 Is only known unto the Lord:
 No power of words nor author's pen
 My countless wrongs can e'er record.

Of her father's suicide, she wrote that he was moved by a:

Conscience wrung with wild remorse
 To hear his child, far-famed in song,
 Wept 'neath a cruel stepfather's curse,
 That he himself had caused the wrong.

Such was my sire, and such his end,
 And such an end was nearly mine;
 But Heaven its mercy did extend,
 And sent kind friends to save in time.

Johnston's more detailed prose description of the initial separation also offered a rationale for wistful solidarity with a "high-souled" father and his fateful choice:

The authoress's father took out a passage for himself, his wife and child, to go to America. On the eve of their departure his wife changed her mind and returned home with her friends, leaving her astonished husband to pursue his journey alone. Being a high-souled proud man, his feelings were deeply wounded at his wife's strange proceedings; hence arose the cause of his not writing for the long period of twenty years, and the above statements were the sad result. Truth is stranger than fiction.

In any event, Edith imagined a return by Russell to "Scotia" in "On the Betrothal of Miss Ellen Johnston" (August 4th), and recorded a "wild gypsy girl" prophesying the joys of the ensuing marriage. In "Lines to Edith with G.D. Russell's and the Factory Girl's Cartes" (November 17th), Johnston contrasted the exaltation of art with the oppression of nineteenth-century factory life.

It is within the massive walls of factory dust and din
 That I must woo my humble muse, her favour still to win.

It is the rude and ignorant whose insults I must brook,
 The envious taunts of galling scorn and cold contemptuous look.

It is amidst pestiferous oil that I inhale my breath,
 'Midst pond'rous shafts revolving round the atmosphere of death.

Johnston followed this with a description of her nightly return alone to Jasper, her affectionate cat, added that "It would be well for many men their hearts were half as true", and decried the bad judgement of Edith's faithless lover: "Proud might he be to gain thy heart, as proud to win thy hand". Her efforts to console Edith made her feel that "[T]his earth seems heaven to linger thus with one so good and true", and she invited Edith to "[a]ccept the *carte* of my betrothed, accompanied with my own".

A reply, "Lines by Edith, On Receiving the Cartes of Mr Russell and the Factory Girl", later appeared in Johnston's volume, but not in the *Penny Post*. In it, Johnston's spirit visits her bedside.

Sister, some strange and witching spell thy spirit casts o'er mine,
 It lights the dull grey eye of day, and o'er my dreams doth shine;
 With lamp in hand, I saw thee by my bed the other night,
 And thou wert beck'ning me to some new mission in its light.

A pleasing male companion-spirit also hovers nearby ("I like that pensive face"), but the speaker wonders whether his presence has deprived her of her ancillary poetic role:

It seems as if this traveller and I had climb'd life's steep
 Wrapt in reserve, till thy brave song burst o'er the waters deep,
 And threw o'er me the minstrel robe I ne'er had hoped to wear,
 And made me come before the world to tell thy talents rare.

In a mildly homoerotic thought-experiment, "Edith" reflects that she might have courted the Factory Girl, had she been a "youth", then pledged "sister-love" and-solidarity:

Ah sister! had I been a youth, this tale would have been mine;
 I'd whispered in thine ear such vows while beat my heart by thine.
 Before this deeper love of thine will sister love grow cold?
 Still take my heart that was another's – through life I'll thee enfold.

In another poem, printed January 26th, 1867, "Edith" proudly compared Johnston to Sappho and loyally repeated her expressions of sororal love:

It trembles in a woman's tear
 Who loves the honour of her sex,
 And watcheth one with hope and fear
 Whose fame each day doth brighter wax ...

Kind Reader, pardon me again,
 My woman's heart doth swell with pride,
 And tears do often stop my pen,
 While writing by this sister's side.

"The Factory Girl Resigns her Crown of Fame to Her Sister, Edith, After Receiving Her Carte, January 1st, 1867" appeared in the *Penny Post* for February 9th, 1867.[26] In it, she assured Edith that

... when I gaze upon thy lovely CARTE
 A mirror to my soul it still shall be.
 Reflecting back a nobler soul's regard –
 An angel guide-star beaming bright on me.[27]

Edith later published two subsequent verse-narratives which may have been based on Johnston's account of her life ("The Maiden To Her Muse. A Golden Legend", the leader for May 25th, 1867, and "Katie's Confession" in the issue of June 29th 1867); and "Fragment (Composed When Bending Over the Factory Girl's Poems)", a tribute to her "lovely actress" and epistolary friend, appeared in the second edition of Johnston's *Poems* in 1869.

... Ellen lives in every line;
 Her photograph is on each page;
 In every verse her soul doth shine –
 Her eye, that ne'er shall dim with age.

Who that hath seen her loving eye
 Shall e'er forget, in changing scenes,
 That through this shifting folio lie,
 Ellen, the lovely actress, leans?

Johnston was blessed in the attachment of her semi-anonymous fellow-poet. "Edith" devoted more than half her poems to Johnston in one way or another, and her evocations of dreams and fleeting suggestions of bisexual sensibility had their own imaginative power.[28] Her verse also vanished after Campbell left the *Penny Post*, and her last name as well as the details of her later life remain unknown.

None of Johnston's poetic correspondence with other women poets probed comparable depths. In "The Factory Girl's Reply To 'A Glasgow Lassie'", printed August 18, 1866, Johnston responded politely to "C.R.'"s expressions of trust in Russell's "love that distance cannot fade", and acknowledged her need to dispel the "mist[s]" of disappointment with "fancy's dreams":

Ah! I have loved to madness; yet strange this tale may seem,
 That my heart hath ne'er known gladness save when in fancy's dream;

For my cup has still been flowing with bitter misery,
 And, alas! there is no knowing when joy will come to me.

...
 Ah! dark thoughts like these come crowding like mist across my mind,
 All my cherished hopes enshrouding with doubts and fears combined.
 The future seems a mystery. Alas! I only know
 That my life is one dark history of toil-worn heart-sick woe.

In "Lines to Isabel from the Factory Girl" (January 19th, 1867), Johnston took interest and pleasure in the now-forthcoming publication of her poems, and at long last acknowledged obliquely the distant Russell's apparent lack of interest:

My life's young years were spent in dark repining,
 In persecution, falsehood, and envy;
 But now a world of love is round me twining –
 My fame is soaring upwards to the sky.

...
 Is it because I am an orphan lonely
 A thousand hearts do sympathise with me,
 And countless lovers vow to love me only
 Would I forsake him far across the sea?

Perhaps Russell's disappearance in Queensland recalled to her her father's silence in Maine.[29] In any event, Johnston also suggested that Isabel might join her and Edith in a poetic sisterhood, and in a characteristic displacement, offered to bless any marriage-lays Isabel might compose for Russell if he returned home to wed *another*. Eros had failed, but sisterly bonds would not.

Johnston finally emancipated herself in print in "The Maid of Dundee to her Slumbering Muse" (July 16th, 1867). She offered a nominal excuse for Russell's silence (ill-wishers may have slandered her), but declared herself "free" of a prospective mate who did not trust or respond to her, and grateful for the liberating solidarity of her fellow "minstrels":

Go, tell thy foes that 'twas the wrongs they've done thee,
 That caused thy wailings in the Penny Post;
 That crowned thee queen, and all those honours won thee,
 And made thee dear old Scotland's favourite boast.

...
 Go, tell the Penny Post to wave its banner,
 And bid its minstrels sing that thou art free,
 And they shall welcome forth in queen-like manner
 Thy Factory Girl – the maid of sweet Dundee.

Whether or not Russell ever read these declarations, expressions of empathy from poets of both sexes helped Johnston maintain the public identity of a poet

of courage and sensibility. She might never be a wife, but she could take pride in her accomplishments and the role of a "queen-like" bard.

Alexander Campbell's Role as Editor, Patron, and Friend

Campbell and Johnston seem to have begun preparations to publish her poems early in 1867, and she directed most of her literary efforts thereafter to that end. She published only three new poems in the paper before Campbell announced on October 19th, 1867 that the printed manuscript was at the binder – two poems to Edith and Isabel mentioned above and "The Maid of Dundee", the leader for July 13th. On November 16th, "She's Coming, Ye Bards!" finally announced her imminent return to Glasgow with the volume in hand.

The elderly Campbell strongly supported this publishing venture, in part perhaps as a kind of personal valedictory. He advertised the forthcoming volume in each issue, published other poets' heralds of its publication, reminded readers to subscribe, recorded subscriptions received, and provided notices of Johnston's other activities and preparations. Every reader of the *Penny Post* was thus reminded that the pioneering appearance of Johnston's *Poems* would be a triumph for this hero of their own class and "gifted daughter of toil".[30]

The first notice appeared at the beginning of the year:

THE FACTORY GIRL'S POEMS.

The first edition of the Miscellaneous Poems of this gifted daughter of toil will be printed on Good Paper, and Cloth Bound, containing about 230 pages, at 2 s 6d to Subscribers. To encourage her friends, the Authoress proposes to give for every Ten Subscribers a Free Volume to the Collector of Subscriptions, which are to be sent to Alex. Campbell, Publisher of the Penny Post, 32 Ann Street, Glasgow, who will take charge of the funds till the required number of Subscribers (500) is obtained, when the work will be proceeded with (January 5th, 1867).

On January 26th, Campbell announced that he had all the necessary manuscripts, and he attached a notice that the poems were being stereotyped to David Morrison's March 2nd tribute to "The Factory Girl". Morrison also published another verse-tribute to Edith on March 23rd, and enclosed several more subscriptions for the book. On May 18th, Campbell published a charge by Johnston of plagiarism by a certain A. Wilson, along with relevant lines from the two poems, and pronounced Wilson's "exposure ... well-deserved".[31]

Campbell also printed J. M. Latchie's poetic tribute to "Scotia's Hard Toiler Girl", and announced on three separate occasions[32] that preparations for an autobiography were under way. He had this memoir in hand by August 17th, and published Edith's "Welcome and Appeal for the "Maid of Dundee"" as the leader for September 21st.[33] He then promised that completion was near on October 19th and November 2nd, and published Johnston's triumphant "She's Coming, Ye Bards" on November 16th. David Morrison also wrote still

another supportive poem for the November 16th issue's front page, and Campbell informed readers that Johnston would come to Glasgow the following week. Edith's "Fragment (Composed While Bending Over the Factory Girl's Poems)", mentioned earlier, appeared as the leader for November 23rd, and another reader, "J.C.", praised Edith for her ardent support in the same issue. Johnston, in short, may have *written* her poems in solitude, but her *publication* of them became part of a collective, almost choral effort.

Campbell finally announced on November 30th that the book was available at the publisher's [34], and Johnston offered to deliver copies herself, as well as "read ... select pieces at soirees or other social gatherings". December 7th brought a reminder that the volume was "much prized by those who have received it", and the issue for December 14th carried as its lead poem "Lines Dedicated to the Factory Girl, On the Publication of Her Works", by a "subscriber" (from Ayr).

After the volume appeared, Campbell continued to report on Johnston's activities throughout the rest of his tenure as editor of the *Penny Post*. On January 11th, he announced that Johnston's friends planned a public reading and singing of her songs, and published her new poem, "Lines to a Loved One". On February 1st, he made a direct plea:

The Factory Girl is ... suffering from ill health and poverty, after working in the factories of Scotland, England, and Ireland for more than 20 years. Like many others she expected to realize as much by her literary productions as would have enabled her to get into some small way of business; but the number of subscribers falling far short of the cost of the work, her expectations have been disappointed, and she is now, like other neglected poets, "feeling it impossible to live longer in this dreadful position." Surely something ought to be done for her.

The February 15th issue brought encouraging news:

We are glad to say that the more Miss Johnston's "Autobiography, Poems, and Songs" become known the more they are appreciated – as an instance of which, a copy had been circulated among the inmates of the Royal Institution at Gartsavel, which produced such an effect that one hundred of them subscribed sixpence each, with which 20 volumes were purchased from the authoress, and distributed by lottery amongst the subscribers.

The "Notices" for February 22nd reported Johnston's appearance at an event in Trades' Hall, Glasgow and an amateur's concert in Hamilton Town Hall, and Campbell published her poem, "Waiting for Him", on March 7th.[35] On March 14th, he wrote that "Miss Ellen Johnston, with the spirit of a heroine, is still in Glasgow, struggling to maintain herself by the sale of her 'Autobiography, Poems, and Songs' till something better turns up to insure her against returning to the din and poverty of a factory life".

Campbell and his contributors continued to do everything they could for Johnston before he had to leave his post in the autumn of 1868. Their efforts were successful: the volume eventually sold eight hundred copies, three hundred more than the minimum needed to break even. Campbell's *Glasgow Sentinel*, the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard* also reviewed the work [36], and a second edition appeared eighteen months after the first.

Johnston's Tribute and Valedictory

Johnston published four new poems in the work's second edition: "Lines to a Loved One", "Waiting for Him", [addressed to Mr. "C-."] and the poignant "Factory Girl's Last Lay", which had also appeared in the *Penny Post*. Campbell provided an initial explanation for his uncharacteristic decision to defer publication of the "Last Lay" on March 21st:

"The Factory Girl's Last Lay" was received a considerable time ago, but its publication delayed on account of her despondency. We are, however, glad to say that she is now in better spirits, and persevering in the sale of her volume.

On June 13th, he added that:

Miss Johnston is succeeding beyond expectation in selling her "Autobiography, Poems, and Songs" among the West-end professional gentlemen, merchants, and tradesmen. . . . "The Last Lay of the Factory Girl" has been long withheld from publication, in consideration of the demanding state of mind and bodily suffering under which it was written, but, as your health and prospects in life are now better, the expression of your former feelings of contemplation of death will soon appear in the Poet's Corner.

The poem and its ringing tribute to a "loved one" able to protect her posthumous reputation finally appeared a week later:

Thy name shines like a beacon, ever sparkling,
Radiant beams where mystery sits unveiled;
Where truth lights Error through its waters darkling –
Where Persecution thy great aim assailed.

I go, my loved one, but I leave no token,
I would have done had fortune smiled on me;
The sad remembrance of a heart that's broken
Is all, my loved one, I can leave to thee.

Stay; I will leave my fame's crown in thy keeping;
Its gems may cheer thee at some future day;

Adieu, my lov'd one, when I'm calmly sleeping,
Sing to the world – "The Factory Girl's Last Lay."

signed, Ellen Johnston, "The Factory Girl"

Johnston never named her protector and "loved one", and Campbell later responded to "Edith"'s submission of some more verses that he was "doubtful that the effect you intend to produce will ever reach or be felt by the parties". Who were these "parties", and why would Edith's "effect" not "be felt" by them? Might one of these "parties" in fact have been the distinguished old socialist and co-operator Alexander Campbell himself, who had delayed publication of verses which embarrassed him?

A poet, of course, might naturally leave her poems in the care of another poet. In any event, Campbell wrote solicitously in his column for June 27th that:

"The Last Lay of the Factory Girl", which we published last week, has been much approved of for the devotional feelings expressed to the "loved one", and already several claimants have appeared for her "Crown of Fame", but none of the aspirants have as yet proved their identity. Besides, we understand that Miss Johnston is still likely to wear her justly earned laurels, as her health is considerably improved, and that she is meeting with great encouragement in the sale of her "Autobiography, Poems, and Songs".

Johnston, of course, had quite literally addressed her poems, letters and news to Campbell for some years, and had good reason to feel deep gratitude toward the man who had warmly encouraged her and worked so unstintingly to help print and promote her work. Might he have become for her the father she had never had, or at least the protector of her literary hopes as she faced the prospect of death?

In any event, Campbell alluded to Johnston four more times before he suddenly relinquished editorship of the *Penny Post* in the autumn of 1868. On August 15th he remarked that her work was "finding ready purchasers among the professional gentlemen and tradesmen who receive her with that attention which her own respectability of appearance and lively conversation justly entitle her to expect", and added that she has prepared a "beautifully executed *carte de visitée* of herself, which she will send to any address". On September 5th he printed a letter in which Johnston reported that she had been robbed, and reported on September 12th that she had attracted the interest of a "Luminary" (perhaps Benjamin Disraeli, who granted her a monetary award of fifty pounds) and found more purchasers for her book.[37] His last published allusion to his friend appeared in his column for September 26th, in which he again mentioned the handsome *carte*, and added that "her friends will be pleased to know that a new edition of her work is in the press".

In the *Poems*, but not the *Penny Post*, Johnston also published "Lines to Mr. Alexander Campbell". Whoever the "loved one" of the "Last Lay" was, Campbell surely deserved this poetic tribute to him:

And thou hast strewn my path with hope
 Until the past doth seem
 A glimmering fancy in each thought
 Or false delusive dream.

Aftermath and Conclusion

When Campbell laid down his editorship in the fall of 1868, the most immediate change was the absence of his characteristic voice in the "Notices", and the *Penny Post* had suspended publication altogether by the end of the year.[38] When a new paper, *The Penny Post and Glasgow Times* started up in 1870, its editor, James Watt, replaced "Notices to Correspondents" with "Answers to Correspondents", and the column's cordiality and love of poetry disappeared.

Ellen Johnston's name did appear in the new-model *Penny Post* once more, in January of 1873:

We are sorry to learn that our old contributor, Ellen Johnston, has been very ill, and is in very distressed circumstances. Some of her old admirers might, perhaps, be inclined to give a little to assist her; and, if they forward anything to our office, it will give us great pleasure to hand it over to her.

Johnston died soon afterwards in the Glasgow Barony Poorhouse, presumably in its infirmary [39], and the *Penny Post and Glasgow Times* carried no notice of her death. In her preface to the second edition of her *Poems*, dated March, 1869 and her last known publication, Johnston acknowledged once again the help of "Mr Alex. Campbell, of the *Penny Post*, to whom I owe my present fortune and fame".

Some kind of unwritten elegy hovers in the wake of this acknowledgement, and in the silence of Johnston's last four years. What happened to her and Campbell between the appearance of the *Poems*' second edition and their deaths?[40] Had a sudden incapacitating illness – a stroke, perhaps – rendered the sixty-eight year-old Alexander Campbell unable to carry out his editorial tasks, or help his friends? Did Johnston manage to write more poems that did not find a publisher, and did not survive her death?[41]

In *A Thousand Times I'd Rather Be A Factory Girl* [42], Susan Alves takes note of the fact that nineteenth-century British women factory workers, unlike a few of their American counterparts, had little or no hope that they would ever be able to earn their livings from their pens. Johnston and Campbell had undertaken an ardent joint effort to overcome this barrier. "She's Coming Ye Bards" proudly described her flight from "the factory so dismal and dreary" to

seek "success in her now finished book", and the last sentence of her "Autobiography" expressed the hope that its publication might help her escape "from the incessant toils of a factory life".

And in relative terms, it almost did, at least for a time. The preface to the second edition recorded two gifts of five and fifty pounds, respectively, from the Queen and the Prime Minister (Benjamin Disraeli), and she had used these (Campbell informed her readers before his departure) to buy a few furnishings and pay debts she had contracted in Glasgow. It is hard not to speculate that had Campbell remained healthy and active, he might have been able to help Johnston prepare another volume, and perhaps even prevail a bit longer over the iron law Alves cites.

In any event, Ellen Johnston clearly envisioned such liberation as an ever-receding ideal, in a kind of converse to Dickens's efforts to banish the memory of the blacking factory. Her poignant responses to fellow *Penny Post* poet contributors belied any speculation that she wrote primarily for money or "fame". She wrote to assuage the sorrows of her childhood and adolescence, to confide and resolve aspects of her experience that violated Victorian social norms, and to transmute failures and disappointments into Wordsworthian tranquility and peace of mind.

Johnston had also written under many circumstances since adolescence, and little short of crippling disease or depression would have been likely to silence her altogether. Yet it had taken the active help of a sympathetic publisher and her acceptance as a gifted and articulate woman by a community of poetic friends to bring her a measure of fulfilment and recognition. For a brief time, Campbell's stewardship of the "Notices" in the *Penny Post* had given Johnston and her sisters transient but exhilarating access to public self-expression, and isolation from this community effectively silenced her, as surely as a gag, or the physical illness that finally killed her.

In Judith Rosen's words, Ellen Johnston claimed "a role that is both singular and constituted in community: the role of bard".[43] Her alternating surges of gratitude and pride also helped her set her past life and sorrows into clear relief, and the energetic solidarity of her brother and sister poets deepened her passionate conviction that the creation and publication of poems was the great achievement of her life.

Her dramatic self-representation and autobiographical performances also reflected the restless and troubled burden of her poems, but the interactive resonances they evoked helped define her as an independent worker who sought a higher purpose for her past. Her fiercely perseverant intensity and Campbell's unwavering support had made her one of very few factory women in mid-Victorian Britain who published a volume of poetry.[44] But she needed the solidarity of her working-class audience and the support of an extraordinarily kindly and principled editor to carry her project through.

So it was a rare and precarious harmony, in the end, a small anthem of talent, fierce commitment, personal friendship, private sensibility, and public solidarity that enabled this factory worker to emblazon her self-perceptions and the aspirations she shared with her working-class audience, and create in her short life a distinctive identity and an eloquent poetic voice.

Correspondence

Professor Florence Boos, Department of English, 308 English-Philosophy Building, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242, USA (florence-boos@uiowa.edu).

Notes

- [1] Elizabeth Campbell, author of *Songs of My Pilgrimage* (1875), also worked briefly in a factory, but she was also a servant and sometime seller of her poems.
- [2] Discussions of Johnston appear in Susan Zlotnik, "A Thousand Times I'd Rather Be a Factory Girl: Dialect, Domesticity, and Working-class Women's Poetry in Victorian Britain", *Victorian Studies* (1991), pp. 7-27, and *Women, Writing and the Industrial Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Florence Boos, "Cauld Engle-Cheek: Working Class Women Poets in Victorian Scotland", *Victorian Poetry*, 33 (1995), pp. 53-74, and "Ellen Johnston", *Nineteenth Century Women Writers*, ed. Abigail Bloom (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp. 231-234; Angela Leighton & Margaret Reynolds, *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Susan Alves, "A Thousand Times I'd Rather Be a Factory Girl: The Politics of Reading American and British Female Factory Workers' Poetry, 1840-1914," dissertation, Northeastern University, 1996; H. Gustav Klaus, *Ellen Johnston and Working-class Poetry in Victorian Scotland* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); Valentina Bold, "Beyond 'The Empire of the Gentle Heart': Scottish Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century", *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. Douglas Gifford & Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); and Judith Rosen, "Class and Poetic Communities: The Works of Ellen Johnston, 'The Factory Girl'", *Victorian Poetry*, 39 (2001), pp. 207-227. A discussion of Victorian working-class women's writings, including Johnston's "Autobiography", also appears in Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).
- [3] Books and anthologies devoted to working-class poetry have included Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth-century British Working-class Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1974) and Brian Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-taught Poets and Poetry in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1987). Selections from working-class poets may be found in Catherine Kerrigan, *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1991) and Isobel Armstrong & Joseph Bristow, *Nineteenth-century Women*

Poets (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). As yet no book has appeared on Victorian working-class women's poetry.

- [4] Brierley himself died in 1885, and the *Journal* ceased six years later.
- [5] Florence Boos, "Working-class Women Poets in the Periodical Press: 'Marie,' Janet Hamilton and Fanny Forrester", *Victorian Poetry*, 39 (2001), pp. 255-285.
- [6] Leslie Wright, in *Scottish Chartism* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1953), remarks that Campbell was one of four founders of the National Radical Association of Scotland in 1836. Campbell was a "constitutionalist" rather than a "physical force" radical (pp. 26-27). J.M. Wheeler, *A Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers of All Ages and Nations* (London, 1889), states that "He early became a Socialist, and was manager at the experiment at Orbiston under Abram Combe, of whom he wrote a memoir. Upon the death of Combe, 1827, he became a Socialist missionary in England. He took an active part in the co-operative movement, and in the agitation for an unstamped press, for which he was tried and imprisoned at Edinburgh, 1833-34. About 1849 he returned to Glasgow and wrote on the *Sentinel*. In 1867 he was presented with a testimonial and purse of 90 sovereigns by admirers of his exertions in the cause of progress. Died about 1873". Alexander Wilson, in *The Chartist Movement in Scotland* (New York: Augustus Kelley, 1970), describes Campbell as a pioneer co-operator during the 1820s and 1830s (p. 14), a leading member of the sponsoring committee for the *Trades Advocate* in 1831-32 (p. 29), and one of the more radical Glasgow reformers (p. 41). According to H. Gustav Klaus, Campbell died on February 10th, 1870. If this date of death is correct (rather than the date assigned by Wheeler), Johnston lost all access to her mentor's help shortly after he gave up his editorial responsibilities.
- [7] Its office was at 11 Coburn Street, Glasgow.
- [8] The two surviving complete sets of issues of the *Penny Post* in the British Newspaper Library are signed A. Campbell, 11 Coburn St.
- [9] Johnston published a few poems in the *People's Journal*, but did not become a steady contributor or evoke friendly reader responses.
- [10] Circulation figures are from the *Waterloo Directory of Scottish Newspapers and Periodicals: 1800-1900* (Waterloo, Ontario: North Waterloo Academic Press, 1989).
- [11] Page references are to the first edition, unless otherwise noted.
- [12] I have been unable to find any trace of Ellen Johnston in birth and death records. H. Gustav Klaus notes that her grandparents, with whom according to her autobiography she was living at the time, appear in the 1841 census in a block called Somers Land in Muslin Street, Bridgeton, but there is no mention of Ellen's presence in their home (p. 79).
- [13] In the "Autobiography" Johnston calls her daughter "My bonnie Mary Achinvole", but a note to "A Mother's Love" (p. 44) explains that the child the poem's speaker calls "My Mary Achin" is "Miss Mary Achenvole", born September 14th, 1852.

- [14] Zlotnick, "A Thousand Times I'd Rather Be a Factory Girl", pp. 217, 222. In Susan Zlotnick's view, "when the home appears at all in her poetry, it does so as a den of terror", and her accounts of a private life filled with abandonment, abuse, and alcoholism "painfully reveal ... the essentially fictional nature of the working-class domestic ideal". Zlotnick also throws the celebratory aspects of Johnston's persona into strong relief ("since she sees herself not as a victim but as a bohemian free spirit, she chooses to celebrate herself with Whitmanesque energy, exulting in her homelessness and embracing the open road as a symbol of her liberation", p. 217), but argues that she "upends the domestic ideal only to reaffirm its hegemony within working-class culture" even as she "presents herself to the reader as a fallen woman – a single mother, a sexual being, and a troublemaker" (p. 222). In response to these characterisations, I would argue that Johnston may have felt an understandable ambivalence about many of her own rebellious roles, easier to affirm in the abstract than in the hostile conditions of a poverty-stricken life. She may also have designed her celebrations of factory life in part to please employers as well as fellow workers. Remarks in her later poems and other writings clearly suggest that she well understood the advantages of security, respectability and a measure of autonomy as well as mental independence, and believed work in the factory was destroying her health.
- [15] Rosen, "Class and Poetic Communities", pp. 213-214.
- [16] *Ibid.*, p. 211.
- [17] Rosen assesses other critical prefaces to volumes by working-class poets, including Gilfillan's wary remarks on the Corn-Law Rhymers, Ebenezer Elliot, in "Class and Poetic Communities"; pp. 210-211.
- [18] These include most of the verses in the section "Poems" and all of the "Songs". Verses in "Poems" apparently written after her arrival in Dundee but before her contact with the *Penny Post* include "Lines to a Sick Friend", "Drygate Brae", "The Opening of the Baxter Park", "Auld Dunville", "O Come Awa' Jamie", "Nelly's Lament for the Pirnhouse Cat", and "Lines to Mr. James Dorward". Later verses in "Poems" include "Lines to Mr. Alex. Campbell", "Address to My Fellow Bards", and "To My Aunt Phemie".
- [19] *Ellen Johnston and Working Class Poetry in Victorian Scotland*. Klaus's Marxist perspectives offer unusual insights into Johnston's self-identification as a working-class writer in the context of other working-class poets of the period; see, for example, "Songs of War and Peace", his chapter on the political content of her early poems, and "The Angry Voice", on her poems of social protest.
- [20] These include "Kennedy's Dear Mill", "Address to Napier's Dockyard", "The Morning: A Recitation. Most Respectfully Dedicated to the Dundee Power-Loom Tenters' Spouting Club", "Lines on Behalf of the Boatbuilders and Boilermakers of Great Britain and Ireland", and "Lines to Mr. Dorward".
- [21] "Beyond 'The Empire of the Gentle Heart'", p. 258. Rosen also avers that in these early, occasional political poems "the energies of post-Chartist politics were aimed less at leveling hierarchies than at reawakening employers to what were perceived as their pre-capitalist, paternalist social responsibilities, a notion that Johnston's occasional verse works quite cannily to exploit" ("Class and Poetic Communities", p. 219).
- [22] Others in this category are "The Lost Lover", "The Parting", "The Happy Man", "Love and War", and "The Forsaken Maiden".
- [23] For a view of the relationship between working-class literature and melodrama, see Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects, The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 176-192.
- [24] On October 21st, Johnston angrily suggested that another "Notices" poet had stolen some of her verses, and the even-handed Campbell printed both poems "to let our readers judge". I found the resemblances rather slight.
- [25] "Class and Poetic Communities", p. 223.
- [26] This was not included in her book, one of her few omissions. Perhaps she had second thoughts about her "resignation".
- [27] In "Thoughts on the 'Crown of Fame,' To 'The Factory Girl'" (March 16th, 1867), one of Edith's best introspective efforts, she assured her friend that "well thy sunny brow the crown is bearing, / Thy sympathies, so warm, do win the world". This too did not appear in the *Poems*, unlike "Lines by Edith to the Factory Girl", "Edith's Reply to the Factory Girl", "Lines by Edith, on Receiving the Cartes of Mr Russell and the Factory Girl", and "Welcome and Appeal for the Maid of Dundee".
- [28] In "Class and Poetic Communities", Judith Rosen remarks that Johnston or her editor chose Edith's "Welcome and Appeal for the 'Maid of Dundee'" to end Johnston's volume, and that her appeal "asks middle-class readers to give an autonomous working-class voice the respect it is due and, furthermore, to consider how the encounter might change the 'thoughtless' assumptions that shape them" (p. 223).
- [29] I have been unable to locate any writings by G.D. Russell published in Australia.
- [30] In "Class and Poetic Communities", p. 221, Judith Rosen suggests that he also gave her direct editorial assistance: "[H]ow much did Campbell work with Johnston to regularize her poems' rhythms and to tone down some of her more vehement turns of phrase? Certainly the voice that emerges in the *Penny Post* is less strident and less explicitly political than Johnston's earlier one, although by no means could it be termed domestic or decorous".
- [31] The resemblances here lay chiefly in the use of natural imagery. This was the second time Johnston had accused another poet of plagiarism (cf. note 11).
- [32] June 22nd, July 6th and July 20th.
- [33] This in turn evoked a response, from "Crawford", "On Reading Edith's 'Welcome and Appeal for the Maid of Dundee'".
- [34] Mr. Love, 40 St. Enoch's Square, Glasgow. Klaus remarks that William Love had collaborated with Campbell on a weekly paper, *The Spirit of the Age* (1848), and that Love's printing establishment was also a radical meeting place (*Ellen Johnston and Working Class Poetry in Victorian Scotland*, p. 69).

- [35] "Lines to a Loved One", "Waiting for Him", and "The Factory Girl's Last Lay" together express esteem and love for someone referred to in "Waiting for Him" as Mr. "C--."
- [36] Klaus, *Ellen Johnston and Working Class Poetry in Victorian Scotland*, p. 72. *Glasgow Sentinel*, November 1st, 1867; *Glasgow Herald*, December 11th, 1867; *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, January 1868. Klaus notes that the radical *Glasgow Sentinel* praised her poems as containing "rich poetic imagery, as well as smoothness of diction", but the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard* counterfactually commended her "poetry of a meekly sinning and suffering spirit". Perhaps the reviewer had not bothered to read Johnston's volume.
- [37] Gustav Klaus suggests that Campbell may also have helped with the application to Disraeli. He reproduces the application letter (*Ellen Johnston and Working Class Poetry in Victorian Scotland*, pp. 91-93) and argues that "This highly stylised petition is unlikely to have been composed by Ellen. ... for why should she have misspelt her own name at the letter-head, whereas the signature is correctly put?" (p. 74)
- [38] See note 4. By the dating in *The Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers*, Campbell had already received a testimonial and monetary award from admirers in 1867, but the *Penny Post* itself made no mention of such an honour. The *Dictionary* estimated his birth date as about 1800, so Campbell would have been about sixty-eight in the autumn. Perhaps the "purse" was actually awarded in 1869, after Campbell had become too ill to work?
- [39] I am indebted to Catherine Kerrigan for the suggestion that Johnston probably died in the hospital rather than the poorhouse itself. Gustav Klaus reports that no person of her name is recorded as dying in the Barnhill Poorhouse, Springburn, used by the Barony Parish, Glasgow in 1873, but that Helen Johnston, a single pauper, age forty-six, died of "anascarca" on April 20th, 1874 (*Ellen Johnston and Working Class Poetry in Victorian Scotland*, p. 77). The age given would be about seven years too great, and Helen and Ellen as well as Johnston were all common names.
- [40] For conflicting reports of the date of Campbell's death, see footnote 6.
- [41] I have been unable to locate more poems by Johnston in other papers of the period, including the *Glasgow Sentinel*, the *Glasgow Herald*, or the *People's Journal* (in which she had published earlier).
- [42] Alves, "A Thousand Times I'd Rather Be a Factory Girl".
- [43] "Class and Poetic Community", p. 216.
- [44] Another factory worker who published her poetry between hard covers was Ruth Wills, a hosiery maker in Leicester and the author of *Lays of Lowly Life* (1861).

A Survey of Work on Scottish Women's Writing from 1995

KIRSTEEN McCUE

ABSTRACT Published work about Scottish women writers is a fairly recent phenomenon in the academy, as are modern editions of older women writers. This article presents an overview of the main publications which have appeared since 1995, when there has been increasing interest in women's writing in Scotland.

Published work about Scottish women writers is a fairly recent phenomenon in the academy, as are modern editions of older women writers. This special issue offers a fine opportunity to present an overview of the main publications which have appeared during the past five years. There has been increasing interest in women's writing in Scotland during this time with a growing number of contemporary writers in print and more and more long-forgotten texts now being rediscovered and newly edited. Journals with a specific interest in Scottish – e.g. *Études Écossaises*, *Scottish Literary Journal*, *Scottish Studies Review*, *Studies in Scottish Literature* – also encourage and frequently include fine new work, although it is not part of my brief to deal with these here.

In 1997 Edinburgh University Press issued *A History of Scottish Women Writing*, a volume of forty-three critical essays with extensive bibliographies, edited by Douglas Gifford & Dorothy McMillan. This was a significant moment. Prior to this there were few sources of information about women writers in Scotland. Some texts had appeared in new editions, mostly published by Virago, but they were few. *The History of Scottish Literature*, edited by Cairn Craig, Ronald Jack, Andrew Hook & Douglas Gifford and published by Aberdeen University Press in 1987 did make mention of some key women writers, but many more were left aside. The Routledge *Dictionary of British Women Writers*, edited by Janet Todd (1989), contains a goodly number of Scottish women but cannot, of course, achieve the coverage of a dedicated volume. Doubtless encouraged by the interest amongst feminist academics of both sexes, the new *History* has become a benchmark for other published work