

Anthologies, Periodicals and the Press: Publicising Manchester Poetry in the early 1840s.

HARRY BARK

ABSTRACT: This paper takes a bibliographic approach to the engagement with and promotion of Manchester poetry within the city in the early 1840s. It focuses on two poetry anthologies produced by Manchester cultural societies (*The Festive Wreath* (1842) and *Athenæum Souvenir* (1843)) and considers the position of local poetry in the short-lived *The North of England Magazine*. The paper argues that poetry was key in negotiating an early-Victorian cultural identity for the city, as literary-minded communities sought to defy the reputation of Manchester as a site of mere industry whilst countering the growing literary and publishing dominance of London. The role of women poets within these communities is also considered, and the paper points towards potential future areas of research, beyond a bibliographic focus, that will enrich understandings of the cultural identity and negotiations of the Cottonopolis in the 1840s.

KEYWORDS: Poetry, Anthologies, Periodicals, Manchester, Gender, Regionalism



THE RAPID GROWTH of Manchester industry in the early decades of the nineteenth century meant that by the 1840s the city was widely seen as a 'centre of "modern life"'.¹ Debbie Bark considers this through a literary framework when describing Manchester in the early years of Victoria's reign as 'a centre of manufacturing and commerce [which] obscured the city's reality as an abundant producer of imaginative literature', highlighting an industrial and cultural divide that became a key aspect of Manchester literary production in the 1840s.² In their work on Manchester's periodical press, Michael

¹ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 95.

² Debbie Bark, 'Manchester and Early Victorian Literary Culture', *Literature Compass*, 8, 6 (2011), 404-414 (p. 406).

Powell and Terry Wyke suggest the need for further research which focuses on the ways in which Manchester texts as material objects 'contributed to the creation of the different representations and identities of the Cottonopolis in the nineteenth century'.³ In this paper I will develop these areas of research to consider Manchester literary identity through a bibliographically focussed account of literary production in the city in the early years of the 1840s.

As Alexis Weedon notes, between 1801 and 1870 Manchester ranked seventh in terms of the number of book titles produced by British cities, and the 3925 titles attributed to Manchester represented only 1.63% of the 240,307 titles produced by London in the same period.⁴ The proportion of UK titles published outside of London between 1840-49 was 24.6%, a notable reduction compared to 26.9% between 1830 and 1839.⁵ Whilst Weedon places Manchester in relation to the growing London publishing hegemony, Simon Eliot considers the broader national picture in providing data for cities other than the major publishing centres of London, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh and Dublin, showing that Manchester, in publishing 681 titles, was far closer to the levels of Liverpool and Newcastle (548 and 574 titles respectively) than it was to London.⁶ In applying this statistical context to material texts, particularly poetry anthologies produced by Manchester societies and groups in the 1840s, it is possible to see the literary status of Manchester being foregrounded in the city's early-Victorian poetic engagements. The statistical picture set out by Weedon and Eliot can thus be broadened through an alertness to the production, formatting and layout of published materials.

As Manchester's literary standing on a national scale receded, literary societies and their associated publications took on a responsibility for defending and promoting a poetic identity for the city, as well as engaging a reading community. One such society was the Manchester Athenæum, which sought to provide 'an institution for the benefit

³ Michael Powell and Terry Wyke, 'Charting the Manchester Tributary of the Golden Stream: Leary's History of the Manchester Periodical Press', *Manchester Region and History Review*, 17, 2 (2006), 43-62 (p. 57).

⁴ Alexis Weedon, *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836-1916* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2003), p. 36.

⁵ Weedon, p. 37.

⁶ Simon Eliot, 'Patterns and Trends and the NSTC: Some Initial Observations. Part One', in *Publishing History*, 42 (January 1997) 79-104 (p. 95).

of the tradesmen, commercial assistants and apprentices, professional students, clerks, of this very populous and flourishing town', suggesting a project of intellectual development alongside a membership rooted in the industrial middle class.⁷ In producing and publishing a poetry anthology, the *Athenæum Souvenir*, which was sold at the 'Athenæum Bazaar' fundraising event at the Town Hall in October 1843, the Manchester Athenæum used poetry to establish a cultural identity for Manchester which sat alongside the city's industrial concerns. This interaction between poetry, poets and society meetings extended to other groups in the city, such as the Sun Inn group of poets who met at the Sun Inn public house on Long Millgate in Manchester during the early years of the 1840s. An anthology made up of the poetry recited at a gathering on 24 March 1842 was published as *The Festive Wreath* (1842). This anthology, along with the *Athenæum Souvenir* (1843), offers an insight into a shared cultural moment for the city as expressed through poetry, with the anthologies promoting and publicising a distinctive sense of regional poetic identity.

The *Athenæum Souvenir* and *The Festive Wreath* are material embodiments of a nascent shift in the focus and cultural identity of the city led by those who produced literary material in Manchester. As Richard Altick observes, Manchester cultural societies moved towards a literary focus in the 1840s. For example, lectures given at the Manchester Athenæum transitioned from an even split between scientific topics and other themes between 1835 and 1842 to having only 81 scientific lectures compared with 313 on 'categories of literature, "education", and the fine arts' between 1842 and 1849.⁸ The anthologies reflect the cultural missions of the groups producing them. They show how these literary-minded communities sought to encourage a specifically Manchester poetic identity through these essentially self-publicising publications that set the tone for the developing literary, publishing and poetic consciousness of the region. Whilst the individual poems and contributors to these anthologies will offer rich ground for future research, this paper offers only an initial analysis of the prefaces and title pages to these anthologies, making a claim for this paratextual material as a statement of cultural and literary intent.

⁷ *Report of the Proceedings of the Public Meeting held 28 October 1835 for the Purpose of Establishing The Athenæum* (Manchester: Taylor and Garnett, 1835), p. 20.

⁸ Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Columbia: Ohio State University Press, 1998), p. 202.

The promotion of poetic anthologies

Maura Ives suggests that there is scope in the field of bibliography to explore the 'circumstances and intentionalities of text production'.⁹ The poetry anthologies of 1840s Manchester provide a site of explanatory potential in which the intentionalities of literary and cultural societies can be connected with their material products. Moreover, a consideration of the role of poetry in Manchester periodicals and local newspapers can develop an understanding of how the modes of publicising the city's poetry reflected the methods and aims of the societies in their commitment to a cultural identity that is entwined with local poetry. Not only did the *Athenæum Souvenir* and *The Festive Wreath* anthologies advertise the projects of their respective societies, but reports in the Manchester press on the events at which the anthologies were sold also suggest a cultural investment in these literary works.

Linda Hughes draws attention to the ways in which the placement of poetry in publications reflect and embody the social and political moments that form them. Using the example of a mid-Victorian periodical, Hughes describes how 'In the April 1855 *Fraser's Magazine* [...] [Matthew] Arnold expresses the dilemma of "wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born" sandwiched between a serial novel and James Anthony Forde's review of *Four Years at the Court of Henry VIII*'.¹⁰ In Hughes' reading, Arnold's poetry is intertwined with the surrounding material which effects meaning: the poetry is literally positioned between the nascent world of the serial book and the 'dead' world of Henry VIII's court. This analysis – which is echoed by Mike Sanders' work on the 'intrinsic context' of poetry as having its meaning formed by surrounding material – foregrounds the importance of the formatting and placement of poetry-related material and can be usefully applied to the *Athenæum Souvenir*, *The Festive Wreath* and published material that engaged with these poetic projects to inform understandings of cultural identity in the city.¹¹ Complementing such more obviously interpretative contextual work, the bibliographer and textual critic D.F.

⁹ Maura Ives, 'A bibliographical approach to Victorian publishing', in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. by John Jordan and Robert Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 270.

¹⁰ Linda Hughes, 'What the *Wellesley Index* Left Out: Why Poetry Matters to Periodical Studies', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 40, 2 (2007), 91-125 (p. 92).

¹¹ Mike Sanders, 'The Chartist Text in an Age of Digital Reproduction', in *Journal of Victorian Studies*, 14, 2 (2009), 301-307 (p. 304).

McKenzie highlights bibliographic study that considers 'dissemination and readership as matters of economic and political motive.'¹² This too can be usefully applied to the ways in which Manchester publications, editors and publishers engaged in a project of local literary identity. McKenzie's claim that 'bibliography is the discipline that studies texts as recorded forms, and the process of their transmission, including their production and reception' can similarly be applied to the Manchester poetry anthologies to consider the ways in which the layout of a text influences meaning.¹³

Both the *Athenæum Souvenir* and *The Festive Wreath* were products of literary meetings in Manchester in the early 1840s and, as will be shown, the prefaces and title pages introduce the contributors and underlying aims of the texts. These paratextual attempts to culturally embolden Manchester poets resonate with the publishing concerns of the period as set out by Weedon, most notably London's 2.5% increased share of the UK published titles total in the 1840s compared with the previous decade, at the expense of cities such as Manchester.¹⁴ The desire for regional publishers to provide varied forms of poetry in an attempt to encourage a reading market in Manchester is understandable. Indeed, it was local publisher George Bradshaw who published *The Festive Wreath* for the Sun Inn group in 1842. Whilst Trefor Thomas interprets this as a philanthropic act by Bradshaw's publishing group, suggesting that the anthology serves as a 'notable example' of the 'literary and artistic interests of the firm', it is also important to acknowledge the economic and publishing context in which this decision was taken.¹⁵ Bradshaw undoubtedly had an interest in Manchester poetry, but his involvement in *The Festive Wreath* formed part of a project that sought to claim a local, and even national, prominence of Manchester literature, something that would be both culturally and financially beneficial for the publisher. In this way, the *Athenæum Souvenir* and *The Festive Wreath* can be seen as forms of advertisement in their own right. As Manchester struggled for national literary status in the period, in terms of both market-share and literary quality, these anthologies figure as physical embodiments of

¹² D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1.

¹³ McKenzie, p. 12.

¹⁴ Weedon, p. 37.

¹⁵ Trefor Thomas, 'George Bradshaw and *Bradshaw's Manchester Journal*: 1841-1843', *Manchester Region History Review*, 17, 2 (2006), 63-73 (p. 63).

various literary (and, for the likes of Bradshaw, economic) projects. In discussing the role of advertising in bibliographical analysis, Jennifer Wicke argues that 'every cultural artifact is produced by individual makers, by institutional settings, by collective aspirations and values', and this is a useful framework through which to understand these anthologies as they embodied the 'collective aspirations and values' of the Manchester poetry producing community.¹⁶ These texts display a paratextual self-awareness of their own rootedness as a regional product, with both anthologies being printed and published in Manchester, revealing the negotiation of economic, cultural and literary interests through the layout, content and materiality of the anthologies.

The unsigned preface and anonymous editing of the *Athenæum Souvenir* affirms its purpose of providing a 'literary home' for the people of Manchester whilst also alluding to the need for sales in order to resolve the 'legacy of bygone misfortunes'¹⁷ (which, as Michael Rose describes, refers to the debts of the Athenæum society that were 'kept down only by the proceeds from the bazaars or lavish soirees'¹⁸). As Gérard Genette argues, the paratextual importance of prefaces up until the middle of the nineteenth century is found in its predominant purpose of presenting an 'argument of usefulness' and the role of the preface in the *Athenæum Souvenir* follows this tradition.¹⁹ The promise of the 'usefulness' of the anthology in terms of being a 'home' for local poetic originality and quality (and to a lesser extent, financial contribution) is a dominant feature. This sense is developed through the distinction in the preface between the three types of contributor in the anthology: those 'already esteemed as worthy of the high meed of praise and distinction which adopts them as national', others of 'less celebrity', and 'occasional writers, residing in Manchester and the neighbourhood'.²⁰ The preface makes clear the integration of the national with the local yet does not specify which contributors fall into each category. Particular

¹⁶ Jennifer Wicke, *Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement, & Social Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 16.

¹⁷ *Athenæum Souvenir* (Manchester: J. Gadsby, 1843), p. vi.

¹⁸ Michael E. Rose, 'Culture, Philanthropy and the Manchester Middle Classes', in *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Cultural Production and Social Policy in Victorian Manchester*, eds. A.J. Kidd and K.W. Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 111.

¹⁹ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 200.

²⁰ *Athenæum Souvenir*, p. v.

contributors will no doubt have been recognised as 'national' or otherwise by contemporary readers, but the preface promotes those 'occasional' local writers on an equal footing with the national names. Whilst acknowledging the national status of some of these Manchester writers, the preface brings together lesser-known and entirely local poets to promote a more inclusive picture of the city's poetic output.

The preface to *The Festive Wreath* similarly reaffirms the literary project of the group that produces it. Unlike the *Athenæum Souvenir*, *The Festive Wreath* has a named editor, and the paratextual contribution of John Bolton Rogerson, himself an active poet in the Sun Inn group of poets, ensures that the preface retains a sense of representing the collective values of the group and their claims for 'usefulness' in terms of their meetings and the anthology itself.²¹ What is particularly notable about the preface to this anthology is its evident desire to situate the work within the city both culturally and historically. The preface opens with a history of the site on which the Sun Inn stands, dating back to 1422, and suggests the setting of their meeting 'possesses a charm from its antiquity and the associations connected with its neighbourhood'.²² This is followed by a reproduction of a report from the *Manchester Guardian* of the meeting that led to the anthology as well as situating the Sun Inn building itself in relation to the house in which 'the celebrated novelist, William Harrison Ainsworth, was born'.²³ In this way, the Cottonopolis, a city of seeming immediate relevance to the early-Victorian industrialisation, is contextualised on a far wider historical scale whilst retaining a sense of contemporary importance as the anthology is assimilated into the cultural currency of the nationally-known Ainsworth. In promoting the anthology, the preface situates the 'friendly bond' that defines the Sun Inn group within a wider claim for the city in historical and, more pressingly, cultural terms.²⁴

The prefaces of each anthology justify the existence of the societies and the materials they produce, framing and infusing the poems in the *Athenæum Souvenir* and *The Festive Wreath* with an appeal to, and promotion of, a poetic identity and

²¹ John Bolton Rogerson was a notable Manchester poet of the period. Around time of *The Festive Wreath* he had had two poetic collections in circulation (*Rhyme, Romance and Revery* (1842) and *'A Voice From the Town', and other poems* (1842)).

²² *The Festive Wreath*, ed. John Bolton Rogerson (Manchester: Bradshaw & Blacklock, 1842), p. iii.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

community. This ensures that the poetry which follows stems from, and provides evidence of, poetic worth and excellence in the city. The prefaces ultimately shape the anthologies as texts of self-promotion, beyond the stature of individual poets, to become cultural advertisements on behalf of the city itself.

The role of gender in anthologising Manchester's poetry

In thinking about these Manchester anthologies, and the related materials of the societies that produced them, considerations of gender come to the fore. Although the percentage of women involved in the UK book-producing labour force increased from 12% to 20.5% between 1844 and 1851, a marginalisation of female poets seems to underpin the poetic communities forged in 1840s Manchester.²⁵ Even though in his address to the Manchester Athenæum in 1844, Benjamin Disraeli asserted that female membership was a key part of the successes of the society, the integration of women was limited.²⁶ This is evident in the anthologies, with *The Festive Wreath* including four female contributors out of the total of nineteen (21.5%), and their contributions taking up just 10.2% of the pages dedicated to poetry. The *Athenæum Souvenir* is remarkably similar in its gender divide, with 20% of contributors being women (six of the thirty) though 21.4% of space for poetry being given to the work of women.

Joseph Weir Hunter emphasised a similar trend in his reflections on Manchester cultural societies of the 1840s, and suggested that it was the potential to 'step outside the circle of domestic cares, and discuss masculine topics in a masculine atmosphere' that led to many of the literary developments in the city, with the exclusively male clubs such as the Athenæum positioned as 'inseparably connected' with literary success in the period.²⁷ Kathryn Gleadle draws on research into the rule books and reports of the Athenæum society to highlight gender segregation within the Manchester Athenæum, noting that 'despite the glowing publicity that surrounded the admission of women to the Manchester Athenæum, they were not actually granted full membership', and were

²⁵ Simon Eliot, *Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing 1800-1919* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1994), p. 93.

²⁶ 'Address of Mr Disraeli, 3 October 1844', in *Manchester Athenæum. Addresses 1835-1885* (Manchester: Manchester Athenæum, 1888), p. 10.

²⁷ Joseph Weir Hunter, 'The Clubs of Old Manchester', in *Papers of the Manchester Literary Club*, 2 vols., ed. John H. Nodal (Manchester: A. Ireland & Co., 1876), I, p. 7.

instead permitted to subscribe to a reduced membership allowing use of the library and admission to lectures only, whilst being excluded from sitting on committees.²⁸ The six women writers contributing to the *Athenæum Souvenir* therefore had no voice in deciding how the funds that they helped to raise would be used. Similarly, at the Sun Inn meeting of 1842, from which *The Festive Wreath* was produced, women were also excluded. A report in the *Manchester Guardian* of meetings at the Sun Inn prior to March 1842 describes the poetic gathering as consisting of 'about 30 gentlemen.'²⁹ Debbie Bark notes that female poets were 'excluded from the public gatherings at the Sun Inn', drawing on Martha Vicinus' account of Isabella Varley,³⁰ a female poet with work published in *The Festive Wreath*, who 'hid behind curtains to hear her poem read to the company'.³¹

This provides valuable context when addressing the Manchester anthologies as material offshoots of the literary projects and broader literary attitudes of the Sun Inn group and the Manchester Athenæum. The marginalised role of female poets within the Sun Inn group was reflected in the textual layout of the preface to *The Festive Wreath*. This provides an insight into what McKenzie terms the 'social processes of transmission' of the text: the structural and visual format of the anthologies are underpinned by the gendered values and projects of the society from which they came.³² Male and female contributors are likewise segregated across the pages reproduced in the report from the *Manchester Guardian* on the 30 March 1842 which sees 'Upwards of forty' attendees listed, with the male contributors being noted in what appears as a priority on page iv.³³ The final sentence of this paragraph on the following page then lists all female supporters and poetic contributors together: 'During the evening, communications were also read from Miss Isabella Varley, Mrs. Caulton, Mrs E. S. Craven Green (of Leeds), and Miss Eliza Battye'.³⁴ The female poetic voice is not

²⁸ Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-1851* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1995), p. 147.

²⁹ 'Provincial Intelligence', *Manchester Guardian* (12 January 1842), p. 2.

³⁰ Debbie Bark, 'Manchester and Early Victorian Literary Culture', p. 412.

³¹ Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth-Century British Working-Class Literature* (London: Barnes and Noble, 1974), p. 160.

³² McKenzie, p. 13.

³³ *The Festive Wreath*, p. iv.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. v.

entirely stifled, yet it is nonetheless reduced, as the two lines dedicated to female contributors out of the twenty-six line paragraph, or indeed out of the total of forty-eight lines given to the 'Poetic Festival' section of the preface, visually and textually segregates and reduces the contribution of women to the anthology.

A Manchester poet of the period who offers an insight into the work of female poets in relation to these literary societies and the material texts relating to them is Ann Hawkshaw. Hawkshaw was a name of relative poetic reputation in the period, having two volumes of poetry published in the 1840s, poems reprinted in the Manchester Press and her poem 'Life's Dull Reality' published in the *Athenæum Souvenir*. Although Hawkshaw does not feature in *The Festive Wreath*, Debbie Bark notes that her 1842 collection '*Dionysius the Areopagite*', with other poems opens with 'Introductory Stanzas', which is dated 25 March 1842, the day after the Sun Inn meeting.³⁵ Moreover, the poem is signed with her 'Manchester' location, reaffirming her own position within the cultural landscape of the city. As references to Sun Inn meetings are made in the *Manchester Guardian* in the months leading up to March 1842, it is likely that Hawkshaw would have been aware of the meeting and the literary project of the group.³⁶ It therefore seems probable that Hawkshaw's dating of the 'Introductory Stanzas' is an acknowledgement both of the actions of the group, and of her isolation from it as a female poet.³⁷ Rather than contribute to an anthology that represents a poetic project from which she is physically excluded, her 'Introductory Stanzas' can be seen as an implicit contribution. Whilst many of her poems in the *Dionysius* collection are lengthy (the title poem 'Dionysius the Areopagite', for instance, covers two thousand five hundred lines across fifty-eight pages), the poem dated 25 March 1842 is made up of six stanzas of six lines, a format in keeping with *The Festive Wreath* anthology. The dating of Hawkshaw's poem speaks to the publicity of the Sun Inn group in the local press and as a result Hawkshaw becomes caught up in Manchester's poetry-producing and -publicising network. The dating of 'Introductory Stanzas' also suggests that reports

³⁵Debbie Bark (ed.), *The Collected Works of Ann Hawkshaw* (London: Anthem Press, 2015), p. xxi.

³⁶ The 'Local & Provincial Intelligence' section of the 12 January 1842 issue of the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 2) is an example of this publicity, in a report on the 'friendly meeting of poets and friends of poetry' at the Sun Inn.

³⁷ Ann Hawkshaw, '*Dionysius the Areopagite*', with other poems (London: Jackson and Walford, Manchester: Simms and Dinham, 1842), pp. iii-iv.

of poetry-producing groups and events in the city in newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* were a key part of ensuring a public awareness of the poetic identity and activities of the city.

The work of Manchester's women writers in relation to the city's anthology-producing poetic communities of the 1840s merits further research. The recent recovery of Ann Hawkshaw's work stands as a valuable example of individual poetic activity from a woman writing in the city that was both contained within and positioned on the margins of Manchester's poetic renaissance in the early 1840s. The promotion of Hawkshaw's poetry in the local Manchester press offers a useful case study to open out questions around the negotiation of an industrial and literary identity in Manchester in the 1840s.

The North of England Magazine

Andrew Hobbs' study of the relationship between local press and poetry publishing suggests that 'there were five million poems published in the English provincial press during the nineteenth century', with around 70% of the publications he sampled including poetry.³⁸ This implies that publishing and poetry, especially in a regional context, are significantly interconnected. Yet the exclusion of poetry from the *Wellesley Index* database – because, according to editor Walter Houghton, it would 'have added an enormous number of worthless items' – has resulted in regional poets and poetry being doubly marginalised: firstly in the database and, consequently, Victorian studies more generally.³⁹ The ways in which the Manchester press engaged with poetry, in terms of the responses to, and apparent cooperation with, the projects of the Manchester Athenæum and the Sun Inn group in contemporary newspaper reports, as well as attitudes towards local poetry in periodicals such as *The North of England Magazine*, allows poetic considerations to be repositioned as key to Victorian cultural and literary studies, as well as enriching an understanding of the transmission of poetry in 1840s Manchester.

³⁸ Andrew Hobbs, 'Five Million Poems, or the Local Press as Poetry Publisher, 1800-1900', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 45, 4 (2012), 488-492 (p. 488).

³⁹ Walter E. Houghton et al., eds., *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), II, p. xvi.

Published in December 1842, in between the publication of *The Festive Wreath* and the *Athenæum Souvenir*, volume II number XI of *The North of England Magazine* provides particular insight into the ways in which poetry was publicised to a reading community in 1840s Manchester. *The North of England Magazine* was a short-lived periodical, running between February 1842 and September 1843, with contemporary reviews suggesting that the 'avowed object' of the publication was 'the elevation of provincial literature'.⁴⁰ The editors' 'Concluding Address' in the final issue suggested that 'a time would come when the word "London" on the title-page would not be essential to successful publication' but, as the economic failure of the periodical suggests, 'it has not yet arrived'.⁴¹ The treatment of poetry in *The North of England Magazine* during its brief existence reflects such an attitude and ultimately resonates with the approach to poetry seen in the newspaper publicity given to the Manchester Athenæum and Sun Inn group. When reflecting on the publication of *The Festive Wreath*, Weir Hunter equates the talent of those involved in the anthology with 'those who slumber [...] in Westminster Abbey', as Manchester's poetry is positioned alongside London equivalents as well as the implied London-centric literary canon.⁴² The city's poetry was caught between the assertion of self-identity and a struggle to define itself against London. Hence, whilst *The North of England Magazine* editors came to claim in their 'Concluding Address' that they could not overcome the publishing force of London, their attempts to engage with and promote Manchester's literary talents provide a valuable insight into the cultural project of the city's poetry in relation to its industrial reputation as opposed to the publishing force of the capital.

Manchester literary culture is a prominent feature of the 'Literary Notices' section in the December 1842 issue of the publication. A review of Ann Hawkshaw's *'Dionysius the Areopagite', with other poems* is the lead review of the section, and it is significant that Hawkshaw's work is the only reviewed text that is listed with a Manchester publisher, Simms and Dinham. Hawkshaw is also claimed as a representative of Manchester in the review, being described as 'an honour to our good old Town', a comment that seems to reaffirm her links with Manchester and the city's literary and

⁴⁰ Joseph Weir Hunter, 'The Clubs of Old Manchester', p. 28.

⁴¹ 'Concluding Address', *The North of England Magazine*, and *Bradshaw's Journal*, 3, 10 (September 1843), p. 283.

⁴² Weir Hunter, p. 27.

publishing activity.⁴³ Whilst the work itself is praised, there is a clear sense that it is the geographical identity of the text that necessitates the primary focus placed upon it. Alongside the review of *'Dionysius the Areopagite', with other poems*, the surrounding articles in the 'Literary Notices' section reflect the difficulty of balancing a literary and industrial Manchester identity. The preceding piece provides a report on an event held by the Liverpool Mechanics' Institution, where a number of new technical and industrial innovations were displayed, and the enthusiasm of the review in declaring that 'We most heartily rejoice this triumph' reaffirms the centrality of such activity and industrialism to the identity and success of the region.⁴⁴ The review of Hawkshaw as the first item in the following section, and, indeed, on the same page of the publication, connects industrial identity with the literary pride espoused for the Manchester poet. 'Literary Notices' is followed by the closing section of the issue titled 'The Manchester Market', where the city is assessed in industrial and economic terms, with reports on the production and sale prices of various Manchester products. The literary section of the publication is significant in its attempt to affirm a cultural and literary character to Manchester, yet ultimately, in this publication, industry dominates. The review of Hawkshaw's work is itself aware of the spatial limits of the 'Literary Notices', acknowledging that 'It was our wish to notice this unpretending work at more length, but time and space are our masters'.⁴⁵ The surrounding industrial and market sections compress the space allotted to literature and the self-aware nature of the constraints of space and formatting in the review invokes a sense of limitation in the face of a constricting industrial theme. The cultural project of Manchester therefore had to work within the dominant industrial mode of the city and the treatment of literature throughout the issue shows the complex relationship that the Manchester literary, publishing and periodical community negotiated between an industrial and literary identity.

Conclusion

Various literary-minded communities in Manchester during the 1840s were engaged in the promotion of local poetry. A collective, and coordinated, production of

⁴³ 'Literary Notices', *The North of England Magazine*, 2, 11 (December 1842), p. 122.

⁴⁴ 'Liverpool Mechanics' Institution', *The North of England Magazine*, p. 121.

⁴⁵ 'Literary Notices', *The North of England Magazine*, p.1 22.

material surrounding poetic projects such as *Athenæum Souvenir* and *The Festive Wreath* anthologies show a network of poetry-promoting and Manchester-promoting groups and institutions that were working in defiance of the reducing national significance of the city in literary terms. Furthermore, activities within and outside of these networks by women poets indicates a productive and engaged broader cultural atmosphere in the city and this is certainly an area that merits further research. The ways in which the Manchester press engaged with poetry, in relation to the Manchester Athenæum and the Sun Inn group, allows poetic considerations to be positioned as key to enriching an understanding of Manchester's cultural identity in the 1840s as it sought to promote and publicise the Cottonopolis as a region of literary significance and identity beyond merely industrial associations. The recent publication of Andrew Hobbs' *A Fleet Street in Every Town* indicates the current research interest in decentralised journalism and writing in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁶ Hobbs' study foregrounds the end of Stamp Duty taxation in 1855 as a catalyst for thriving provincial newspaper cultures, yet explorations of local and regional cultural activity in the years leading up to 1855 can connect the vitality of cultural and regionally-minded projects such as those of early-1840s Manchester with the provincial journalism that Hobbs explores in the second half of the century.

In this paper I have used bibliographic approaches (in McKenzie's sense) as a means of contextualising Manchester poetic communities active in the 1840s. However, there remains fruitful work to be done in recovering the lives and work of individual poets whose contributions to poetic anthologies in the city were so vital in the formation of regional and cultural identity.



BIOGRAPHY: Harry Bark studied for a BA in English Literature at the University of Leeds and recently completed an MSt in English (1830-1914) at the University of Oxford.

harry.bark@sjc.ox.ac.uk

⁴⁶ Andrew Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: the Provincial Press in England 1855-1900* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018).