

“And every Lawyer’s Clerk writes rhyme”:

Robert Baldwin as Poet, York, 1819-20

Robert Baldwin is known to Canadians as a politician rather than as a poet, although he was considered in his day a deeply cultured man and an adept rhetorician. The English-Canadian cultural imaginary positions Baldwin, in tandem with Louis-Hippolyte La Fontaine, as the “father” of responsible government: a chief tactician for the concept, he shared with La Fontaine the joint premiership of the united Canadas in 1842-43 and again from 1848-51. Despite his standing in the political patri-lineage, and the solidity of his achievements, the scholarship on Baldwin is surprisingly scanty and there is no authoritative biography. His role may have been too mediative, his personal life too muted, for such attention.

This essay considers Baldwin before he was, literally or figuratively, a “father”: this is a study of juvenilia.¹ Here is Baldwin in a different key, before he became an irretrievable melancholic after the death of his beloved wife, and an unremittingly public figure. The focus is a manuscript collection of poetry, authored by Baldwin and at least one other, written throughout 1819 and brought into final form in 1820.² Related letters provide what may be a first instance of sustained literary criticism in Upper Canada.³ These items demonstrate the persistence of scribal publication in early Canada, and the interdependence of coterie cultural production with more public endeavours and institutions. And they raise issues additional to Baldwin’s early cultural formation: what was the literary field of early York, only 26 years after its formal founding and six years after the American invasions?

Robert Baldwin was born in 1804 into one of the “first families” of “Little York,” a family linked through dense Irish kinship connections, and then

Canadian marriage, to the prominent Russell and Willcocks clans.⁴ The Baldwins' modest financial situation strengthened those ties: Dr. William Warren Baldwin, Phoebe Willcocks Baldwin, and their children lived for many years in a condition of mutual dependency at "Russell Abbey" with the aging and ailing Elizabeth Russell; in turn, Dr. Baldwin (first a physician, now a lawyer) managed the Russell holdings.

By 1818, however, the outlook had improved. Dr. Baldwin's land investments and legal practice were thriving with the boom in the colonial economy. Construction commenced on a large frame dwelling three miles from the town, on a 200-acre plot on Davenport Hill bequeathed by William Willcocks. An early sketch shows a simple and well-proportioned house, in the Georgian style, light and airy with long rows of six-over-six windows (Thompson 78). The new home became the centre of family life, although Dr. Baldwin retained offices at Russell Abbey, which remained the family's town home. "Spadina" welcomed the Baldwins for the new year of 1819.

On that new year, the young Robert Baldwin was nearing his fifteenth birthday, and in his penultimate year at the Home District Grammar School (the "Blue School" in the York vernacular) under the redoubtable John Strachan. He was a young man of substantial (although not as yet absolutely assured) expectations, to be realized three years later when the death of Elizabeth Russell passed half of the vast Russell holdings to his mother and made Robert heir-designate. But the great expectations were as much *of* him, as *for* him: his father intended him for the law and for reform politics, which suited the boy's own inclinations, although Dr. Baldwin's dynastic aspirations—his innately "feudal feeling," in the words of one relative—may have been less congenial (Scadding 33).⁵ A complex interplay of family connections and political instabilities marked Robert Baldwin's early years: the nine-year-old Robert struggling on foot, with his mother and the younger children, north on Yonge Street ahead of the invading Americans, while his father stayed behind to prevent the sacking of Russell Abbey and to tend the wounded. The family connections were themselves a novelistic blend of affections and obligations, legacies and debts.⁶ All contributed to make Robert Baldwin—or so he is invariably described—intensely idealistic, involuted, and preternaturally responsible. That he would turn poet as an adolescent is not surprising.

Indeed, a long literary strain runs in this political family, beginning with the first Robert Baldwin, bankrupted in Cork producing a political newspaper, the *Volunteer Journal* (Thompson 99).⁷ Both Robert Baldwin (the

elder) and William Baldwin were classically trained: a letter from William Baldwin to his very young son recommends Virgil “as the most beautiful of the Roman poets” (cited R.M. Baldwin 84). A brother of Dr. Baldwin served on the frigate that carried the Irish poet Thomas Moore back to England from his 1804 trip to Canada and the United States; the family prized this connection to Ireland’s “national” poet and, indirectly, to Byron, of whom he was an intimate (Thompson 75). The family’s literary inclinations are symbolized by the building of a library at Spadina, and by the guest book in the picturesque summer house where family members, visitors, and even servants recorded impressions in verse (Robertson I: 175).⁸ Family literary productions could be elaborate, as evidenced by the program for a play titled “The Revenge” produced with a cast of cousins as a Christmas entertainment in 1824. (Robert Baldwin took the lead as “Don Alonzo”; Dr. Baldwin’s verse “Prologue” is witty and metrically adroit.)⁹ In the autumn of 1819, Robert Baldwin’s friend James Hunter Samson could quip that “I am happy Spadina contains such a host of poets. I suppose you are the Appollo [*sic*]” (28 Nov. 1819). The literary lineage would extend to Robert Baldwin’s own grandson, the journalist and critic Robert (Robbie) Ross, who displayed the family trait of staunch responsibility in his courageous friendship to the vilified Oscar Wilde.

The major intellectual influence on the young Robert Baldwin (henceforth Baldwin) must have been the Reverend John Strachan: it could hardly have been otherwise. For 20 years, Strachan had been moulding the minds and souls of the young men of Upper Canada’s elite and rising classes, and his curriculum was by now well-defined. A newly-hired assistant instructor recorded his first impressions in the fall of 1819, noting “a class of only two in Greek, who took up Horace and Livy in Latin, and there were three Latin forms below them. . . . None were much advanced in mathematics, and, with the exception of the senior two had not passed the fourth book of Euclid” (cited Robertson I: 118). Baldwin, head boy in his final year, was one of the advanced pair: he would also have been trained by Strachan in the rhetorical arts, particularly declamation. Strachan was confident of his educational principles: “Delay no more/ To plant instruction on Ontario’s shore,” he had exhorted in “Verses Written August 1802,” foreseeing that in a not-too-distant future, “At Kingston, bards may glow with Milton’s fire/ Or seek a calmer bliss from Dryden’s lyre” (Strachan, ll. 129-30; 139-40).

But in early 1819, Strachan’s educational ideals were proving a distinct impediment to one young Upper Canadian poet. Writing to his slightly

older friend James Hunter Samson (19 to Baldwin's 15) Baldwin complained that a surfeit of Greek was spoiling his Poetic Muse; to which Samson jokingly retorted that the law had not spoiled *his* ("you will perhaps say because you had none to spoil" [4 Feb. 1819]). Samson and Baldwin had become friends the previous year, when Samson was studying at York; now he was apprenticing law in the Kingston offices of Christopher Hagerman.¹⁰ Samson accepted with alacrity and even ardour Baldwin's proposal to continue the correspondence.

Samson's reply set the tone: the swapping of verses and criticism, occasional discussion of political and legal matters, gossip about mutual friends, and confidences about crushes on local "belles." (In the time-honoured tradition of Petrarch and Boccaccio, Baldwin was especially vulnerable to any new "Gallery Goddess" in church [4 Feb. 1819].) Personal details and controversial opinions are hinted and even hidden given the vagaries of the post, and the need to entrust some letters to travellers between York and Kingston. Unfortunately, only Samson's side remains of this lively documentation of social mores, while Baldwin's responses must be read between the lines or reconstrued. This archival situation replicates an apparent imbalance in the original correspondence: Baldwin as poet to Samson as critic; Baldwin as confessor to Samson as advisor; while Baldwin never reciprocated the intense and sometimes intemperate nature of Samson's epistolary friendship. The letters provide a window onto the homosocial, possibly homoerotic, life of young men of Upper Canada, as well as their literary longings.¹¹ There are 41 extant letters from Samson between February 1819 and November 1822, tidily numbered by Baldwin and the date of receipt noted. Following a gap of several years are a further 14 letters, written from 1825 to 1827, dealing with legal matters primarily and charting the cooling of the friendship.¹²

Despite Baldwin's dry spell and Samson's self-deprecation, their exchange was under way, Samson leading with a parody of provincial social life:

Our Kingston Belles had long work'd hard and steady
 At making dresses; getting flounces ready
 One object did the minds of all employ:
 The coming ball filled every soul with joy
 Point out the female look'd not with delight
 Unto the dance upon their Queen's birth night!
 See each striving to be first in fashion
 Their eagerness would move a stone's compassion. . . .

When the death of the Queen is announced and the ball postponed, the ladies weep—for the dresses they cannot wear. These couplets show Samson at his satiric best: “And now I have led the way I hope you will follow my example and send me any poetry you may make.”

Baldwin responded with a draft poem on rejected love, and a request for honest criticism, which Samson supplied abundantly and with tact. “I admire your poetry extremely, and should not make any alteration in it if you had not told me to deal candidly, and was afraid if I left it as it was you might suspect I dissembled,” he began. Moving sequentially through the text, Samson pens three pages of notes, correcting repetitions, tweaking the scansion, and choosing among, even devising, alternative wordings.¹³ Equally pragmatic advice is offered to the (again) lovelorn Baldwin, who should keep his mind on his Greek and Latin and thus cultivate qualities attractive to any worthy young woman (25 Mar. 1819). But the educational and economic disparities were always there: Samson regretted the deficiencies in his own schooling and moral formation and felt sorely the lack of a classical education (11 April 1819; 20 June 1819). Throughout the correspondence he is attempting Latin in fits and starts, purchasing a Virgil, intending Cicero, studying with a local cleric, but with little lasting success.¹⁴ Samson’s English was more polished than Baldwin’s however, judging by his constant corrections of Baldwin’s slipshod spelling, and many little homilies on the topic. And his letters show a sound literary understanding: while Baldwin was surely right to stick to the law, Samson might well have been an editor, in another time and place.

Indeed, Samson’s sustained reflections on the role of the critic show the influence both of Pope and of Horace (even if he knew the latter only in translation). Baldwin had sent paired odes to the seasons:

I admire the simplicity of your spring; and compare it to the strains of nature’s bard, my countryman, Burns. You desire me to correct autumn, which I shall try under these express conditions: That you do not praise my corrections, nor adopt any but what pleases your own taste. For example; if a writer of genius should adopt all the corrections, additions, and deductions of a petulant critic, In [sic] what kind of a garb would his productions appear? why, patched here, torn there, daubed, discoloured [sic], stained, and in short exhibiting every thing but its original appearance.

Again, a litany of corrections follows. “I have not the least doubt but the critic will be criticised. Send me your death of Achilles” (11 April 1819).

While sharing with Baldwin a taste for Burns, a veneration of the Greeks, and (like most young men of the day) a conviction that Byron was the avatar of the poetic, Samson shows a more neoclassical sensibility, admiring clarity, wit, and self-knowledge. These principles emerge in the doggerel he drafted in haste to catch the next post:

The Poets now are such a race
 I'm almost sham'd to show my face
 You'll not find any now below it
 For every grocer's boy's a Poet
 A Cobler [sic], Blacksmith or divine
 And every Lawyer's Clerk writes rhyme.
 And though the blockhead hardly knows
 The difference between verse and prose
 H'el [sic] gabble on sans rhyme or reason
 And talk when always out of season
 He'll tell you all about mythology
 Misspel [sic] his words, commit tautology
 Some lines with seven feet some with six*
 In Short the whole amounts to nix.+
 Two themes alone employ their pens
 Backbiting and defaming friends. . . .

* For instance me.

+ the vulgar word for nothing (18 April 1819)

Perhaps pleased by the poem, which he would later title "The Modern Poets," Samson made a proposal in his characteristically casual way:

I shall collect all your and my poetry in a little Book, with the initials of the AUTHOR at the bottom of each piece. . . . In a former letter I said I had lost all taste for poetry, however, the maggot bites me sometimes, I retire, and feel no inclination for any other company than the Muse, but after writing half a dozen lines I start up ejaculate "Fudge" and leave the piece unfinished. . . . Notwithstanding you shall have all the overboiling of the noddle of—
 Your ever sincere friend... (18 April 1819)

It must have been apparent by now, for all the value of Samson's criticism, that their inclinations were dramatically different: Baldwin a Romantic, lyrical in spirit, sensitive to natural beauty, and obsessed with the role of heroic figures in the destiny of nations, as witnessed by the titles of some lost early poems: "Ode to Passion," "The Death of Achilles," "The Destruction of Mexico." (Baldwin ruefully recognized himself as the mythologizer of Samson's line 11.) There was an imbalance in their poetic production in quantity and, Baldwin may have suspected, in quality as well. Surely he did not see his own verse as the overboiling of his noddle.

Baldwin delayed in his response; perhaps sensing reluctance, Samson offered a sustained and more serious 12-line conceit, in which the mayflower-son is awakened to life by the sun-father (10 May 1819). Baldwin then produced a diplomatically ambiguous statement of prior plans, judging by Samson's reply: "You say you are going to collect your poetry in a book: Will you give mine a place? leave a margin at the bottom so as to make notes and corrections. If I were you I would first write it in its primitive state" (20 June 1819). Undampened, Samson continued with his original scheme: "You have sent me the following pieces. Ode to Spring, Ode to Passion, Mexico, Death of Achilles, Verses on Henrietta, Aeneas descent into hell, A verse composed going to school, all of which I shall enter in a book; indeed, the most part are already entered." (9 June 1819). In a later letter, Samson detailed how he transcribed poems as letters arrived, with the letter number at the top of the page, and renewed his request to be included in Baldwin's volume: "Will you do the same should you think the nonsensical effusion of my brain worth the trouble?" (5 Sept. 1819).

While many of the poems mentioned in the letters have vanished, evidently both poets attempted a variety of forms and models. On Samson's advice, Baldwin dropped work on an epic in order to continue with the "Ode to Tecumse" (a name spelled variantly throughout the poems and correspondence) which Samson had admired in an earlier draft (20 June 1819). Samson produced dialect verse including a bigoted exchange between a "Mungo" and a "Massa": Baldwin disapproved and Samson foreswore such "doggerel dirty poetry" (10 Oct. 1819). Possibly with Pope's "sacred eclogue" *The Messiah* in mind, both composed verse renditions of chapters of Isaiah and swapped this literary problem back and forth in their letters. Each also attempted to "metamorphose" or "transmetamorphose" (in their terms) some classical authors, with Samson presumably reliant on translations or interlinears. Perhaps heartened by their progress, Baldwin had taken the bold step of submitting one of his verses for publication—to crushing effect. Samson was robustly consoling:

I shall say a word or two about your Monthly Critic and his poetry. You say he rejected your Tecumse without looking at it. I certainly think it was the much the same whether he looked at it or not; he knows as much about poetry as a horse does about his grandfather. You do not agree with him when he says the more pains you take the better you write poetry; ditto me. There is some excuse for him however on that point. He finds [sic] infinite labor to produce the barren effusions of his own brain. . . . His lines metre without regard to anything else; for instance he says in his anniversary "The [illegible] snow our eye balls stun."

Here he makes a singular noun agree with a verb in the Plural [sic] number. In another place he says, "they'll impart," these contractions are very seldom found in any authors but such as Butler and Wolcot, and in the last line of the same he has 13 feet. (10 Oct. 1819)

Encouragingly, Samson praises Baldwin's poetry as resembling his "favorite Burns"—by which he means its "simple, easy, and natural style" with a "natural flow of sounds from beginning to end" (28 Nov. 1819; 10 Oct. 1819), contrasting such "effortless" composition to the "Prodigious" production of the "Monthly Critic." While they often quipped about their different heritages—Irish for Baldwin, Samson a Scot—"Burns" was an aesthetic common denominator.

While their letters more or less ceased in the winter months—the Upper Canadian mail slowed with the winter decommissioning of the steamboat, and Baldwin was ill in the new year (as worried letters from his friends attest)—early spring found them still scribbling. Baldwin remained fascinated by the Tecumseh theme and Samson generated a miscellany: three valentine verses, "scotch" dialect verses, and an encomium to women, with several other pieces started. But their literary correspondence was drawing to a close. In May, Samson reported he had completed nothing whether from laziness, idleness or "something else." By October he would write:

I do not know whether I ought to be ashamed of it or no—but I have dropped the acquaintance of the muses in toto; so far as respects composing I am fond of reading good poetry notwithstanding—You therefore must not give me credit for more than I deserve—go on and leave me to climb parnassus [sic] easily—. . .
(11 October 1820)

"Do you ever write now?" he had enquired of Baldwin in the preceding month.¹⁵

Baldwin continued to write and to send verses for Samson's perusal, but not for long. His younger brother Henry, ailing since birth, had died at the age of thirteen in May; Samson's maladroit response to Baldwin's melancholy announcement—Samson wrote hastily, and chided Baldwin for owing him a longer letter—may have caused Baldwin to draw back from their collaboration. Baldwin had completed his studies at the Blue School; he had spent some of the summer serving in the militia; and he was admitted to the study of law.¹⁶ In that year he wrote "FINIS" to more than his book of poems.

“Poems. By Robert Baldwin. & Others.” is written in a 16 cm x 20 cm bound notebook, with marbled covers and lined numbered pages. It has a title page, 81 pages of contents, an editor’s note, an alphabetical index by title, and an errata page with no corrections. The manuscript is fair copied in a single hand (probably Baldwin’s), with short underrules after stanzas and longer underrules for the end of poems, not always consistently. No authorship is given for any of the individual items. The manuscript is in very good condition except for two missing leaves that appear deliberately ripped out; the tops of several other pages are torn (perhaps as a result) leaving several poems incomplete. The title page reads as follows:

Poems.
By
Robert Baldwin.
&
Others.

I confess it was want of consideration that made me an author; I writ because it amused me; I corrected because it was as pleasant for me to correct as to write; and I published because I was told I might please such as it was a credit to please.
Pope

Collected by James Samson Hunter.

Vol. 1.st

1820.

The title page seems designed as much to mislead as to inform. Like the old canard about the Holy Roman Empire, “Poems. By Robert Baldwin. & Others Collected by James Samson Hunter” is not just poems; it is not apparently authored by “others”; and it wasn’t collected by Hunter (or even Samson).¹⁷ Only “Robert Baldwin and “1820” are entirely correct. As to the rest: the volume contains two prose selections as well; while the poems are primarily Baldwin’s, the evidence points to a duet rather than multiple “others”; “Hunter Samson” is a literary sobriquet; and he was not in any case the “collector,” a role assumed, as we have seen, by Baldwin. (To compound the situation: the term “collector” was by now a thinly-disguised simile for “author,” since Walter Scott had been revealed as the “collector” of the ballads in *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*.) “Vol. 1.st.” implies other volumes, which are not extant if indeed they were ever planned. Last, is a cryptic closing comment informing the reader that “This vollume [*sic*] contains 1192 verses, most of which are the composition of Mr. Doe himself. Note of the Editor.” Is the “editor” the same as the “collector,” and (if not)

why is Baldwin (clearly identified on the title page) given a *nom-de-plume* here? The running jests and innuendoes of the Baldwin-Samson correspondence, as well as *à clef* comments in the volume's prose pieces, suggest that this title page could be decoded by only a select few.

Enough evidence exists, however, to overturn the assumption that this collection was assembled and copied by Samson.¹⁸ The absence of chronological ordering or of letter numbers means that this is not the collection to which he refers in his letters; and the omission of many poems Samson earlier transcribed indicates that this is not a fair copy of Samson's version either. More likely, this is a much-pared and fair copied version of Baldwin's own collection; a (tentative) comparison of the hand to Baldwin's annotations on the received letters, and the many mis-spellings, suggest he is the copyist. Samson's title billing perhaps glosses his gratitude to Baldwin for giving him credit "for more than I deserve" (11 October 1820). While Baldwin could conceivably have used Samson's assemblage in producing his own, there are no references to notebooks passing back and forth. The provenance information for "Poems" lacks attribution or dating, only noting it was received from Baldwin family members.¹⁹

While the manuscript's bibliographic directions are confusing, the document functions more clearly as a guide to tastes and intents. The selection of an epigraph had been the source of some discussion in the spring of 1820: Samson was searching for a suitable "motto" but had few books to hand in Belleville where he was assisting lawyer James Macaulay for the month. "The easiest manner to find a motto would be to look into the Spectator where every piece bears one: but most probably you would disdain to get one so easily" (10 March 1820). The eventual selection from Pope must have struck just the right note of gentlemanly amateurism and even insouciance.

"Poems" consisted originally of 52 poems and two prose-poem pieces. Two poems are now missing, but the index identifies them as "To Adeline. A Dream." and "Ad Patrem." (Was "Ad Patrem" the verse penned in anticipation of Samson's father's visit? But only the two poems already quoted can be definitively deeded to Samson; my working assumption is that most if not all of the remainder are Baldwin's.) The contents may be sorted into some broad generic categories. Not surprisingly given the age and sensibilities of the authors, almost half are love addresses to young women: "To Anna" (recipient of nine addresses), and (sometimes multiply) to Adeline, Anna-Maria, Clara, Eliza, Fanny, Harriet, and Rosaline. Some poems take the pretext of an impromptu, fragment, dream, or farewell, and there is a

duo to Adeline occasioned by the (real or imagined) exchange of locks of hair (verses lent an unintended resonance by the epigraph from Pope). Given the care with which love-objects' identities are disguised even in the letters, these poems are not likely addressed to actual Annas and Adelines of York and Kingston (even if an amorous "Robert" is personified in one poem). Indeed, Samson's cavalier editorial suggestion, that "Henrietta" should replace "Harriet" in the interests of scansion (25 March 1819), indicates that names may have been chosen as much for their sonic properties or literary associations. (Although the crushes of these easily-smitten young men were a powerful prompt to composition: witness "An Impromptu to Rosaline (written in Church)."

In the Samson-Baldwin correspondence, "belle" and "muse" are closely collocated terms.) In addition to the poetic addresses, "They Vow" and two poems titled "To Woman" treat this theme more generally. While these poems must have been of moment to their composer(s), their current worth is primarily as evidence of themes and forms then in vogue.

The remaining half of the poems can be divided into smaller categories. First, are poems of friendship and commemoration: there are poems "To Givins" and one "To Samson," while "To W. Stoughton" addresses another mutual friend, a teacher who had taken an especial interest in Baldwin, apparently written on the occasion of his departure from the Home District Grammar School.²⁰ "To De Hoen" praises the Baron Frederick De Hoen (formerly Von Hoen) a British army officer and close friend of the Baldwins (it was to his Yonge Street farm that the family fled in 1813), who had returned to Germany in 1817. One poem is addressed "To Miss Newpine," seemingly a childhood sweetheart for whom the author retains a warm regard; while a memorial verse "On the Death of Mrs McGill" mourns one of the Baldwins' earliest Canadian friends, whose "Davenport" estate was on the lot west of their "Spadina." The occasion for the fairly-generic meditation "On the Death of a Friend" cannot be determined. Biographical evidence supports Baldwin as the author of all or almost all of these poems, which are of interest from a social-historical perspective.

While the length of the epic had defeated Baldwin—and Samson had advised dropping one such effort, "the subject being too long and laborious for your present occupation" (31 May 1819) with the regiment—he tackled heroic topics by adopting more manageable literary forms and by staying closer to his frame of reference. "Death of Tecumseh" presents the slaying of Tecumseh, at the Battle of Moraviantown in 1813, as a martyrdom, by

conflating battlefield scenes with (what was believed to have been) the later desecration of Tecumseh's body; while "To Tecumsee" assures the departed hero of his eternal commemoration on history's page. Here Baldwin heads the long line of Canadian poets drawn to this compelling figure, and provides an early "mythologization" of the heroes of the recent war.²¹

Several poems clearly emulate admired authors. "To a Cricket" and "To a Moth. In November" are identifiably Burnsian, where an address to a small creature carries an encomium to domestic virtue or a wry reflection. A verse translation of a lyric by Anachreon was probably motivated by Thomas Moore's own "Odes of Anachreon" of 1800. The two "Ossianic" fragments follow the format with an opening "argument" or summary of the action, followed by narrative parodying the bardic rhythms of James Macpherson's "original." Other poems, less specifically indebted, rehearse the familiar *topoi* of the period: odes appreciating Nature's beauty and power, and lyrics on poetic inspiration and composition ("The Lyre"; "The Broken Wire"). A "Canadian" departure is quite literally provided by "The Canadian's Exile's Adieu," which eschews meadows, zephyrs, and muses for fields, strong gusts, and maidens who roam under "native skies."

While the poems show range in models and influences, Baldwin's novitiate status caused caution in stanzaic and metrical forms. Almost one-third of the poems are in cross-rhymed iambic tetrameter quatrains; a further four are in iambic tetrameter with a different stanzaic structure. This line gives a suitable aura of simplicity (and, some would sense, sincerity) to these youthful productions, but places expressive restrictions. And even then, the poems have a surplus of e'ens, 'eres, ne'ers, and other syncopic shortcuts (despite Samson's disapproval of "contractions"). Plural interjections and invocations also assist with metrical measure—a surplus of "ahs" give the addresses to young women a particularly love-sick quality—as do ingenious coinages and substitutions ("Canadia" is apostrophized in "The Canadian Exile's Lament," and Tecumseh placed on the banks of "Delaware" rather than the "Thames"). However, in contrast to his epistolary critic, Baldwin seems not to have been over-concerned with metrical regularity, favouring a looser line.

Baldwin's classical training probably led to some experimentation with syllabic lines or with hexameters. Quotations from the letters suggest that, in the well-trodden footsteps of Dryden and Pope, he chose heroic couplets for his classical "metamorphoses" or his own epics.²² The extended line, when it does appear, is primarily hendecasyllabic. There are some ballad

stanzas, and approximations of a common measure; and Burns' influence is felt even if the Burnsian stanza is never strictly emulated. This point may be most economically made if the reader hums "Afton Water" while reading the opening of the ode "To Tecumsee."

Could Baldwin, or Baldwin/Samson, have printed "Poems" if they had wished to do so? Several years would pass before Hugh Thomson of the *Upper Canada Herald* in Kingston issued a first volume of verse (of unknown title) and soon a second, *A Poetical Address to the Liege Men of Every British Colony and Province in the World* (1823) (Parker 74). The first verse monograph in York was J.L. Alexander's *Wonders of the West, or, A Day at Niagara Falls in 1825*, printed in the year of its title (Firth LXXXXV). But the capacity was there: The King's Printer issued non-governmental materials such as almanacs and sermons; indeed, Charles Fothergill would print *Wonders of the West*. In spring 1820, a second press appeared in York with John Carey's fledgling newspaper, *The Observer*; and a skilled Edinburgh bookbinder, George Dawson, had been in business in York since 1817 (Hulse 79). Aspiring authors could also look to the presses of Kingston, Niagara, or even Lower Canada.

Publication of individual verses was also feasible. While the first Upper Canadian literary magazine, James Martin Cawdell's *The Roseharp*, would not appear until 1823 in Niagara, Baldwin would surely have known, in the summer of 1820, of his fellow literary society member's plan to launch the *Glencawdell Portfolio* (Fleming 451). Cawdell's plan remained unrealized, but would Baldwin have considered placing his verses there?²³ Newspapers published poetry, both short selections and longer productions—Adam Hood Burwell's *Talbot Road* had appeared in two instalments in the *Niagara Spectator* in 1818, for example (Bentley 92)—and even the *Upper Canada Gazette* published poetry, especially of an occasional or epideictic nature. Carey's new press, and Cawdell's proposed new magazine, must have raised exciting possibilities for publication in York. But the words of the "Monthly Critic" may have been felt more deeply than either young man would admit.

However, the verses were public, thus published, in a different way. Samson's soldier brother John couriered letters between York and Kingston, but was also a "bit of a Poetaster" (18 Apr. 1819) and an early audience: "John has got a few lines I wrote him extempore, in scotch, which if you wish you can obtain from him" (10 March 1820). James Givins, then a disgruntled store clerk in Cornwall, wrote to Baldwin about his own reading

and asked for, and received, examples of Baldwin's "muse" (21 Feb. 1820; 5 June 1820).²⁴ The Ossianic fragments, *jeux d'esprit*, also comically delineate a social set: the brothers Gador and Salmin, their friend the loosely disguised Balnor, and a maiden who mourns their deaths by the brook of Givna. In this respect the title of "Poems" is correct: it was written within a circle of "Others." Or, more precisely, "circles," if we add the "host of poets" assembled at Spadina. "Poems" is best defined as "coterie" verse, literature which functions to maintain a literary conversation among a deliberately restricted group. As a result, selections by friends and family are almost invariably included, according to David Shields' observations of similar collections in early America (Shields "Manuscript" 415). (Perhaps we should take Baldwin's word about the "Others.") Such social functions would be eclipsed by a too-narrow focus on the authorship of Baldwin alone. Some connotations of "coterie" are also misleading: frivolity, exclusivity. Coterie authorship may be needed to propagate controversial materials; to target an audience strategically; to protect the power of the authorial "signature"; and to build networks of like-minded individuals.

Similarly, the productive "finish" of the holographic work is underestimated if manuscripts are viewed as a pre-print stage of production. "Poems" is a book, generically and materially, even on more contemporary understandings of the term, including the "book-like" attributes of cover, title page, contents listing, index, and enumerated pages. (Shields also notes in coterie collections a characteristic care in the selection of addressees and epigrams, in the organization of contents, and in calligraphy ["Manuscript" 415].) "Poems," in sum, is a coterie book produced and circulated through scribal publication. Scribal publication, like coterie circulation, may well be a deliberate (rather than a default) choice, allowing the author an artisanal control over the finished book, and an ongoing participation in processes of production and distribution. Shields has emphasized in another context that, "discovery of the literature of British America depends on an understanding "the *mixed print and manuscript culture* that operated in the provinces": addition of "North" is a useful inflection of Shields' formulation (*Oracles* 6).

Whether "Poems" ever circulated, or was meant to circulate, outside of friends or family networks, cannot be ascertained. Clearer, however, is Baldwin's determinate role in expanding and institutionalizing such cultural circles.²⁵ In June of 1820 ten young "Gentlemen" convened the first literary society in Upper Canada: Baldwin, his cousin (and future brother-

in-law) Robert Baldwin Sullivan, James Givins, and James Martin Cawdell, were among the young literati, meeting for mutual improvement and debate.²⁶ The group was supplanted by Baldwin's next effort (to which Hunter Samson also belonged), a Juvenile Advocate Society inaugurated in February of 1821.²⁷ Initially a debating club (for legal topics particularly), it soon became a forum for the practice of "deliberative democracy" (in the term of Jeffrey McNairn) with the law-student members paying scrupulous attention to their own procedures and record-keeping, and tackling more contentious questions: "Has the Legislature of a Mother Country the right to tax a Colony which sends no representative to such Legislature?" Eventually, under pressure from Baldwin, the society developed a "bicameral" structure to handle both legal and general topics, and added reading and discussion to its mandate. Speaking always to a "side," they found, restricted treatment of topics compared to conversation, which "frequently starts a stream of ideas and knowledge long forgotten and makes the memory more alert in drawing forth its hidden stores" (Minutes 17 Dec. 1821). This group, which persisted until 1826, was quickly emulated by a Student Society in Kingston founded by Samson; the two groups kept in touch through letters, overlapping memberships, and the exchange of debate topics.²⁸

Samson and Baldwin corresponded for several more years, with diminishing frequency and intimacy; political differences finally divided them. Samson drifted further from the York and Kingston circles, becoming Belleville's sole lawyer in 1823. He turned conservative, most notoriously helping to engineer the libel and breach of privilege charges against William Lyon Mackenzie that resulted in Mackenzie's expulsion from the House of Assembly. And, despite a loving and well-connected marriage, Samson became ever more embittered, dying an alcoholic in 1836 (Boyce 772-73).²⁹ Baldwin's life would appear the exact opposite: he was a prosperous, accomplished, and eminently trusted man, who retained lifelong, if somewhat moderated, literary interests.³⁰ But he became increasingly frail in both physical and mental health, a prisoner—like Hunter Samson, in this respect—of his own inwardness. Perhaps he should have remained a poet; perhaps he needed an expressive outlet for his ideals, his memories, and his grief. When Baldwin's body was exhumed and gutted in a post-mortem mimicry of his late wife's caesarean section, and when her coffin was disinterred so that his could be chained in perpetuity to it, the shocked family followed testamentary instructions that could have been scripted by Byron himself.

This essay is not the first to turn to the “private” Robert Baldwin.³¹ But such private poetry—even the poetry of aspiration, friendship, and desire—fulfilled a distinctively public function and indeed was dependent on existing venues and circuits for its very composition. In an era when family ties were political bonds; when a new ruling bourgeoisie was formed through the forging of friendships; when the press could be considered either too restricted in view or too profligate in distribution to be trusted; and when (even, ostensibly, private) poetry served to integrate family, acquaintance-ship, power, and information—the distinction between public and private cannot be clearly drawn. This would not be news to scholars of early Canadian politics (Jeffrey McNairn, for example, has tracked the rhetorical widening of “private” opinion into a public sphere); nor to book historians (Gwendolyn Davies has documented another instance of the persistence of scribal publication at the moment of print proliferation, in the analogous cycle of authorship, copying, and criticism of the Tory poet Jacob Bailey [Davies 371-72]). And David Bentley has recently reminded literary scholars of the continuing importance of authorial coteries, of the dependence of “individual” creative acts on collective endeavour, in his study of the Confederation *group* of poets. Robert Baldwin’s “Poems” and its surrounding web of actors and circumstances, insist on a scholarly convergence of political history, book history, and literary history if we are to reconstruct the communicative terrain of early Canada.

SELECTIONS FROM THE POEMS OF ROBERT BALDWIN

From the Greek of Anachrion

As late I wish'd to sing Atridis' praise,
 And twine a wreath for mighty Cadmus' name,
 My Lyre refused to sound heroic lays,
 And all its' [*sic*] accents breath'd a lovers [*sic*] flame.

Again I tun'd it and began to feel
 A strong desire Alcides works to sing,
 But love's soft accents from my Lyre would steal,
 And lover's sighs the fond chords only ring.

Farewell then Heroes farewell then for me,
The lover's sighs my Lyre alone can move;
And every verse I'd proudly sound to thee,
It sweetly softens into kindling love.

[Excerpt from] To a Moth. In November

Little fluttering insect go,
And hide thee in thy nest,
For oh! th'approaching frost and snow
Will chill thy little breast. . . .

Then go and sleep in torpor while
Cold Winter's frosts are raging here,
Nor wake 'till Springs [*sic*] returning smile
Again unbinds the frozen [*sic*] year.

But oh! what thousands of mankind,
Who proudly boast a soul supreme,
Lay torpid with their thinking mind,
In Pleasure's more destructive dream.

[Excerpt from] The Broken Wire

I lately took my golden Lyre
From off the wall, where long it hung,
And struck the once extatic [*sic*] wire
To wake its' [*sic*] notes to life and song. . . .

At length the chord of love I found,
By some ill- govern'd hand was broke,
That once, with sweet mellodious [*sic*] sound,
Sooth'd softly every lay I woke. . . .

[Excerpt from] The Death of Tecumsee

. . . . Columbia's Heroes nearly yield,
 They almost quit the groaning field;
 When Lo!—in the tumult of the strife,
 A wretch, who had not soul to dare
 The Hero to an equal war,
 Stole with a dastard hand his noble life;
 Pierced in the back the Warrior lies;
 His eye now languishes in death;
 Midst thousands now he faints he dies;
 Midst thousand foemen yields his breath.
 Now crowds tumultuous throng around,
 Each eager to inflict a wound.
 How many plung'd within that heart
 A sword the [*sic*] ne'er had dared to wield. . . .

[Excerpt from] To Tecumsee

Oh! shade of Tecumsee thou bravest of men
 The valiant have fallen, go sleep thou with them;
 For tho' o'er thy tomb no proud columns arise,
 And plant their high heads in the wide azure skies,
 Tho [*sic*] no tablet is rais'd to commemorate thy fame,
 Nor the smooth polish'd marble engrav'd with thy name,
 Thy deeds by tradition, and history's page,
 Shall be handed successive from age down to age. . . .

[Excerpt from] The Canadian Exile's Adieu

. . . . Farewell, e'er again I revisit thy shore,
 Let what climes, or what regions my footsteps explore,
 What frowns, or what smiles of false Fortune I see,
 Canadia—I'll fondly look back upon thee,
 When my bosom beats high in the tumult of rage,
 Or languishes soft in repose,
 Yet Canadia thy fields will my thoughts still engage
 While my bosom yet beats or my life blood yet flows. . . .

NOTES

- 1 The author is grateful to: Sandra Alston (on the *Glencawdell Portfolio*); Jennifer Bunting (Lennox and Addington County Museum and Archives); Patricia Fleming (on the Baldwin family); Douglas Fyfe (Spadina Historic House and Garden); David Galbraith (Scott as collector; coterie publication); Susan Lewthwaite (Archives of the Law Society of Upper Canada); Christine Mosser (Baldwin Room, Toronto Reference Library). Eli MacLaren searched the *Upper Canada Gazette*, hunted for the “Monthly Critic,” analysed the York Reading Institution ticket, and found the 1828 Baldwin poem. David Bentley and J.R. de J. Jackson also assisted in the search for the mysterious “Monthly Critic.”
- 2 “Poems. By Robert Baldwin. & Others. . . . Collected by James Samson Hunter. Vol.1st.” Baldwin Papers, L 6. Baldwin Room, Toronto Reference Library.
- 3 Letters, John Hunter Samson to Robert Baldwin. Baldwin Papers, L5 (A69).
- 4 See Firth “Russell,” Firth “Willcocks,” and Fraser “William Warren Baldwin” for details of family history and interconnections.
- 5 Henry Scadding, married to Robert’s cousin, noted how William Baldwin’s liberal politics jarred with his desire to “establish in Canada a family whose head was to be maintained in opulence by the proceeds of an entailed estate” (Scadding 33-34).
- 6 While Russell Abbey was in the Georgian style (its name was initially a family joke, a connection made to *The Children of the Abbey* [Hounson 64-65]), there were gothic undertones. The relationship between Elizabeth Russell and her half-brother Peter was so devoted that the *DCB* calls them a “couple” (Firth “Russell”); she became mentally ill following his death and the American invasions.
- 7 There is a later and more radical Dublin journal by the same title (R.M. Baldwin 23).
- 8 While the Glen Cottage book is not available (apparently retained by Baldwin descendants), Robertson lists some contributors between 1820 and 1827, including a servant, Stephen Gwynn, who wrote a “metrical account” of the 1806 wreck of the American ship *Patriot* which he survived (Robertson I: 175). The young Robert also would have used the library at Russell Abbey, a fine (if slightly dated) collection. On reading in the Russell family see Joseph Willcocks, *Letterbook and Diary, MU 1735*, Archives of Ontario.
- 9 The Tragic Muse, caressed from earliest time,
Needs not from us a complimentary rhyme,
Yet, though our tyros would not wish to tear
One sprig of laurel from the poet’s hair. . . .
Powell papers, Baldwin Room, TRL. For the “Prologue” (with some mistranscription), see Middleton *The Municipality of Toronto* (I: 159). The entertainment included a performance of *She Stoops to Conquer* and a “Bombastes Furioso.”
- 10 They may have been friends even longer: later Samson would write that he met Baldwin in 1816 (11 July 182?).
- 11 This merits another article: the long debate (July 1819 to February 1820) between them as to whether male-male or male-female relationships were the nobler; and provocative albeit comic references to the gossip about their friendship (2 May 1819).
- 12 Letters 3, 32, 34, and 37 of the initial run are missing (the latter three perhaps destroyed because they referred to a feud between Samson and James Givins). One letter is unnumbered: probably because it arrived after its successor. The second series contains 11 dated items and three undated that appear to belong to the same period.
- 13 Two pages are missing of these (evidently extensive) suggestions.

- 14 Samson refers to “Homer’s [F]rogs” (10 Mar. 1820). He was admitted to study just before the Law Society instituted entrance tests of applicants’ liberal knowledge (including translation of Cicero).
- 15 Samson continued to write sporadically: an “anagram” on the name of a young woman (Letter JHS 20 Nov. 1822); and a “rhapsody” to R.B. Sullivan (Letter J.S. Cartwright 4 Dec. 1826, Baldwin Papers), for example.
- 16 Baldwin apparently served in John Samson’s regiment (21 May 1820). While admitted in April to commence legal study in August, he postponed until Hilary term of 1821.
- 17 Henceforth, for simplicity, “Poems.”
- 18 Assumed, for example, by Cross and Fraser (“The waste” 170).
- 19 There is another suggestive but inconclusive clue. The title of Samson’s poem is amended to “The ladies’ Disappointment. 1819.” If the manuscript was copied in 1820, the change might have been made to prevent the reader thinking the poem a disrespectful reference to the death of Queen Charlotte in 1818. But “1819” is crowded onto the line: perhaps added later to prevent a similar connection to the death of Queen Caroline in 1821. In a third but less likely possibility, the entire manuscript may be a later copy of the initial 1820 transcription.
- 20 Samson notes Stoughton’s gratitude for a “Farewell” Baldwin wrote (19 Aug. 1819).
- 21 Baldwin precedes George Longmore’s *Tecumthé* (1824), and John Richardson’s *Tecumseh* (1828).
- 22 Lines apparently from “The Death of Achilles,” analysed by Samson, are in heroic couplets (2 May 1819).
- 23 No copies exist of the 1823 *The Roseharp*; the *Glencawdell Portfolio* is known only by a prospectus in the *Upper Canada Herald*.
- 24 Letters James Givins to Robert Baldwin, Baldwin Papers L5, A47, Baldwin Room, Toronto Reference Library. James Givins was one of the sons of administrator and “Indian agent” James Givins (also Givens).
- 25 One other endeavour may date from this time: Baldwin is listed as secretary on a book ticket for the “York Reading Institution,” probably an early “social” or circulating library. MU 2097, #95, AO.
- 26 Literary Society of York. Rules and Regulations. Thomas Ridout Papers, MU 2391, AO.
- 27 Juvenile Advocate Society minutes, Archives of the Law Society of Upper Canada. Barker thoroughly analyses the JAS’s legal training function.
- 28 On the Kingston group see JAS minutes (30 April 1822); Samson to Baldwin (22 Mar. 1822) and later allusions; and letters by John S. Cartwright (3 July 1824; 26 Sept. 1825; 31 Dec. 1825), also Baldwin Papers. This chronology corrects that of *Come, bright Improvement!* where the York Literary Society and JAS were at points conflated.
- 29 Samson married Alicia Fenton Russell, niece and ward of Sir John Harvey, lieutenant-governor of Nova Scotia. During this research a new item was identified by Jennifer Bunting: a love letter from Samson (16 Jan. 1828) detailing pre-nuptial negotiations. Item 035237, Lennox and Addington County Museum and Archives.
- 30 His later tastes are epitomized by his favourite novel, Fanny Burney’s *Camilla* (Cross and Fraser 46). There was some further verse: see the fragment of a mock epic from 1828, “The Reply of ROBT. B*L*W*N, Esq.” (CIHM 40807).
- 31 See, especially, work by Cross and Fraser; source, as well, for the testamentary instructions.

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