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SUBVERSION OF THE VICTORIAN GENDER BIAS AGAINST WORKING-CLASS WOMEN IN JANET HAMILTON'S *POEMS, ESSAYS, AND SKETCHES*

JANET HAMİLTON'IN *POEMS, ESSAYS, AND SKETCHES* ADLI ESERİNDE VIKTORYA DÖNEMI İŞÇI SINIFI KADINLARINA YÖNELIK CİNSIYETE DAYALI ÖNYARGILARIN YIKILMASI

Dilek BULUT SARIKAYA*

Abstract

Contrary to the women of the upper-class who found relatively ample space in the literature of the Victorian period, working-class women were not given due consideration, denigrated into a morally inferior position and pushed into the peripheries of the society. Janet Hamilton (1795-1873), however, appears as a Scottish working-class essayist and an exceptional poet who takes women of working-classes as her foremost concern. Hamilton, in her poems, represents the difficulty of becoming socially, culturally, and politically under-privileged women of the working-classes in a class and gender-biased world of the Victorian Britain. Reducing the distance between the working-class women and the mainstream society, Hamilton's poems have an avid propensity to construct a communal bridge across class and gender divisions, restore the moral dignity of working women and solicit sympathetic identification with the everyday plights of the working-class women. The purpose of this study is to read a selection of Hamilton's poetry in Poems, Essays, and Sketches (1780) to unveil Hamilton's representation of working-class women whose participation in Britain's industrial development has been largely evaded. The study further reveals Hamilton's rebellious pursuit of social justice and equality for the stigmatized and marginalized women of the working class.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Janet Hamilton, Victorian Poetry, Working-Class Women, Gender Bias*

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Öz

Viktorya dönemi edebiyatında nispeten geniş bir yer bulan üst sınıfa mensup kadınların aksine, işçi sınıfı kadınlarına gereken ilgi gösterilmemiş, ahlaki açıdan aşağı bir konuma düşürülmüş ve toplumun dış çeperlerine itilmişlerdir. Bununla birlikte, İskoç işçi sınıfının eşsiz bir şairi ve deneme yazarı olan Janet Hamilton (1795-1873), işçi sınıfının kadınlarını odak noktasına almıştır. Hamilton, şiirlerinde, Viktorya Britanya'sının cinsiyete ve sınıf ayrımına dayalı dünyasında, sosyal, kültürel ve politik haklardan mahrum bırakılmış işçi sınıf mensubu kadın olmanın zorluklarını ustaca temsil etmektedir. İşçi sınıfı kadınlarla, egemen toplum arasındaki mesafeyi azaltmayı amaçlayan Hamilton'ın şiirleri sınıf ve cinsiyet ayrımlarının ötesinde ortak bir köprü oluşturarak işçi sınıfı kadınların ahlaki saygınlığını iade eder ve bu kadınların günlük sorunlarıyla sempatik bir özdeşleşme kurar. Bu çalışmanın amacı,

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Bulut Sarıkaya, D. (2024). Janet Hamilton'ın *Poems, Essays, and Sketches* adlı eserinde Viktorya dönemi işçi sınıfı kadınlarına yönelik cinsiyete dayalı önyargıların yıkılması. *Anasay* 30, 116-129.

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Cappadocia University, English Language and Literature Department, dileksarikaya27@gmail.com, **ORCID ID** https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5514-6929

Hamilton'ın Poems, Essays, and Sketches (1780) başlıklı eserindeki bazı şiirleri inceleyerek, Britanya'nın endüstrileşme sürecinde yadsınamaz katkıları olan, fakat büyük ölçüde görmezden gelinen işçi sınıfının kadınlarının temsilini ele almaktır. Bu çalışmada ayrıca, işçi sınıfının ötekileştirilmiş ve damgalanmış kadınları için Hamilton'ın vermiş olduğu sosyal adalet ve eşitlik arayışı ortaya konmaktadır.

Keywords: *Janet Hamilton, Viktorya Dönemi Şiiri, İşçi Sınıfının Kadınları, Cinsiyet Önyargıları*

Introduction

Women's engagement with literature within the morally conservative social milieu of the Victorian society is an act of remarkably challenging performance considering the legal, political, and educational hindrances on women's way to success as writers and poets. A noteworthy observation is made by Dorothy Mermin who asserts that "male writers were afraid that the apparent predominance of women as producers and audience…would feminize – that is, degrade – the profession of literature" (1993, p. 45). Olverson, on the other hand, draws attention to the restrictions of women to have equal access to education by saying that: "it was clearly very difficult for young middle-class girls with academic ambitions to acquire a sufficiently rigorous classical education" during the 19th century (2010, p. 12). These assessments serve a clear evidence of the difficulty of becoming a woman in Victorian age where patriarchal preconceptions and dualities lock women up within stereotypical images and roles. Yet, it is definitely more difficult to be a woman of working class at the bottom of the Victorian social structure as the most impoverished, exploited, and marginalized groups of people. Excluding few exceptions of the self-educated middle-class women poets like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Emily Dickinson, the poetry of women did not receive a momentous critical attention from Victorian scholars and in due course, were consigned into oblivion. Even in the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, the contemporary scholarship on Victorian literature still preponderates mainly upon the Victorian middle-class women writers, overlooking a vast amount of literature produced by the working-class women writers. Hence, Florence S. Boos' anthology of *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain* in 2008 is a particularly important contribution to the recovery and re-canonization of the hitherto silenced and lost voices of the working-class women poets who suffered most from the gender and class biases of their age. Janet Hamilton, (1795-1873) a Scottish working-class poet, is one of the "Victorian proletarian women [who] wrote thousands of lines of poetry" among other working-class poets like "'Marie,' Ellen Johnson, and Fanny Forrester" (Boos, 2008, 13). With a serious concern of a wide variety of social problems, innately intertwined with each other, Hamilton, on the one hand, identifies with the Chartist struggle for the improvement of British working-class conditions, and, on the other hand, assiduously writes to unsettle bigoted societal opinions about male chauvinism, double standards, and biased gender politics which are essential patriarchal elements weaving the socio-cultural fabric of the Victorian society. This study, therefore, intends to explore Janet Hamilton's *Poems, Essays, and Sketches* (1870) which allows an unmediated and realistic access to the subordinated working-class women's daily experiences of discrimination, violence, injustice, prejudice, and subverts patriarchally composed and socially imposed, stereotypical gender roles for women by emphasizing the importance of raising awareness and forming solidarity among working-class women to fight for their social, domestic, and marital rights.

Working-Class Women in Victorian Britain

Britain's industrial revolution that begins in the mid-18th century and continues without stagnation in the 19th century has an incendiary role in re-shuffling and giving birth to a new, stabilized Victorian class structure. Shifting the paradigms of power dynamics between social classes, industrial development fosters political and economic empowerment of the middle-classes, puts an end to aristocracy's landownership system, and inevitably gives rise to the steady

evolution of the working-classes as the prevailing workforce constituting the backbone of Britain's capitalist industrial economy. A new hierarchal social stratum is constructed by the capitalist industry premised upon "the conviction that class harmony is an unnatural and undesirable state of affairs", and class consciousness is the chief determinant of the class relations (Jones, 1996, p. 81). It is not hard to see the precarious implications of this new economic system, the primary impetus of which is to create a new world order and a social control over individuals. Drawing a firm line between the producers and consumers of the society, Britain's aggressive capitalist development and its economic principles give serious credentials to the exploitation of a certain group of people, in that case, working-classes, for the interests of upper-classes. A remarkable observation is made by Paul Pickering in pointing up to the working-classes of the Victorian Britain who are designated as "the producers of wealth" while the consuming remainders of the society are called "parasites" (1995, p. 163). E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working-Class* comments on the devastating impact of industrial development as follows:

> We can now see something of the truly catastrophic nature of the Industrial Revolution; as well as some of the reasons why the English working class took form in these years. The people were subjected simultaneously to an intensification of two intolerable forms of relationship: those of economic exploitation and of political oppression. Relations between employer and labourer were becoming both harsher and less personal… But at each point where he sought to resist exploitation, he was met by the forces of employer or State, and commonly of both. (1966, pp. 198-199)

In tandem with this drastic acceleration of the labor exploitation and oppression of the workers, there is a nascent awareness and political consciousness among the working-classes about the imperative role that their labor force plays in Britain's economic development. The rising discontent of the workers about their unattained rights and terrible working conditions emerge as significant deriving forces that bring workers together around common ideals like the necessity of forming organizations and solidarity. The most vital catalyst in organizing, informing, and creating a deep awareness among workers about social inequalities, political injustices, and class discrimination is the Chartist movement. Savage and Miles define the Chartist movement as "the first organized political movement" spearheaded by the working classes that demand "political reform" through a "powerful critique of political corruption and injustice…pressing for the creating of a democratic polity" (1994, p. 6). The publication of "the People's Charter", beginning from the 1838, implanted radical ideas in the minds of the masses provoking them to react against the oppression of workers, capturing the public sympathy, and thus, giving "vivid and compelling identity" to the movement (Chase, 2007, p. 19). Infused with an ethos of radicalism and rebellion, the Chartist movement succeeds in creating foundational democratic changes in British political system like the passing of a series of Reform Bills extending the voting rights, first to the middle-classes and later to the lower-classes by inspiring the "lower classes to believe that they had a right to the franchise and that it was legitimate to create social unrest in order to gain it" (Bossche, 2014, p. 29). Furthermore, strong social and political reverberations of the spirit of insurgence ignited by the Chartist campaigns have also culminated in the "repeal of Corn Laws in 1846" which is marked as one of the "turning points in the history of British radicalism in the nineteenth century" followed by important set of laws like "Mines Act" and Factory Acts setting forth certain regulations like limiting long working hours and obliging an age limit for child laborers (Biagini, 1991, p. 136).

During the entire course of Britain's industrial transformation, the crucial role played by women in invigorating the activist struggle of working-classes is intentionally strived to be obscured and suppressed despite the fact that "[w]orking-class women fueled the Industrial Revolution, making up as much as 60 percent to 80 percent of the workforce in light industries such as cotton manufacturing" (Johnson, 2001, p. 1). Resonating with their domestic exploitation and gender-based discrimination in the public plane, women were removed into the peripheries

of the industrial sector as the most disadvantaged and oppressed members of the working-classes. Regardless of groundbreaking legislative changes on the road to improve working conditions and the life standards of workers, women workers' terrible working conditions which were worse than male workers remained unaltered. As Wandy F. Neff records, with the passing of the "Factory Bill of 1833, women were often compelled to work long hours" during both day and night at exceedingly low wages and employers "preferred them [women] because they were cheap" (1966, pp. 29-30). With their rights unprotected by any trade union, women workers were rendered more susceptible to workplace exploitation. Due to the strong belief that women should not work outside of their houses male workers waged a vigorous war all throughout the 19th century to keep women outside of trade union organizations and only "in 1911 did the main union add an organizer for women and undertake a major recruitment campaign" (Stearns, 2013, p. 115). The Chartist discourse itself was embedded with the same patriarchal ideology creating a "domestic ideal in which the male was the breadwinner and the woman a wife and mother 'whose household duties ought to be her only employment'" (Chase, 2007, p. 43). As Susan Zlotnick remarkably notes, men of the working classes fully internalized this ideology and "adopted a representation of waged work that excluded women in order to restrain female competition in the workplace and hence secure their own imperiled patriarchal interests, challenged by the rise of the self-possessed, wage-earning factory woman" (1991, p. 10).

Nevertheless, at the pinnacle of its industrial development, the 19th century Victorian Britain witnessed an unrelentingly need of women's and children's workforce for its belligerently burgeoning factory system, and subsequently, women's partaking in industrial workforce turns out to be an inexorable process, despite all the efforts of their male counterparts to marginalize women from the male-dominated world of industrial market. Neff aptly stresses that women "as workers did not harmonize with the philosophy of the Victorians, their deification of the home" which is vested tightly on the patriarchal conceptualization of women as passive and domestic creatures, submissive to their husbands and sacrificial mother to their children (1966, p. 14). Regardless of the indispensable contribution of women to the industrial boosting and economic prosperity of Great Britain, women's workforce was exploited brutally by their employers in low-paid jobs and disproportionately hard work. "It wasn't until 1850", Kara Barrett writes, "when the law forced mill owners to pay women workers the same wages as men (when their quantity and quality of work was equal to a man's output" (2013, p. 16).

Within the historical frame of political and social injustices and gender inequalities women are exposed to in Victorian Britain, Janet Hamilton who belongs to the marginalized working-classes, holds a realistic mirror to the gender biases of Victorian age and spends a worthwhile effort for maintaining the legal and political equity of men and women by restoring the usurped rights of women in almost every sphere of their social and private life. To this end, Hamilton frequently bespeaks of the problems of working-class women who are either abused by their employers or oppressed by their husbands.

Working-Class Women in Janet Hamilton's *Poems, Essays, and Sketches*

In the 19th century, massively increasing literacy rates among all social levels including working-classes spur the emergence of a popular publishing market trying to meet the consumer demands of notably increasing reading public. Newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, and tracts that could be afforded cheaply by the working-classes became highly useful platforms where the government decisions, political regulations, and the problems of working-classes were discussed, analyzed, and criticized while instructing working-class readers about their social and political rights. The literary sphere for the working class is eventually turned into "a common method of getting radical propaganda to the public" (Webb, 2019, p.39). Among this intensively political and socially active working-class canon, Janet Hamilton arises as a significant Scottish woman writer who has developed a keen awareness of the ongoing social, political, and economic affairs of her country and uses her writing as an effective medium of conveying her radical socialist ideas and discussing the problems of working-class women. With her "devotion to the cause of

temperance" – since drinking and alcoholism among the working class cause unbearable problems for families, especially for women who are forced to carry alone the heavy burden of their household –, Hamilton becomes a paragon of working-class perseverance and resistance with her role "as a hardworking wife and mother, and her status as a beacon of self-improvement and good moral character despite becoming disabled by blindness" (Blair, 2019, p. 140). Beginning from "[the age of] seven she worked at home spinning yard for the market" and later, "[at the age of]"nine her mother taught her to embroider using a tambour frame, not as a graceful female 'accomplishment', but as a vital means of earning hard cash" (McEathron, 2005, p. 245). Along with giving birth to ten children, Hamilton develops an endless passion for learning in spite of the gender-based obstacles put by the patriarchal paradigms on her way to success. Strict moral codes of Victorian society are "premised upon a firm exercise of double standards precluding women from having an equal access to social, educational, financial, and legal rights" (Bulut Sarıkaya, 2024, p. 94). As a self-educated writer, Hamilton "worked as a tambourer and educated her children at home" and even after going blind in her sixties, she "continued to orally compose poetry, which James, her son, transcribed" (Meehan, 2008, p. 87). In the 1870 edition of *Poems, Essays, and Sketches,* Hamilton expresses her love of reading with these words: "I read Bible stories and children's half-penny books with eager delight before I was five years of age" and at the age of eight, "I found to my great joy, on the loom of intellectual weaver, a copy of Milton's Paradise Lost and Allan Ramsey's Poems" (Hamilton, 1870, p. viii). She has an ultimate faith in the exigency of education for the intellectual development and political and social empowerment of working-class women, constituting the most suppressed and subordinated individuals of the Victorian society. Hence, behind her "seeming conservatism" as McMillan puts forward, Hamilton "teaches an oblique message of feminist aggression" (1997, p.86).

Diversified images of women, manifesting drastic changes according to their social classes hold an exceptional place and frequently become a subject of heated debate in Janet Hamilton's poems. In "Contrasted Scenes From Real Life", Hamilton provides two entirely different and opposing scenes from the active city life of London. The poem consists of two scenes; in Scene I which is titled as "Marriage of Sir R. Peel with Lady E. Hay", Hamilton pays attention to grandiosity of aristocratic lifestyle, "high-born bridesmaids, with a beauteous bride" whose lives are inscribed with "rank, wealth, and beauty of land" (1880, p. 86). The glittering world of the upper-class women is explored in an atmosphere of fairy tale where "diamonds flash, and white plumes wave between, / And lustrous silks, and robes of satin sheen" (1880, p. 86). Immersed in awe-inspiringly luxurious and comfortable lives, the women of aristocracy are completely unaware of the existence of working-class women and their terrible conditions of life in working-class slum areas where women are devalued and reduced into demeaning objects. Hamilton's criticism of stringent class boundaries is explicitly seen in the following lines:

> Are showered upon the fair and noble bride.
> She, blushing, tearful as a dewy rose,
> Leans on the arm belov'd as forth she goes
> To mount her gilded chariot, swift away
> For home, and love whirls on the cortege gay.
> Ah, happy bride! though now to thee is given
> Earth's best and brightest; at the throne of heaven
> The meanest female of the human race
> Shall occupy with thee an equal place. (Hamilton, 1880, p. 86)

The poem gives expression to the dichotomous categorization of women in Victorian age where the upper-class women are conceptualized as fragile, kind, "tearful as a dewy rose" while the women of working-classes are diminished into being the "meanest female of the human race" (Hamilton, 1880, p. 86). The poem conveys Hamilton's righteous indignation of the class-based society in which morality and dignity are disseminated unjustly by the politically and economically powerful classes. The value ascribed to women according to the Victorian moral

standards are conditioned hypocritically on women's social status in the way that women of the aristocracy are allowed to entertain themselves with opportunities that are presented to them; conversely, women of the working-classes are not even considered to be human. Knelman argues that purity, dignity, and domesticity as idealized images of women take shape in flesh and bone in the personality of Queen Victoria and are associated with "the upper-class that surrounded her" but "the newly powerful working class which found its voice in the Chartist movement of the 1840s insisted on looking downward as well as upward" (1993, p. 29). Hamilton, in a similar way, by juxtaposing two contrasting images of women – those of higher classes and the working class –, forces her readers to look into the miserable life of working-class women, and further, demands sympathy for the working-class women who are usually scorned and rejected.

Significantly enough, the poem points to an important fact that no matter which social class they belong to, women are still considered to be the property and object of male authority. Griffin remarkably elucidates that "[a]t the heart of Victorian gender politics, lay the legal doctrine of coverture, which held that married women had no legal identity" intercepting women from making legal "contracts and that all of a woman's personal property passed to her husband when she married" (2012, p. 9). Upper-class society, as the poem shows, views women as an expensive and valuable material object that should be preserved and possessed by men. That is, undeniably, a highly crucial insinuation to the traditional gender roles casted upon women by the Victorian patriarchal society from which even greatly honoured women of the upper classes cannot escape. More plainly, although the upper-class women seem to be benefiting from the wealth and prosperity that their social class offer, they are still perceived by the dominant patriarchal ideology as tender and precious objects in need of protection and possession of men. For that reason, the poem shows the newly wedded "fair and noble lady" in a position of "[l]ean[ing] on the arm belov'd as forth she goes" as a symbolic implication of the fact that a woman, in Victorian patriarchal society, is always in need of a man and disallowed to have an independent identity in isolation of man (Hamilton, 1880, p. 86). Therefore, no matter which social class they belong to, women cannot elude from being subjected to a process of objectification by the masculine authority which forms an ultimate control and dominance over women who are envisaged as the weaker and fragile sex. The working-class women, on the other hand, are totally disparaged as "meanest female of the human race" and thrown into suffering, poverty and appalling living conditions since they do not belong to high-born aristocracy (Hamilton, 1880, p. 86).

Furthermore, the poem reiterates a socialist viewpoint of Hamilton who attempts to destabilize the predetermined hierarchical social structure of Victorian Britain where class distinction is the primary criterion that defines relationship between individuals. Hamilton expresses a socialist dream of creating a non-hierarchical, classless society where women are not estimated according to their wealth or social rank. Suggesting the equality of all women whether they belong to aristocracy or working-class, Hamilton's poem argues that despite all the injustices that reign over this world, "at the throne of heaven" working-class women will occupy "an equal place" with the women of the upper-class (Hamilton, 1880, p. 86). Undermining the accepted social conventions and rigid class formations of Victorian patriarchal ideology which divide the society into different groups legitimizing the exploitation of one social group by another, Hamilton promotes a radical idea of the erosion of social classes and advocates an egalitarian and non-discriminative notion of an ideal society.

In the second scene, titled as "The Incident is Taken From 'Household Words'", the poem's focus moves away from the glittering world of the upper-class women, featured by extravagant lifestyles towards dark, gloomy, filthy, "murky fogs, and chilly, drizzling damps" of London where poverty and misery overflow from every corner (Hamilton, 1880, p. 87). The poem allows for its readers an easy access to explore the ghetto areas of London which usually remain invisible and unknown to the attention of the upper-class. The poet invites her readers to walk through penurious streets where "[t]enacious mud o'erspreads the slimy street, / And clogs the walker's slow exploring feet" (Hamilton, 1880, p. 87). Addressing directly to philosophers and

intellectuals of the age, Hamilton says that: "Go on, large-hearted Son of Genius, go!" to look into the heartbreaking misery of the working-class people till "thy heart is pained, thine eyes o'erflow" with a "sight to sicken and appal" (Hamilton, 1880, p. 87). In her depiction of a residential district of a typical slum in Victorian London, stricken by crime and poverty and occupied densely by the working-class people, Hamilton captures a brief scene of a homeless girl who is at first sight, cannot be noticed under "a dark pile" (Hamilton, 1880, p. 87). When "the shrouding rags" are lifted, as the poet confirms, "a female face" that does not convey any sign of life, feeling or expression except "a dreary blank" can be seen (Hamilton, 1880, p. 87). Summarizing the life of the poor girl plainly as an "[e]xcess of misery all her powers hath numbed", Hamilton, in the ensuing lines of the poem, gives voice to the girl who recounts that she and her friends are forced to live in the streets after being expelled from the workhouse: "-Three wintry nights – back from the workhouse driven /Like things accursed of men, and lost to heaven!" (Hamilton, 1880, p. 87).

Hamilton, in her poem, draws attention to the fact that in an epoch of unprecedented economic, political, industrial, technological, and cultural refinement of Victorian Britain, there is a dramatic retrogression in the living conditions of the working-classes who are confined into abject poverty. Because of their low social standing, poor people are disrespected, isolated and reduced into a position of inhumanity, disgusted by their society and neglected by God. Although the workhouses, originally, are regulations of the government's Poor Law system as a solution for the amelioration of working-class life standards, they turn out to be institutions of torture and punishment for already disadvantaged groups of people, particularly for child workers who are exploited by their employers under terrible conditions. With "the New Poor Law of 1834", Young suggests, "public charity in the form of the workhouse [became] more degrading and humiliating than the meanest employment" (1999, p. 50). The rules of England's "New Poor Law" were extremely difficult and based on the principle of "less eligibility" which "meant that conditions in the workhouse had to be worse than the conditions of the poorest labourer, so that people would only seek help if they had no alternative" (Clark, 2009, p. 64). Compelling children to work for long hours in dreadful jobs, workhouses operate as systems that play upon the vulnerabilities of poor people, utilize them as slaves, and condemn them into malnourishment, wretchedness, and torment.

> 'Sisters young, they say,
> To Destitution's darkest ills a prey.'
> 'And who the next?' 'She from the country came,
> And found no choice of life but want or shame.'
> Dickens, thy graphic pencil paints with power
> The crimes, the follies, and the woes that lower
> And taint our moral atmosphere; still lend
> Thy potent aid – be still the outcast's friend! (Hamilton, 1880, p. 87)

Taking women's victimization as its primary concern, the poem refers to the weighty consequences of Britain's rapid urbanization and industrial development which enforce poor, young girls, to move from small villages into bigger industrial centres where they become an easy prey to the manipulations of men. The same Victorian societal norms that promote moral decency and domestic propriety of middle-class women swiftly pull these poor girls into a life of destitute and shame propelling them to work as prostitutes. The societal bias towards working-class women is underpinned by Hamilton's allusion to Charles Dickens who explores abundantly, through his social realist novels, the moral decadence of working-class people and their corrupt lifestyles. Hamilton, in these lines develops a discursive strategy of blurring the notions of respectability and morality which are duplicitously preserved for middle- and high-class women while working-class women were consigned into the status of depravity, criminality, and immorality. Judith Walkowitz confirms that under the limited occupational opportunities, prostitution seemed to be a rational option for poor girls who migrated into towns from small villages. "They were not

rootless social outcasts but poor working women trying to survive in towns that offered them few employment opportunities and that were hostile to young women living alone" (Walkowitz, 1999, p. 9). Prostitution, however, as Walkowitz writes, "did not free women from a life of poverty and insecurity, and further subjected them to physical danger, alcoholism, venereal disease, and police harassment" (1999, p. 31). So, instead of providing women of working-classes with enough economic independence, prostitution invigorated more atrocious vulnerabilities on behalf of women who are further victimized by extremely biased ethical standardization system of the Victorian patriarchal society. Likewise, Hamilton's poem depicts how these socially and economically impoverished girls are stigmatized as a threat for the mainstream society, and thus, disparaged in prostitution which is ethically inappropriate and unacceptable occupation for the women of the upper-class. The "graphic pencil" of Dickens, as Hamilton argues, fosters a false and unrealistic image of working-class women by representing them with loose moral values that substantiates the societal prejudices and class discrimination against working-class women (Hamilton, 1880, p. 87). So, rather than using his pen to "taint our [working-class] moral atmosphere" Hamilton urges Dickens to be "the outcast's friend" and support working-class women through his writing (Hamilton, 1880, p.87). Hamilton, here, reveals her genuine belief in the power of literature in shaping public opinion and composing beliefs, values, and mindsets of societies that play a determining role in their inter-class relationships. Eliciting empathy for the women or working-classes, Hamilton, in her poem, implores Dickens to use his pen in a less biased manner by avoiding stereotypical representations that would amplify the deepening of social distinctions and stratifications. She asks Dickens to use his pen more effectively to prompt a social and cultural change in the ideological sub-structure of Victorian society by depicting working-class women in more humanitarian manner with enough moral standing in such a way that fixed presumptions of the mainstream society about working-class culpability will not be nurtured but disrupted by more egalitarian depictions.

In her fervent attempt to speak on behalf of working-class women, Hamilton frequently ponders upon the burdensome task of motherhood for working-class mothers who work incessantly in outstandingly difficult circumstances to perform their parental duties with limited financial income. Hamilton addresses to working-class mothers in "To Mithers" and expresses her sympathetic understanding of the working-class women's endless struggles to keep their family together by caring, nourishing, and educating their children while cooking for their husbands. Adopting a Scottish dialect in her poem, Hamilton gives a vivid account of full-time profession of motherhood, child-care, and the management of household economy.

> Hear me, mithers, O mithers!
> Wives o' puir workin' men,
> Wha toil baith late an' early
> Little to spare or spen';
> Weel ken I, my titties,
> Hoo ye maun haud an' hain,
> Tentily warein' the gear
> That feeds an' cleeds your ain. (Hamilton, 1880, p. 277)

As an authentic voice of Scottish working-class women, Hamilton pays attention to mothers and housewives who undertake the responsibility of putting food on the table with restricted financial incomes of their husbands. Women of the working-class are the most destitute groups who are severely affected by poverty since they have a direct experience of daily exposure to the predicaments of penury and deprivation, social segregation, and discrimination in Victorian society. Hamilton calls working-class mothers as her sisters, "my titties" (1880, p.277), and assures that she knows well what kind of troubles working-class mothers undergo and how grueling it is to feed and put clothe on children with so little money that their husbands bring in. Within the context of limited social, political, and economic opportunities provided by a class-based system of the government, working-class mothers at the margins of the Victorian society

and their miraculous efforts to solve domestic financial problems are exalted by Hamilton. In the second stanza of the poem, Hamilton elaborates on mothers' everyday confrontation with the realities of industrial world that place heavy responsibilities over the shoulders of women. Every single detail about restricted economic facilities that affect women's ordinary life is designated painstakingly by Hamilton as she also is one of these working-class women who try to survive in difficult conditions of life. Women's jobs, recounted in the poem, involve mending their husband's clothes to "fend the cauld" and repairing the shoes to protect their feet from mud and wet (Hamilton, 1880, p. 277). Additionally, children also need food and expect care from their mothers: "Bairnies are roun' ye hingin', / Milk an' meal they maun hae" (Hamilton, 1880, p. 277). Yet, more important than meeting the physical needs of children, the poem argues, is the necessity of a proper education of children. Without undervaluing the important work that they accomplish, Hamilton advises working-class mothers not to be neglectful of their children's education with an excuse of impecunious economic conditions: "The bairnies maun get schulin', / An' though the fees be sma'," (Hamilton, 1880, p. 277). Hamilton reinforces the crucial importance of education for working-class children in spite of their restricted economic revenue. The poem suggests that a great responsibility should be taken by mothers to concentrate on the education of their children which is the only way to circumvent the social and economic encumbrances of their marginalized social positions. Intersected with their political, social, and cultural isolation, the working class is also restrained from having an equal access to educational facilities of their country on account of the conviction that knowledge brings political awareness that may entice them to question their inferior position in the society, in Jonathan Rose's words, "education would foment discontent" (2010, p. 24). Hence, "Economic inequality" in Victorian society is "rested on inequality of education" that normalizes the systematic policy of leaving the working class ignorant and uninformed of their social and political rights (Rose, 2010, p. 24). Speaking to mothers and holding them accountable for the education of children evince that Hamilton is intellectually aware of the key role played by women in the education of children since mothers spend more time together with their children while fathers are usually absent figures who spend most of their time out at work. Hence, Hamilton does not hesitate to criticize mothers who waste their time gossiping in the street and abandon the care of their children: "Dinna stan' lang at the door, For gossips will come oot" (Hamilton, 1880, p. 278). Taking the gravity of education into account, particularly for working-class children who are bereaved of the most basic educational opportunities, gossiping is surmised to be a deviation from the ultimate goal of working-class empowerment and enlightenment. Thompson evaluates the 19th century educational discrimination against the working class as a system of apartheid and writes that "after 1795 there was a profound alienation between classes in Britain, and working people were thrust into a state of *apartheid* whose effects – in the niceties of social and educational discrimination – can be felt to this day" (1966, p. 177, emphasis in the original). The state of apartheid connotes a harsh criticism of a political system of segregation and discrimination according to religious, racial, or social classes of societies. As a self-educated poet of working-classes who has a first-hand experience of educational injustices of Victorian Britain, Hamilton gives much credence to the supremacy of education as the only gateway for working-classes that may help them overcome their social and class barriers and open the paths of economic, social, and cultural freedom.

Besides gossiping, the problem of alcohol is also portrayed as a severe problem among working-class mothers that often gears families towards destruction. There is no "sic plague on the yirth" and no "sic curse in life", the poet affirms, that is greater than a "drunken wife" (Hamilton, 1880, p. 278). Women's over-consumption of alcohol is brought into foreground as a deep concern which "grieves [the poet] me to think" over since alcohol addiction among the working-classes become a pervasive problem in the nineteenth century industrial Britain as coping strategy to escape from overwhelming poverty and social discrimination (Hamilton, 1880, p. 278). At the nucleus of working-class culture, drinking excessive amount of alcohol begins gradually to pose problems for factory owners who need sober and functional workers during the course of speedy industrialization in Victorian Britain. Consequently, the mid-nineteenth century

has witnessed a great propaganda against alcohol abuse, named as "temperance" movement "emphasizing the evils of drink" (Dingle, 1972, p. 613). Alcoholism is strictly condemned owing to the notion that it corrupts "man's rational and higher moral faculties" and is intricately linked whether causally or otherwise, with other social evils such as poverty, crime, gambling and prostitution" (Greenaway, 2003, p.8). Women's over-consumption of alcohol, on the other hand, has been "more roundly condemned and stigmatized" with a strong emphasis on women's gender roles as paragons of moral perfection, child-bearers, mothers, nurturers, and wives (Thom, 1997, p. 49). Accordingly, Hamilton depicts intemperance among working-class mothers as a more crucial problem the ramifications of which are more extensively felt in the family and society in general, and hence, is perceived as a "curse" by the poet (Hamilton, 1880, p. 278). Alcoholism, promoted by urbanized lifestyle, actually constitutes the most devastating hindrance for working-class women to transcend their gender and class obstacles by offering an easy but pseudo-escape from the debased atmosphere of slums and a brief psychological relief from the resentment of their socially outcast positions. Hamilton, in this respect, reprobates alcoholism as a great moral weakness, stimulating the corruption of values, destruction of families, and forsaking of children.

In addition to pointing out women's overwhelming responsibilities and problems at home, Hamilton deals with working women's political and economic dereliction in the capitalist industrial Britain in "A Lay of Tambour Frame". The poem is vested upon the hardships of women's tambour work which is also the personal profession of Hamilton. The poem provides a detailed portrayal of the physical traces of heavy work that can easily be detected in women's "colourless cheek" and "fingers cramped and chill" (Hamilton, 1880, p. 249). Women workers' exposure into gender discrimination, exploitation, cheap labor, and the bereavement of social and legal rights are conferred in the poem as follows:

> No union strikes for you;—
> Unshielded and alone,
> In the battle of life-a battle it is,
> Where virtue is oft o'erthrown.
> O working men! Oh, why
> Pass ye thus careless by,
> Nor give to the working woman's complaint
> One word of kind reply (Hamilton, 1880, p. 249)

The idea of women worker is not well-received within the patriarchal frame of Victorian social structure on account of the common assumption that a woman's place is at home not outside. This ideology notably is ordained by validating women's marginalization in industry leaving them unprotected by trade union organizations. Stearns states that the "neglect of women by the union movement added to the workingman's belief in female inferiority" (2015, p. 115). A concerted effort, as a result, is made by this misogynist mindset in the Victorian age to categorize women workers as inferior to male workers and thus, rendering them susceptible to workplace exploitation and domination. In her direct appeal to the men of the working classes, Hamilton demands respect and recognition for working women whose contribution to the industrial development of Victorian Britain is predominantly disregarded. Undismayed by profound male attempt of obstruction in Victorian Britain, women workers actively involved in the world of industry. In Pickering's estimation, "57.7 percent of the adult labour force" was performed by women in the early 1840s (1995, p. 58). Notwithstanding the greatness of the amount of women workers, they were still faced with abuse, discrimination and exploitation by their male counterparts. Basch writes that: "In the mines, fields, factories, workshops, women, married or not, worked in inhuman conditions" (Basch, 1974, p. 52). Similarly, Barrett states that women "were worked to death not only because they were subjected to the lower wages and less profitable jobs, but because… there was no way to advance out of it because society will always view the working women as below them" (2013, p. 7). In the same vein, Hamilton's poem denounces the male workers who remain taciturn and irresponsive to the complaints of women

workers about their inhuman working conditions. Hamilton points finger at "[s]elfish, unfeeling men" who cry "like the leech" and say "Give us, give us still" while women workers are subdued under heavy jobs and long working hours by "tambour[ing] / For fifteen hours a day" (Hamilton, 1880, p. 250). The poet also evokes a sympathetic call for solidarity between workers without discriminating women on gender grounds and asks that "are they not sisters by human ties, / And sympathy's kindly flow?" (Hamilton, 1880, p. 250). Unsettling the patriarchal ideology of the inferiority of women workers, Hamilton's poem conveys a personal indignation at male antagonism towards women workers and reconstructs a class-conscious interrelationship between women and men rather than situating them on diverse grounds according to their gender differences. In that sense, Hamilton's poem tries to eradicate gender-biases among workers so that working men will come to the awareness of women as their co-workers and sisters rather than their rivals and enemies.

CONCLUSION

Janet Hamilton's poems demonstrate a uniquely authentic portrayal of the Victorian working-class world that is kept out of sight and concealed to the public notice, from the perspective of disempowered and neglected women of working-classes whose daily struggles hold a magnifying glass to a socially, economically and culturally stratified society that is split up across gender and class barriers. Hamilton's poetry allows a vivid insight into the working-women's everyday encounters with oppression and discrimination both by the male members of their own classes and the mainstream Victorian society. Unfit for the idealized, angelic image of Victorian women, working-class women reign over Hamilton's poems as active agents of political and social change, drawing attention to the necessity of trade unionism for women workers that would secure their legal and political rights. In that respect, Hamilton utilizes her poetry as an effective platform to discuss socially and politically marginalized groups of working-class women who are exposed to double exploitation on gender and class base. Committed to become the voice of silenced women of working-classes, Hamilton undertakes the role of social reformer and pays crucial attention to the everyday experiences of working-class women. Working women's lives are revealed to be replete with suffering, poverty, and hard work in Hamilton's poetry which makes a strong case for the empowerment of women workers, amelioration of their living conditions and transcending their class and gender boundaries. Thus, an activist discourse of resistance against oppression and socio-economic injustices are blatantly observed in Hamilton's poetry which encapsulates an acute social criticism of Britain's rigid class system, economic and social norms and biased cultural values diminishing working-class women into the mortifying position of inferiority and inhumanity.

Glossary of Scottish Words

Ain: Own

Baith: Both

Bairnies: Small children

Cauld: Cold

Cleed: To put clothes on

Dinna: Don't

Fend:Defend

Hain: Save, Protect

Haud: Hold

Hoo:How

Ken: Know

Maun: Must, Manage

Mither: Mother

Oot: Out

Puir:Poor

Schulin': Schooling

Sic: Such

Tentily: Attentively

Tittie: Sister

Wha: Who

Weel: Well

Yee: You

Yirth: Earth

Ethical Statement/*Etik Beyan*

The study titled "Subversion of the Victorian Gender Bias Against Working-Class Women in Janet Hamilton's Poems, Essays, and Sketches" has been conducted in compliance with scientific, ethical, and citation principles. No alterations have been made to the collected data, and this work has not been submitted for evaluation to any other academic publication platform. This study does not require an ethics committee approval. The article has been prepared in accordance with the ethical guidelines of *Anasay Journal*, which are based on the principles established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) for authors, reviewers, and editors.

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