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Beyond the rhyming weavers

Ivan Herbison

- 1 It is almost forty years since John Hewitt published his ground-breaking study and anthology of Ulster-Scots rural poets¹. In identifying the literary tradition which he called the Rhyming Weavers, he effectively set the parameters of critical discourse which have continued to inform discussions of their work as well as perceptions of their cultural significance. The publication of 1974 was the culmination of work begun in the 1940s². Indeed, the term “Rhyming Weaver” appears in the title of a series of articles which he contributed to a linen trade magazine in 1948³. In 1951 he was awarded an MA degree for a study of nineteenth-century Ulster poetry, in which he considered not only the Rhyming Weaver tradition, but also that of the Rhyming Pedagogues and of the Colonial poets⁴. A summary of his research was published as a private paper⁵.
- 2 The gap of over twenty years between the submission of his thesis and the publication of his book may be partly explained in terms of biography by his relocation to Coventry. However, it is also indicative of the stony critical ground which he was attempting to work during this period. The 1974 volume was not reprinted until 2004, despite several approaches to the publisher. It was not until 1980 that the work of a rhyming weaver came back into print⁶. Despite his valiant efforts, Hewitt did not succeed in restoring the Rhyming Weavers to the literary canon⁷. Even the revisionism of the 1990s perpetuated their exclusion from the new canon of Irish writing. *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991) does not contain a single Ulster-Scots poem, and two subsequent volumes have not attempted to rectify the omission⁸.
- 3 It is the argument of this paper that only by taking the Ulster-Scots poets beyond the concept of the Rhyming Weavers can they be restored to a place in literary history. This is not intended as a criticism of Hewitt. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that the issues and attitudes of the 1940s and 1950s, the period during which Hewitt was developing his concept, need to be updated, if the weaver poets are to be understood in contemporary critical contexts. This entails a revisionist approach to Hewitt’s analysis which will historicise the concept of the Rhyming Weavers. That critical process is a larger project, and this present essay is a preliminary contribution which intends to sketch some of the tasks which lie ahead.

- 4 Hewitt's approach to the Rhyming Weavers can be seen in terms of a quest for personal literary identity and a search for a critical agenda for Ulster writers. There is no doubt that he identified with his poetic forbears in a number of ways. Their working-class roots and radical sympathies appealed to his socialist political outlook. However, his own avowed agnosticism sometimes prevents him from fully recognising the importance played by religious belief in their work. There were limits to the extent to which they could act as models. Though he admired their use of Ulster-Scots, he did not seek to employ it as a poetic idiom in his own writings. Nevertheless, he used them to bolster his promotion of regionalism as a literary movement⁹. He claimed the Rhyming Weavers not merely as his own personal poetic forbears, but as "the literary ancestors he so desperately desired to underpin his theory of regionalism"¹⁰. He was anxious to defend the authenticity of the weaver poets against accusations of being mere imitators of Burns¹¹. The theory of regionalism justified the isolation of the weaver poets from influences other than the Scots vernacular tradition. Above all, he presents the history of the Rhyming Weavers as a "grand narrative" of decline and fall, neatly paralleling the collapse of handloom weaving in the face of industrialisation. Hewitt ties together the fates of linen and literature¹². For Hewitt the weaver poets have no living literary relatives to continue the vernacular tradition. This conveniently allows him to claim them as adoptive ancestors of regionalism. As portrayed by Hewitt the Rhyming Weavers are distinctively regional, or even sub-regional poets, their sense of place being located in specific districts such as East Antrim, North Down and Mid Antrim, or even tied to particular townlands: Orr of Ballycarry, McKenzie of Dunover, Herbison of Dunclog. While this approach literally grounds the poets in their particular localities, it makes it more difficult to assess their work in the context of larger social, political and cultural concerns.
- 5 Despite Hewitt's considerable reputation and his efforts at recuperation, the weaver poets have continued to suffer from marginalisation and critical neglect¹³. Perhaps it is time to move criticism beyond the parameters of the Rhyming Weavers.

Beyond Decline and Fall

- 6 One of the consequences of Hewitt's grand narrative of decline and fall is his desire to confine the Rhyming Weavers firmly to the past. He does not regard it as a living tradition, and thus he ignores or significantly undervalues, poets writing in the twentieth century. He makes various attempts to demarcate the end of the tradition. His 1951 paper concludes with 1850; his thesis has 1870 as its end point; his book brings this forward to 1900.
- 7 Even though his book includes the work of Thomas Given (1850-1917), published in 1900, one senses a reluctance on Hewitt's part to admit Given to his canon¹⁴. One might have thought that Thomas Given's vigorous use of the Ulster-Scots vernacular would have commended him to Hewitt, as it had commended him to Revd George R. Buick, the writer of the Preface:

He is specially happy when using the Doric of his native district as the vehicle of expression. Here his muse seems most at home, becoming at once more natural and forcible, with spontaneity and freshness, language which is decidedly more idiomatic and picturesque than when he contents himself with dipping into "the well of English undefiled" [...]¹⁵.

- 8 However, Hewitt is reluctant to accept Given into the ranks of his Rhyming Weavers. His comments are either grudging or dismissive. The following remarks are typical:

Somewhere the centrality of the bard to his life and community has broken down.

[...]

[T]hough he lived in the same part of the country and their years overlapped, it was only a book by the dead Bard of Dunclug which he saluted.

He swapped no rhymes with fellow poets [...] Nor does he ever glance at another man's trade with an informed, amused or affectionate eye.

[T]he end of "an auld sang"¹⁶.

- 9 With his concluding remark Hewitt anxiously seeks to draw a line under the Rhyming Weavers. This is in spite of the fact that Thomas Given seems to fit some of the cherished criteria which Hewitt applies to other poets. Like David Herbison, he has a strong social conscience, and is indignant about ill treatment of the poor:

Guid keep me frae the tender care
O' those wha dole the poorhouse fare
Or clads tae misery its share
O' man's relief

But shud it come, O hear my prayer

Let Life be brief.

[From "Outdoor Relief and The Guardians"

Poems from College and Country, p.186-87.]

- 10 He shares Herbison's love of natural detail:

The blackbird keeks oot frae the fog at the broo
Gies his neb a big dight on a stane;
His eye caught the primrose appearin' in view
An the tiny wee violet o' Nature's ain blue;
He sung them a sang o' the auld and the new –
A sang we may a' let alane.

[From "A Song for February" *Poems from College and Country*, p. 149.]

- 11 He exchanged Poetical Epistles with Bab McKeen, famous for his Ulster-Scots contributions to *The Ballymena Observer*¹⁷.

For when the paper is broucht in,
The wee yins for my specks will rin,
An' young and auld shut up their din
Withoot a hint,
Until they ask wi' eager grin,
Has Bab oucht in't?

[From "Poetical Epistles tae Bab M'Keen", I-V

Poems from College and Country, p. 250-57.]

- 12 Far from maintaining isolation from other poets, he regards David Herbison as a father figure of a generation of young Ulster-Scots poets:

It seemed tae be his sole desire
Tae keep frae Death auld Ulster's lyre,
An' sing wi true poetic fire
Hir hills and plains;
Though some micht hae the same desire,
They're only weans.

["Lines written on receiving a copy of David Herbison's poems" *Poems from College and Country*, p. 230.]

- 13 Why, then is Hewitt so reluctant to admit Thomas Given to the canon? One answers lies in the conflict between Hewitt's desire to cast the Rhyming Weavers in the radical

dissenting tradition, with which he personally sympathised, and the political and religious ideas which he encountered in Given's work. Given's identification with Orangeism, and his support for the ideology of Imperialism conflict with Hewitt's preferred political agenda:

Still let us pride in takin' pert
 Wi those wha thole oppression's dert
 Let's gie the twa-faced their dessert
 And shut their mooth.
 What though oor speech be sometimes tert
 We'll tell the truth.
 [From "Poetical Epistle tae Cullybackey Auld Nummer"
Poems from College and Country, p. 186.]
 How he upheld the flag o' his fathers and yours –
 Nae surrender wi' him tho' the hale worl' wur Boers
 Nae wunner we're proud o' oor countryman's fame
 And thankfu' tae Heaven for his comin' hame.
 [From "Defender of Ladysmith"
Poems from College and Country, p.259¹⁸.]

- 14 Like the majority of Ulster-Scots in Mid Antrim, Thomas Given was opposed to Home Rule, and wary of the minority of Presbyterians who advocated it:

Ho! Home Rule Presbyterians a',
 Doubly-dyed in Adam's fa'
 Withoot the nails to claut or claw
 Your weasent skin,
 Ere death enshrouds you wae a scraw,
 Come in! Come in!
 [From "The General Assembly and Home Rule" *Poems from College and Country*, p. 231-32.]

- 15 Here he jocularly associates political unorthodoxy with religious unorthodoxy. His reference to their being "Doubly-dyed in Adam's fa" alludes to the Auld Licht theology of double predestination, rejected by the New Licht faction. Thus he invites Home Rule Presbyterians to "Come in" and conform to both orthodoxies¹⁹.
- 16 In drawing the line at 1900, Hewitt also rejects from the canon another Mid Antrim poet, whose work poses an even greater challenge to his construction of the Rhyming Weavers. Adam Lynn is one of the less familiar names in the story of Ulster-Scots poetry. Yet his modestly-entitled *Random Rhymes frae Cullybackey*, published in 1911, provides eloquent testimony to the survival of the Ulster-Scots literary tradition into the twentieth century. Thus Lynn's work calls into question Hewitt's argument for the inevitable decline of the Rhyming Weavers and their poetry. He lived well into his nineties, and died in the mid-1950s. Consequently, he was alive at the time that Hewitt was researching the tradition. It is not known whether Hewitt was aware of this. Adam Lynn was living proof that the grand narrative Hewitt was constructing was not the full story.
- 17 There are several ironies in the case of Adam Lynn. He wrote in vigorous and fluent Ulster Scots, betraying no signs of linguistic decay. Quite the opposite, for Lynn writes in a denser vernacular register than Herbison. He was also a worker in the textile industry, a machinist if not a handloom weaver, employed by the firms of the Maine Works and Frazer and Haughton. Though the Biographical Notice describes Lynn as being "of a retiring and thoughtful disposition²⁰", he was very much a part of his community, and took particular pride in his membership of the Flower of the Maine Lodge of the British Order of Ancient Free Gardeners, a fraternal order organised on Masonic lines:

Come and join the British Order O' the Gerners, yin and a'; Weel registered it is noo,
And backed up by the la'. [...]

Then, if ye ir attentive, boys, And keep things weel on han', Ye'll no hae very lang
tae wait Till ye ir a journey-man.

By this yer knowledge widens oot; So if ye dae yer pert, Ye'll get a certificate tae
show Yer mester o' the ert. ["Come and Join us", *Random Rhymes*, p. 10-11.]

- 18 Lynn is an acute observer of his rural society, and is at his best when describing countryside activities such as a hiring fair or lint-pulling (*Random Rhymes*, p. 13-14) or commenting on "freats", local superstitions of which both the rational and the religious thoroughly disapprove:

Which things hae lang been in oor Isle, An' seems tae me wul' yit awhile. Believe it
yis or no. Though education is advanced These "auld freats" ir sae well enhanced
'Tis hard tae bid thim go.

Sure whun the cruck an' links go cra'k Ur a burnt peat fa's on its ba'k, A stranger
soon ye'll see; But watch the wye ye big it up An' lissen weel the dreamin' "pup"
That niver telt a lee. ["Freats", *Random Rhymes*, p. 58-59.]

- 19 All of these are characteristics which Hewitt praises in the work of the earlier poets, and a strong argument can therefore be made for continuity of the tradition rather than decline. In matters of religion and politics, however, Lynn does not conform to Hewitt's model.

- 20 Lynn grew up in the aftermath of the 1859 Revival, and some of his work has a decidedly evangelical and moral temper. His own religious background reveals an unusually wide variety of ecclesiological influences. He came from Covenanter stock, attended a Presbyterian Sabbath School, and was a member of the Church of Ireland (*Random Rhymes*, p. III). Thus, in matters of religious controversy, such as the issue of hymn-singing, his response is notably eirenic:

I trust that ere long we may see All following the Lamb, And think no sin, outside or
in, To sing a hymn or Psalm. ["The Hymn Question", *Random Rhymes*, p. 3-4.]

- 21 The period leading up to the publication of *Random Rhymes* was a time of political tension, culminating in the Home Rule Crisis of 1912. Though Lynn seldom writes explicitly on political matters, his work sometimes reflects a blending of identities. His treatment of the Boer War reveals a mixture of emotions: pride in Sir George White, the "hero" of Ladysmith; relief at the ending of hostilities; criticism of political leaders on both sides, Kruger, Steen, and Gladstone.

- 22 ("Paddy at the Front", *Random Rhymes*, p. 28-29). Writing before partition, he sees no contradiction between a patriotic identification with Ireland and the Orange tradition:

Each yin loves dear thir native lan', Despite the heat or cauld, Ur whither big, ur
whither wee, Ur whither young or auld; Ur whither rich, ur whither poor, In it A'll
wish tae dee, I think nae shame, I'm jist the same, Dear Ireland fur me. ["Ireland for
me", *Random Rhymes*, p. 146-48.]

- 23 He even uses the traditional Irish greeting 'Cead Mile Failte', to welcome Dunnygarron Orange Lodge to the Twelfth of July Demonstration (*Random Rhymes*, p. 156-57), and is inspired to celebrate the colourful spectacle of the procession:

The colours ir o' ancient date, Fur purple, blue, an' scarlet mate; The flags an'
banners ir first-rate, An' sashes tae; A think we hae nae ocht can bate A guid Twalt
Day. ["The Twalt o' July", *Random Rhymes*, p. 45-47.]

- 24 An examination of the work of Given (1900) and Lynn (1911) thus casts doubt on Hewitt's narrative of decline and fall, and his desire to treat the Rhyming Weavers as a dead

tradition, a museum exhibit – He was, after all, a museum curator. He declared the poetry of Thomas Given to be “the end of an auld sang²¹”. Adam Lynn, writing over a decade later from the same village, shows that there was life in the “auld sang” yet, and that the Ulster-Scots poetic tradition lived –and lives – beyond the Rhyming Weavers.

No Female Bards?

- 25 Gender is another area in which Hewitt’s treatment of the Rhyming Weavers needs some correction. He includes only one working-class female bard, Sarah Leech (1809-1830)²². Since Hewitt’s time feminist criticism has engaged in the recuperation and revaluation of women’s writing. The publication of Volumes IV and V to supplement the original *Field Day Anthology* are a testament to how far this critical project has progressed.
- 26 Even for its time, Hewitt’s treatment of Sarah Leech is condescending and dismissive:

A vehement supporter of the Protestant, Anti-Repeal cause, she addressed the Brunswick Club.
She is rather a dull than a downright bad rhymers.
She belongs to the host of humble versifiers, so eagerly taken up by fashionable patrons²³.
- 27 These comments are designed to call into question her authenticity as a female working-class voice. She portrays herself as a “Rhyming Spinner²⁴”. However, for Hewitt her greatest crime would seem to be that she was a supporter of the pro-Unionist Brunswick Club.
- 28 Critics have identified a distinctive tradition of female songs, and this opens up new avenues of investigation and comparison for Leech’s work. Jane Gray makes the following comparison between the male weaver poets and the female spinners:

While the rhyming weavers began their versifying careers in similar settings, their female counterparts never bridged the gap between oral and written composition.
This is partly because women were much less likely to be literate²⁵.
- 29 Leech, however, can be seen in the context of a tradition of women labouring-class poets whose work began to appear in the eighteenth century²⁶.
- 30 There are also a number of female poets associated with the Rhyming Weaver tradition. These include Frances Brown[e] (1816-79), The Bard of Stranorlar, sometimes referred to as “The Blind Poetess of Ulster”; Elizabeth Willoughby Treacy (1821-96), Mrs Ralph Varian (Cork), who used the pseudonym “Finola” and Mrs Ida White, wife of the owner of *Ballymena Observer*, who published under the name “Ida”. All were part of a poetic circle linked with David Herbison. Hewitt is highly dismissive of “Finola” and “Ida”, calling them “remarkable if scarcely relevant ladies²⁷”. He had considerable admiration for Mrs White’s politics if not her poetry:

As a republican, a freethinker, and, later an exile in Paris, she followed a rather unusual career for a Ballymena woman, for which a spell of imprisonment in Holloway, a public attack on the Czar of Russia, and some verses addressed to John Burns the dockers’ leader, set the key²⁸.
- 31 This feminist icon was the same Ida White who sewed cushions for the Bard of Dunclug!
- 32 There is little doubt that the number of female poets can be substantially expanded. Crawford Gribben draws attention to his relative Margaret Crawford (1870-1950), who lived at College Farm Carnlough and Thornhill Farm, Antrim²⁹.

- 33 Hewitt's Rhyming Weavers are overwhelmingly masculine. Many more female voices remain to be recuperated from a variety of sources as yet insufficiently explored – periodicals, newspapers, and unpublished papers – to build a more complete understanding of Ulster Scots poetry.

Beyond Antrim and Down

- 34 While not explicitly confining himself to Ulster-Scots areas, Hewitt's focus falls primarily on Antrim and Down, taking little account of the Mid Ulster district. Even within that county, North Antrim is under-represented. He mentions James McKinley of Dunseverick³⁰ and Hugh McWilliams of Loughguile³¹ but neither receives the attention of James Orr (1770-1816) or Hugh Porter (born 1781). As has already been observed, Sarah Leech of Raphoe receives a somewhat superficial treatment.
- 35 A consequence of drawing tightly defined boundaries to "contain" the poets is to exclude some literary figures who, while not occupying a central place in the Ulster-Scots cultural heartland, nevertheless were influenced by and interact with the tradition of Ulster vernacular poetry. Such a figure is W. F. Marshall, "The Bard of Tyrone" (1888-1959). Marshall was deeply interested in dialect. As well as contributing to the *Scottish National Dictionary*, he compiled an Ulster dialect dictionary which remains unpublished. It was once thought to have been destroyed³². Marshall used dialect most effectively and authentically in his own verse:
- The dialect in many of the ballads is from my own county of Tyrone. I do not conceive that any apology is necessary for the inclusion of such ballads. In past days this dialect was something which the schoolmaster "lenged" out of us with a cane. Nowadays the cane is laid aside³³.
- 36 One of his most celebrated poems, "Me an' me Da" (also known as "I'm livin' in Drumlister")³⁴ has many links to the Rhyming Weaver tradition, particularly in its detailed observation, wry humour, and sympathetic treatment of the hardships of old age. Marshall's work as a whole deserves reassessment.
- 37 Many poets of the weaver tradition emigrated from their native land. Hewitt does not consider this poetic diaspora. James Orr spent some time as a political exile in America and is said to have contributed to American periodicals. James McHenry of Larne (1785-1845), John Smyth of Ballymena ("Magowan") (1783-1854), and Henry McD. Flecher of Moneyrea (1827-1902) also emigrated to America and continued their literary careers³⁵. In the case of Flecher, his last volume of poems, *Odin's Last Hour and other Poems*, appeared in 1900. The task of assembling and analyzing the product of the Ulster Scots diaspora has barely begun. The interactions between home and abroad remain to be researched. The recent edition of Robert Dinsmoor's work provides a telling foretaste of other materials yet to be discovered³⁶.

Beyond Critical Boundaries

- 38 The concept of the Rhyming Weavers has contributed to the ghettoization of Ulster-Scots literature. It has been characterised as a literary form bounded by, or even defined by its locality. It has been either ignored by or excluded from critical discourse on literature and national identity. It has faced ejection from the literary histories of both Ireland and

Scotland. However, there are now signs to suggest that the critical isolation of Ulster-Scots literature, and of the weaver poets in particular, may be nearing an end.

- 39 There have been a few harbingers of a more sympathetic critical climate. Norman Vance includes David Herbison and Francis Davis in his social history of Irish literature³⁷. Samuel Thomson (1766-1816) is represented in Andrew Carpenter's *Verse in English from Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (1998) and in Volume Two of *Eighteenth Century English Labouring-Class Poets* (2003)³⁸.
- 40 James Orr appears in *The Penguin Book of Irish Poetry* (2010)³⁹. More significant is the publication of Frank Ferguson's Ulster-Scots *Anthology*⁴⁰. The appearance of Frank Ferguson's chapter in the *Oxford History of the Irish Book* marks further progress into the critical main stream⁴¹.
- 41 One of the most promising critical developments has been Jennifer Orr's reassessment of Samuel Thomson in relation both to labouring-class poetry and in terms of his relationship to Romanticism. For Hewitt, Thomson was a somewhat anomalous figure, by profession a school master, and hence, in Hewitt's classification, a "Rhyming Pedagogue"; yet his close association with James Orr drew him into ranks of the Rhyming Weavers. Jennifer Orr demonstrates that Hewitt failed to recognize the political dimension to Thomson's work⁴². She has continued to reconstruct Thomson as the leading figure in the dissemination of Romantic ideas⁴³. He emerges as a figure very different from Hewitt's construction of The Bard of Carngranny. In linking Thomson to mainstream literary movements, Orr has opened up new ways of understanding the weaver poets, which take full account of their literary and cultural affiliations, thus permitting an escape from the critical straightjacket of the Rhyming Weavers.

Legacy

- 42 In exploring ways of taking the critical perception of the weaver poets beyond the parameters first established by John Hewitt, I am conscious of the immense debt which students of the Ulster Scots vernacular tradition owe to him. He rescued the Ulster poets from an almost impenetrable obscurity, and thus enabled others to build on his achievement. It is hardly surprising that sixty years on a degree of revisionism is both necessary and desirable. Needless to say, Hewitt's book remains essential reading, even if we might question some of his preconceptions and conclusions. In going beyond the concept of the Rhyming Weavers, we must never underestimate the scholarship and critical acumen which lies behind *The Rhyming Weavers*.

NOTES

1. *Rhyming Weavers and Other Country Poets of Antrim and Down*, Belfast, Blackstaff Press, 1974; reprinted with Foreword by Tom Paulin, 2004.

2. See, for example, "The Bitter Gourd: Some problems of the Ulster Writer", *Lagan*, 3, 1945, p. 93-105, reprinted in Tom Clyde (ed.), *Ancestral Voices: The Selected Prose of John Hewitt*, Belfast, Blackstaff Press, 1987.
3. "The Rhyming Weavers, Parts I, II, III", in *Fibres, Fabrics and Cordage*, 15, nos. 7-9, 1948.
4. "Ulster Poets, 1800-1870", unpublished MA thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1951.
5. *Ulster Poets 1800-1850*, paper read to the Belfast Literary Society, 3 January 1950, privately printed 1951.
6. Ivan Herbison, ed., *Webs of Fancy: Poems of David Herbison, The Bard of Dunclug* (Oxford and Ballymena: Dunclug Press, 1980).
7. See Ivan Herbison, "'The Rest is Silence': Some remarks on the Disappearance of Ulster-Scots Poetry", in J. Erskine and G. Lucy (eds.), *Cultural Traditions in Northern Ireland. Varieties of Scottishness: Exploring the Ulster Scottish Connection*, Belfast, Institute of Irish Studies, QUB, 1997, p. 129-145.
8. Seamus Deane (gen. ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, 3 vols, Derry, Field Day Publications, 1991; Angela Bourke (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vols IV and V: Women's Writing and Tradition*, Cork, Cork University Press, 2005.
9. See, for example, "Regionalism: The Last Chance", *Northman*, 15.3, Summer 1947, p. 7-9, reprinted in Clyde (ed.), *Ancestral Voices*, op. cit., p. 122-125.
10. Aoileann Ní Éigearthaigh, "'No Rootless Colonist': John Hewitt's Regionalist Approach to Identity", in James P. Byrne, Padraig Kirwan & Michael O'Sullivan (eds.), *Affecting Irishness: Negotiating Cultural Identity Within and Beyond the Nation*, Reimagining Ireland 2, Frankfurt am Main and London: Peter Lang, 2009, p. 133.
11. John Hewitt, *Ulster Poets, 1800-1850*, op. cit., p.17.
12. For a brief account of this theme, see Ivan Herbison, *Presbyterianism, Politics and Poetry in Nineteenth-century Ulster: Aspects of an Ulster-Scots Literary Tradition*, Belfast, Institute of Irish Studies, QUB, 2000, p. 3-6.
13. See, for example, James P. Byrne, Padraig Kirwan & Michael O'Sullivan (eds.), *Affecting Irishness*, op. cit., p. 74.
14. *Poems from College and Country by Three Brothers* [Patrick Given, Samuel Fee Given, Thomas Given], Belfast, W&G Baird, 1900.
15. George R. Buick, *Poems from College and Country*, op.cit., p. 139-40. On George R. Buick, see Eull Dunlop's Introduction to *Buick's Ahoghill*, Ballymena, Mid Antrim Historical Group, 1987.
16. John Hewitt, *Rhyming Weavers*, op. cit., p. 122.
17. See Stephen Herron, "Bab McKeen: The McKeenstown (Ballymena) Scotch Chronicler", in Michael Montgomery and Anne Smyth (eds.), *A Blad o Ulstèr-Scotch frae Ullans*, Belfast, Ullans Press, 2003, p. 165-158.
18. See also "General Sir George White at Ladysmith", *Poems from College and Country*, op. cit. p. 192; "Thoughts on the Death of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield", *ibid.*, p. 215.
19. Double predestination is the Calvinist doctrine that God, as an act of His sovereign will, from before the creation has predestinated some to eternal salvation (the elect) and has foreordained others to eternal damnation (the reprobate). See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III: 21. The Auld Licht faction maintained that the doctrinal standards of Presbyterianism,

established in the seventeenth century, could not be changed or reinterpreted. The New Licht faction argued that they could be reinterpreted in the light of reason and advances in knowledge.

20. Adam Lynn, *Random Rhymes frae Cullybackey*, Belfast, W. & G. Baird, 1911, Biographical Preface, p. IV.

21. John Hewitt, *Rhyming Weavers*, op. cit., p. 122.

22. See Celine McGlynn and Pauline Holland (eds.), *Sarah Leech: The Ulster-Scots Poetess of Raphoe*, Co. Donegal, Belfast, Ulster-Scots Agency, 2006; reprinted 2010. This edition republishes *Poems on Various Subjects*, Dublin, J. Charles, 1828.

23. John Hewitt, *Rhyming Weavers*, op. cit., p. 63-64.

24. *Poems on Various Subjects*, p. 55.

25. Jane Gray, *Spinning the Threads of Uneven Development: Gender and Industrialisation in Ireland during the Long Eighteenth Century*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2005, p.17.

26. See Susanne Kord, *Women Peasant Poets in Eighteenth-Century England, Scotland, and Germany: Milkmaids on Parnassus*, Rochester, NY, Camden House, 2003.

27. John Hewitt, *Rhyming Weavers*, op. cit. p. 118.

28. John Hewitt, *Rhyming Weavers*, op. cit., p. 117-18.

29. Crawford Gribben, "Another undiscovered Ulster-Scots poet", *Ullans*, Nummer 11, 2010, 125.

30. *Poetic Sketches descriptive of the Giant's Causeway* (1819).

31. *Poems and Songs* (1831).

32. See J. A. Todd, Foreword to *Livin' in Drumlister: The Collected Ballads and Verses of W. F. Marshall, The Bard of Tyrone*, Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1983, p. xii.

33. *Ballads and Verses from Tyrone*, Introduction (1929). Cited in Gordon Lucy, "W F Marshall: The Bard of Tyrone", *Ullans*, Nummer 11, 2010, p. 65-74.

34. *Livin' in Drumlister*, op. cit., p. 32-33.

35. On McHenry and Fletcher see D.J. O'Donoghue, *The Poets of Ireland: A Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary of Irish Writers of English Verse*, Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1912; on John Smyth see David Herbison, "John Smith, 'Magowan'", *Ulster Magazine*, 2, No. 23, November 1861, 441-44.

36. *Robert Dinsmoor's Scotch-Irish Poems*, introduced by Frank Ferguson and Alister McReynolds, Belfast, Ulster Historical Foundation, 2012.

37. Norman Vance, *Irish Literature: A Social History: Tradition, Identity and Difference*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990.

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ABSTRACTS

This paper examines the origin, development and construction of John Hewitt's concept of the Rhyming Weavers. It argues that there is a need to reassess his concept in the light of contemporary critical concerns, and to develop critical perceptions of the work of the weaver poets beyond the parameters first established by Hewitt. An examination of the work of Thomas Given (1900) and Adam Lynn (1911) casts doubt on Hewitt's treatment of the Rhyming Weavers as a past or vanished tradition, and argues that Hewitt's views on politics and religion led him to neglect or undervalue poets such as Given and Lynn. It is also argued that the concept of Rhyming Weavers needs to be extended to encompass more female poets, poets of the Ulster Scots diaspora, and poets beyond Counties Antrim and Down, such as W. F. Marshall.

Cet article examine l'origine, le développement et la construction du concept des « Rhyming Weavers » (poètes tisserands), élaboré par John Hewitt. Il affirme qu'il est temps de revisiter son concept à la lumière des préoccupations de la critique contemporaine, et de pousser les perceptions critiques de l'œuvre des Rhyming Weavers au-delà des paramètres établis à l'origine par Hewitt. Une exploration de l'œuvre de Thomas Given (1900) et de Adam Lynn (1911) remet en question la façon dont Hewitt conçoit les Rhyming Weavers comme appartenant à une tradition révolue ou disparue, et suggère que les idées politiques et religieuses de Hewitt l'ont amené à ignorer ou sous-estimer des poètes comme Given et Lynn. L'article affirme également que la catégorie des Rhyming Weavers devrait être étendue afin d'inclure davantage de poètes femmes, ainsi que des poètes de la diaspora Ulster Scots, et des poètes venant de comtés au-delà d'Antrim et de Down, comme par exemple W. F. Marshall.

INDEX

Keywords: Rhyming Weavers, Ulster-Scots, Hewitt John, poetry, cultural heritage, Northern Ireland

Mots-clés: Rhyming Weavers, Hewitt John, poésie, héritage culturel, Ulster-Scots, Irlande du Nord

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