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Ulster-Scots Psalmody: A Consideration

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- ¹ In the various editions of the Scottish Psalter, the biblical psalms are arranged “in metre” (rhyming English verse) for the purpose of congregational singing in public worship. “Exclusive psalmody” (the singing in Christian worship of *only* metrical psalms) was the universal Presbyterian and Calvinist practice in the English and French-speaking world from the 16th century down to the mid 19th century, and remains so for some notably in Ireland. Today, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland remains the largest Protestant denomination in Ulster, but it no longer embraces exclusive psalmody. In the late 19th century, there was considerable controversy over the introduction of hymn singing in worship services. This new controversy came against a backdrop of recently-healed divisions in the Presbyterian Synod of Ulster between the Old Lights and the New Lights. The Old Lights were conservative Calvinists who believed that ministers and elders should subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith. The New Lights were more liberal and were unhappy with the Westminster Confession and did not require ministers to subscribe to it. Intellectually and politically, the New Lights were associated with the Scottish Enlightenment and local radical dissent in the 1798 rebellion. They dominated the Synod of Ulster during the eighteenth century.
- ² Many Synod of Ulster church members found a more congenial atmosphere in the rapidly multiplying congregations of the secession movement, introduced from Scotland in the 1740s. By 1818, these congregations had formed a rival Secession Synod, while the smaller numbers of Reformed Presbyterians or Covenanters (also introduced in the 18th century from Scotland) had also formed their own synod in 1811¹. When the Secession Synod joined with the Synod of Ulster in a new union of Irish Presbyterians in 1841 (the birth of the present Presbyterian Church of Ireland), some Seceder ministers only joined after obtaining assurances that only the metrical psalms would be used in worship. Although hymns were not sung, some Synod of Ulster congregations had been using paraphrases (of other biblical texts) along with Psalms in their worship prior to 1840.

- 3 Against this background, the introduction of instrumental music into Irish Presbyterianism caused much furore in the late 19th century. The harmonium or organ was particularly derided as an abomination – the *kist o whussles* (“chest of whistles”) – by those who believed that the psalms should be sung unaccompanied, that is, without the playing of any man-made instrument. The age-old tradition of having a precentor as an official of the congregation to “raise the singing” by singing the first line of the psalm at the start (and taking singing classes in local houses to practice the psalm tunes in 4-part harmony) was only threatened by the advent of church organists in the early 20th century. But the introduction of hymns caused even greater dismay among those who believed that the singing of scripture was far superior to any “man-made” composition and that the use of hymns opened the door to doctrinal error.
- 4 Henry Cooke, the mid 19th-century Irish Presbyterian leader and Moderator of the Synod of Ulster who as the champion of orthodoxy and evangelism forged the 1841 Union of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, entered the fray as the “grand old man” of Irish Presbyterianism in 1860 on the side of exclusive psalmody and an attempt to prohibit the introduction of church organs. He was invited to write an introduction to a Belfast reprinting of an 1858 Philadelphia volume on the subject. Here he described his own journey through the process of first accepting and then rejecting the introduction of hymns into Presbyterian worship:

My earliest recollection of family and public psalmody is that of the exclusive use of the English version of the Biblical Psalms, authorized by the Reformed Church of Scotland. In our Presbyterian Churches, so far as my knowledge extends, others were unknown. When I entered the ministry, in 1807, the Scottish selection of Paraphrases and Hymns had come into partial use; and influenced by the feeling in their favour, I was gradually led to adopt them. The principle of their use once adopted, the way to others was opened to an unlimited extent; for if these paraphrases and hymns be good for public worship, it follows that others may be as good, or better. Accordingly, at one time of my ministry, I dedicated both time and pains to selecting, from all accessible sources, an additional volume, with an essay, embodying a defence of its use in private or in public worship [...] [T]wo things confirmed my decision in favour of the exclusive use of inspired psalmody in public worship. First, the Biblical Psalms being inspired by the Holy Ghost, in using them, there can be no error. Secondly, though in uninspired sacred poetry I had discovered many beauties [...] I never had discovered any compilations which I could pronounce free from serious doctrinal errors. This I perceived to be especially the case with not a few of the Paraphrases and Hymns, authorized by the Church of Scotland. If a doctrinal error be, at all times, dangerous, how much more when [...] in the devotions of the sanctuary! (H. Cooke, Belfast, 1861²)

- 5 But hymns were the latest thing in worship and Presbyterian congregations were susceptible to this new trend. In 1895, the General Assembly set up a Committee to select suitable hymns for a Presbyterian hymnbook. The same debate was taking place in the Scottish church at that time and so a joint *Church Hymnary* was produced in 1898 (with psalms and paraphrases included in a separate section)³. The edition of the metrical psalms included in the 1898 *Church Hymnary* was identical to the 1880 revised edition of the Scottish Psalter produced by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Its title tells much of its story: *The Psalter in Metre: a revised version prepared and published by authority of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, with tunes selected and arranged by a committee representing The Church of Scotland, The United Free Church of Scotland, The Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (London, 1880). The preface to the 1880 Psalter (still in use today) explains:

As it is now more than two hundred years since the admirable Scottish Version was prepared, several of its words and phrases, and not a few of its grammatical forms, have become antiquated; while through the progress of Hebrew scholarship [...] some of its renderings have been shown to be inaccurate. In the present Revised Version an attempt has been made to remove these portions where there are erroneous renderings, errors of syntax, faulty rhymes, obsolete words, or want of correspondence between the rhythm of sense and the rhythm of sound. And while the Old Version, out of regard for the place which it has in the memory and affection of the people, has been very tenderly dealt with, it is hoped that most of its graver blemishes have been removed [...] Twenty-seven alternative psalm-versions have been added, and these give a little more variety than is to be found in the Scottish Version.

- 6 By 1917, the majority of Irish Presbyterians were using hymns as well as psalms in their worship services, and by 1940 there were only a handful of congregations still resisting them. A *Revised Church Hymnary* was produced in 1927 with over 700 hymns and the *Third Edition Hymnary* was produced in 1973. The most recent Irish Presbyterian hymnbook appeared in 2005 with psalms, paraphrases, traditional hymns and contemporary worship songs all included⁴. The reality today is that the “mixed” practice of psalms, traditional hymns and contemporary praise in “all-age services” has been rapidly shifting towards the exclusive use of contemporary worship songs. Organists, organs and choirs have been replaced by (rather than supplemented with) Musical Directors, praise bands and microphoned singers in many “successful” Presbyterian Churches, so that a well-attended church with drums, guitars and microphones in the front is an increasingly common sight.
- 7 But in Ulster today the 40 or so congregations of the 250-year-old Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (a separate denomination also known as the “Covenanters”) continue to reject instrumental music and hymn-singing. They alone in Ireland maintain the tradition of exclusive, unaccompanied psalmody. The Covenanters have in the past been associated with resistance to innovation of “new” tunes or to change in the revered words of the 17th century Scottish Psalter, and yet in 2004 a remarkable new translation in modern English of the metrical psalms was produced, with many alternative metrical versions of individual psalms to facilitate their unaccompanied singing to popular “hymn tunes” of other denominations⁵.
- 8 For a variety of reasons, this 2004 version of the Psalter provides a perfect exemplar for any translation exercise of the metrical psalms into Ulster-Scots. Its preface outlined the strategy adopted in 1991 by the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland “to commission the Psalmody Committee to proceed with a modern version of the Psalter” – with the following brief:
 1. The words must be an accurate translation of the original.
 2. The meaning must be readily understood. Thus archaic language must be replaced and contorted syntax eliminated. Awkward and contracted words should be avoided.
 3. While we should strive for rhyme we should not be limited by an absolute necessity for it.
 4. New tunes with new metres should be incorporated.
 5. Some well-loved Scottish Metrical versions should be retained side by side with the revisions.
 6. This strategy should be applied to versions currently available rather than starting from scratch with only the Hebrew text. (It was later agreed that the main resources for revision groups should be Hebrew interlinear text, the New American Standard Version and the New

International Version, together with the past and current Psalters of the R. P. Church of Ireland and the R. P. Church of North America, and the revised versions of the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The co-operation of the last three bodies in giving permission to use ideas and portions is gratefully acknowledged.)

7. As new versions become available these should be sent round the congregations for use, comment and helpful suggestions⁶.
- 9 This radical revision of the archaic language of the words, largely unchanged since the 1650 Scottish Psalter, and the extensive changes in wording in numerous versions to allow for “new tunes with new metres”, was both practical and sensitive. “Unused” tunes were omitted only after consultation with each congregation’s precentor, and an even broader consultation process was engaged in before “new” tunes were added. Thirty-one “well-loved Scottish Metrical versions” (true to the wording of the 1650 Scottish Psalter) were retained side by side with the revisions as alternative versions.

Origin of the 1650 Scottish Psalter and its tunes

- 10 When thousands of Lowland Scots settled in east Ulster in the early 1600s they brought with them their own Scottish Calvinist ministers, and all the “Reformed” religious attitudes and practices common at home – including an early version of the Scottish Psalter as the only form of sung worship. The origin of that Scottish Psalter lies of course in its Hebrew parent – the 3000 year-old hymn book of Judaism which contained 150 Psalms arranged in five books with headings to indicate tunes and special occasions for use. When Erasmus of Rotterdam produced his Greek translation of the New Testament in the early 16th century, he wrote in the introduction to the third (1522) edition:

Would that [those words were] translated into all languages, so that not only

- 11 Scotch

and

- 12 Irish

, but

- 13 Turks

and

- 14 Saracens

might be able to read and know them [...] it is both indecorous and ridiculous that laymen and women should, like parrots, repeat their Psalms and pater-nosters in Latin which they do not comprehend [...] Like St. Jerome I think it a great triumph and glory to the cross if it is celebrated by the tongues of all men; if the farmer at the plow sings some of the mystic Psalms, and the weaver sitting at the shuttle often refreshes himself with something from the Gospel⁷.

- 15 In Erasmus’ day services were in Latin, and music had become the ornate preserve of the clergy. The ordinary worshipper could only listen, not take part. One effect of the Protestant Reformation was to give the people voice again in sung worship. In Germany Martin Luther wrote hymns and, using many popular folk tunes, set them singing. In Geneva under John Calvin the psalms were set in metre with simple and apt music. In the Genevan Psalter of 1551, the tunes for Psalms 100, 124 and 134 are those familiar settings still used today and known by the names “Old 100th”, “Old 124th”, and “Old 134th”.

- 16 Religious persecution forced many Scots, French and English abroad, and as early as 1558 there was a congregation of English-speaking refugees in Geneva. Most of the Genevan exiles were, like Calvin himself, French-speaking, and the metrical psalms of the first Genevan Psalter of 1551 became the hall-mark of these Huguenots (with Psalm 68 becoming known as their battle-hymn). The Anglo-Genevan Psalter was prepared for the use of Knox's English-speaking congregation in 1561, and this was the beginning of the Metrical Version in English. Along with Scotland's John Knox was William Whittingham from England who married the sister of John Calvin and in 1559 took over from Knox as minister of the English congregation of exiles in Geneva. To Whittingham we owe the 1560 Geneva Bible – the first English version to be translated directly from the original languages. It was also the first Bible to be printed in Scotland, around 1579. A 1603 edition of the Geneva Bible remained more popular in parts of Ulster than the 1611 King James Authorised Version until the end of the 17th century⁸. But while at Geneva, Whittingham also turned some of the psalms into metrical versions, the familiar words of Psalm 23 and Psalm 124 being his translation. By 1564 Knox was back home in Scotland and the first Scottish Metrical Version published, although it was not until 1575 that all 150 psalms were included in the Scottish Psalter⁹.
- 17 The 1650 Scottish Psalter was produced as *The Psalms of David in Meeter: newly Translated and diligently compared with the Original Text and Former Translations; more plain, smooth and agreeable to the text than any heretofore; allowed by the Authority of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1650). Apart from the Bible, no other publication was, for 300 years, to hold such a central and significant position in Ulster-Scots popular culture. Throughout the 17th century, a succession of editions of the Scottish Psalter (most notably 1650), extended the range of tunes provided, and wherever these were of a different metre, additional “versions” of some psalms were provided. When the 1880 edition appeared for the Irish Presbyterian Church, there were 27 such alternative metrical versions of individual psalms given, and a total of almost 200 psalm tunes. This allowed for the inclusion of many “new” tunes, and for the adaption of popular hymn tunes from other traditions. As a general rule, the majority of these “new” tunes of the 19th century were not in Common Metre (8686); hence the requirement of alternative metrical versions of the words. It should be stressed that the “older” metrical settings were still being used alongside the new, as were the older tunes.
- 18 Throughout Ulster-Scots popular literature in the 19th century, there is frequent reference made to the “*Twal Tunes*”¹⁰ – the 12 traditional and most popular tunes in the countryside. Most of these had their origins in different editions of the Scottish Psalter in the 17th century: Abbey (Scottish Psalter, 1615), Aberfeldy (Scottish Psalter, Aberdeen, 1633), Bon Accord (Scottish Psalter, Aberdeen, 1625), Caithness (Scottish Psalter, 1635), Culross (Scottish Psalter, 1634), Dunfermline (Scottish Psalter, 1615), French (Scottish Psalter, 1615), London New (Scottish Psalter, 1635), Martyrs (Scottish Psalter, 1615), Melrose (Scottish Psalter, 1615), Wigton (Scottish Psalter, 1635) and York (Scottish Psalter, 1615). In addition, the Genevan Psalter of 1551 was the source of the tunes with more elaborate metres such as “Old 100th”, “Old 124th”, “Old 134th”, and the Anglo-Genevan Psalter of 1556 was the source of “Old 29th”.
- 19 Surviving 18th and early 19th century hand-copied manuscript psalm tune-books from Antrim and Down feature these tunes¹¹, with one of 1744 giving not only the 12 tunes, but also the secular words to be used in the “singing classes” held by the precentor in local homes to practise the tunes and 4-part harmonies before the introduction of church

“choirs” (the actual psalm words from the psalter being reserved for worship). Some of these verses were simple doggerel, but easily memorised because of the use of humour, Ulster-Scots words, or local place-names¹². Some too were more serious. For example, the verses used to practise the tunes “French” and “Martyrs” were:

The first of all begins with French;
The second measure low;
The third extendeth very high;
The fourth doth downward go.
This is the tune the Martyrs sang,
When they were going to die,
When they were to the scaffold brought
The truth to testify.

- 20 But local flavour and humour were just as common:

The reason that this tune’s called York
I never yet could know;
They might as well have called it Cork,
Carnmoney or Raphoe.

- 21 A later version of the “York” practise verse was in Ulster-Scots:

*The name o this tune is ca’d York
For why A dinnae know
They micht as weel hae ca’d it Cork
Carmarthan or Raphoe.*

- 22 These “nonsense” rhymes show how important the stress-pattern or iambic metre was in the translation of the psalms into metrical form, even where they were all composed of Common Metre stanzas. It is interesting that so many of the practice verses were in the vernacular, while the English words of the Psalter remained sacrosanct in their 17th century translation.

- 23 Many other practice-verses in “light” Ulster-Scots have been recorded, such as:

Newton is a purty place,
It sits doon by the sea;
Scrabo is an ugly hill,
Three times yin is three.
*Oh Bangor’s notes are unco heich,
An’ try the lassies sair;
They pech an grane an skirl an skreich,
Till they can sing nae mair.*
Keep silence, all ye sons of men,
And hear with reverence due;
*The maister has gan oot tae smoke
But he’ll be back the noo.*
*There was a Presbyterian cat
Went huntin for its prey
An in God’s hoose it kilt a moose,
Upon the Sabbath Day
The folk they a’ wus horrified
Tae hear o sic a thing
The sexton birl’t it roon his heid
An oot its brains did ding*¹³.

- 24 These “Presbyterian cat” verses were also sung in Scotland (in a slightly different version) to the psalm tune “Desert”¹⁴.

The Ulster-Scots cultural context

Poetry

- 25 The use of a light “comic” register of Ulster-Scots in these practise verses highlights a serious cultural issue for the use of the language in a respectful and dignified religious context – such as in Bible translation or in worship. Ulster-Scots writers have – like the rest of their community – tended to reserve use of the “hamely tongue” for community life, the home and humour. English, even the 17th century English of the King James Bible, is firmly embedded in the Ulster-Scots psyche as the language of religion. When Ulster-Scots is used for serious subjects, especially religion, it can be regarded as disrespectful and the intention behind its use satirical.
- 26 One early “serious” translation of a short passage of the psalms into Ulster-Scots was written by the county Antrim poet James Orr, the “Bard of Ballycarry”, shortly after the 1798 Rising, a rebellion in which he played a leading role. It appeared at the top of his classic poem “Donegore Hill”, written in dense Ulster-Scots, where Orr’s Ballycarry Company of United Irishmen scattered, along with the rest of the “Army of Ulster”, after their defeat at the nearby Battle of Antrim. The short, one verse translation (Psalm 78, verse 9) requires explanation, for it appeared as an incidental preliminary to the poem as follows:
- Ephie’s base bairntime, trail-pike brood,
Were arm’d as weel as tribes that stood;
Yet on the battle ilka cauf
Turn’d his backside, an scampered aff¹⁵.
- 27 Orr’s poem was, on the surface, poking fun at himself and his neighbours for “turning out” with the rebels. But that was as it had to be in the aftermath of the rising. Orr knew that he had two means of disguising his real feelings so that they could only be understood by sympathetic, fellow Ulster-Scots. The first device was the dense Ulster-Scots language he used which would not be easily penetrated by outsiders. The second was the coded use of the psalms – which many Presbyterians then knew off by heart. Verse 9 of Psalm 78 is used to identify the “*throuither squath’ry*” of his comrades-in-arms who “*took leg, that day*”, with the Israelite children of Ephraim. The Scottish Metrical version has the same verse:
9. The sons of Ephraim nor bows
Nor other arms did lack;
Yet, when the day of battle came,
Faint-hearted they turned back.
- 28 But to make sense of this we need to know the following two verses as they appear in the Scottish Psalter:
10. They brake God’s covenant, and refused
In his commands to go;
11. His works and wonders they forgot,
Which he to them did show.
- 29 There were two families of “Orrs” associated with the rebellion in county Antrim, James Orr the poet, and William Orr the martyr. James Orr was not related to the most celebrated martyr of the ’98 rebellion, his namesake William Orr, who was hanged at Carrickfergus in 1797. James Orr witnessed the hanging while standing alongside William

Orr's brother, Samuel. He wrote a poem about this event which affected him deeply, but as the very slogan "Remember Orr" (referring to William Orr) was banned, he does not name the victim in his poem, "The Execution". One verse records, "The Choral psalm with sad delight; consoled the breasts his speech had riv'n". William Orr had taken no spiritual chances at the gallows, for he was accompanied by two Presbyterian clergymen, one Old Light and one New Light. Both these ministers later emerged as leaders of the rebellion themselves (Stavely, a Covenanter from Kellswater, and Hill, a radical New Light from Ballynure near Ballycarry). Both read and sang the psalms to William Orr as they accompanied him from the jail to the gallows¹⁶.

Prose

- 30 By the end of the 19th century the "kail-yard novel" rather than vernacular poetry had become the popular genre for Ulster-Scots writers. As this coincided with an acrimonious debate among Presbyterians about the introduction of hymns and instrumental music, this controversy became a major theme for humour in Ulster-Scots literature.
- 31 Archibald M'Iloy of Ballyclare in county Antrim, in his auto-biographical novels, *When Lint was in the Bell* (1897) and its sequel *The Auld Meetin'-Hoose Green* (1899), introduces the subject through Humphrey Barr, the precentor who was paid £5 a year for "raising the tunes" from the precentor's box under the pulpit in the Presbyterian Meeting House. These "Twal Tunes" were sacrosanct, so there was the inevitable opposition when any "new" tunes for the psalms were introduced: "*A wheen o liltis no fit for the hoose o' God*"¹⁷. Another target for M'Iloy's sympathetic touch was the discordant singing. The remedy was to pension off the precentor and form a choir under the schoolmaster. The result was that Humphrey Barr took himself off to the Covenanters and the choir became a constant source of bickering. M'Iloy states: "some of us were almost inclined to follow Humphrey to the Covenanters. Others would have joined the Methodists, only for the hymns and harmonium"¹⁸.
- 32 In his sequel, M'Iloy says that the formation of a choir was the beginning of the end. Already a tuning-fork had been introduced: instruments would surely follow. Humphrey Barr, the old precentor who had been removed from his precentor's box and who kept his Bible, psalm-book and tune book in a fireside recess in the wall at home declared: "*Ye'll niver fin onythin' at'll come hame tae the herts o' God's people like Daavid's Psalms set tae the guid auld tunes*"¹⁹.
- 33 W. G. Lyttle of North Down wrote prolifically in full Ulster-Scots at the same period as M'Iloy (whose novels were typical Scots "kail-yard" in that only the dialogue was Ulster-Scots and the connecting narrative in English). His *Life in Ballycuddy* (circa 1900) deals with the same theme (the removal of the precentor and the introduction of hymns, choirs and instrumental music) almost to the exclusion of any other topic in the consecutive chapters: "Kirk Music", "The Ballycuddy Precentor", "The General Assembly of 1879", "The Ballycuddy Elders", "The General Assembly of 1880" and "The Newtownbreda Harmoneyum". Lyttle's style poked fun at the psalmody tradition, and his own strong opinions in favour of change are transparent when Robin Gordon, his main narrator, regales the Moderator and the General Assembly during the debate on outlawing instrumental music in 1879²⁰.
- 34 A visitor to Ballycuddy Meeting-House asks Robin, "*wha rises the tunes?*" The question was asked because of the chaotic and raucous singing of the psalms. The answer was "*Sammy*

Tamson", who was later to resign as precentor because, "my soart o' singin's oot o' fashin noo". Truth was, his singing wasn't up to the mark anyway: "He wud be the better o' a whunbush drawed a wheen times up an' doon his throat." When Sammy did go, a presentation was made, "then his reverence said a wheen words an' axt if Sammy wud let us hear his voice afore we parted, singin' the 'Auld Hundred'. Sammy had his handkerchy oot wipin' his een, but he wus a' richt by the time his reverence had gied oot the samm, an' he rowled oot the notes, an' made them trimmle ower ocht²¹".

- 35 When Robin and his like-minded elders got their way and a harmonium was bought, the minister stopped visiting: "Oor minister hasnae darkened the daur iver since 1858... 1858 He gangs in fur samms an' vokil singin', but he wud nether hae hymns, parryfrases, nor instreymments o' ony kin²²."

Singing classes

- 36 In county Down in the early 18th century, singing classes were held in local houses or farm barns, where the owners would supply tea and other refreshments. After the psalm-tune practice, the gathering became one for amusement with songs, recitations, and kissing games²³. The precentor seems to have been involved in leading these classes, and his office was certainly well-paid by the congregation. McIlroy's Humphrey Barr was paid £5-0-0 per annum, and in Islandmagee First Presbyterian Meeting House the precentor was paid £6-0-0 per annum in 1859 (the only other paid official was the Sexton who received £4-5-0)²⁴. By the 1870s there were two men, James Flack and Robert Campbell, sharing the precentor's duties in First Islandmagee – and the salary of £10.0.0. Their duties included,

[conducting] a weekly music class and leading the choir on Sabbaths. Mr. Flack, being at the same time precentor to Second Islandmagee, assisted to train the choir, and Mr. Campbell conducted the Psalmody on Sundays. The latter resigned his office in 1895, and was succeeded by Mr. John Dick, who is still in office [1927], and who has had the gratification of seeing the installation of a fine organ, and the introduction of the Church Hymnary during his precentorship²⁵.

- 37 James Flack was the local schoolmaster. His successor as precentor in Second Islandmagee was Hugh Dick, "[...] well-known in local musical circles as an enthusiastic exponent of the Tonic Sol-Fa system [...] His classes in the eighties were attended by large numbers of young people"²⁶. A further generation back, in the 1830s, we get more information of these county Antrim singing classes from the Ordnance Survey Memoirs. For the Parish of Islandmagee they record:

A school for learning sacred music is held in the meeting house in the townland of Kilcoanmore and is attended by the adult male and female members of both congregations of Presbyterians to the number of 109 [...] each of whom pay 1s per quarter for 26 lessons. It was established in 1839, its principal object being the introduction of the more modern psalm tunes instead of the "auld twelve" introduced by their Scottish forefathers, and which are still by many congregations in remote and retired districts, but particularly by the Covenanters, retained to the utter exclusion of all others²⁷.

- 38 Similar singing classes where "sacred music" was taught were also noted in the Memoirs in the Antrim parishes of Mallusk, Templecorran, Kilbride ("held once a week in the farmhouses"), Ballylinney, Ballynure ("a singing school for sacred music was established by the Presbyterians of Ballynure, and held in the house of John Logan, publican, in the village [...] A regular master is employed, whose salary for teaching is 1s per quarter from

each of the males”), Killead, Templepatrick (“not always held in the same place”) and Carrickfergus. In the north Londonderry parish of Aghanloo, the singing classes were regarded as part and parcel of the local traditional culture:

The local customs are those most prevalent among all Scottish inhabitants of the country [...] dancing is a favourite amusement [...] they seem to be very fond of fiddle playing. Singing schools are held in rotation among the Presbyterian farmers’ houses and after music, both sacred and profane, a dance generally concludes²⁸.

- 39 In these parishes, the 1830s Ordnance Survey Memoirs also link this rural psalm-singing tradition to communities that were Ulster-Scots speaking. In Mallusk Parish: “Their dialect, accent, idioms and customs are strictly Scottish [...] They are rather rough and blunt”; in Templecorran: “Their accent, idioms and phraseology are strictly and disagreeably Scottish, partaking only of the broad and coarse accent and dialect of the Southern counties of Scotland”; in Islandmagee: “All their sports [pastimes] are of a Scottish character. The inhabitants, being all of Scotch descent, retain the manners and habits of their ancestors”; in Drumtullagh: “[...] peopled by the descendants of the Scottish [...] The Scottish language is spoken in great purity”; and in Ballintoy: “They are all descendants of the Scottish settlers of the 16th century, as may be inferred from their very broad Scotch dialect and accent²⁹.”

- 40 In some Ulster-Scots areas where the more formal singing “schools” were not found, their need was recorded, as at Drummaul:

At the Presbyterian meeting house the entire congregation join in singing. The tunes to which their psalms are set are only 12 in number, and are those used by the Covenanters of old [...] but at the same time there is a want of harmony or melody in the music at the meeting houses in this parish³⁰.

- 41 Although it can be assumed that the origins of the precentor and the informal singing classes with entertainment afterwards go back to the 17th century (and before in Scotland), there are few historical references to confirm it. Rev. Robert Blair mentions the precentor in his Bangor church in 1632. He had come over as a Scots Presbyterian minister to Bangor Abbey in 1623 declaring he would not “submit to the use of the English liturgy nor Episcopalian government”. That there was conflict with the bishop is not surprising, and in 1632, after a period of enforced absence, he returned to resume his preaching but, “for form’s sake I did not go up into the pulpit, but stood beside the precentor³¹”. At the same time in county Down, James Hamilton, another Presbyterian minister from Scotland came to Ballywalter in 1626 where he served as minister until 1636. In 1649, after his return to Scotland, James Hamilton was appointed by the General Assembly as one of six men to “overtake the review and examination of the new paraphrase of the Psalms³²”. Another of the six was George Hutcheson who had been sent to Ulster by the General Assembly there in 1644³³.

- 42 Much later, in Carrickfergus in 1830 the precentor was called the “Precentor or Singing Clerk”. He was to be paid £20 a year and meet the following requirements:

That he must be competent to teach all the parts in sacred music. He must attend each Sabbath morning to practice the tunes to be sung that day in the congregation. He must conduct the psalmody of the congregation for public worship. He must teach gratis a class of twenty children [...] so that they may be able to accompany and assist him in the public psalmody³⁴.

- 43 The process of change that began in the 19th century involved the introduction of formal singing schools, “new” psalm tunes, hymns, instrumental music and church choirs. It was also the beginning of the end for exclusive psalmody and the office of precentor.

Translating the metrical psalms (for singing) into Ulster-Scots

- 44 C. S. Lewis (himself an Ulsterman), wrote of praise and the biblical psalms:

The Scotch catechism says that man's chief end is to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever". And we shall know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify [...] the Psalms are poems, are poems intended to be sung: not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons³⁵.

- 45 Although Ulster-Scots now has the status of a "European Regional Minority Language", the downside of centuries of stigmatisation and exclusion from formal education has left its legacy. The revered use of English as in the Authorised Version of the Bible and the Scottish Psalter is firmly imbedded in the Ulster-Scots psyche. Because Ulster-Scots is a highly stigmatised language which survives mostly as a spoken tongue among "insiders", there is widespread internal prejudice against its use in a formal register, and in formal situations. This reserve applies even more strongly to its use in the special formality of church. Ulster-Scots, in "comic" register, is often regarded as disrespectful, and inappropriate. Fortunately, these contextual issues of "religious" language and register have been addressed in the Ulster-Scots Bible translation programme³⁶. The publication of the gospel according to Luke in Ulster-Scots (with parallel text from the 1611 Authorised Version)³⁷, has been so well received in the community that the ground is well prepared for an Ulster-Scots Psalter. Although today the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland is perceived as ultra-conservative in its custodianship of the exclusive psalmody tradition within the Ulster-Scots community, in fact its own 2004 "modern English" translation of the Psalter reflects an openness to modern translations of sacred texts into the "heart-language" of the community, providing they are accurate and respectful.
- 46 A translation of the complete New Testament from the original Greek into Scots by W. L. Lorimer was published in 1983³⁸, and in 1861 the non-metrical psalms were translated "*Frae Hebrew intil Scottis*" by P Hately Waddell³⁹. Ulster-Scots speakers have considerable difficulty with the Scottish-Scots of both these works. The over-riding considerations must be, however, accuracy of meaning and "sing-able" metrical setting to appropriate tunes. The translation must be a poetic work in itself, but can only be deemed successful as and when it is used and accepted in worship.
- 47 Only about twelve Psalms translated into Ulster-Scots have been published in metrical form for singing to the equivalent tunes in the Scottish Psalter⁴⁰, and only a few of these have actually been sung by congregations in Ulster-Scots church services⁴¹. Unlike the Bible translation process which involves translation teams "testing" alternative renderings as part of the process, translating the metrical Psalms is an individual process with retrospective "testing". At the time of writing, the present author has completed the initial draft translation of all 150 Psalms, along with a further 30 or so "alternative versions" set to different tunes and metres, representing the full "canon" of the Scottish Psalter in Ulster-Scots. Before publication, however, much work is still required. The "sing-ability" of each Psalm to the given traditional tune(s) will be tested using a specially-recruited Psalmody choir, and the text edited to ensure conformity to the recently agreed spelling standards⁴². Antiquated spellings, for example "*quh*-" for "wh-", originally included to signal a dignified and historic register for the translation, have

been found to be difficult to read “naturally” by native speakers, and so words like “*quha*” (who) will be changed throughout to “*wha*”, etc. Another proposed change will be to use the pronouns “*thee*”, “*thy*” and “*thine*”, but only when referring to God. This suggestion has been made to retain “respectful” language when referring to the Deity, given the history of marginalisation of the language as “comic” and disrespectful. Of course, traditional Ulster-Scots poets of the 18th century such as James Orr and Samuel Thomson regularly used “*thee*” and “*thy*” in their Ulster-Scots poetry to signal respect – even mock respect as in Orr’s “To the potatoe”:

Thou feeds our beasts o’ ilka kin’,
The gen’rous steed, and grov’lin’ swine:⁴³

- 48 It is hoped that a full music edition of the Ulster-Scots Psalter will be published by the Ulster-Scots Language Society in 2014. As the New Testament translation of the Four Gospels is also nearing completion, it is intended that these too will be published in the same year, marking what should be a significant advance for Ulster-Scots literacy and the language’s use in a public context.

NOTES

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2. *The True Psalmody: or, the Bible Psalms the Church's Only Manual of Praise; with Prefaces by Henry Cooke, John Edgar, and Thomas Houston*, Belfast, 1861.
3. Laurence Kirkpatrick, *Presbyterians in Ireland: An Illustrated History*, Dublin, Booklink, 2006, p. 66-67.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 81
5. Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, *The Psalms for Singing: A 21st Century Edition*, Cambridge, Cameron Press, 2004.
6. *Ibid.*, iii. The Preface (p. iii-iv) also states: “A Music Sub-Committee petitioned all precentors before deleting unused tunes and adding new ones”.
7. Preserved Smith, *Erasmus, A Study of his Life, Ideals and Place in History*, New York, Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1923, p. 84.
8. George Hill (ed.), *The Montgomery Manuscripts (1603-1706)*, Belfast, Archer & Sons, 1869, 124. This was also the case in Scotland until the 1650s – see Graham Tulloch, *A History of the Scots Bible*, Aberdeen, University Press, 1989, p. 18.
9. Unpublished Mss. Notes compiled by Rev. A J Gailey on Scottish psalmody in Presbyterian worship, c. 1950, Ulster Folk Museum Archive No. S-2-13.
10. For example: Archibald McIlroy, “The Precentor”, in *When Lint was in the Bell*, Belfast, McCaw, Stevenson and Orr, Limited, The Linenhall Press, 1903, p. 46.
11. Mss. books of Psalm tunes, Ulster Folk Museum Archive No. X9-1-14a-c; X9-1-5a-c.
12. John Stevenson, *Two Centuries of Life in Down 1600-1800*, Belfast, McCaw, Stevenson & Orr Ltd, Dublin Hodges, Figgis & Co., Ltd, 1920, p. 194-199.

13. *Ullans, the Magazine for Ulster-Scots*, Nummer 2, 1994, p. 20; John Stevenson, *Two Centuries of Life in Down 1600-1800*, *op. cit.*, p. 194-199. NB: italics are used here in these verses to highlight Ulster-Scots usage.
14. See William Robb, "Practice verses for Psalm Tunes", in *Ullans, the Magazine for Ulster-Scots*, Nummer 3, 1995, p. 59-61.
15. See Philip Robinson (ed.), *The Country Rhymes of James Orr, the Bard of Ballycarry, 1770-1816*, Bangor, Pretani Press, 1992, p. 115-119; Philip Robinson, *Oul Licht, New Licht*, Belfast, The Ullans Press, 2009, p. 45-48.
16. William Stavely also read Psalms 74, 76 and 119 at the execution of the young Covenanter Dan English at Connor in 1798.
17. Archibald M'Ilroy, *When Lint was in the Bell*, Belfast, M'Caw, Stevenson and Orr, Limited, The Linenhall Press, 1897, p. 46.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
19. Archibald M'Ilroy, *The Auld Meetin-hoose Green*, Toronto, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1899, p. 31.
20. Wesley Guard Lyttle, *Robin's Readings, Part 3: Life in Ballycuddy, Co. Down*, Belfast, R. Carswell and Son, Limited, circa 1900.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
22. *Ibid.*, 22.
23. John Stevenson, *Two Centuries of Life in Down 1600-1800*, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
24. Dixon Donaldson, *Historical, Traditional, and Descriptive Account of Islandmagee*, Belfast, 1927 (reprint by Islandmagee Community Development Association, 2002), p. 114.
25. *Ibid.*, p.116.
26. *Ibid.*, p.124.
27. Angelique Day and Patrick McWilliams (eds.), *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Parishes of County Antrim: Volume 10, Parish of Islandmagee*, Belfast, Institute of Irish Studies, QUB, 1995, p. 33.
28. Angelique Day and Patrick McWilliams (eds.), *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Parishes of County Londonderry: Volume 11, Parishes of Aghanloo, Dunboe and Magilligan*, Belfast, Institute of Irish Studies, QUB, 1991, p.10.
29. See Philip Robinson, "The mapping of Ulster-Scots", in Anne Smyth, Michael Montgomery and Philip Robinson, (eds.), *The Academic Study of Ulster-Scots: Essays for and by Robert J Gregg*, Cultra, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, 2006, p. 3-9.
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31. Thomas Hamilton, *History of the Irish Presbyterian Church*, Edinburgh, 1887, p. 39-44.
32. Thomas Young, *The Metrical Psalms and Paraphrases; A Short Sketch of their History with Biographical Notes of their Authors*, London, A & C Black, 1909, p. 94.
33. Patrick Adair, *A True Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 1623-1670*, Belfast, Marcus Ward AND Company, 1866, p. 101.
34. David J. McCartney, *Nor Principalities nor Powers: a History (1621-1991) of 1st Presbyterian Church, Carrickfergus*, Carrickfergus, 1991, p. 198.

35. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, Glasgow, Collins, 1961, p. 10 & 82.
36. Philip Robinson, "Religious language as a register for Ulster-Scots: A consideration of the case for an Ulster-Scots Bible", in Anne Smyth, Michael Montgomery and Philip Robinson (eds.), *The Academic Study of Ulster-Scots: Essays for and by Robert J Gregg*, Cultra, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, NMGNI, 2006, p. 87-92.
37. Philip and Heather Saunders (eds.), *Guid Wittins frae Doctèr Luik*, Belfast, Ullans Press, 2009.
38. W. L. Lorimer, (trans.) *The New Testament in Scots*, Edinburgh, 1983.
39. P. Hatel Waddell, *The Psalms: Frae Hebrew intil Scottis*, 1871; reprinted Aberdeen, 1987.
40. Philip Robinson, *Oul Licht, New Licht*, *op. cit.*, p. 49-82; Philip Robinson, *Alang tha Shore*, Belfast, The Ullans Press, 2005, p. 50-56.
41. Non-denominational Ulster-Scots services organised by the Ulster-Scots Language Society in Belfast such as in Fitzroy Presbyterian Church (2005), and Townsend Street Presbyterian Church (2006) included singing of Psalms and Bible readings from published Ulster-Scots versions.
42. Ivan Herbison, Philip Robinson and Anne Smyth (eds.), *Spelling and Pronunciation Guide: The Ulster-Scots Academy Implementation Group Proposals*, Belfast, The Ullans Press, 2012.
43. Philip Robinson (ed.), *The Country Rhymes of James Orr, the Bard of Ballycarry, 1770-1816*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

ABSTRACTS

The Scottish Metrical Psalter of 1650 commands an iconic cultural significance within the Ulster-Scots tradition, and it has been treasured with intense religious affection for hundreds of years. This is particularly true for the rural Presbyterian heartlands of Antrim and Down that had been settled by Lowland Scots in the early 1600s (and which today remain the "core" Ulster-Scots speaking regions). Paradoxically, the 1650 Scottish Psalter used traditionally by this community is in English (as is the equally-treasured 1611 King James Version of the Bible). The provision of a translation of the metrical psalms into Ulster-Scots is considered in three contexts: the historical, religious and cultural significance of the Scottish Psalter to the Ulster-Scots speaking community; the modern Ulster-Scots language development programme which seeks to promote its everyday use in extended contexts; and the parallel (and parent) Ulster-Scots Bible translation project.

Le Psautier métrique écossais de 1650 occupe une place iconique au sein de la tradition Ulster-Scots ; il est l'objet d'une intense affection religieuse depuis des siècles. Ceci est particulièrement marqué dans les fiefs presbytériens ruraux d'Antrim et de Down qui, colonisés par les Écossais des Lowlands au début du XVI^e siècle, demeurent les régions-clé pour la langue Ulster-Scots. Paradoxalement, le Psautier écossais de 1650 qu'utilise traditionnellement cette communauté est en anglais – tout comme l'autre pièce maîtresse, la traduction de la Bible commanditée par le roi Jacques I^{er} et publiée en 1611. L'article explore la traduction des psaumes métriques en Ulster-Scots dans trois contextes: la signification historique, religieuse et culturelle d'un Psautier

écossais pour les locuteurs Ulster-Scots ; le programme contemporain du développement de la langue destiné à promouvoir l'utilisation quotidienne de l'Ulster-Scots dans des contextes plus larges ; ainsi que le projet parallèle (et originel) d'une traduction de la Bible en Ulster-Scots.

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